“Relax into laughter”: Jane Austen’s *Emma* and the Sentimental Novel

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English and Related Literature

December 2024

Abstract

This dissertation argues for the value of studying Jane Austen's *Emma* (1816) in context, not as a singular masterpiece by a singular author, but as a book with a plot constructed upon the tropes of the typical domestic-sentimental novel as published between 1780 and 1815. Modern interpretations of Austen sometimes overlook the critical insights to be derived from comparing her work to her contemporaries. Although many Austen scholars have examined her work in relation to other pre-eminent writers of her age such as Maria Edgeworth and Charlotte Smith, comparatively little attention has been paid to the now-obscure novelists who produced domestic-sentimental novels for the reading public. Emma Woodhouse's deluded attempts at matchmaking are derived from the tropes of the sentimental genre. Austen parodies novel clichés in *Emma*, and sometimes she substitutes prosaic everyday situations for melodramatic novel scenarios, but she does not overthrow the essential conventions of the marriage-plot novel. Compared to the overt parody of *Northanger Abbey* (1818), *Emma* is markedly more subtle. Textual clues suggest that *Emma* may have begun as a spoof of the domestic-sentimental novel which Austen revised in her artistic maturity into a pathbreaking experiment in domestic realism. A close reading of *Emma* reveals many allusions to popular domestic-sentimental novels, which were widely read but widely derided during Austen's lifetime. Examining Austen's work in the context of both the popular novels of her time as well as in the context of the debate around popular novels reveals her deep engagement with the popular literature of the day. In *Emma*, Austen found a way to marry her love of burlesque to her commitment to realism.

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Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks are due to my supervisor, Dr. Alison O'Byrne, who encouraged me to apply for the Masters program at York and guided me along on my journey to the "so, what." Thanks also to my TAP supervisor Dr. Jennie Batchelor for her encouragement and extremely helpful feedback. I am grateful for the opportunity to pursue this degree as a distance student. As a mature student, I am deeply appreciative of the technological advances made since the last time I was at university. For example, the pioneering scholar of the sentimental novel, C.L. Thomson could not locate a copy of the 1769 novel *The Fortunate Blue-Coat Boy* by Orphanotrophian (21f), but I accessed this book within 30 seconds of learning of its existence. The voices of the past have become immediate and real, thanks to the internet. I am also grateful for the pioneering work of Peter Garside, Anthony Mandal, and the other scholars of the Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research at the University of Cardiff, whose *British Fiction 1800-1829* website I have consulted innumerable times. Thank you to two kind friends in the Zoom Silent Writing Group, Sue Bremner and Vicki Parnell, who proof-read my draft.

Author's declaration:

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references. In accordance with the Policy on Transparency in Authorship in PGR programmes I acknowledge that I received assistance from two postgraduate peers who proofread this thesis and advised me on missing words and grammar and gave me their opinion of the clarity of my argument.

Engraved illustration for "Guilt Pursued by Conscience; or, The Perfidious Friend: a Tale," in The Lady's Magazine*, November 1802, p. 563. Clara, a foundling girl from a boarding school who married Mr. Knightley, a respectable landowner, coincidentally meets the man who betrayed her father and stole her inheritance. He makes amends and confirms that she comes from a good family.*

Notes:

All quotes from Austen's writings are from *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen*. general editor Janet Todd. Cambridge: UP 2005-2008, except for Austen's letters. In-line citations are *Juvenilia*, Sense and Sensibility=*SS*, Pride and Prejudice=*PP, Emma*, Mansfield Park=*MP*, *Persuasion*, Northanger Abbey=*NA,* Later Manuscripts=*LM*. For Austen's letters, I used Deirdre Le Faye's Oxford UP 3rd edition of *Jane Austen's Letters*. Letters are referenced by page number rather than by date.

Where "Jane Austen" forms part of the title of an inline citation, it is abbreviated to "JA."

Novels, poems, and plays of the long eighteenth century are usually referenced in the body of the dissertation by their titles alone, to avoid multiple attributions to "Anon" or "By a Lady." To save word count, the novel's publication date is supplied on first citation but usually omitted in subsequent citations.

Introduction

Interpretations of *Emma*

While Jane Austen's fourth novel *Emma* (1816) is widely agreed to be her most complex and well-crafted work, it has been the subject of many differing interpretations. Robert Liddell and P. D. James hailed it as the first detective story, while Walton Litz and others regard it as a *bildungsroman*. Alistair Duckworth, Gregg Hecimovich and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson have examined Austen's use of riddles, games, and puzzles. Novelist Stella Gibbons noted "the exquisite skill with which the characters weave in and out of the theme" while Joseph Wiesenfarth compared Austen's handling of her subplots to a "fugue". Lionel Trilling famously described Highbury as an "idyll," while Brian Southam, Thomas Keymer, and Michael Kramp expounded on the "Englishness" of *Emma*. Marxist critics such as David Kettle and David Aers viewed Austen through the lens of wealth and class. Biographer John Halperin and John Wiltshire and Freudians such as Geoffrey Gorer put Austen on the couch and tied the events of her life to the plots and themes of her writing. Feminist perspectives have been influential since the 1970s, as outlined by Laurence Mazzeno, while scholars such as Tiffany Potter have contributed queer interpretations. [1]

This dissertation argues for the value of studying *Emma* in context, not as a singular masterpiece by a singular author, but as a book constructed upon the typical domestic-sentimental novel as published between 1780 and 1815. A close reading reveals that *Emma* is filled with allusions to and critiques of the popular novel.

[1] Authors and works cited in this passage: Liddell *The Novels of JA* 1963; P. D. James 289-310; Litz *JA: a study of her artistic development*; Duckworth 292-297; Hecimovich 29-41; Heydt-Stevenson "Games, Riddles, Charades" 150-165; Gibbons intro to *JA's Emma* xiii; Wiesenfarth 217; Johnson, *Jane Austen*; Trilling 60; Southam *JA's Englishness* 187–201; Keymer 107-125; Kramp 147–168; Kettle 112-123; Aers 118–136; Halperin *Life of JA* also summarized in Mazzeno 147-8); Wiltshire 133-142; Gorer 197-204; feminists summarized in Mazzeno 107-130; Potter 187–203.

Two significant differences

Studying Austen in context includes taking into consideration the low status of novels in her day and the unmatched status of Austen in ours. In Austen's time, novels were derided as being frivolous and even harmful— they were not accorded the same status as other types of literature. The distinction was comically illustrated in *Emma*, when Emma Woodhouse asks Harriet Smith whether the yeoman farmer Robert Martin "is not a man of information beyond the line of his own business? He does not read?" (28). Emma is asking whether Martin has informed his mind with history, moral philosophy, and poetry. In her blithe ignorance, Harriet responds that Martin has read the *Elegant Extracts* (1783) and *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) but has not read *The Romance of the Forest* (1791) or *The Children of the Abbey* (1796). To use modern analogies, Emma asks if Martin reads Steven Pinker and Paul Krugman, and Harriet replies that he has read some *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* and *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1934) but not the *Twilight* trilogy. Likewise, when Mr. Knightley announces he has given up any hopes of Emma following a course of steady reading (37), he is not thinking of novels. Although a qualitative distinction between literature and mass market novels persists today, novel-reading is no longer a controversial pastime; in fact, the decline of reading for pleasure is viewed with concern by the National Endowment for the Arts as detrimental to society (Iyengar 2024).

The second significant difference between the reading experience of Austen's first readers and today is that Austen's name is now ensconced in the pantheon of great English authors, but in her brief lifetime she was merely one of many anonymous novelists competing in the marketplace. Subscribers to a circulating library in 1816 probably read her novels alongside works by other authors, such as Elizabeth Gunning, Mary Meeke or Anne of Swansea. How many Austen devotees today have even heard of—let alone read—these forgotten authors? In consequence—and setting aside our high estimation of Austen's artistry—a reader of Austen today is likely unaware that her works "contain large amounts of materials that were the common property of novelists, essayists, moralists, and other writers of her day" (Moler 1). To give a personal testimony, I was startled when I came across bumptious John Thorpe-types in novels such as *Ellinor, or, The World as it is* (1798), *A Winter in Bath* (1807), *The Bristol Heiress* (1808) and others. In Austen's parody, John Thorpe promises Catherine Morland a trip to Blaize Castle, but they only make it as far as the outskirts of Keynsham. In *Fanny, a Novel in a Series of Letters* (1786), Samuel Horton plots to take a young heiress on a day trip to see some ruins and put her

in a compromising situation (I:44-6). Sam Dibbins in *First Impressions* (1801) takes the heroine to see some ruins, then tries to abduct her to Gretna Green (III:23-35).

To Austen's first readers, Mary Bennet's "[p]ride relates more to our opinion of ourselves; vanity to what we would have others think of us," (*PP* 21) would have been recognized as a threadbare aphorism, while today it is posted on the internet as a notable Austen quote[2] (Manning *Held up to derision*). Therefore, because of the changing status of the novel and the elevation of Austen's reputation, our experience of reading an Austen novel is quite different from the experience of Austen's contemporaries. This has consequences for how we engage with, and interpret, Austen. As Marilyn Butler observed, studying Austen in isolation is "a recipe which effectively spare[s] Austen from evaluative comparisons, or from being located in her own literary, intellectual, or social ambience" (x).

Prior scholarship on Austen in context

From the inception of serious scholarship about Austen, there were those, such as R. Brimley Johnson, C. L. Thomson, and Mary Lascelles, who advocated for studying Austen in context. More recent scholars of note include Kenneth Moler, Frank Bradbrook, Anthony Mandal, Mary Waldron, Natalie Neill, Olivia Murphy, Albert J. Rivero, Susan Allen Ford, Neil Wenborn, Jacqueline Labbe, and Lorraine Fletcher.[3] However, most studies have focussed on examining the influence of Austen's favourite authors, such as Dr. Samuel Johnson, Samuel Richardson, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth and Charlotte Smith. While these famous writers undeniably influenced Austen, there exists an extensive and under-explored body of work, authored by dozens of now-forgotten writers—mostly women—marketed through the circulating libraries which proliferated in Austen's lifetime. These forgotten authors cannot be described as having "influenced" Austen, in the sense that she wished to emulate them. These authors did not enjoy critical respect in their own time, nor, as Baldick notes, in subsequent "standard accounts of the eighteenth-century 'rise of the novel' [which] had pushed women novelists into invisibility."

[2] https://bit.ly/3ZJrGhC Search on "X" (formerly Twitter) for "vanity and pride are different things."

[3] Authors and works cited in this passage: Johnson 128-139; Thomson 261; Lascelles 41-86; Moler *JA's Art of Allusion;* Bradbrook *JA and her Predecessors*; Mandal *JA and the Popular Novel*; Waldron *JA and the Fiction of Her Time*; Neill 163–192, Murphy *JA the Reader*, Rivero 208-223; Ford *What JA's Characters Read*, Wenborn 21-27, Labbe *Reading JA After Reading Charlotte Smith;* and Fletcher 36-44.

While, in my view, the exploration of commonalities between Austen and popular literature provides its own justification, my argument is not simply that Austen drew on a common pool of ideas, plot devices, tropes, idioms, and moral certainties to construct her novels. She also used parody, understatement, and ironic substitution to laugh at, critique, and reform the novel. In *Emma*, Austen created a heroine who is deluded by the (then) well-known tropes of the domestic-sentimental novel—but Austen's allusions to the novels of her day go beyond Emma Woodhouse's quixotry. Austen subtly refashions the melodramatic conventions of the popular novel to create a story grounded in realism.

Background and methodology

According to Garside (29), 3,374 novels were published between 1770 and 1819, many of them authored by females. While feminist scholars such as Dale Spender (140-1) have protested the exclusion of these works from the history of the novel, it is still the case that comparatively few have received modern scholarly attention and even fewer are read for pleasure. I have read (or skimmed) about 120 of them, which is not even five percent of the total, but this sampling has provided me with numerous examples of conventional novel tropes.

I started reading these forgotten novels for my own interest about four years ago. Initially, I wanted to know if female authors of Austen's time expressed abolitionist views more explicitly than Austen with her "dead silence" in *Mansfield Park* (1814). My interests broadened as I realized these novels were a rich source of information about contemporary opinion and prevailing social anxieties of the late Georgian/Regency era. Authors editorialized about breastfeeding, wearing rouge, female education, mercenary marriages, hunting, reckless carriage driving, the impressment of sailors, the war with Napoleon, the Royal family, Methodism, novel-reading, and much more. Listening to these voices opened a window into the past; as well, I could compare Austen's reticence to her more outspoken sister novelists.

I began to recognize recurring plot patterns and tropes, such as portrayals of London as both an irresistible lure and a sinkhole of vice. I learned that when an author needed to send a character away for plot reasons, she sent them to the East or West Indies, as Austen sent Sir Thomas Bertram to Antigua *Mansfield Park*.

After reading dozens of novels featuring foundling heroines, the source of Emma Woodhouse's delusions about Harriet Smith became apparent. Jane Fairfax's rescue from drowning is likewise a commonly-used novelistic convention.

I searched digital archives of novels for scenes that resembled the episodes in *Emma*, using key phrases such as "gypsies," "charades," and "poultry-thieves." In those three instances, I did not find similar scenarios, but I encountered many examples of the heroine's charitable visit, the heroine's dangerous illness, and the perils of attending the opera or theatre, all of which are reflected in *Emma*.

I avoided most gothic novels since it appeared that the gothic genre has received more attention from the modern academy than the domestic-sentimental novel. Nor did I read much historical fiction, since Austen did not write in this genre.

In addition to reading the forgotten novels, I reviewed the literature for discussions of *Emma* as a parodic novel and for analyses of Emma Woodhouse as a quixotic or deluded heroine. I reviewed some histories of the novel and the critical reception of sentimental novels. I reviewed some histories of parody and satire in English literature.

Austen in context

My research has led me to conclude that Austen's innovations as a writer were spurred by her criticisms of the popular literature of her time. She brilliantly used dialogue to delineate her characters' motivations and to advance her plot. She "radically subordinated" the sententious or melodramatic narrator with free indirect discourse (Wenborn 40). With unprecedented sophistication for her times, she wove hints and red herrings into her story. She refused to foreground prevailing moral orthodoxies such as the obsessive focus on female chastity. She replaced the contrived and melodramatic travails of the heroine with every-day events. Instead of an abduction, or a shipwreck, or a purloined will, the dramatic turning point of *Emma* is a young woman being rude to a garrulous spinster at a picnic.

Austen read and enjoyed circulating-library novels but she also laughed about them. These are the novels which inspired her parodic Muse. I contend that Austen's affinity for parody is present in her entire *oeuvre,* from her earliest juvenilia to her final unfinished fragment, *Sanditon*.

Chapter One of this dissertation examines the techniques of the parodist in novels such as *The Heroine* (1813) and *The Female Quixote* (1752). I then examine the episodes in *Emma* which employ parodies of novelistic tropes. Chapter Two discusses how Austen substitutes every-day events for the melodramatic tropes of domestic-sentimental novels, such as Harriet's encounter with aggressive beggars as a stand-in for some more serious peril. Chapter Three

discusses the conventions of the sentimental novel which Austen retained and used unironically, such as Emma's filial devotion to her father. Chapter Four briefly surveys some of Austen's innovations in narration, exposition and dialogue, innovations which I contend arose out of her perceptive critiques of the popular novel.

Although this dissertation interprets *Emma* as a novel about novels, it cannot be denied that Emma Woodhouse is not portrayed as a novel-reader and that scholars differ on whether we are intended to view her as influenced by novels. Chapter Five reviews the few literary allusions which do occur in *Emma* but counters the theory that it is filled with allusions to gothic novels. Finally, while the forgotten novels are often trite and formulaic, they are still a fertile ground for research in their own right. This chapter concludes by suggesting that scholars should be cautious about declaring that Austen was unique in some aspect or other if they have not first searched for similarities in other contemporary novels.

My conclusion addresses the question: "If Emma is a novel about novels, why doesn't Austen explicitly portray Emma Woodhouse as being deluded by novels?" I suggest that *Emma* is perhaps an expansion and reworking of an earlier and more parodic story, perhaps first drafted during the heydey of the domestic-sentimental novel, i.e. the 1790s. While the evidence left to us is slight and incomplete, the record indicates that Austen was preoccupied with the language, conventions, tropes and improbabilities of the popular novel, and by her own testimony, her artistic choices reflect her decision to "keep to my own style & go on in my own way" (*Letters* 306). Austen intended her fourth novel to provide an example for the reformation of the novel; a conclusion that runs counter to much modern scholarship which explicates a hidden or subversive message in *Emma*.

In brief, I argue for studying Austen in context because knowledge of the forgotten novels of Austen's era reveals the scale of Austen's inspirations, innovations and accomplishments.

Chapter 1: Austen and Parody

1.1 Parodic techniques

Jane Austen's muse was a comic muse, and while she and her family were "great novel readers" (*Letters* 27) the predictable plots of sentimental novels aroused her mockery. Looser points out that while Austen was well read, her juvenilia clearly shows that she was acquainted "with the opposite of great literature," and that she wrote "incredibly perceptive send-ups of their tics and tropes" (5:55-7:16). The sentimental novel "was to occupy English writers and readers to an almost unbelievable extent" during Austen's lifetime (Shepperson 83). Bander's summary of the genre sets out its basic conventions:

> [A] genteel, accomplished, principled, country-bred young lady of sixteen or seventeen, often of obscure or apparently illegitimate birth, enters the fashionable world where her striking loveliness attracts eager suitors, some desirable, some dangerous… after three, four, or five volumes, her enemies are exposed and punished while she is discovered to be of high birth and of unimpeachable virtue… With some variation from novel to novel, such was the novel-plot that Austen mocked throughout her lifetime, even as she adopted, domesticated, tested, and remade it (146-7).

As a devotee of Samuel Johnson, Austen was schooled to reject anything that he defined as "cant" —overblown rhetoric, posturing religiosity, and sentimentality—and it was "natural for her to react through the mockery of burlesque" (Harmsel 11). Austen was not the only parodist of her era, of course. Parodic treatments of the popular novel were "[s]o common…" states Uddén, "that the anti-novel formed a genre of its own, written in a satirical and intellectual mode" (36). Charlotte Lennox's early parody *The Female Quixote* was followed by many others, notably *Modern Novel Writing* (1796), *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810), *Rosella, or, Modern Occurrences* (1799), and *The Heroine, or, Adventures of a Fair Romance Reader,* aka *Cherubina* (1813). Young Jane Austen more than matched these parodic efforts with her hilarious short story *Love and Freindship*, in which two couples place true love above every other consideration, including having anything to live on:

> "Victuals and Drink!" (replied my Husband in a most nobly contemptuous Manner) and dost thou then imagine that there is no other support for an exalted mind (such as is my Laura's) than the mean and indelicate employment of Eating and Drinking?" (*Juvenilia* 111).

These parodies relied upon the familiarity of their audience with the tropes of the sentimental novels but given the hyperbolic language and improbable situations of the genre, it must have been challenging to produce a comic version that was even more hyperbolic and improbable than the original. To demonstrate, one of the following dialogues is from a parody and one is from a novel—but which is which?

> "My happiness!—and what of my happiness? Is it not gone, lost for ever?—Have you not destroyed it? Damnation and distraction—Why do I linger here?"

> "I cannot pray! –I will not—no—Hell is but reprobation—that is mine already—or will be soon… I know him,—he knows not me,—-no, nor my deeds… Oh, Mortimore! –Mortimore!"

The first quote is from the parody *Modern Novel Writing* (1:147)and the second is from *A Modern Incident in Domestic Life* (1803, I:120).

In addition to employing hyperbole, the author of *Modern Novel Writing* used Monty Python-like non-sequiturs, rather like some of Austen's juvenilia:

> the Earl… in the pride of youth, with seventeen pipes of old port in his cellar, and constituting the felicity of his family, died, as he was dancing a hornpipe. He left the Countess to bewail his loss, and to wear spectacles, if ever she should attempt to read by candlelight (I:239).

Parodists also used meta-narration, where characters and narrators humorously reference the conventions of gothic or sentimental novels. In *Northanger Abbey* (1818) Catherine Morland unfortunately lives in a neighbourhood without "one lord; no — not even a baronet. There was not one family among their acquaintance who had reared and supported a boy accidentally found at their door" (*NA* 9). Mary Charlton frequently used this type of irreverent aside in her novel *Rosella*, as when the deluded protagonist Sophia Beauclerc wonders about the housekeeping arrangements in isolated castles staffed with only a couple of ancient domestics: "how, how in

the names of the household gods, can the mysteries of the ménage be conducted! Who washes, who dusts, who irons, who cleans, who mends, who cooks?" (233). Likewise, Austen's Catherine Morland knew from her reading of gothic novels that"all the dirty work" in the fictional "abbeys and castles...was to be done by two pair of female hands at the utmost" (*NA* 190). Other similarities between Charlton's *Rosella* and Austen's writing are discussed in Appendix A.

It is not surprising that Austen, a parodist herself, read and enjoyed parody. She was "amused" and "diverted" by *The Heroine*. In a March 1814 letter to her sister, Austen remarked that she had "torn through the 3rd vol. of the Heroine & do not think it falls off" (*Letters* 256). The remark indicates that Austen understood that a parodic premise, while entertaining, is difficult to sustain. Parodies tend to be shorter than their targets—Fielding's *Shamela* is less than one-tenth the length of Richardson's *Pamela*. *Rosella,* for all its wit, is "a string of episodes which follow a regular rhythm of expectation and disappointment," and its four volumes could benefit from a substantial trimming (Schowerling 45-9). As Shepperson puts it, "Few writers can be witty for five hundred pages at the expense of some one else's book" (163).

The protagonists of gothic parodies are often young women or men who have read so many novels that they confuse fiction with reality. The ghost in the old castle turns out to be the housekeeper's pet squirrel in *Nobility Run Mad* (1802, III:91-121). Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey* convinces herself that the old furniture in her guest bedroom must contain some interesting relic, some clue to a long-buried crime, such as a key to a secret passage or a confessional manuscript. But the supernatural element is comically revealed to be something more prosaic, and the old manuscript turns out to be a "collection of washing-bills" in *Northanger Abbey* (*NA* 327). In other words, delusion is followed by comic disappointment.

From the very first academic essay written about Austen in 1883, it has been recognized that she eschewed the burlesques of her juvenilia and the self-aware parodic tone of *Northanger Abbey* in her later works (Pellew 23). Austen's reasons for subduing her parodic impulse will be further explored in the conclusion, but for now it can simply be asserted that a parodic tone survives in all her novels. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Edward Ferrars's declaration that he prefers "a troop of tidy, happy villagers" over "the finest banditti in the world" (*SS* 113) is similar to the meta-narration of parody. On the other hand, Marianne's serious illness, Willoughby's self-justification—these aspects of *Sense and Sensibility* are not handled as parody. There is no overt reference to the fact that heroines falling ill, or scoundrels attempting to explain their actions, are

novelistic conventions. But perhaps there was a more parodic tone in an earlier draft. Crisp speculates that *Sense and Sensibility* was "first conceived [as] a literary satire in the spirit of *Northanger Abbey*… in the form in which we now possess it however the satirical element has been submerged" (69). Shepperson likewise speculated "that the early draft of *Sense and Sensibility* showed an even stronger tendency to burlesque than the final version" (141).

Similarly, Ford suggests that earlier drafts of *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)—then titled *First Impressions*— might have included more satirical commentary on conduct books, the then-ubiquitous guides to proper female behaviour. Darcy's pronouncement that accomplished women are well-read, reminiscent of the strictures of Hester Chapone in her *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* (1773) and the passing reference to *Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women* (1766), might be "mere remnants of what might have been a more extensive and more obvious use" in an earlier draft. "Does the subtle integration of these conduct books suggest something about how Jane Austen 'lopt & cropt' her way to *Pride and Prejudice*?" (Ford 117).

I make the same supposition for *Emma*. Many parodies featured a heroine who confused novels with real life; Emma Woodhouse's quixotry may have been more pointed in a first draft, and more sustained throughout the novel. The first volume of *Emma*, featuring the Harriet/Elton storyline, is the most overtly parodic. Austen repeatedly uses the device of delusion leading to comic disappointment, as when Emma manoeuvres to get Mr. Elton and Harriet alone together. Emma thinks Mr. Elton, "speaking with animation," is revealing his love for Harriet, but instead:

> he was only giving his fair companion an account of the yesterday's party at his friend Cole's, and that she was come in herself for the Stilton cheese, the north Wiltshire, the butter, the celery, the beet-root, and all the dessert (95).

But as will be discussed, there are fewer instances of delusion/disappointment in Volumes II and III and they are not treated in the same comic fashion.

1.2 Parodic tropes of the sentimental novel in *Emma*

The specific novel tropes which spur Emma Woodhouse's imagination into overdrive are the foundling heroine and the rustic suitor. She then takes it upon herself to create novelistic episodes with the painting of a portrait and a charitable visit.

1.2.1 The Foundling Heroine

Zunshine and many other scholars have pointed to Emma's misperception of her protégée Harriet Smith as arising from the "scores of legally conceived though temporarily misplaced" (155) heroine-foundlings who populated the novels of the era. Usually, the heroine who is *thought* to be illegitimate discovers she is an heiress, lost as an infant through misadventure or malice. *The History of Charlotte Summers* (1749) may be "the earliest prototype of this story of the lost daughter" (Perry 96), but dozens of examples abound, including *First Impressions,*[4] *Glenmore Abbey* (1805), and *Secrets Made Public* (1808). Even if she is only "the natural daughter of somebody" (*Emma* 22), the social standing of the foundling heroine improves greatly after she is acknowledged by a well-born and wealthy parent, as occurs in *Emily, or the History of a Natural Daughter* (1756), *Ellinor,* and *Modern Characters* (1808). Emma, therefore, has novelistic precedent for concluding that Harriet has a genteel father who will come forward with a dramatic backstory and a handsome inheritance.

1.2.2 Harriet's portrait: "the beauty of one, the skill of the other"

Emma opens her campaign to unite Harriet with Mr. Elton by offering to paint Harriet's portrait, based on her conviction that a portrait can inspire or betray feelings of love—as in *The Picture* (1766), *Children of the Abbey*, *First Impressions, Eva of Cambria* (1811) and *Patronage* (1814), to name a few representative examples.

The portrait-painting episode mirrors an incident in the novel *Clara* (originally *Claire d'Albe*) (1808). In both novels, a female friend takes her friend's portrait while a lover looks on. In *Emma*, of course, Emma Woodhouse is unaware that Mr. Elton's raptures are directed at her, not at the subject. In *Clara*, the heroine is a married woman who has drawn the infatuated admiration of a houseguest. He upbraids Clara's friend Adeline for not capturing her beauty and the "noble, graceful, and enchanting movements which are displayed in her every gesture." Insulted by his critique, Adeline throws "down her pencils in a pet," and refuses to continue (I:116-119). Emma uses the same expression when she recalls her annoyance over her sister's criticism of her sketch of her brother-in-law: "I put it away in a pet, and vowed I would never take another likeness" (47). The resemblance to *Clara* may be a coincidence, or Austen may have

[4] The novel which scholars believe induced Austen to change the name of her own manuscript to *Pride and Prejudice*.

read this book and decided to do a comic take-off of the situation. However, most of the novel tropes in *Emma* appear to be generic and not drawn from any one particular novel or novels, such as when Emma adds some height to Harriet in the picture. This provides another hint that Emma is fashioning Harriet into a sentimental heroine—they tended to be tall. Amanda of *Children of the Abbey* is a "tall, elegantly-formed girl" (I:36), as is Ellen in *Ellen and Julia* (1793 I:43), and the heroine of *Louisa, or the Cottage on the Moor* (1789 I:6), among many others. Mr. Knightley, with his typical directness, tells Emma "[y]ou have made her too tall" (49), while Mr. Elton will not hear a word against Emma's skill. Even though Emma thinks Mr. Elton's praise is laughably florid, she wilfully perseveres in her delusion, as when she thinks to herself: "You know nothing of drawing. Don't pretend to be in raptures about mine. Keep your raptures for Harriet's face" (45).

1.2.3 The unwanted rustic suitor

Mr. Elton is in London, looking after the framing of the portrait, when Harriet receives a written offer of marriage from yeoman farmer Robert Martin. Emma has already hinted to Harriet that she ought to back away from her friendship with the Martins:

> "The misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates. There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by every thing within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you" (30).

Austen may be referencing the real-life social degradation meted out to girls of illegitimate birth, but fictional foundling heroines invariably suffer the insult of being propositioned by men of fashion looking for a well-bred mistress, as occurs to the titular heroines *Miriam* (1800), *Ellinor,* and *Susan* (1809). [5] As well, the heroine sometimes receives marriage proposals from men who are not of the gentry. In *The History of Charlotte Summers*, the orphaned heroine takes refuge with a farm family to escape the usual evils to which heroines are exposed, but soon finds she has unwittingly inflamed the passions of two local clodpoles. "When shall we send to the Clerk to proclaim the Banns," exclaims one, "do let it be in a short Time, for I'm in a woundy Hurry, till you and I get between a Pair of Sheets: Odds-bodikins!" (II:96).

[5] *Susan* is the novel which scholars think caused Austen to change the name of her heroine in *Northanger Abbey*.

Charlotte sends him away: “How now? Whence proceeds this Insolence… be gone, and learn your Distance” (II:98). In *First Impressions*, the heroine has no idea who her parents are, but she cannot bring herself to wed the middle-aged steward of an estate. In *Miriam*, the heroine runs away from her guardian rather than be forced into marriage with a prosperous but coarse farmer.

Had Robert Martin read *Children of the Abbey* when Harriet first recommended it to him, he would have come across the passage in which the heroine Amanda “stared” with “astonishment” at the priest who brings her an offer from a local farmer: “She had at first believed him jesting.” Then, once realizing he is in earnest, she haughtily responds that if her rustic swain “‘consulted his own happiness, he would seek to unite himself with a woman brought up in his own sphere of life.’” (IV:46-7).

Emma does not hesitate to step in and preserve Harriet from the ignominy of an unequal match. Knowing that her protegee is destined for better things, she manipulates Harriet into turning down Martin’s presumptuous offer. Complicating matters for Emma is that Robert Martin has failed to live down to her expectations. His letter is well-written; she tries to explain it away and even when she cannot, she persists in turning Harriet against him:

> “Yes, indeed, a very good letter,” replied Emma rather slowly—“so good a letter, Harriet, that every thing considered, I think one of his sisters must have helped him...yet it is not the style of a woman; no, certainly, it is too strong and concise; not diffuse enough for a woman. No doubt he is a sensible man, and I suppose may have a natural talent...It is so with some men…” (53).

After the rejection is sent, Harriet cannot stop thinking about the hurt she is causing Robert and his family, so Emma reminds her of another suitor and *his* family. By now she has gone far beyond merely hinting that Mr. Elton likes her—she is inventing entire scenes and suggesting what the characters are saying:

> “Let us think of those among our absent friends who are more cheerfully employed,” cried Emma. “At this moment, perhaps, Mr. Elton is shewing your picture to his mother and sisters, telling how much more beautiful is the original, and after being asked for it five or six times, allowing them to hear your name, your own dear name” (59).

Thomson (263) suggests that Emma's speech patterns diverge at this point from her usual way of speaking and resemble the "elegant and polished phrases" used by "refined heroines." Here, Emma employs parallelism (Yelland, 94) to describe the effect of the portrait on Mr. Elton's family:

> "It is his companion all this evening, his solace, his delight. It opens his designs to his family, it introduces you among them, it diffuses through the party those pleasantest feelings of our nature, eager curiosity and warm prepossession. How cheerful, how animated, how suspicious, how busy their imaginations all are!" (59).

Thomson thinks Austen is inadvertently lapsing into an archaic style, but perhaps she is deliberately using these phrases to illustrate that Emma, throwing aside all caution, has become the narrator of Harriet's story. She speaks in a style more attuned to the previous century, when sentimental novels were at their peak of popularity.

Upon Mr. Elton's return, Emma invites him to contribute to Harriet's collection of riddles and charades. While this episode is part of the sequence of delusion and disappointment, I cannot tie it to a novel trope involving charades. To date, I have not come across any novels where riddles and charades were used in courtship, so this episode will be discussed in the section dealing with Austen's use of understatement and substitution.

1.2.4 "A charitable scheme"

The next episode in the deluded courtship involves a charitable visit, which Austen turns to several uses. The quixotic aspect of the charitable visit involves the cast-iron trope that when a hero sees a heroine carrying out some benevolent errand, he falls in love with her. For example, Mr. Falkland is smitten when he calls on a needy family and discovers the heroine already ministering to them in *A Winter in Bath* (II:40-2). Valcourt Beverly rushes to help Isabella Arundel assist a cottager's child with a broken leg in *The Decision* (1811, II:130-35). Charlotte Clarkson and Henry Denbigh's mutual attraction turns into love when they unite to bring succour to a blind officer's widow in *I'll Consider of It* (1812, III:117-8).

Therefore, when Emma and Harriet encounter Mr. Elton on their return journey from a visit to a poor family, Emma is delighted, because when a hero and a heroine "meet in a charitable scheme," their admiration of their mutual benevolence "will bring a great increase of

love on each side" (94). So confident is Emma in the efficacy of this type of encounter, she thinks to herself, "I should not wonder if it were to bring on the declaration. It must, if I were not here" (94). She resorts to a falsehood about a broken shoelace to engineer an opportunity for Harriet and Mr. Elton to be alone. The reader, however, is not deceived, not even when the narrator calls Mr. Elton and Harriet the "lovers" who are "standing together at one of the windows" in the parsonage which enjoyed a "most favourable aspect" of the beauties of nature. Emma experiences the delusion and disappointment of the quixotic protagonist: "For half a minute, Emma felt the glory of having schemed successfully. But it would not do; he had not come to the point" (96). She convinces herself that a little more time and encouragement will bring on the declaration.

Austen's portrayal of the charitable visit also stands in notable contrast to the sentimental language employed by other novelists in similar scenes, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.

1.2.5 The distracted hero

Emma's attention is then taken up with the visit of her sister and brother-in-law, and her efforts to keep the somewhat irascible John Knightley from ruffling her father's feelings. Emma's devotion to her father serves as a counterpoise to her officious interference with Harriet, but she has learned how to readily manipulate people who are less clever than herself by being her father's caretaker.

The hospitable Mr. Weston invites the Hartfield family to dinner on Christmas Eve, along with Harriet and Mr. Elton. But Harriet comes down with a sore throat and cannot attend. Illnesses were useful for detaining a character in one location or another as needed for plot purposes, as in *Constance* (1785), *The Gipsy Countess* (1799) and most notably *Susan*. The *Monthly Review* drily noted that *Susan* contains "a prodigious number of fevers" (*Review of* Susan 319). Susan, her mother, her hero, her amorous persecutor, and her governess are all stricken at one time or another, and some several times.

Austen is not above using this convention to remove Harriet from the dinner party scene, but she disguises the contrivance by directing the readers' attention to Mr. Elton's indifference to the news of Harriet's illness. Emma expects Mr. Elton to react as a hero ought, and at first, he does:

> "Dreadful!— [he emotes] Exactly so, indeed.—She will be missed every moment." This was very proper; the sigh which accompanied it was really estimable; but it should have lasted longer. (123).

But "only half a minute afterwards he began to speak of other things," to Emma's "dismay" (123). Emma is measuring Mr. Elton against heroes like Constantine Mordaunt in *Mystery and Confidence* (1814) who "trembled, and turned pale" when told the girl he loves has a bad cold: "Good God! You do not surely apprehend any danger in her complaints?" (I:122). In *Miriam*, Henry Stafford haunts the corridor outside the heroine's bedroom and begs the apothecary: "Pray do you—is there—do you suspect any—any danger of her life?" (I:192). In *Susan*, the hero discovers a rival "pacing [the hall] with all the agitation his fears for Susan excited" (II:25). Clearly, Mr. Elton fails to measure up. Emma's bewilderment is answered when the truth breaks upon her as she and Mr. Elton are driven home from the dinner party.

1.2.6 Mr. Elton's proposal—delusion ends

Mr. Elton is not the only suitor to propose to a girl in a carriage, and in the few examples I have found, the proposal is refused. Mr. Davenant gets Ethelinde Chesterville alone in his chaise (I:239-245) but she is so distracted she doesn't even realize he is proposing. In *Eva of Cambria*, Horatio Barrington jumps into a carriage to be alone with Clara Toryns, but her mother has already ordered her to reject his overtures (II:80-4).

Some critics, such as Donnelly (120-2), have found a hint of sexual menace in this scene. Easton ("The Encouragement I Received") suggests Austen is hinting at "sexual assault" and Ford argues that Austen is invoking "gothic brutality" (189) when Mr. Elton seizes her hand and begins "making violent love to her". The term "violent love" would not have struck a contemporary reader as forcibly as it strikes us today. Therefore, I urge the strategy of looking at this language in the context of the times. The Corvey Collection of digitized novels holds eighty-two titles which include the phrase "violent love" and 147 titles which include the phrase "seized her hand," published between 1780 and 1816.[6] "Violent love" was often used to describe an impetuous passion, not a physical assault. As well, Mr. Elton did not contrive the circumstances

[6] Search of the Corvey Collection (European Literature, 1790-1840: The Corvey Collection, Gale Primary Sources) conducted on November 22, 2024.

which got him alone in a carriage with Emma. He is a passenger; he is not in control of the carriage or the two male servants, and he does not try to change the destination.

Finally, Emma's opinion of Mr. Elton is greatly lowered, but in the extended meditation which follows his proposal, she clearly does not think of him as a dangerous libertine; she regards him as a fortune hunter whose protestations of love are hollow.

These more sinister views of the carriage scene are in service of an interpretation of *Emma* as a feminist novel containing subtle messages against conventional courtship and marriage, or even against the patriarchy writ large. I will return to the question of whether Austen intended such a message in Chapter 5 section 3, and also in the conclusion.

1.3 Volumes II and III of *Emma*

Chastened and humiliated, Emma vows to control her imagination in the future. In the remaining two volumes of the novel, there are additional subtle allusions to novelistic tropes, but there are only two more delusive episodes where Emma perceives real life in terms of the conventions of the novel—the water rescue and the gypsy rescue.

1.3.1 The water rescue

"An ingenious and animating suspicion" arises in Emma's mind when she learns from Miss Bates that Jane Fairfax has turned down a trip to Ireland with her friends the Campbells in favor of visiting her aunt and grandmother in Highbury. Emma's suspicions are strengthened when Miss Bates mentions that Jane served as chaperone when Miss Campbell walked out with her fiancé Mr. Dixon before their marriage. The most suggestive piece of news is that Mr. Dixon saved Jane from drowning at Weymouth:

> "…and she, by the sudden whirling round of something or other among the sails, would have been dashed into the sea at once. . if he had not, with the greatest presence of mind, caught hold of her habit—...ever since we had the history of that day, I have been so fond of Mr. Dixon!" (171).

Emma assumes that Jane nurses a hopeless passion for Mr. Dixon, then she charitably amends her suspicions to surmise that Jane is innocent; it is Mr. Dixon who is in love with her. But only the flight from a forbidden love could explain her choice to return to the obscurity of Highbury.

Mudrick condemns Emma for making up "the most outrageous slander" about Jane Fairfax "without a shred of evidence" (187), but Miss Bate's testimony of a water rescue is all the evidence Emma needs. A man who rescues a heroine from drowning is instantly infatuated with her, as demonstrated in *Ethelinde* (I:80-2), *Ella Rosenberg* (1808 1:8-10), and *Secrets Made Public* (I:131-2). This was a long-standing and well-known trope: Sophia Primrose is marked out for Mr. Burchell when he rescues her in the *Vicar of Wakefield* (1776). The parodic heroine Cherubina is "indignant" when a hero fails to materialize when she falls into a shallow rivulet. (*The Heroine* II:117). Elizabeth Inchbald even cautioned her fellow novelists against using it: "suffer [the heroine] to be rescued from impending death by the sagacity of a dog, a fox, a monkey, or a hawk; anyone to whom she cannot give her hand in marriage; for whenever the deliverer is a fine young man, the catastrophe [climax] of your plot is foreseen, and suspense extinguished" (qtd. in Murphy *JA the Reader* 136). In other words, the significance of Jane's water rescue would have been instantly recognized by Austen's contemporary readers.

1.3.2 The heroine between a rock and a hard place

Her suspicions fully awakened, Emma prods the unsuspecting Miss Bates with the comment that Mrs. Dixon [Miss Campbell as was] "has no remarkable degree of personal beauty; is not, by any means, to be compared with Miss Fairfax" (172). Even though the narrator assures us that the Campbells and Jane lived together without friction (176), Emma knows that heroines in this position become the blameless targets of jealousy and resentment, as in *The Woman of Letters* (1783), *Fanny, or the Deserted Daughter* (1792), *The Match Girl* (1808), *Ellinor*, and *A Winter in Bath*, among many others. The poor but beautiful dependent attracts the admiration of the man intended for the daughter of the house. The resulting enmity places the heroine in such an untenable position that her only recourse is to leave, as Jane leaves the Campbells.

Emma is witness to another heroine rescue later in the novel; Harriet's rescue from a band of panhandling gypsies, which leads her to assume that Frank and Harriet must inevitably fall in love with each other. Emma will be disabused of her erroneous assumptions about the water rescue and the gypsy rescue, but when the veil falls from her eyes, the scene is not handled as pure farce. Emma wakes up to the serious errors of judgment she has made and is genuinely contrite.

Chapter 2: Substitution and Understatement

2.1 Absence of meta-narration

Amongst the many sentimental novels studied for this dissertation, at least a dozen featured characters who perish or almost perish while crossing the Irish sea. This naturally crossed my mind when I recently travelled from Dublin to Holyhead by ferry. However, the sea was as smooth as the proverbial mill pond for my trip and my husband was not called upon to lash me into a lifeboat or hold my head above the billowing waves.

Novelists sometimes broke the fourth wall to joke about the fact that travel for heroines almost always involved peril, as opposed to prosaic reality. In *Ellinor,* the titular heroine makes an uneventful trip to London, in defiance of the "misadventures which are so constantly occurring to the heroines of contemporary novelists" (III:51). Austen makes a similar sly remark in *Northanger Abbey*: Catherine Morland's journey to Bath with the Allens "was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero" (*NA* 78).

Austen purposefully eschewed the melodramatic excesses and improbable occurrences of the domestic-sentimental novel in her mature novels as well, but without signposting the substitution with meta-narration. Throughout *Emma*, Austen "ridicule[s]… false literary romanticism, by a deliberate and ironic use of literary and romantic conventions and cliché" (Craik, *JA Six Novels* 154). One of the ways she subtly uses ridicule is to substitute the mundane and prosaic for the dramatic, beginning with her introduction of her heroine.

2.2 Substitution

2.2.1 Opening of Emma

> Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her...The real evils, indeed, of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself… (2-3).

Austen uses the "hyperbolic rhetoric" of "evil" and "danger" to describe nothing worse than the problems which Emma's complacent opinion of herself will cause. This introduction stands as a satiric contrast to the typical sentimental novel (Easton, "Emma and Sir Charles" 64). As Clery remarked: "heroines in the *proper* mold were Cinderellas, they were underdogs, they had to face all sorts of melodramatic trials and tribulations, they were bereaved, they fell into poverty, they had threats to their reputation, they had pursuing villains, seducers, all of that was swept aside by the opening paragraph of *Emma* which lays down all her advantages" (16:17-16:25). For example, *First Impressions* commences with: "Marie de Vaublanc had just attained the age of seventeen, till which period sorrow had never obtruded itself on her youthful mind...Alas! To the eye, accustomed only to a continued sunshine, how fearful must be a lowering sky!*"* (I:1). Poor Marie is turned out of her home with just the clothes on her back and is handed over to a panderer. The author of *Eliza* (1800) loudly alerts the reader to impending perils for her heroine: "Born with virtues and graces which placed her above the rest of her sex, ELIZA was the darling of her family...But who can dream of events to come? Oh ELIZA! Little can you imagine what ill-fated destiny awaits thee!" (I:1). Gertrude in *Black Rock House* (1810) "had never known a care" before her seventeenth birthday (I:5) but she soon faces abandonment and betrayal by her husband, poverty, illness, and the (real life) great flood of 1809.

Emma Woodhouse is focused on Harriet as a heroine in the making, not on herself, so that in the opening of Emma, she is not literally in the place of the vulnerable heroine. At least she does not see herself in that light. But she has lost her governess, and the loss of a maternal or guardian figure is often the event which commences the heroine's troubles, as in *First Impressions*, *Miriam*, and *The Unexpected Legacy* (1804). Kirkham (131) compared Emma's loss of Mrs. Weston to the parodic heroine Cherubina whose story begins with the loss of her governess, who was dismissed for kissing another servant in the pantry. Mr. Woodhouse's lamentations over "poor Miss Taylor" (6) are also gently comic, and both circumstances stand as a contrast to scenes where the protector expires after murmuring a final blessing on the innocent head of the unprotected heroine.

2.2.2 The Charade

Emma's attempts to improve Harriet's mind with "useful reading and conversation" (73) are consistent with her campaign to mould her into a proper sentimental heroine. Contrary to the famous remark in *Northanger Abbey* about the attractions of female imbecility, novelists of

Austen's era were prone to elevate "the liveliness of beauty animated by wit" over "mindless beauty" (Brophy 16). Narrators showered approbation on their heroines for their fondness for reading. After doing a little recreational singing and weeping, Amanda of *Children of the Abbey* selects a book from the library and is "delighted with her employment" (I:47). Adeline of *Romance of the Forest* "constantly derived her chief information and amusement" from books (I:208).

But Harriet and Emma's "useful reading" is soon laid aside in favour of the trivial amusement of collecting riddles and charades. A search of the digitized novels of Austen's era did not yield any examples of heroines writing or collecting riddles and charades. I have not found any examples where a charade or a riddle is used in courtship. Instead of light-hearted riddles, some heroes compose poems or sing ballads, as in *Romance of the Forest* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Sentimental heroines are more apt to weep than laugh. Amanda in *Children of the Abbey* weeps over the best-selling tragic novel *Paul et Virginie* when she isn't weeping for herself.

Where charades *are* referenced in novels, they appear in social settings. In *Zeluca* (1815), the anti-heroine uses a French charade to expose her cousin's ignorance of the language (I:184-188). In *Isadora of Milan* (1811), the "female members of the party" are challenged "to compose a charade, a madrigal, a verse impromptu, or a passing witticism" (I:170) in a manner similar to Frank Churchill's antics at Box Hill.

Perhaps Austen felt some antipathy to love poetry. She shows her approbation of Mr. Knightley when he addresses Emma in "plain, unaffected, gentlemanlike English" (488). She also smirked at love poetry in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth pronounces on the "efficacy of poetry in driving away love...I am convinced that one good sonnet will starve it entirely away" (*PP* 49). Her last heroine, Charlotte Heywood, thinks Robert Burns "felt and he wrote and he forgot" (*LM Sanditon* 176). Instead, Austen uses a charade which Harriet is too simple-minded to solve. Emma solves the charade easily, but she still misinterprets Mr. Elton's intentions.

2.2.3 Understatement of charitable visit

As discussed, Austen used a charitable visit as part of her quixotic Harriet/Elton plot, but her description of this visit, and the narrator's reflections on Emma's compassion toward the poor, call for further exploration. Austen's unemotional and terse description of a family afflicted by sickness and poverty stands in striking contrast to the maudlin treatment of poverty and

charity in the sentimental novel. Austen does not employ the trite and formulaic language other authors used to laud the sensibility of the givers and the artless gratitude of the receivers. For example, in *Secrets Made Public*, Ellen, a foundling adopted by the benevolent Sir Octavius, is "the constant companion of his charitable excursions, and her sensibility was spoken by the tear that glittered in her eye, as the infant to whom she gave bread lisped its little prayer of thanks, or the white-headed old man crossed his hands on his breast, and, looking to the heavens, breathed a silent blessing on his benefactor" (I:97). In *Consequences, or Adventures at Rraxall Castle* (1796), the old family tutor upbraids the daughter of the house: "I have heard no sick man's prayers, nor poor man's blessings for anguish softened, or for food supplied by Lady Charlotte's bounty—No little children lisp her name with gratitude, or send their artless orisons to Heaven for blessings on her head!" (II:38-9).

Austen does not give us a glimpse of the afflicted family showering Emma with gratitude, nor does Emma shed a tear as she walks away. The narrator's remark that she "had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little" could stand as a commentary on the saccharine portrayals of the poor. For example, a virtuous little urchin in *The Sons of the Viscount and The Daughters of the Earl* (1813) receives a guinea from the heroine and declares he will buy a dress for his widowed mother which will render her fit to go out in public: "I am happy, so happy, that my dear mammy can go to church and pray to God to bless your ladyship and the other ladies who have been so good to us" (III:87).

Austen's handling of the charitable visit suggests that she regarded charity as an intrinsic duty for a gentlewoman, but she rejected the condescending attitudes in sentimental novels. Emma dispatches the subject of the poor family with: "If we feel for the wretched, enough to do all we can for them, the rest is empty sympathy, only distressing to ourselves" (94).

2.2.4 Harriet and the Gypsies

In Volume III, Chapter 3, Austen uses "gipsies" to provide some *faux* danger for Harriet Smith. Heroines faced a variety of perils in novels, which provided an opening for a timely rescue by the hero. Brothers Julius and Horatio in *Eva of Cambria* meet their future brides because of a carriage accident and a runaway bull, respectively. In *Romance of the Forest,* the hero rescues Adeline from ravishment by an evil nobleman. In *Emma*, Austen substitutes a more probable event—a girl being intimidated by aggressive panhandlers. Ford plausibly suggests that

the gypsies are a domestic substitute for the banditti of an Ann Radcliffe novel (184). Although Emma Woodhouse does not refer to novels, the event sends her imagination into overdrive:

> Such an adventure as this,—a fine young man and a lovely young woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain (362).

I have not found an example of a rescue from gypsies by a hero apart from the short story "Pastoro and Pastorella" in the December 1776 issue of *Lady's Magazine*. This brief tale is set in some unnamed Arcadia, not the contemporary English countryside. Pastorella is assaulted by a "wretch who had… conceived an illicit passion for her." Pastoro comes to her rescue and "after beleaguering the brutal wretch till he could not stir, carried off his fair one in triumph" (*Pastoro*, 675-6). But Charlotte Smith children's book *Rural Walks* (1795) does provide some striking parallels to Harriet's misadventure, even though no heroic rescue is involved. Young Caroline and her female cousins are walking in a country lane: [all ellipses added]

> [S]uddenly… came forward a group of gypsies… who all… began to beg; while the three girls, extremely terrified, walked on as quick as they could [while throwing money]… towards the importunate group; one woman, however, still continuing to follow them… while, on looking back, they saw the two men still gazing after them; their terror, and of course their speed, increased, and they at length gained an open road… Caroline… was so much alarmed at an encounter, which in all their solitary walks had never happened before, that she engaged a farmer's servant whom she met, and whom they happened to know, to attend them for the rest of their walk (II:118-119).

Caroline and her cousins are "terrified" and try to appease the gypsies with money, but this only stimulates a demand for more—just as occurs with Harriet. This encounter "had never happened before" on their walks, while Emma reflects that "[n]othing of the sort had ever occurred before to any young ladies in the place" (362). In both cases, the gypsies are portrayed as being alarming, but not truly dangerous. Caroline's aunt reassures the girls they were in no real peril, while Austen suggests Harriet and her walking companion Miss Bickerton should have behaved with more resolution. In Smith's version there are male gypsies "gazing after" the

young girls. Perhaps Austen specified that Harriet only saw one stout woman and some children to remove any hint of sexual menace from the scene.

Austen winds up her episode by explaining that the gypsies take "themselves off in a hurry" rather than face "the operations of justice" (364). There is no mention in *Rural Walks* of notifying the local constable. Instead, Smith has her fictional aunt go on to discuss the mythical origin of gypsies and their treatment in literature such as in *Tom Jones*. She weighs up the folkloric accusations against them (child-snatching) against what she has known them to do (steal livestock and sleep in barns). She quotes Cowper—Austen's favourite poet—who describes them as "self-banished from society," a people whose way of life renders them permanently poor and outcast (*The Task* 119-124). For both Austen and Charlotte Smith, gypsies appear to be a nuisance but a fact of life in rural England. They represented a plausible encounter for Harriet to be rescued from, as opposed to a melodramatic threat to her safety, such as a would-be abductor.

2.2.5 Two subtle allusions

While the gypsy encounter is the most dramatic episode involving Harriet, she features in other passing allusions to novelistic clichés; namely, the sacrifice of the relics of a lost lover and the amazing coincidence. Crisp noted a resemblance between Harriet Smith's surrender of her "most precious treasures," (her relics of infatuation with Mr. Elton), with the heroine of Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* (1810), who undertook "the painful task of destroying every relic" of her rejected lover (Brunton qtd in Crisp 287f3). Murphy points to Montague Thorold in Charlotte Smith's *Celestina* (1791), who collects "many little memorials" of the heroine such as her handkerchief (Smith qtd in Murphy *JA the Reader*134), while Ford thinks the reference is taken from *Adelaide and Theodore* (1783) (*What JA's Characters Read* 176). Harriet's little bonfire might point to one of these novels, or to a novel that has not been re-discovered yet, or to all of them. But the comically pathetic nature of Harriet's treasures—a pencil stub and some court plaister– "decisively nudges imitation in the direction of parody" (Cronin and McMillan xlix). Just as with Mr. Elton's flowery language, Emma is bemused by Harriet's ceremony. Harriet is playing out a novel trope and Emma thinks it is rather silly.

Several circumstances involving Robert Martin strike Harriet as "very odd." She thinks the "fortnight and a day's difference" between her birthday and his is "very odd" (29). She is also amazed to encounter him while out walking: "[o]nly think of our happening to meet him!—How

very odd!" (31) and at the local general store: "sure it was so very odd!—but [the Martins] always dealt at Ford's" (191). Harriet's wonderment at circumstances that do not stretch the bounds of probability contrasts with novelistic coincidences that do. For example, when the titular heroine flees from her heartless guardian in *Miriam*, the first mail coach that she steps into just happens to contain her long-lost father. In *What Has Been* (1801), the heroine, destitute in London, randomly collapses in front of a townhome, which just happens to be the new home of her cousin, who has just returned to England after receiving a handsome inheritance. In *Black Rock House*, the desperate heroine, abandoned by her husband, stops at an inn where she encounters her husband, followed immediately by her father and step-sister, then by her husband's step-sister. Austen explicitly satirized the remarkable coincidence in *Love and Freindship* (*Juvenilia* 121) in which a nobleman encounters his four grandchildren in swift succession. Harriet's "very odd" may be a subtle joke about the novelistic coincidence.

2.2.6 The heroine's sacrifice

After Frank is summoned away by the domineering Mrs. Churchill, Emma realizes that she cannot really be that much in love because in her daydreams, the scenarios she spins always end with a farewell, not a happily ever after. Nor does she imagine there will be anguish on either side. "Their affection was always to subside into friendship. Every thing tender and charming was to mark their parting; but still they were to part" (284). Emma realizes she is failing to act the part of a broken-hearted heroine: "In not one of all my clever replies, my delicate negatives, is there any allusion to making a sacrifice" (285). Tandon sees this passage as the most "explicit" comparison of "Emma's imaginative speculation and the activity of a novelist" (*Emma* annotated 302n2). By way of comparison, in *Children of the Abbey,* Amanda agrees to call off her marriage at the request of the hero's father: "'It must, it must be made,' she wildly cried, 'the sacrifice must be made, and Mortimer is lost to me forever.' She flung herself on the bed, and passed the hours till morning in agonies too great for description" (II:92). Ida, in *Woman, or Ida of Athens* (1809) gives up a man who is not a native Athenian: "For the family—for the country...I would sacrifice my happiness!—would!—Oh, God!—I will!—I do!" (III:39). In *The Sons of the Viscount and the Daughters of the Earl*, Lord Desmond and the lovely Cecil De Courci, separated by parental tyranny, confess their forbidden love:

> "Ah!" cried his lordship, in an agony of despair, "the attainment of my wishes has only increased my misery. I shall see you, beloved of my soul, compelled to give your hand to another, while my tortured heart is racked…"
>
> [Cecil responds:] "Never can I be your's, my lord; yet never will I become the wife of another" (III:56).

In contrast, Emma calmly concludes that Frank Churchill "is not really necessary to my happiness. So much the better. I certainly will not persuade myself to feel more than I do" (285). She hopes that Frank's infatuation with her (which exists of course only in her imagination) will soon subside.

But once Emma realizes she is in love with Mr. Knightley, her adherence to romantic orthodoxy does not extend to giving him up to a rival. In 1890, Goldwin Smith noted Emma's refusal to attempt to "transfer Knightley's affections" to Harriet. She does not aspire to emulate the delicate scruples of "heroines of romantic fiction" (133-4). Austen opts for realism over romance: "[N]o flight of generosity run mad, opposing all that could be *probable or reasonable*, entered her brain" (*Emma* 470, emphasis mine). Austen also mocked the trope of self-sacrifice in *Pride and Prejudice* when Elizabeth tells her sister Jane: "if, upon mature deliberation, you find that the misery of disobliging [Mr. Bingley's] two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife, I advise you, by all means, to refuse him" (*PP* 134).

2.2.7 Jane is the sentimental heroine

As critics have observed, Jane Fairfax, not Harriet Smith, is the true sentimental heroine hiding in plain sight, but Emma is too blind to see it. Jane Fairfax is in self-imposed exile from a life of elegance with the Campbells. Jane, who in reality has come to Highbury to reunite with the man she loves, lives in a poky little apartment. She can only find respite from the incessant chatter of her aunt by accepting invitations from the ignorant and intrusive Mrs. Elton. Although Jane is not driven to escape into a convent or to a remote Hebridean village—as was the heroine of *Children of the Abbey*, she arouses Emma's sympathy: "Such a home, indeed! such an aunt!" said Emma [to herself]. "I do pity you. And the more sensibility you betray of their just horrors, the more I shall like you" (394).

Emma's reference to "sensibility" and "horrors" are surely deliberately allusive of the language of the sentimental and even the gothic novel. While Jane's persecutions might not

deserve the name of "horror," her situation is a very trying one. To add to her stress, the man she loves has eagerly seized on Emma's suspicions about Mr. Dixon and he is enormously amused at the idea of her reputation coming under a cloud.

For the heroines of sentimental novels, "the female virtue of 'reputation'" was "closely allied to chastity" (Kasbekar 35). Typically, impediments arose between the hero and the heroine when her virtue was called into question through misunderstanding or malice. In *Children of the Abbey*, untoward appearances lead Lord Mortimer to repeatedly leap to the conclusion that Amanda is unchaste and therefore unworthy of his love. He coldly rejects her several times before her innocence is established. In *Constance*, the heroine's fiancé is persuaded to break off with her, not once but several times, creating great misery for both.

Austen turns this trope upside down—Frank Churchill *knows* that Jane Fairfax's virtue is spotless, and he thinks Emma's suspicions about Jane and Mr. Dixon are hilarious. To urge Emma to say more, he flatters her perspicacity in detecting the illicit connection. "I, simple I, saw nothing" (235). He makes barbed remarks about "Ireland" and "Dixon" every time he, Emma, and Jane are together.

2.2.8 "[W]ithout its being much to the purpose"

The third sub-plot to be resolved in *Emma* is the Harriet sub-plot. Emma's joy at the prospect of marrying Mr. Knightley is marred by her guilt over Harriet. She wisely sends Harriet off to enjoy the diversions of London. Before long, Mr. Knightley brings the unforeseen and delightful news that Harriet has accepted a proposal from Robert Martin. Mr. Knightley adds that while relating the circumstances that led to their reconciliation, the happy groom-to-be:

> "did mention, without its being much to the purpose, that on quitting their box at Astley's, my brother took charge of Mrs. John Knightley and little John, and he followed with Miss Smith and Henry; and that at one time they were in such a crowd, as to make Miss Smith rather uneasy" (515).

Austen's contemporary readers knew that Harriet's uneasiness at Astley's Ampitheatre *was* very much to the purpose of the happy conclusion of the interrupted love affair. This is because a heroine who attends a public place of amusement is "lay[ing] a foundation for future incident," as Barrett's parodic heroine Cherubina explains (*Heroine* I:189). The theatre or opera was a place for an unexpected *rencontre*, or a terrible misunderstanding, or an insult to a

vulnerable heroine. In *The Metropolis* (1811), the heroine is propositioned by a "box-office lounger," who asks, "Will you be my *chère amie*, and exchange a shop for elegant apartments, and a hackney-coach for your own chariot?" (I:14). The hero, overhearing this insult, lays the cad out with a right hook to the jaw. In *Mystery and Confidence,* a lieutenant who harbors an unrequited love for the heroine accuses her of being a kept woman, unaware that she was respectably married. A duel almost ensues. Merely getting through the crowded theatre doors proves to be too much for Sarah Burney's weepy heroine Clarentine Delmington, for in addition to being jostled about, she is exposed to the impertinent remarks of the male lookers-on. When she is caught in the "general rush" and:

> instantly enclosed on every side… after vainly contending… with the fearful apprehensions that seized her, she lost all command over herself, and uttering a piercing shriek, fell back without sense or motion in [her admirer Mr.] Eltham's arms (*Clarentine*, II:214-6).

Thus, when Harriet turns to Robert Martin for protection and comfort at Astley's, the couple are acting out a novelistic trope, transferred from Covent Garden to the circus.

2.2.9 More prosaic reality

Five chapters separate Emma and Mr. Knightley's proposal scene from their wedding because there are impediments to be resolved and many details to be cleared up. The story of the Churchill/Fairfax secret engagement must be revisited, and the actions of Frank and Jane must be explained. We learn that after leaving the strawberry party at Donwell, Jane met and quarrelled with Frank, who wanted to walk her home, but she refused. He retaliated by behaving spitefully at the Box Hill picnic, leading Jane to break off their engagement by letter. She receives no reply from him because his letter of apology to her was carelessly "locked up in [his] writing-desk" (482).

Misplaced or purloined letters played important roles in sentimental novels, especially when it came to the separation of lovers. However, I have not seen another example of a crucial letter misplaced because of "confusion of...mind and multiplicity of business" (481-2). This is a less dramatic and more probable circumstance than a letter purloined by a tyrannical parent or forged by a malicious rival as occurs in *Modern Manners*, *The Heir of Montague* (1798), and

Constance, to name a few. Likewise, the resolution of Harriet's storyline relies upon the realistic and the probable.

The first of Emma's delusions is the last to be punctured when Harriet "proved to be the daughter of a tradesman ...Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!" (526). Readers acquainted with the usual course of events in a sentimental novel must have appreciated the sly understatement of substituting a tradesman for a viscount. Harriet does not receive a stupendous dowry and a casket of her late mother's jewels, although her father must have given her a respectable settlement since we learn that Robert Martin "was treated liberally" (526).

Despite her rejection of novelistic convention, Austen gives Harriet a happy ending. In this respect, Emma follows a pattern established in the parodic *Northanger Abbey*: Austen "first exposes everything false and absurd in the conventions these novels rely on to elicit suspense and distress, and then surprises her readers by using the conventions more successfully than her predecessors did, to evoke the same responses" (Fergus *JA and the Didactic Novel* 7). Catherine Morland was wrong to suspect General Tilney murdered or immured his wife, but he *is* a household tyrant. Harriet is not of genteel stock, but she makes a happy and secure marriage anyway.

2.2.10 Poultry thieves—trite or trope?

Emma faces a final impediment to her marriage with Mr. Knightley—her own father's reluctance. The impasse is easily solved by the arrival of poultry thieves in the neighbourhood, a *deus ex machina* that has drawn criticism for being a contrivance (Brodey 13-14). However, the episode might resonate differently with Austen's first readers for two reasons: firstly, the theft of poultry was a commonplace occurrence, so common, as Cobbett noted, that "no man in England has the smallest expectation of being ever able to taste what he raises, unless he carefully locks it up in the night, and has dogs to guard the approaches to the hen-roost" (656). Secondly, perhaps the reference would resonate differently today if we knew it to be a satirical allusion to a literary trope. Harriet's love story concludes with a subtle joking reference to the "alarm at the opera" trope, and perhaps the poultry thieves are also intended to be a similar subtle joke/reference. I have searched for novels employing a similar type of resolution. Often the hero and heroine meet when he rescues her from danger, or a father's resistance to a match is overcome by the hero coming to the rescue, as in *Elfrida, or Paternal Ambition*, but I have not found examples of a

hero being called to defend the heroine in the *resolution* to a novel plot. It is worth noting that "hen-roost strippers" are mentioned in the parodic novel *Rosella* as people who "might, upon an emergency" be reimagined as "banditti" (14) in the overheated imaginations of Sophia Beauclerc and her friend Selina.Perhaps some more illustrative examples will emerge from the digital archives in future.

Chapter 3 Novel conventions retained or ignored

The Fair Quixote, Rosella, and *The Heroine* may be parodies but they nevertheless conform to basic romantic orthodoxies. In the same way, as Munderlein recognized, *Northanger Abbey* "pursues a non-parodic narrative of its own that is not a mocking imitation of either another text or a genre" (38). Austen gives us an unconventional heroine in Emma Woodhouse, but in a marriage-plot novel with five weddings.

Austen uses certain conventions of the sentimental novel in a non-ironic fashion.

3.1 The orphaned protagonist and other conventions of the novel

Jane Fairfax, Frank Churchill, and Emma Woodhouse are orphans or half-orphans, a circumstance that would be quite striking in modern life for three young people in their early twenties but is not at all remarkable in a sentimental novel. For heroines, this is a pre-condition for placing her in a vulnerable position; this is certainly the case for the heroines of *Children of the Abbey* and *Romance of the Forest.* Austen downplays maternal loss in *Emma*: "[h]er mother had died too long ago for her to have more than an indistinct remembrance of her caresses" (3). The titular heroine in *Laura Blundel and Her Father* (1812) lost her mother at a young age, but "[n]o affliction had clouded the gay sunshine of her youth, or unruly passion disturbed the cheerful serenity of her bosom" (I:60). When parental loss is necessary for the plot, it is a sometimes merely a necessary precursor to the action of the story, not a traumatic loss.

Emma herself adheres to some romantic convictions, such as the truism that love is blind, which traces back to the blindfold on Cupid. Because she "could yet imagine [Frank Churchill] to have faults" (284), she decides she cannot be very much in love with him. She "rejoice[s] to hear" Mr. Knightley calmly state that Jane Fairfax "has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife" (311). By the same rule, however, she concludes that Mr. Knightley cannot be

in love with *her*, especially after he scolded her for being rude to Miss Bates. "[S]he could not flatter herself with any idea of blindness in his attachment to her" (452-3). Austen resolves the quandary created by this romantic orthodoxy by explaining that to Mr. Knightley, Emma is "faultless in spite of her faults" (472).

Other devices used—but modified—in *Emma* are the explanatory letter, unquestioning filial piety, life-threatening illness, and misunderstanding. The letter was used for exposition, the heroine's filial piety attested to her sublime character, illness added to the tension of a novel and, as discussed, often served to keep a character in one place, and misunderstandings were often manufactured by the hero's or heroine's enemies.

3.2 The inset narrative, filial piety, the heroine's illness

The inset narrative, delivered in person, as with Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*, or via letter, as with Frank Churchill or with Mr. Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, is "a habit once common in novels, but now rare" (Mullan *How Novels Work* 164). Austen might be implying some mild mockery of the convention in Mr. Knightley's remark: "What a letter the man writes!" However, at a mere 2,794 words, Frank's letter is a model of brevity compared to some other backstories, such as Henry Darleville's 10,675 word missive in *Cecily Fitz Owen* or Henry Stafford's 8,400 word apologia in *Miriam*.

As for filial piety, while Emma does not bathe Mr. Woodhouse's hand with her tears or kneel and ask for his blessing as many another heroine might, it is clear that she genuinely loves him and expects others to treat him with respect, a point that is repeatedly reinforced. While some view Mr. Woodhouse as an annoying (Mudrick 195) or even as a sinister (Jenkyns 158-165) presence in his daughter's life, I contend that Austen does not parody the father-daughter relationship in *Emma*. Mr. Woodhouse is a comic figure, but he is presented in an affectionate light, not a mocking one. Austen does not challenge conventional notions of filial piety.

Harriet Smith suffered a bout of illness in Volume I as discussed, but it is Jane Fairfax who follows the traditional path of falling ill after enduring heartbreak. A typical heroine's illness starts with fainting fits, followed by high fever, followed by delirium and sometimes death. If you take a friendless heroine into your home or lodging-house, there is a good chance you will find yourself with a seriously ill patient on your hands, as kind-hearted people discover in *Fanny, or the deserted daughter*, *Children of the Abbey*, *Romance of the Forest*, *Ellinor*, *The Wife and the Lover* (1813), and *Constance*. In that last novel, misunderstanding and malice lead to

Constance Fitzarthur's estrangement from the man she loves. "In the evening she was so ill that [her landlady sent for] an apothecary...her fever now increased every hour, and rendered her delirious." Our heroine slowly recovers, then receives word that her mother is very ill. She faints, as pale as a corpse, and "[h]er fever now returned as violently as before, and with less probability of her recovery…" but she pulls through (II:229-241). In *Fanny: a novel; in a series of letters*, the heroine is outraged when the amorous Lord Davenant hides in her room to proposition her. She sends him away but:

> the shock she had received attacked her spirits with double violence: mortified pride, offended virtue, and I fear disappointed love, raised such dreadful conflicts in her oppressed bosom, that she...fell into a most alarming state of sensibility, the vacant look, and languid smile of which, were more terrible even than a raging fever which succeeded, attended with a delirium (I:137).

Austen opted against placing her heroine at death's door. Jane Fairfax suffers from emotional and mental torment, or as Mr. Perry puts it, she has a "nervous disorder" (424), but as Emma discovers, she is not too ill to go "wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury" after turning down a carriage ride "under the plea of being unequal to any exercise" (426). However, Frank's reaction on seeing her "wan, sick looks" (483) after their reconciliation makes it clear that her psychological misery had affected her physically.

3.3 Contrived and natural misunderstandings

Austen does not rely on the malignant interference of a rival or some contrived misunderstanding to engineer Jane and Frank's temporary estrangement. As C.L. Thomson notes, Austen's lovers are not separated by "inadequate causes" or "unlikely adventures" (259), unlike other novels of the era.

Perverse misunderstandings abound in *Susan*. Lady Kenheath thinks the heroine has fallen in love with her husband, but Susan really loves young Archibald. Archibald thinks Susan is going to marry Donald MacLaurin, while Susan thinks Archibald is going to marry Lady Kenheath's daughter. Constance Fitzarthur in *Constance*, and Caroline Percivil in *The Bristol Heiress* are the victims of untoward events—both are seen, unchaperoned, in the company of a male in a disreputable part of town.

Austen rises above contrived misunderstanding with Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax's rupture. Their estrangement arises from their differing personalities: she wants to behave discreetly, while he wants to amuse himself by deceiving everyone in Highbury, flirting with Emma, and teasing Jane about Mr. Dixon. Jane concludes that he regrets the engagement.

The double misunderstanding between Knightley and Emma is a consequence of Emma's interference in Harriet's life. She knows that she is responsible for Harriet's raising her eyes to Mr. Knightley. "If Harriet, from being humble, were grown vain, it was her doing too" (451). No accidental untoward event or malicious rival has created the problem—it is the heroine herself.

When lovers are separated by misunderstanding, the reader is usually tipped off about the error. We know the lovers have been the victim of a forged letter, or a malicious rumour, or some compromising circumstances. In the case of such misunderstandings, the dramatic tension arises from wondering when and how the misunderstanding will be cleared up. Thanks to the glimpse Austen gives us of Mr. Knightley's state of mind in Volume III, Chapter 5, the reader knows he is not in love with Harriet. Their mutual misunderstanding creates a temporary impediment before the happy resolution. Third volume impediments are quite typical for a marriage-plot novel.

3.4 Convenient death

Jane Fairfax is rescued from her unenviable situation by a convenient death, which brings an accession to riches through marriage and a happy ever after. Hume is dissatisfied with Mrs. Churchill's death, which he condemns as "happy-making fudge" (295-6). In a more realistic novel, Jane would have become a governess. But if rational outcomes were the order of the day, then, as Charles Bingley remarked to his sister, it would not be so much like a ball, or rather, it would not be so much like a marriage-plot novel. Austen also killed off the older brother of Eleanor Tilney's true love, which enabled them to marry and also enabled Catherine Morland to marry Henry Tilney, in *Northanger Abbey*. Austen herself does not comment on the convenience of these deaths, and they are undeniably novelistic conventions.

Frank Churchill is undeniably a bit of scoundrel, so is Austen's wrap up to the story to be taken at face value? The question of the happy ever after is further discussed in the conclusion.

Chapter 4 Austen's Innovations

4.1 Nature and probability

Before discussing Austen's innovations, it would be appropriate to reiterate that the purpose of this dissertation is to study *Emma* in the context of the novels of her age. As pioneering feminist scholar Ellen Moers argued: "Jane Austen achieved the classical perfection of her fiction because there was a mass of women's novels, excellent, fair, and wretched, for her to study and improve upon" (44). The scant record left to us indicates that Austen consistently noticed and objected to improbable events and unnatural behaviour in novels. She gave Mary Brunton's *Self-Control* credit for being "excellently-meant" and "elegantly-written," but "without anything of Nature or Probability in it" (*Letters* 234). After re-reading *Clarentine* she pronounced it to be "foolish" (*Letters* 120).

Austen eschewed sensationalism, melodrama and lachrymosity in her own writing, as seen in the prior examples of the substitution of prosaic reality for melodrama. In addition, she she avoided "thorough novel slang" such as "vortex of dissipation" (*Letters* 289) and paid close attention to pacing and putting her characters in motion. If we attentively read the sequence which begins with Harriet visiting Emma at Hartfield and ends with Harriet, Emma, Mrs. Weston, and Miss Bates climbing the staircase to discover Frank Churchill repairing Mrs. Bates's spectacles, we see how Austen provides a natural motivation for everyone's movements. Emma, for example, accompanies Harriet to Ford's to run interference just in case the Martins are also there. Harriet dithers over her purchases so Emma grows bored and walks to the door:

> …when her eyes fell only on the butcher with his tray, a tidy old woman travelling homewards from shop with her full basket, two curs quarrelling over a dirty bone, and a string of dawdling children round the baker's little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread, she knew she had no reason to complain, and was amused enough; quite enough still to stand at the door… (251)

The passage excerpted above has drawn much critical commentary and speculation. Thompson (257) saw it as a commentary on the "tedium" of country life, Parker (357-8) thought it was an indictment of Emma's "proprietorial" and complacent class privilege, while Murphy suggests that as an example of "fictional realism," the passage "has no precedent in the fiction of Austen's time" (141). But whatever else Austen intended artistically by this passage, she wanted

to cloak the fact that she moved Emma to the door like a chess piece so she would observe Frank Churchill and Mrs. Weston walking down the street. "In *Emma*, the workmanship is so fine that it conceals itself," says Craik (*JA Six Novels* 125).

4.2 From stock characters to unforgettable characters

Austen transformed stock novel characters into personalities so vivid and memorable that even in her lifetime, readers surmised that she must have based them on real people (*Austen Leigh* 147-8). It was a typical practice of authors during this period to introduce a gallery of comic but static characters, often to set off the perfections of the heroine. Lydia, Kitty, and Mary Bennet, along with their mother, are fools compared to Elizabeth and Jane (Manning "Held up to derision" 96). However, Austen saw the error of inserting characters who played no part in the plot, as she observed in a novel by Sir Egerton Brydges, who introduced "many characters, apparently merely to be delineated" (*Letters* 22).

In *Emma*, Mrs. Elton and Miss Bates are two characters with stock origins. Mrs. Elton's social awkwardness marks her as an iteration of the vulgar merchant's daughter. Usually these characters—such as Clarintha Ludford in *Ethelinde* (1789) or Mrs. Wilkinson in *The Bristol Heiress*—exist merely to "enhance our appreciation of the heroine's true nobility or gentility" (Crisp 333) and provide a laugh at the expense of the upwardly mobile merchant class. Mrs. Elton, however, is not merely a stock character wheeled out for the reader's amusement. Austen uses Mrs. Elton's self-absorption for comic purposes, but she also has a role to play in the plot with her incessant pestering of Jane Fairfax.

In Austen's time (and earlier) novels and plays abounded with garrulous characters, usually of a lower social status than the principals. Miss Bates is a character in this tradition. Grundy traces this type of character back to the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* and describes them as speakers who give "a mass of trivial circumstantial detail… these talkers have no sense of proportion, no power of prioritizing" ("Why do they talk" 53-4). Talkative servants appear in *Elfrida, or Paternal Ambition* (1786), *An Old Family Legend* (1811), and *Mystery and Confidence*, to give just a few examples. They were used for exposition delivered in a humorous fashion—since it was deemed comical when the servant was maddeningly slow to provide essential information. The servant Joanna in *Miriam* relates some shocking news:

> "Oh Miss! This comes of old gentlemen or elderly gentlemen marrying young beauties, never no good can come, I'm very sartin, but howsomedever I'll tell you. Last night, 'twas near ten o'clock, and Joseph was just a-stirring out the fire, and I was unpinning my cap when helter-skelter we heard such a noise! [etc. etc., etc.…] Well, Miss, the short and the long is that Mrs. Fitzpatrick has 'loped, and carried off a deal of money with her…." (*Miriam* II:214).

Given their ubiquity in plays and novels, it seems that English readers from previous generations could not get enough of long-winded exposition from faithful old domestics. Modern readers who are irritated or perplexed by Miss Bates's volubility might be more reconciled to her if they knew she was an iteration of a traditional stock character who Austen uses in the traditional way to provide exposition—as when she announces Mr. Elton's engagement—but Miss Bates also unwittingly provides clues. For example, the narrator does not tell us that Frank Churchill danced the last dance before supper with Jane Fairfax so that he can sit with her at supper. We must glean the fact that he is escorting Jane and her aunt to supper out of Miss Bates's stream-of-consciousness chatter.

4.3 Exposition and dialogue

Chief among Austen's claims to genius is her talent for using dialogue. She uses dialogue for exposition, for letting us in on how characters feel about one another, and for revealing their own blindness in how they perceive themselves. First, as Hilary Mantel noted:

> Exposition is the trickiest bit of the [novelist's] trade. We all know how *not* to do it: "Why, masters, here comes the Lady Anne Boleyn, she who has supplanted the Spanish Queen Katherine in the fickle affections of our sovereign, King Henry VIII" (4).

In other words, characters should not be telling each other things they already know. The epistolary novel *A Woman of Colour* (1809) opens with Olivia Fairchild recounting to her governess the story of her parents; how her father loved but did not marry her mother, an enslaved African princess who died giving birth to her. "You will ask me why I recapitulate these events? Events which are so well known to you," she adds. She explains, "I love to dwell on the character of my mother" (55). The real reason, of course, is that the reader must learn Olivia's backstory.

Emma features dialogue between Mr. Woodhouse and his daughter in which she repeats assurances she has given to him before, and we suspect, will have to give again. Because Mr. Woodhouse is so anxious and querulous, Austen commences her world-building with Emma repeating information to soothe her father:

> "My dear, how am I to get so far? Randalls is such a distance. I could not walk half so far."
>
> "No, papa, nobody thought of your walking. We must go in the carriage, to be sure."
>
> "The carriage! But James will not like to put the horses to for such a little way;—and where are the poor horses to be while we are paying our visit?"
>
> "They are to be put into Mr. Weston's stable, papa. You know we have settled all that already. We talked it all over with Mr. Weston last night" (6-7).

And Austen uses the same device to give exposition about an upcoming visit:

> "Have you thought, my dear, where you shall put [Isabella]—and what room there will be for the children?"
>
> "Oh! yes—she will have her own room, of course; the room she always has;—and there is the nursery for the children,—just as usual, you know. Why should there be any change?… (84-85).

Moler (2-5) and others have noted Austen's enduring interest in exploring self-knowledge versus self-deception, as (for example) in the case of her erring heroine Elizabeth Bennet and her resentful hero Captain Wentworth. Austen notably uses dialogue to illustrate self-deception and hypocrisy (Craik, *JA: Six Novels* 131). Mr. Weston holds himself out as someone who is too charitable to disparage Mrs. Churchill, even though he can never resist the opportunity of doing so. He and Mrs. Elton carry on a polite conversation in which they both vie to maneuver the topic back to themselves. Austen leaves it to her readers to detect and laugh at their hypocrisy, but unlike many other authors of her era, she does not add an intrusive editorial pointing out their folly.

The narrator does not comment on the growth of Emma's influence on Harriet's perception of herself; we see it through Harriet's changing patterns of speech. During the charitable visit, Harriet answers with little more than "Oh! Dear no," and "Oh! Dear, yes," when Emma philosophizes on their obligations to the poor (93-4). By the time of the dinner party at the Cole's, she confidently gives her opinion on matters she knows nothing about and shows snobbish indifference to Jane Fairfax's fate: [ellipses added]

> "Well, I always shall think that you play quite as well as [Jane Fairfax] does, or that if there is any difference nobody would ever find it out… I saw she had execution, but I did not know she had any taste. Nobody talked about it. And I hate Italian singing.—There is no understanding a word of it… [b]esides, if she does play so very well, you know, it is no more than she is obliged to do, because she will have to teach" (250).

In Volume III, Harriet protests she has "not the presumption to suppose" that the man she regards with "veneration" might care for her. Emma, thinking that she is speaking of Frank Churchill, assures her "there have been matches of greater disparity" (370-1). When Emma's misunderstanding comes to light, Harriot's habitual "dear Miss Woodhouse" deference gives way to rebuke: [ellipses added]

> "I should not have thought it possible… that you could have misunderstood me… considering how infinitely superior he is to every body else… Mr. Frank Churchill, indeed! I do not know who would ever look at him in the company of the other. I hope I have a better taste than to think of Mr. Frank Churchill, who is like nobody by [Mr. Knightley's] side" (442).

Although this section is devoted to Austen's innovations as an author, it is worth noting that this plot point –a misunderstanding over which man a girl admires—resembles the denial that Genevieve Widdrington gives the titular heroine in *Margiana, or Widdrington Tower* (1808), a novel Austen is known to have read:

> "Lord Lothian!" exclaimed Genevieve, indignantly. "Oh, how have you fallen into an error so insulting to me? ...how came you so far deceived, as to think I could

possibly love so poor, so unworthy a character as Lord Lothian, after knowing and appreciating the excellencies of [Ethelred] Delancey?" (IV:201).

4.4 Hints and clues

"About ten days after Mrs. Churchill's decease" (427) Emma learns of the secret engagement between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax. It is a moment, as John Mullan says of revelations in novels, "when what we have already read shifts its significance" (*How Novels Work* 179). To take one example, the meaning shifts in the exchange between Emma and Frank, when she asks if he is aware Jane is to be a governess. "You know… what she is destined to be?" Frank hesitates, then answers "I think I do" (216). Only on a re-reading do we understand that he is probably suppressing a smile because he intends to marry her and raise her to social eminence and wealth.

Many novels in Austen's time depended upon revelations of secrets for their plot resolutions. Austen's brilliance in embedding clues about the coming revelation in *Emma* is even more remarkable when we compare it to the unsophisticated techniques used in other novels. For example, in *An Old Family Legend*, the garrulous old servant swears he has seen a ghost of his late master, but of course it really is the hero, who was thought to have perished in a shipwreck.

P. D. James described clues as: "facts which are hidden from the reader but which he or she should be able to discover by logical deduction from clues inserted in the novel with deceptive cunning but essential fairness" (250). In other words, and unlike many other novels of the era, it is possible for a clever and attentive reader to figure out the hidden revelation on a first reading of *Emma*. Other scholars, such as Bell, have listed many of the embedded clues, such as Frank's arrival in Highbury shortly after Jane's, the pianoforte being delivered after he goes to London—ostensibly to get his hair cut—his mentioning Mr. Perry's plan to buy a carriage, information he got from a letter from Jane, his foul mood after he encounters Jane walking home in the heat from the Donwell strawberry party. From Miss Bates we learn that Jane accepted a position as a governess immediately after learning of Frank's abrupt departure from Highbury.

In contrast, while we have no doubt that the elegant heroine of *Romance of the Forest* must be of good birth, we are not given sufficient information to figure out her parentage until the truth is revealed to us. In *Black Rock House* and *The Match Girl*, an illegitimate daughter seeks revenge on the family that relegated her to second-class status, but her identity is kept a

secret until late in the novel. In *Black Rock House* the villainess "broke suddenly into a hearty laugh" (I:31) after introducing the heroine to a dashing captain at a ball. This suggests that she has a secret, but not what that secret may be.

Often, the narrator informs the reader that information is being withheld. In *Ellinor*, a woman disguised as a fortune-teller: "came to do Ellinor all the evil in her power… but who she actually was; time must *develope*" (II:300). In *Miriam*, the heroine's guardian had "reasons which had induced him to become her protector, which he had not avowed to any one…" (I:22). The gothic *A Modern Incident in Domestic Life* is filled with impenetrable hints: "*Why* Mrs. Courtney uttered such a frantic shriek, or *what* caused such violent emotion, the reader is left to imagine…" (I:62). Austen may be poking fun at this kind of hint-dropping when the narrator tells us "Mr. Knightley… for some reason best known to himself, had certainly taken an early dislike to Frank Churchill" (I:5). His reason for disliking Frank Churchill is not exactly impenetrable.

Some tropes are used so frequently that the reader can predict, for example, that the ghost is actually a real person, but this is not the same as a clue. For example, in *An Old Family Legend* it is immediately obvious that the handsome and gallant Cuthbert was substituted in infancy by his wet-nurse, though this "secret" is not revealed until the fourth volume.

To date the only actual *clue* in a novel other than Austen's that I have encountered occurs in *Lady Maclairn* (1806). Lady Maclairn and her unpleasant sister-in-law are both oppressed by secrets. They frequently rush from the room or burst into tears for unfathomable reasons. One tidbit, however, stands out: Lady Maclairn's youngest son Malcolm tells the heroine that his mother: "suckled me herself; her health had not admitted of this duty when [older brother] Philip was born'' (II:12). Later, we learn that the real reason Lady Maclairn did not breastfeed Philip is because he is *not* her son; she was blackmailed into pretending he was. He is the illegitimate son of her sister-in-law! Austen is thought to have read *Lady Maclairn* because she mimics its prolix style in a letter to her niece Anna (Letters 195).

Further exploration of forgotten novels might turn up some more authors who gave their readers actual clues, as opposed to dropping hints that a revelation was to come. However, it appears that Austen's contribution to what would become the detective novel cannot be understated.

4.5 Tricks of the narrator

Austen's dropping or withholding of clues is related to her pathbreaking use of free indirect discourse. The use of FID in *Emma* has been examined by many scholars, such as Booth ("Point of view" 242-66), Mullan (*What Matters* 308-312), C. Johnson and Tuite (120-7), and Cohn, who writes: "In her narrated monologues Austen seems precisely to cast the spirit of epistolary fiction into the mold of third-person narration… with the rhythm of inner debate… exactly transposed into narrative language, without explicit quotation or authorial explication" (113). Yet, there is a subtle but significant change in Austen's use of the narrator between the first volume and the next two volumes. In Volume I, the narrator shows us that Emma is deceiving herself, even as we are privy to her thoughts, assumptions, and judgements. In Volume II, however, the narrator appears to endorse Emma's suspicions about Jane Fairfax. A significant passage occurs after Emma learns that Jane Fairfax is coming to Highbury. The narrator ties Jane's poor health to the marriage of the Dixons, and reports that Mr. and Mrs. Campbell (Jane's guardians and the parents of the newly-married Mrs. Dixon) told her not to look for work until she had recovered:

> [Jane Fairfax] had never been quite well since the time of their daughter's marriage; and till she should have completely recovered her usual strength, [the Campbells] must forbid her engaging in [governess] duties…

The narrator also implies that Jane is hiding a secret which may be known, or suspected, by the Campbells:

> With regard to her not accompanying them to Ireland, her account to her aunt contained nothing but truth, *though there might be some truths not told*. It was her own choice to give the time of their absence to Highbury...and the Campbells, *whatever might be their motive or motives, whether single, or double, or treble,* gave the arrangement their ready sanction (177). (emphasis added)

This is information outside of Emma's knowledge. Emma was not in a position to know if Jane's letter to Miss Bates "contained nothing but the truth" or whether there were "some truths not told." Further, while Miss Bates explains that the Campbells "particularly wish her to try her native air, as she has not been quite so well as usual lately" (171), she says nothing about

the Campbells forbidding her to look for a governess post. That is information provided by the narrator and does not appear to be a supposition on Emma's part. Miss Bates gave Emma some of the details of Jane's letter, but Emma deliberately escaped so that she did not have to hear the letter read to her. Who then, is vouching for Jane's veracity in the letter while slyly suggesting there might be "some truths not told"? I suggest that it is the narrator—independently of Emma—who insinuates that Jane is harbouring a guilty secret, a secret suspected by Mrs. Dixon's parents. Further, and unlike the events of the Elton/Harriet storyline, nothing occurs to alert the reader that Emma is mistaken; rather, Jane Fairfax's pallid complexion and her guarded air serve to deepen the suspicion that she is guarding a secret and possibly a broken heart.

Thus, we are made aware by the narrator that some information is being withheld. After the revelation of Frank and Jane's engagement, we realize that *this* is the "truth not told," not a doomed love affair with Mr. Dixon. Austen reported the existence of a secret while at the same time misdirecting the reader.

4.6 Austen's impetus

The foregoing is not intended to serve as a comprehensive explication of Austen's innovations as a writer. My intention is to suggest that the impetus for these innovations arose out of Austen's commitment to the "natural and probable." As Shepperson wrote: "What could be more natural than that a youthful critic of the novels of her day, endowed with creative ability, should in maturity seek to correct their faults and supply their defects?" (131). I contend that on the evidence, Austen's underlying motive was to reform the novel, not reform the world. To borrow Tom Bertram's gallantry to Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, "Those who are showing the world what [novels] *should be* are doing a great deal to set them right" (*MP* 58).

Chapter 5: A novel about novels

5.1 *Emma*'s debt to other novels and plays

As previously noted, many scholars have argued for studying Austen in context, at least in comparison with her best-known contemporaries. However, other critics have rejected the idea that Austen's mature novels owe anything to her contemporaries. While *Northanger Abbey* is

unmistakeably a parody of gothic novels, not all critics agree with White (55–63) or Fletcher (36-44) that *Emma* is a parody as well, or is even notably influenced by other writers. Thomson stated that *Emma* "shows little trace of the influence of preceding writers" (172). Fergus thinks "[t]he later novels largely abandon literary jokes and referents, and to compare them with eighteenth-century novels does little to yield a clearer view of their techniques and concerns" (*JA and the Didactic Novel* 1). Mullan declares that "[b]y the time that she began writing *Emma*, Austen was no longer responding to other novelists, she was in new territory, in dialogue with her own earlier novels. She had been steeped in the fiction of the 18th and early 19th centuries, and in her earliest work she wrote against the novels of sensibility or the gothic fiction that she knew so well. But in the creative furore that saw her complete her last four novels in five years, she left the conventions of existing fiction behind" ("How JA's *Emma* changed" 2015).

While it is true that Austen was innovating new techniques and pioneering a new type of novel, I must agree with Neill, who sees Austen's mature works as intertextually engaged with the novels of her era: "her distinction as a writer largely results from the fact that she adopted the work of other writers. Her novels offer slanted readings and pointed revisions of an inherited body of literature which has now largely fallen into obscurity" (163).

Mandal argues that "[t]he Austen novel consistently tends to define its vision of life in relation to literature; Jane Austen habitually expresses herself in terms of imitation, parody, correction of her predecessors and contemporaries" (*JA and the Popular Novel* 1). White argued: "While in all her best works [Austen] moves into levels of technique and perception far beyond the limits of parody, it is clear this pervasive interest enters in some ways into all her writing. *Emma* is a good example of how the parodic point of view can infuse a work apparently far from parody. I do not mean to suggest that *Emma* is a parody, or that childhood precedent necessarily determines later productions. But I do think a novelist who is also a parodist tends to see life in a special way—a way colored by a bookish background" (55).

Apart from parody, some scholars have pointed to specific works as sources of themes and plot points in *Emma.* Hecimovich thinks the "plot structure" of *Emma* derives from *Sir Charles Grandison* and *Camilla* (23). Others have traced thematic allusions to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Johnson and Tuite 125)*, Twelfth Night* (Schmidt 213-221), *The Tempest* (Tandon *JA and Morality* 168-70) and *Romeo and Juliet* (McGraw 220-1). Murphy argues that *Emma* is Austen's response to *Discipline* (1814), a novel about an arrogant girl

humbled by adversity who ultimately marries her mentor/lover ("*Rethinking Influence"* 104-106). Selwyn notes that while living in Bath in 1799, Austen saw Thomas Dibdin's *The Birthday,* featuring a devoted daughter named Emma who will not leave her father (237). Kirkham (121-139) thinks Austen was inspired by *The Heroine* (1813) for its quixotic aspects, while I point to resemblances to the parodic novel *Rosella* in Appendix "A". Copeland (*The Anonymous JA* 196-7) suggests Austen drew names and plot points from an 1802 *Lady's Magazine* short story about a marriage across class lines[7] in which Mr. Knightley, a landed gentleman, marries a girl of unknown parentage from a boarding school. Emma Woodhouse mentions the novel *Adelaide and Theodore*. Ford (196-203) argues that *Emma* is a re-working of this novel. Although I have my own nominations for likely sources for Austen's work—such as the novels of Elizabeth Helme (Manning "A Source" 19–24 and Manning "Admiral Croft")—I agree with Crisp that "there exists… the danger of reading too much into the evidence, of confusing what may merely be an example of a commonly accepted convention with direct source material" (iii). However, *Emma*, like all of Austen's work, reflects her deep engagement with the literature she read and sometimes parodied.

5.2 Few direct references

While this dissertation has argued that *Emma* is a novel about novels, there are, admittedly, few direct references to novels in the text. Emma pronounces that Mr. Elton's charade is a precursor to a proposal, using the analogy of the "motto to the chapter... soon followed by matter-of-fact prose" (79). Emma is referring to the snippets of poetry or pithy quotes, then referred to as "mottos", that many novelists (but not Austen), inserted at the beginning of each chapter.[8] This, plus Emma's mention of *Adelaide and Theodore,* are the only indications that she reads novels.

More broadly, despite some passing references to poetry, Shakespeare and the Bible, *Emma* contains few literary references overall when compared to other novels of the period, such

[7] "Guilt Pursued by Conscience; or, The Perfidious Friend: a Tale," in *The Lady's Magazine*, Nov. 1802, p. 563.

[8] For example, the term "motto" is used in the *British Critic*: "the affixing of a motto from some English Poet to every Chapter," (Review of *Days of Chivalry*, 1798, 554). Eliza Kirkham Mathews' brother-in-law, who was helping her get her novel *What Has Been* (1801) explained that he: "added some mottoes" to her chapter-headings (Mathews, 312). Grundy points out that Austen did "not, like many of her contemporaries, seek to raise the status of the novel and confer authority on her own fictions by heading chapters with literary quotations" (*JA and Literary* 191).

as *Mystery and Confidence*, *The Denial* (1792), *Strategems Defeated*, *Susan*, and *Traits of Nature*, in which characters routinely quote snippets of poetry, write poetry, refer to and discuss novels and literature. A final and tenuous connection to novels is the narrator's frequent references to Emma's "fancy," a term she uses where today we would say "imagination." In Austen's time the phrase "work of fancy" was used as a synonym for novels. Austen referred to herself as a "Writer of Fancy" in a letter thanking the Countess of Morland for her kind words about *Emma* (*Letters* 309). Thus, the word "fancy" to describe Emma's imagination may have summoned up the idea of novels for Austen's first readers in a way it does not today.

5.3 Gothic novels

Scholars such as Ford, Hickmann and McInnes have argued that *Emma* is haunted by a gothic sensibility. It is true that of the three novels referenced in *Emma*, two are gothic. However, the tropes they cite as pointing to a gothic sensibility, such as the absent mother (Ford 181), the foundling heroine (Hickmann 191) and the comically garrulous character (Hickmann 216), are not exclusively gothic. They are also tropes of the sentimental novel.

Hickmann stresses the "uncertainty" that hovers in the air in the gothic and compares it to the withheld narrative information in *Emma* which "hinders readers from resolving the narrative's mysteries" (197). It is true that an air of mystery is central to the Gothic novel. But sentimental novels. especially those involving foundlings, also rely on mystery, such as *Lady Maclairn*, *Miriam*, *Secrets Made Public*, or *Nobility Run Mad.*

McInnes suggests that Austen "constructs a gothic Ireland out of Emma's conjectures about Jane's relationship with the Anglo-Irish Dixons" (71) which brings "haunting, destabilising hints of Irish violence (69) "to haunt the margins of the text" (76). I doubt that the mention of Ireland inevitably summoned up the gothic to the reader's mind in Austen's time. As a practical matter, authors often needed to send their characters off-stage, and during the Napoleonic Wars, when Europe was closed to Englishmen, authors used the East and West Indies, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales for their destinations (Moretti 26). Ireland features as a destination in non-gothic novels such as *The Splendour of Adversity* (1814), *What Has Been*, *Ellinor*, and in Austen's unfinished fragment *The Watsons*.

Likewise, Mr. Knightley's home, Donwell Abbey, may be suggestive of the gothic, but not all fictional abbeys are gothic abbeys. *Munster Abbey* (1797) is not a gothic novel; it is a thorough-going paean to the class system and the British way of life. *Griffith Abbey* (1807) is a

typical foundling tale, complete with strawberry birthmark but with no supernatural elements. Emma Woodhouse's suggestion that Miss Bates will be "haunting the Abbey," if Mr. Knightley marries Jane Fairfax (243), appears to me to be a light-hearted allusion, not a cryptically dark one.

Confinement and imprisonment feature in gothic novels, but while Emma's life in Highbury is almost claustrophobic, I cannot agree that Austen intends an allusion to gothic confinement (Ford 180). Those who suggest that Mr. Woodhouse is a gothic tyrant are, like Catherine Morland, letting their imaginations get the better of them. Austen lays much stress on Emma's devoted love for her father. The narrator tells us at the outset that one of "the real evils" in Emma's life "was the power of having rather too much her own way" (3). If Austen meant that poor Emma *seldom* had her own way because of her miserably constrained life, then the narrator is being ironic.

The gothic novel is essentially a sentimental novel with bonus castles, faux-supernatural events, murder, transgressive sexuality and mayhem, elements which are entirely absent from *Emma*. Villains are essential to a gothic novel and *Emma* does not have a true villain or a villainess. Yet I concede, as Ford suggests, that in describing Emma as Jane Fairfax's villain, a "perpetual enemy" who "stabbed Jane Fairfax's peace" we are flirting with the language of the gothic novel. As well, I agree that Austen's "gipsies" could well be a safe domestic substitute for Ann Radcliffe's banditti (Ford 184-5).

McInnes concedes that "there is little to connect *Emma* with *The Children of the Abbey* in terms of plot." McInnes argues that the *absence* of such allusions is suggestive in itself; for example, if Austen makes no overt comparison between placid, prosperous Donwell Abbey and a haunted gothic abbey, that means we are intended to see one (75). Such an argument is non-falsifiable. Hickmann likewise suggests that Austen's technique sometimes *resembles* Radcliffe and sometimes *contrasts* with Radcliffe but in either case, we should infer a relationship to Radcliffe: "Emma frequently jumps to conclusions, an inclination that stands in ironic contrast to the Radcliffe heroine's methods of investigation, which usually entail prolonged periods of uncertainty" (192-3). McInnes makes other far-fetched gothic connections. For example, in *Children of the Abbey*, a portrait of the heroine is used to trick a girl into thinking that her sweetheart is unfaithful. McInnes draws a line to "the muddle about Harriet's portrait in *Emma*"

(70) when the only commonality is that a portrait is involved, but portraits were not unusual objects in genteel life or in novels.

A more significant point of departure between the hypothesis of this dissertation, and the work of these three scholars, is that I see Austen's allusions to sentimental novel tropes as a lighthearted and playful critique of novelistic excess. But a gothic connection opens a secret hidden panel to a darker message lying beneath the placid everyday events of Highbury, and that message is: life for women under the patriarchy is not so different from the terrors of a gothic novel (Ford 180-1). If Austen intended such a message, she certainly immured it like an imprisoned wife under layers of conflicting textual evidence. Instead of creating a story (like hundreds of other novels of the time) in which a vulnerable, powerless heroine is bullied and coerced by authority figures, Austen devised a story about an independent heiress in which the only person unable to marry the one he loves is not a young female but a young man. The person holding him in thrall is a female; his aunt. Moreover, nothing prevented Austen from including a feminist character who openly inveighs against the status quo, as authors did in *Ellinor*, *What Has Been*, *Cecily Fitz-Owen (1805)*, and *Fanny Fitz-York* (1818), to name a few. Instead, the moral arbiter of the story, Mr. Knightley, endorses the principle of wifely submission (38)[9] and the strongest feminist statement comes from the ridiculous Mrs. Elton: "I always take the part of my own sex. I do indeed. I give you notice—You will find me a formidable antagonist on that point. I always stand up for women" (331).

In other words, many other female authors, now forgotten, were more outspoken than Austen. If Austen chose to be exceedingly subtle with her anti-patriarchal message, I could not say whether the artistic experiment was a failure or a triumph, if it took two hundred years for the message to be noticed.

In my view, Austen intended *Emma* not as a subtle blow against her society, but as a corrective to the melodramatic excesses of the novel, an experiment in social realism. And of course, it was recognized as such from its very first review (Scott 188-201). These gothic speculations by modern critics imply that they would like to see a little *more* sensationalism in Austen. The gossips of Highbury made a match of Emma and Frank Churchill, but the scholars

[9] Mr. Knightley to Mrs. Weston: "You might not give Emma such a complete education as your powers would seem to promise; but you were receiving a very good education from her, on the very material matrimonial point of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid" (38).

go much father: Emma's attraction to Harriet is erotic (Mudrick 190). Potter suggests that Emma feels a "clearly powerful but confusing attraction to Jane Fairfax" (187). Perhaps Harriet Smith is Miss Bates's secret love child (Lank 15). Or perhaps she's Jane Fairfax's half-sister (Kelly, H. 234). Handler and Segal suggest that Emma's devotion to her father borders on the incestuous (41-2). Perhaps Frank Churchill murdered Mrs. Churchill (Monk 342-353).

Given that Austen banished melodrama from the pages of *Emma*, it is ironic to see melodrama reintroduced by way of modern scholarship.

5.4 Is Emma Woodhouse a novel-reader?

Austen was not ashamed of being a novel-reader;[10] she was well aware of the debate around the dangers of novels. In novels and essays of the era, a "novel-reading miss" was typically a silly and ignorant young woman who thinks real life is like a novel. The stereotype appeared in both comic and tragic iterations. An early comic example is the character of Lydia Languish in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* (1775). The comic trope was still in use in *Fanny Fitz-York* (1818) in the character of a spinster who refused all suitors because she read too many novels and "dreamt of rank, equipage and establishments" until she was "on the wrong side of forty" (I:2-4). In a tragic and cautionary sub-plot in *Cecily Fitz-Owen*, novel-reading leads to the ruin of working girl Fanny O'Byrne, who is seduced by an army officer (I:180-1). Sarah Green combined comedy and tragedy in *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* (1810) in the delusion and downfall of Margaret Marsham. However, as will be further discussed in the conclusion, Emma Woodhouse is not explicitly portrayed as a novel-reading miss, although her delusions appear to derive from sentimental novels.

Scholars are divided over whether we are intended to think of *Emma* as a novel filled with novel tropes, whether sentimental or gothic. Some critics, such as Mudrick (181-206), Tanner (176-207), and Greenfield (145-197), have entered into extensive analyses of *Emma* without mentioning novel tropes—such as Harriet's parodic representation of a foundling heroine—at all.

Williams raises the issue but argues that Austen did *not* intend for us to think of Emma as a reader, and that Emma's ideas about "illegitimacy and infidelity" could have been drawn from

[10] As in the often-quoted remark that her family were "great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so" (*Letters* 26).

examples that came her way in Highbury and from her own "errors of the imagination" (140-144). Pickrel thinks "Jane Austen makes it abundantly clear that Emma is no reader" because Austen does not give "a literary source" for any of Emma's thoughts or actions. (311). Kauvar argues that "fiction as the prime cause of illusions has been replaced by human delusions. Emma misjudges situations because of her lack of information, not because of her reading" (218).

I contend that these explanations are insufficient. A young woman like Emma Woodhouse might fail to comprehend why an ambitious vicar would not marry an illegitimate girl, but that does not explain her certainty that Harriet, although illegitimate, is destined for an advantageous marriage.

On the other side of the argument, Lascelles was one of many scholars who concluded Emma could have acquired her notions "only in her reading" (69). Magee asserts that "Emma in fact tries to impose purely bookish versions of the courtship convention on the life of Highbury" (5), while McMaster concedes that while "[w]e hear less about [Emma's] literary precedents than we do of Catherine Morland's," nevertheless "her preconceptions are quite clearly drawn from similar sources" (77). Nor, as it happens, are novels mentioned at a key point in *Northanger Abbey*: Henry asks Catherine Morland: "What have you been judging from?" (*NA* 203) after he catches her coming out of his late mother's bedroom. It is obvious, but unstated at that moment, what she has been judging from.

I agree with Murphy that "*Emma* is unique in Austen's adult *oeuvre* in its obsession, not only with other texts, but with the unspecific, stock elements of the eighteenth-century and romantic-era novel. The source of this obsession is Emma Woodhouse herself… as she confidently manipulates everything she sees, hears and conjecture to conform with the much over-used plots of the novel of sensibility" (*JA the Reader* 132). Further, these tropes are central to the plot because they propel Emma's misconceptions and her attempts to "arrange everybody's destiny" (*Emma* 449). The episodic nature of the Harriet/Elton storyline, with its motif of delusion/disappointment, most closely resembles a parodic novel, comparable to Shepperson's description of *The Female Quixote* as "a succession of incidents strung on the thread of [the protagonist's] romantic madness" (73). Thus, Emma Woodhouse has been described as someone who "would rather be an author" than a heroine (Bander "Very Important"), a "surrogate author," a "shadow novelist," a "pretty terrible novelist," and a "surrogate bad novelist," (Magee 5; Fletcher 36; Murphy 133; Tandon intro *Emma* 17).

And Emma is not the only imaginist in Highbury. Harmsel (130) argues that other characters have "almost completely internalized" the conventions of sentimental fiction, while Fletcher points out: "[t]he plot interweaves the variety of competing fictions created by Emma, by minor characters, and by the narrator" using the "literary stereotypes that the popular fiction [of Austen's] time afforded" (36). With its five courtship stories, *Emma* is "a great treasury of fictional moments revitalized" (Doody 361). Mrs. Weston, herself the beneficiary of a fortunate happy-ever-after, hopes her stepson Frank will fall in love with Emma. She also projects a marriage between Mr. Knightley and Jane Fairfax. Mr. Elton's language to Emma, his "hoping—fearing—adoring—ready to die if she refused him (140), is "inspired by the same weary muse of literary romance" which propels the Harriet/Elton subplot (Burrows, 36-8). When recalling the events of her courtship, "Mrs. Elton represents herself as a heroine willing to sacrifice the delights of Maple Grove for love, and Elton as a frantic, despairing lover" and when she boasts of her inner "resources," and her "caro sposo," her "conversation—unlike Emma's—is permeated with 'novel slang'" (Moler 177-8). Wiesenfarth adds Mr. Woodhouse to the list of deluded characters because of his persistent attempts to regulate the diet and daily routines of everyone in his orbit (*Errand of Form* 113).

Harriet Smith is an exception. Though Emma tries to turn Harriet into a heroine, Harriet seems unaware that she is being manipulated. She is unconscious of any parallels between her life and her favourite novels, even though she has read *Children of the Abbey* and *Romance of the Forest*. Emma's persuasions work on her unconsciously, and fortunately, that influence fades away quickly when Harriet reunites with Robert Martin in London.

5.5 Novel revelations and a window into a culture

The novel-readers of Highbury, the teachers and parlour boarders at Mrs. Goddard's school, were reading the same novels read by Austen's first readers—novels which are no longer read today. Copeland points to the consequences of taking Austen out of her literary context: "Jane Austen has long since been rescued by her admirers from the tables of the circulating library, but with a great loss, I think, to our understanding of her work, and with an even greater loss of our appreciation of the context of women's fiction in her time" (*Women Writing* 115). I do not contend that everyone must read *Columella* (1779) and *Clarentine* to properly appreciate Austen. Any attentive reader will pick up on the implicit values and attitudes of Austen's day just by reading her novels. Bander goes so far as to declare: "[w]ere the novels of the long eighteenth

century to disappear, their existence and characteristics could be inferred from Austen's own writing" (147). However, any earnest Austen scholar would benefit from an annotation explaining Mrs. Dashwood's reference to *Columella* in *Sense and Sensibility*[11] or be intrigued by the resemblances between the plot of *Mansfield Park* and that of *Clarentine*, in which an overbearing and miserably unpleasant aunt wants to prevent a romance between the heroine and her cousin. The heroine retreats to a seaside town, to which she is followed by a rakish admirer.

A secondary, but nonetheless heartfelt argument of this dissertation, is to urge further study of the forgotten novels of the circulating library for their own sake. Joyce M.S. Tompkins, though a pioneering expert on this genre, described them as nothing better than "tenth-rate literature" (v) and as the "leaf-mould" in which Austen's "exquisite" work "was rooted" (vi). Tompkins justified the study of these novels, not as works of art, but as a significant genre in the history of the novel and as a cultural and social phenomenon which shed light on the era which produced them. They open a window to the prevailing issues, anxieties, moral panics, and moral certainties of the long eighteenth century. Even the much-maligned novels of the Minerva Press "are indispensable to any accurate picture of the age" (Taylor 85). In that respect, the advantages brought about by the digital age cannot be understated, especially by people like myself who used card catalogues, manual typewriters and carbon paper at university. As Batchelor notes:

> It is hard to imagine that [intertextuality studies] could have been written without the recent advances in digital humanities… which have made the works of women writers widely (if not universally) accessible, and textual evolutions and linguistic allusions easier to trace ("Influence, Intertextuality," 7).

Further, while I would be the last person to discount the esteem in which Austen is held as a writer, an exploration of the forgotten novels enables us to recognize the innovations of dozens of forgotten and anonymous authors. If Helena Kelly was better acquainted with them, she might not have asserted that Austen: "was the only novelist of this period to write novels that were set more or less in the present day and more or less in the real world" (24). To take another example, a search of online resources rebuts Fletcher's (36) claim that the word "imaginist" was coined by Austen and has subsequently been used only in discussions of *Emma*. Though Austen

[11] "Austen scholars (versed in the classical tradition but not in that of eighteenth-century fiction) at first supposed" that Mrs. Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* was referring to Columella, "an obscure Latin writer" instead of a character in a 1776 novel ''who shares that name," (Grundy f45, 213).

may well have coined the term independently, the word "imaginist" appears in James Norris Brewer's 1811 novel, *An Old Family Legend* (I:127) and, according to the OED, was first used in 1806 in a short story in the *Universal Magazine*,[12] possibly also by Brewer, who, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography,* was a contributor to that journal. A search on Google NGrams confirms that others used the word "imaginist" in the 19th century in contexts unrelated to Austen.[13]

Vivien Jones supposes that "the daring representation of [Catherine Morland's] flawed eligibility as a heroine in the opening chapter of *Northanger Abbey* is something entirely new" (281). But since only a fraction of the digitized novels of the past have been well-scrutinized, how can we be certain? One remarkably similar example occurs in *I'll Consider of It* (1812), which describes its heroine, also named Catherine, as a girl who:

> could not endure the fatigue and trouble of learning music… She was very fond of working in the garden, digging, hoeing, riding on horseback, feeding poultry, and playing with dogs and cats; she was not fond of working at her needle, wristbanding of shirts was her aversion, and she hated the trouble of writing a letter (I:26).

Harris argues that *Northanger Abbey's* John Thorpe, with his vulgarity and his pride in his horsemanship, was intended by Austen as a "savage satire" of the Prince Regent (181). This theory does not take into consideration the fact that, as noted earlier, John Thorpe is an iteration of a comic stock character who appears in many novels, such as Richard Dawkins in *A Winter in Bath* (1807), who embarrasses the heroine whenever she encounters him in the public rooms at Bath. She is mortified to learn that he expects her to marry him.

Aers writes that Austen's "emphasis on the exact financial and class basis of marriage settlements" is "striking" (135). To an "unhistorical reader," as Tompkins put it, the "curious tariff of dowries and settlements" is indeed striking (165). But no contemporary reader would have been struck by an emphasis on money and class. Rather, one would be hard-pressed to find a sentimental novel that did *not* enumerate the financial prospects and family background of all

[12] "Lucubrations of an Idler," *Universal Magazine*. 6 Jul-Dec 1806. pp.129-132: "If, however, the imaginist designs his Deity in the mellow tints of age, which is the aspect that conveys the idea of majesty and wisdom mingled with benevolence, he certainly must err…" (131).

[13] Google NGram results, https://bit.ly/4fuei6m for the word "imaginist."

the main characters. Aers interprets Austen's description of Harriet and Emma's charitable visit and Harriet's encounter with the gipsies as evidence of Austen's indifference (as he supposes) to the social inequities of her times. He does not take into consideration the contrast between Austen's treatment of these episodes and similar scenes in sentimental novels (129-132). Thus, he misses the critique of sentimentalism implied by her treatment of the charitable visit, and the critique of sensationalism in the gipsey episode.

According to Bander, "Austen may be the only serious novelist apart from [Charlotte] Smith to write a novel that includes a defence of novel-reading" (152). However, many authors (whether or not we qualify them as being "serious" authors) discussed, criticized, and defended novels within their own novels. Further, when we compare Austen's "Defense of the Novel" to the statements of other novelists, we can discern a surprising difference between Austen and her contemporaries. This comparison begins with placing Austen's defense in context.

5.6 For or against novels

To understand the context in which novels were consumed in Jane Austen's lifetime, it is important to be aware that, as Jane Dashwood Crisp observed, "[d]uring Jane Austen's creative life the whole question of the novel, its use and its intrinsic value, was being canvassed with… vigour" (23). Critics feared that with their sensational incidents and extravagantly romantic love affairs, novels encouraged readers to develop unrealistic notions about life. Polemics on "the dangers of novel reading pervade the ephemeral literature of the day—the little-known periodicals, books of conduct designed for young men and young women, treatises on education, and even the forgotten novels themselves—as well as the letters and the diaries" (Taylor v).

To a degree which would be astonishing today, "[c]ritics… commended those works in which the story was subservient to—and a vehicle for—sound moral principles" (Bartolomeo 124) and condemned works which they felt romanticized forbidden love. The Latin phrase "dulce et utile," or "sweet and useful," represented the idea that novels could convey a moral lesson in an appealing package. For example, in 1790, a critic for the *Monthly Review* prescribed that the "sentiments" of a novel "should be moral, chaste, and delicate" and that the author could interject "moral reflections, in the view of blending instruction with amusement" (400-2). The *Critical Review* decreed in 1807 that "the province of the novelist" was to "illustrate the prevailing weaknesses and the peculiar virtues of human nature, and uniformly to excite the sympathy of the reader in favour of moral excellence" (Review of *A Winter in Bath* 290.).

Whatever their true opinions, authors looking for financial success and critical acclaim had a strong incentive for assuring readers that their works were morally beneficial (Macleod, 134). Some authors claimed in their prefaces that their *sole* motive for writing was to inculcate the love of virtue and the detestation of vice (Taylor 88-9). Margaret Holford promised her readers would "find nothing injurious to religion or morality," and if she managed to amuse, that was but "a secondary gratification" (*First Impressions* ii-iii). The author of *Fanny, a Deserted Daughter* protested that if she became "conscious of a single line inimical to the interests of virtue, she would burn the book, rather than present it to the public, though she were sure of being celebrated as the first novel-writer of the age" (I:xii).

Many now-forgotten novelists referenced the debate over novel-reading in their own novels. The preface to *The Unexpected Legacy* is devoted to a debate between the narrator and her friend. The friend declares: "there are none *good*; for those which are merely *harmless* can have no claim to that title, and those which are *dangerous* are positively bad…" (I:v). The narrator, Mrs. Sedley, replies that weak-minded persons will be drawn astray in life, whether they read novels or not, and she reiterates the *dulce et utile* argument: "[i]nstruction cannot assume a more pleasing form than when attired by the hands of a chaste and correct fancy" (I:xiv). In *The Heir of Montague* (1797), Lady Sarah languidly declares "since the days of Richardson scarce a tolerable novel has come out." Frederic Montague asks her if she has read Burney or Charlotte Smith or "the new novel of Mrs. Radcliffe, I mean *The Romance of the Forest*?" He enthusiastically adds: "for fancy, style, sentiment, description and narrative... I have not met its superior" (II:41-2). Frederic then advances a theory promoted in modern times by Steven Pinker (176-7), that "much of the humanity and benevolence which characterizes the present day has arisen from the perusal of those humble and despised productions, the modern novels; since nothing has so much conduced to soften the heart, and awaken the affections" (II:44).

In *Modern Manners, or, A Season at Harrowgate* (1817) a "maiden lady" reacts with indignation to the claim that all women like reading novels. The impetuous Julia (a Marianne-like character) responds: "And I, madam, pity you for a prejudice, which deprives you of a gratification, which works of imagination, when written with taste and feeling, must create." Julia stresses the pleasure of novel-reading, while an older gentleman, Mr. Seymour, interposes and corrects her by saying novels must serve a moral purpose:

> As works of imagination merely… I should not plead for them; no, not even if written with taste and feeling… These weapons are often so bright and dazzling, that the sentiments and morals are lost amidst their fascination and brilliancy; but…while we have the works of [a Maria] Edgeworth, an [Elizabeth] Hamilton, a [Jane] West, and a [John] Moore, who, by lashing the follies of the times, and making (if I may be allowed the expression) fiction the vehicle of truth; yes, while their lessons exist, shall we quarrel with the mode in which they are conveyed? (118-9).

These examples stand in striking relief to Austen's famous "defense of the novel" in *Northanger Abbey* because Austen does *not* mention novels as a "fitting vehicle for moral instruction" (Colon). Austen mentions "pleasure," "genius," "wit," "taste," "humour," "thorough knowledge of human nature," and "best-chosen language," [14] but she does not plead for novels because they elevate virtue and condemn vice. When the Tilneys and Catherine discuss novel-reading in Volume I, Chapter 14 of *Northanger Abbey*, they do not speak of useful moral lessons either—even Henry Tilney, a clergyman, has nothing to say on the matter.

Though Austen does not, like so many of her peers, defend novels for the moral lessons they provide, we should not assume she was indifferent about morality in general. There is every reason to believe, for example, that she was active in the practice of her Christian faith. I suggest that Austen withheld herself from didacticism for artistic reasons. As a writer, she was simply not inclined to sermonize—she liked satire. She laughingly referenced the debate over moral strictures in novels in her conclusion to *Northanger Abbey*: "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" (*NA* 261). No-one is punished for their misdeeds in *Emma*, no-one gets a public comeuppance, not even the Eltons. Mr. Knightley knows of Emma's interference in Harriet's life, but she never has to confess to him that she spread uncharitable and damaging gossip about Jane Fairfax.

[14] "Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world… there seems almost a general wish of… slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them… in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language" [ellipses added] (*NA* 30-1).

In her "defense of the novel," Austen specifically targeted those novelists who made a point of denigrating novels and novel-reading in their own novels, of "degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances, to the number of which they are themselves adding," (*NA* 300). And indeed, this is exactly what many novelists did. In *Traits of Nature*, the heroine spurns her mother's collection of over-heated French novels. When Lucinda Fortescue refuses to go for a walk with her husband because "I have got into the middle of the last new novel, and I am quite mad to finish it" we know she is no heroine and in fact she dies, leaving her hero free to marry his true love (*The Sons of the Viscount* II:52).

The clergyman father of the heroines in *Romance Readers and Romance Writers* approves of novels which "hold up a faithful picture of the times they live in; lash vice, in whatever shape it may appear, and applaud virtue in every one." However, he cautions that a too-moralizing approach, (he mentions Hannah More's sermonizing novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*), will drive away casual readers who will "fly to the dangerous rubbish of licentious publications" instead (46).

In *Northanger Abbey,* the narrator comes out firmly in defence of novels and Henry Tilney unabashedly enjoys reading them, yet much of the humour is derived from gothic tropes and Catherine's temporary delusions. Austen reconciles the contradiction between praising and mocking novels by suggesting that so long as the reader understands that gothic novels are fiction, they may be enjoyed safely. Catherine Morland learns her lesson: "Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works, and charming even as were the works of all her imitators, it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the Midland counties of England, was to be looked for" (*NA* 205).

In this respect, as Kauvar argues, Austen's heroines are more psychologically complex than the stereotypical novel-reading miss in that their delusions are not blamed *solely* on their choice of reading matter. "Marianne's personality more directly than her reading is the reason for her mistakes. Like Catherine Morland, Marianne Dashwood matures by realizing how invalid her conclusions are" (218). Emma sometimes succumbs to novelistic conventions, but along the way she sometimes recognizes and rejects them. She is repulsed when Mr. Elton spouts romantic mush: "Sighs and fine words had been given in abundance; but she could hardly devise any set of expressions, or fancy any tone of voice, less allied with real love" (146). She is pleased when Harriet puts her misery over Mr. Elton aside to enjoy the Coles' party (237). In the end, she takes

responsibility for her misconceptions, for her interference, for her actions. Her misdeeds cannot be blamed on her reading matter, and her self-reformation redounds to her credit.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Why wasn't Austen explicit?

It is one thing to hypothesize that Austen submerged a parodic treatment of the domestic sentimental novel in *Emma*. But this does not tell us why. Why isn't *Emma* an explicit parody in the vein of *The Female Quixote*? Why do we never see Emma Woodhouse reading a novel?

Lascelles dismissed the question: "the bookish origin of such follies does not need to be stated explicitly" (68-9). But speculation about possible answers might shed some light on Austen's motivations as a writer. Perhaps she considered parody to be a lesser or restrictive form of literature; the difficulty of sustaining a parodic premise was previously discussed in Chapter One. She may have felt that she had covered this territory with *Northanger Abbey*, even though *Northanger* was unpublished at the time. She may have feared that her parodic target, the domestic-sentimental novel, had already peaked in popularity.

The success of a parody begins with the recognizability of the target. *Azemia* (1797), for example, contains many references to London political cliques which would only be intelligible to a reader who was knowledgeable about the London political scene. The reader must be aware of the "cultural, social and political" context to appreciate this novel (Munderlein 46). Of course, in some cases parodies outlive their targets. Many readers enjoy "You Are Old, Father William," and "How Doth the Little Crocodile" in *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) without knowing they are parodies of then-famous poems, typical of the sententious verse children recited in the schoolroom. Many readers of *Sense and Sensibility* are unacquainted with the cult of sensibility that provided the basis for Marianne Dashwood's beliefs and actions, but nevertheless they can be engrossed by the story. Generally though, if the parodic target is an ephemeral one, the parody might become dated and even unintelligible. Austen literary criticism provides an example of a parody mistaken for a serious article: Douglas Bush's 1956 article "Mrs. Bennet and the Dark Gods" appeared in a compilation of satires of literary criticism, *The Overwrought Urn* (1969) but

was discussed by Mazzeno as though its exploration of Greek mythical archetypes in *Pride and Prejudice* was seriously intended (81).

Although some parodies— such as the *Rejected Addresses* and *The Heroine*—were bestsellers, eschewing parody appears to be a safer path to winning respect as a serious author. Rose suggests that parody was and is viewed as a "rather lowly comic form which ha[s] been of little real significance in the history of literature" (1). For example, Shepperson described Henry Fielding progressing from the "youthful ebullience of his farces and satirical pamphlets to the ripe wisdom of his novels," implying that a realistic novel is an artistic improvement upon burlesque, which in the final analysis is a "parasite" upon another person's work (8).

As for the trope of the "novel-reading miss," Moler felt that "novel-reading, as the sole cause of the heroine's absurdities," was a "crude device" (170). All these considerations—the timeliness of the parodic target, the limitations of parody, and Austen's refusal to condemn novel-reading outright—might explain why Austen did not emphasize novels as the cause of Emma Woodhouse's delusions.

6.1.2 The "dull elves" theory

Alternatively, perhaps Austen did not think it was necessary to point out that she was parodying novel tropes. This is the "dull elves" view of Austen,[15] who wrote for people who were well educated enough to notice her allusions. Craik points to Mrs. Elton's reference to "Hymen's saffron robe" from Milton's *L'Allegro*. Austen, she says, "is sure that her reader is equipped to catch the allusion, and so to perceive Mrs. Elton's ridiculous pretension" (*JA in Her Time* 173). Murphy even argues that "Austen's expectation of readerly ingenuity is ultimately what sets her apart from other novelists of the Romantic period" who were much more apt to spell things out for their audience ("*Rethinking Influence*" 102).

Surely Austen's first readers understood that Harriet Smith was a parody of a foundling heroine. In modern times, however, the allusion appears to be lost upon some critics. Tony Tanner (181) questions Emma's "obsession with this pretty little nobody from who-knows-where." His explanation is Freudian; Emma is using Harriet as a proxy "who will engage in all the potentially dangerous" interactions Emma shies away from, including "sexual" ones. In "The Enigma of Harriet Smith," Morris thinks it is "unlikely that a woman of [Emma's]

[15] "I do not write for such dull Elves/As have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves" (*Letters* 202).

accomplishment would select someone unworthy of her friendship and favour." He proceeds to argue that Harriet is not really the simpleton that she appears to be. But when we understand that Emma sees Harriet as a heroine we have the key to Emma's assumptions and actions.

6.2 Is *Emma* an expansion of an earlier parodic work?

Mandal (7) observed that Austen's earliest adult manuscripts were composed in the 1790s coincident with a "surge" in the publication of novels.[16] The three novels mentioned by name in *Emma* are *Adelaide and Theodore*, published in1783, while *Children of the Abbey* and *Romance of the Forest* were published the 1790s, as were Isabella Thorpe's seven "horrid" novels in *Northanger Abbey*. This peak of novel-writing at the end of the eighteenth century was "matched by a corresponding rise in female authorship," as Mandal notes (7). "The first [novel-writing] surge of 1788 coincides with the writing of [Austen's] juvenilia (c. 1788-93), while the second [surge] of 1796 correlates with the first drafting of her early novels." By the time *Emma* came out in 1816, both gothic and sentimental novels were declining in popularity and other genres were rising in popularity, notably the didactic and evangelical novels of Hannah More, Mary Brunton and Barbara Hofland. Austen's "advertisement" to *Northanger Abbey,* the only preface she ever provided for a book, reveals her concern that "parts of the work" were "comparatively obsolete" (NA 1).[17] She put the manuscript "on the Shelve" and told her niece "I do not know that she will ever come out" (*Letters* 333). Had she lived, she might have decided against publishing *Northanger Abbey* altogether. Her concern that her satiric target was dated may also explain why Emma Woodhouse is not explicitly a novel-reading miss who is under the sway of domestic-sentimental novels.

Admittedly, there is no family history indicating that an earlier story laid the foundations for *Emma*. A memorandum left by Cassandra Austen indicates that Austen began writing *Emma* in January 1814 and completed it in August of the following year (qtd. in Kirkham 139). However, this did not prevent Brimley Johnson (79), Q.D. Leavis (14-8) and Kirkham (139) from suggesting that plot elements from Austen's abandoned novel *The Watsons* were later recycled for *Emma,* such as the heroine's invalid father. If we are open to the possibility that

[16] Mandal points to two surges in novel publication

[17] "The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes" (NA 1).

Emma had a longer gestation period than one and a half years, it is conceivable that Austen drafted an early version targeting the domestic-sentimental novel, around the same time she was lampooning the gothic novel in what would become *Northanger Abbey*. The story of a girl who attempts to direct the romantic destinies of others may have had its origin in parody, but the basic premise was so appealing that Austen replaced a novel-reading miss with a girl who was "under the power of fancy and whim" (*Emma* 106). In her revision, Austen disguised the trope-driven nature of the Harriet/Elton storyline by blending in other non-parodic storylines i.e., Emma's argumentative relationship with Mr. Knightley, speculation about Frank Churchill, and the visit of the John Knightleys at Christmas. Austen added a conventional love plot for Emma and Mr. Knightley and created a mystery plot with embedded clues around Jane Fairfax. Nevertheless, the trope-driven comic elements remain.

6.3 Conventional happy endings

Beyond the question of forgotten novelistic conventions, not every reader will comprehend the implicit social mores of Austen's time. A situation which rouses modern indignation, such as primogeniture, is simply a fact of life in many novels of the period. Moffatt reports that many of her students don't comprehend "the social stigma of Harriet Smith's illegitimacy" (47). The scandal of the secret engagement is likewise not so shocking in modern times, as Gibbons observed in 1964: "Perhaps we ask ourselves, would there have been quite so much horror and dismay when the secret of the engagement is at last revealed? It is impossible to imagine a similar contemporary situation" (xii). This distance from the social and novelistic conventions of Austen's time also influences modern reactions to the Fairfax/Churchill and Emma/Mr. Knightley happy-ever-afters.

Austen's conclusions to her marriage-plot novels are obviously germane to the debate about hidden or subversive messages in her works. Does *Emma* conclude with a conventional happy ending for its three sets of lovers? According to Tandon, "a certain critical consensus has built up, according to which the ending of *Emma* cannot possibly be sincere, since no novelist as clever as Austen could truly have believed in such a confection" (*JA and the Morality* 173). Some critics reject the Fairfax/Churchill match, chiefly because of Frank Churchill's behavior, even though Austen used the novel's moral arbiter, Mr. Knightley, to bless the union and predict that Frank "may yet turn out well" (466). In this interpretation, the Frank/Jane pairing is an ironic

one, intended by Austen to serve as a "caveat against the duplicitous representations of sentimental novels" (Rivero 219).

The question is one of Austen's intentions. If we insist that Austen intended a sincere and conventional happy-ever-after for Frank and Jane, we must acknowledge that many people remain unconvinced. Austen cleverly sustained a secret love story subplot, but the secrecy set Austen up for difficulties with her conclusion. The reader has no opportunity to become invested in the love story. Jane's reserve has cloaked her from us, and she is allotted only one sentence to explain why she forgave Frank and what she loves about him—and this one sentence is retailed at second-hand by Mrs. Weston:

> "I did not make the allowances," said she, "which I ought to have done, for his temper and spirits—his delightful spirits, and that gaiety, that playfulness of disposition, which, under any other circumstances, would, I am sure, have been as constantly bewitching to me, as they were at first" (457).

There is another alternative. We can look at Frank Churchill in the context of the times; that is, we can measure him against other leading men. He is no worse than many others and arguably, he is better. Heroes of circulating-library novels were remarkably prone to believing any aspersion against the heroine's reputation. Following in the tradition of Shakespeare's Claudio who insults his bride at the altar yet is rewarded with her hand at the end of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Henry Stafford accuses the titular heroine of *Miriam* of being a kept woman. Lord Mortimer repeatedly rejects Amanda of *Children of the Abbey* because of false aspersions on her character. The high-minded hero of *What Has Been* gets her kicked out of her aunt's house after he compromises her by trying to get into her bedroom in the middle of the night. He promises to take care of her if she will marry him, then refuses to stoop to the degradation of employment. He starts carousing and drinking away what little money they have, all the while urging her to support them by writing a novel. The impetuous hero of the novel *Ella Rosenberg* essentially ruins the heroine's life when he urges her to elope with him. Before the first night, she repents and leaves him, but her reputation is still ruined and she takes to the stage. When he re-encounters her years later, he upbraids her for several pages for her fall from virtue. "*Oh Harold, you blackguard*," one exasperated reader wrote in the margin of the page (British Library copy, viewable on Google Books II:91).

A modern reader would be horrified by the prolonged and needless psychological torture the hero of *An Old Family Legend* inflicts on his wife before their happy ending. In contrast, Frank Churchill merely teases Jane Fairfax about accusations which he knows to be false. He always holds the highest opinion of her principles and morals, and he takes her without a penny to her name.

While this defense of Frank Churchill may not convince everyone—or anyone—at least we can see that many heroes behave abominably by modern standards and yet they get their happy ending with their heroines. Surely not all those other authors intended to subvert the patriarchy by presenting us with unlikeable heroes.

As for Emma and Mr. Knightley, many modern readers and critics cannot take Austen at her word about the "perfect happiness of the union" (528). Hecimovich's sympathies are for the groom—Mr. Knightley has blundered into a miserable marriage and is forced to live at Hartfield to guard his father-in-law's chickens (53), but most of the reservations are directed at Mr. Knightley. Some feminist scholars reject the notion of Emma surrendering her free-spirited self to her starchy bridegroom, despite the narrator's assurance that she "look[s] forward to giving [Mr. Knightley] that full and perfect confidence which her disposition was most ready to welcome as a duty" and she wishes for "[n]othing, but to grow more worthy of him, whose intentions and judgment had been ever so superior to her own" (519). I detect no irony in those passages, though others may. Some are unhappy with the age gap, and in particular Mr. Knightley's declaration that he has loved Emma since she was 13 years old. But again, readers in Austen's time would have encountered other examples of an older mentor/lover, such as in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Ellinor*, *Celia in Search of a Husband* (1809) and *Mystery and Confidence*. Older heroes were "a cliché in novels of the period" (G. Kelly, *English Fiction* 133). Many novels contained incest teases in which a brother almost sleeps with a sister (as in *Farmer of Inglewood Forest)* or a father almost sleeps with a daughter (*Modern Characters*). But Austen establishes at the ball at The Crown that Emma and Mr. Knightley are "not so much brother and sister" (358). I conclude that Austen was sincere, though others may remain unconvinced.

6.4 Preaching or parody?

Doubts over Austen's intentions in her happy-ever-after open the door to questions about the intended moral of *Emma*. Revisionist critiques say the message is there, but subtly hidden. In the absence of direct statements from Austen herself, many scholars have stepped forward to

interpret her interesting silence. They have cast her as a conservative and as a radical, as a Georgian and as a Romantic, as a woman disengaged from the wider world and as an author who was deeply invested in the controversies of her times. Some critics, notably Southam, suggest that *Emma* is a paean to England, others defend Austen from the suspicion of being proud of her country (Normandin 823-842; Kelly, H. 197-235). Some think the patriarchy is the target (Heydt-Stevenson *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions* 159-180; refuted in Manning "From 'Namby-Pamby' to 'Sinister'"). These critics redefine *Emma*—a marriage-plot novel with five weddings and no unhappy marriages—as an anti-marriage novel, and Austen as a "secret radical" (H. Kelly 29-30) or a "subversive" feminist (Heydt-Stevenson *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions* 27).

Further, they argue that Austen had a reason for being subversive and not explicit in her criticism of slavery, or colonialism, or the patriarchy, or her times in general. She lived in an age of government censorship and strict religious and social mores and was constrained from expressing her opinions (H. Kelly 22; Harris 163). However, my reading of over 120 novels of the era has yielded numerous examples of novelists and poets, many of them women, who openly condemned slavery, compared mercenary marriage to slavery or prostitution, disparaged colonialism and criticized the Regent. Alethea Lewis's *The Microcosm* (1801) contains a scathing and lengthy anti-slavery diatribe, concluding: "Will our readers excuse the above digression upon the miseries of thousands of their brethren now slaves in Christian territories? Will they heave the sight of pity and drop the tear of sympathy upon human woes? Or will they indignantly shut the book and descant upon the absurdity of mixing such a subject with the incidents of a novel?" (III:90-5). Eliza Kirkham Mathews' *What Has Been* (1801) includes a feminist character and an anti-slavery narrative. The hero exclaims: "by Heaven, the nation that allows the inhuman traffic of selling man to man, heaps on itself unutterable disgrace!" (II:137).

Further, I have found no instance in contemporary reviews of the novels I've read where the anti-slavery or pro-feminist editorial attracted a mention, let alone condemnation. *The Microcosm* received five reviews, none of them mentioned, much less objected to, its anti-slavery opinions. The two reviews of *What Has Been* likewise made no mention of its

progressive stance.[18] These and other examples challenge the theory that Austen was unable to be more outspoken because of external pressures.

It should also be noted that in cases of works deemed seditious or libelous, punishment fell upon the publisher (Hay 131). If Austen's novels were veering into dangerous territory, her publisher John Murray had every reason to be alert to the consequences. He would also be aware of the financial risk of publishing a marriage-plot novel that advocated against marriage. Murray worried that *Emma* lacked "incident and romance" (Murray 288). He did not say that it "lacked narrative coherence and an emotional payoff," which would be the case if Mr. Knightley did not love Emma and was just marrying her to acquire the Hartfield land, as suggested by Helena Kelly (221-2).

We can also look at contemporary commentary on the appropriate uses of satire. If Austen had a national or social target in mind, she was not following the advice of her favourite poet Cowper, who thought:

> [Satire] may correct a foible, may chastise
> The freaks of fashion, regulate the dress,
> Retrench a sword-blade, or displace a patch;
> But where are its sublimer trophies found?
> What vice has it subdu'd? whose heart reclaim'd
> By rigour, or whom laugh'd into reform?...

The anonymous author of *I'll Consider of It!* (1812), explained that his strictures were directed toward "private individual vice and folly which most need the lash of satire" as opposed to "laws, government, public institutions, and delegated power" (II:207).

In addition to the "lash," another frequently used expression, borrowed from Pope's *Essay on Man*, described the satirist as an archer (line 13). A mirror analogy was likewise

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18 Reviews of *The Microcosm*: *The British Critic* Vol 18 (Aug 1801) 197; *The Critical Review*, Vol 33 (Dec 2801) 460: "he might have formed a pleasing tale in about two, instead of five, volumes"; *European Magazine* 40 (July 1801), 43-44; *Monthly Mirror* 12 (Sept. 1801), 180: "an odd and incongruous mixture of the grave and the gay."; *Monthly Review*, ns, V35 (Aug. 1801), 428-29: "The claims of morality are supported with energy, and the duties which religion demands are forcibly inculcated. The youthful mind is not led astray by seducing theories, nor tempted to throw off the restraints of virtue by new-fangled doctrines subversive of the best interests of society." Reviews of *What Has Been*: *Critical Review*, ns, v32 (July 1801), 351-52; *Monthly Mirror*, 11 (March 1801), 182-83: "the sentiments are uniformly credible to the moral and religious principles of their author."

borrowed from James Thomson's "The Seasons" (line 644). Thus, the *Critical Review* said approvingly of author Sarah Green that she "'shoots folly as it flies'; and, in the most pleasant way, "'holds to the world a picture of itself'" ("Review of *Good Men*" 331-2). Critics approved of novelists, even female novelists, who shot or lashed folly.

Perhaps Austen agreed that it was not the role of the satirist to engage in animadversions upon public topics. She may also have been familiar with Richard Brinsley Sheridan's 1779 play *The Critic*, in which Mr. Sneer declares that the "follies and foibles of society, are subjects unworthy" of comedy, which should target "the greater vices and blacker crimes of humanity" and provide "a most serious moral." He believes that a [fictional] new play, *The Reformed Housebreaker*, will—through "wit and mirth" alone—convince burglars to reform themselves: "I have no doubt but that bolts and bars will be entirely useless by the end of the season". (Act 1 10-11). Thus, Sheridan mocks the notion that satirists should tackle serious subjects, or that anything would be accomplished if they did.

Austen's demonstrated predilection for light satire together with the absence of explicit political critique in her novels leads me to conclude that like these other satirists, her targets were human foibles—not patriarchy or empire. I concur with Professor Robert Garnett:

> [Austen's] novels dramatize not social ills, but individual failings: vanity, greed, pride, selfishness, arrogance, folly. For all her humor and wit, she was a rigorous moralist. Adult life demanded adult behavior: self-awareness, propriety, kindness, good sense.

6.5 What Mattered To Austen

As we have seen, Austen did not defend herself or her novels, apart from her short "advertisement" in *Northanger Abbey*. Nor was she as explicit in her didactic message as other novelists of her times.

To play off the title of Mullan's *What Matters in Austen*, I suggest that Austen's surviving letters are the obvious place to look for evidence about what mattered *to* Austen. Ford (17) points out that of Austen's "surviving letters, approximately three quarters (119 of 161) mention or discuss reading books or newspapers, either silently or aloud; allude to or quote from literary works; discuss and analyze her theatre experience; refer to her own writing, the processes of publication, and the reception of her fiction." Austen often playfully cast family life into

novelistic forms in her letters. In her August 23, 1796 letter to her sister, written from London, she wrote: “Here I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I begin already to find my Morals corrupted...hoping you are all alive after our melancholy parting,” adding that their brothers “are both gone out to seek their fortunes; the latter is to return soon & help us to seek ours. The Former we shall never see again” (*Letters* 5).

We cannot prove that the surviving letters are more than a random sampling, but it appears that Cassandra and other family members cherished those letters which preserved the voice of their beloved sister and aunt sounding forth on a subject she never tired of—the novel.

The year before her death Austen was still deriving private amusement from the tropes of the sentimental novel, with her “Plan of a Novel.” In this brief satirical outline, the accomplished heroine, a pattern of sensibility and rectitude, is driven from place to place and exposed to a variety of hardships. As well, Austen continued to be engaged artistically with the possibilities arising out of confusing fiction with reality. *Sanditon*, her last, uncompleted novel, composed during her final illness, features a deluded *male* novel-reader, Sir Edward Denham. The two novels mentioned in the manuscript are famous older novels: *Clarissa* (1747) and *Camilla* (1796). Denham is also an enthusiast for the poetry of Robert Burns as well as several then-contemporary poets: Walter Scott, James Montgomery, Thomas Campbell, and William Woodsworth. Austen’s heroine, Charlotte Heywood, just like Emma Woodhouse, sees a real girl, (Clara Brereton) as “the most perfect representation of… a complete heroine … Such poverty and dependence joined to such beauty and merit seemed to leave no choice in the business” (*LM* 169). However, Austen explicitly absolves Charlotte of being a novel-reading miss:

> These feelings were not the result of any spirit of romance in Charlotte herself. No, she was a very sober-minded young lady, sufficiently well-read in novels to supply her imagination with amusement, but not at all unreasonably influenced by them (*LM* 169).

Note that in this passage, just as with her “Defense of the Novel,” Austen leaves out the common proviso that novels should be a vehicle of moral improvement. A sensible person can read novels for “amusement.” It is only silly, weak-minded people like Sir Edward Denham who confuse romance with reality. Denham’s resolve to emulate Lovelace from *Clarissa* by seducing Clara Brereton suggests that Austen planned to feature the threat to female chastity—that obsessive theme of the domestic-sentimental novel—in her *Sanditon* plot in some way or other.

Yet, Austen mentions the danger only to disclaim it. We are assured that Clara Brereton "saw through [Denham] and had not the least intention of being seduced" (*LM* 184). What did Austen intend for these characters? We will never know, but it appears that she planned to continue with her exploration of the delusions of fiction versus the lessons of real life, or as Mandal wrote: "[t]he Austen novel consistently tends to define its vision of life in relation to literature (1).

6.6 What is the moral of *Emma*?—Relaxing into laughter

This dissertation has argued for the importance—and the reward—of understanding the literary context of Austen's novels. Through studying the popular novels of Austen's time, we can recognize that, as Harmsel observed, Austen "burlesqued" the "popular fictional conventions" of popular genres, "but she continued to use them, too. And by analyzing her use of the popular fictional conventions of the preceding era—her transformation and adaptation of them—the reader may gain a new criterion for criticizing her art and a new insight into the meaning of her novels'' (9).

Austen's literary innovations arose out of her criticisms of the novel but were also based on profound self-awareness. Her predilection for satire and parody, taken together with her dedication to the natural and probable, should be taken into consideration when speculating about her underlying message.

She does not place her heroines in improbable scenarios, such as being captured by Algerine pirates or escaping into the wilds of North America in a canoe. Instead of being wrongfully accused of theft or defrauded of an inheritance, her quietly stoic heroines (such as Elinor Dashwood, Anne Elliot and Fanny Price) endure the all-too-realistic scenario of hiding their broken hearts while being around people who don't know how much pain they are causing.[19] For Fanny Price, every conversation with Edmund will come around to the topic of Mary Crawford. Admiral Croft asks Anne Elliot whether Frederick ought not to come to Bath to find a wife among the pretty young ladies. These heroines are called upon to exert the virtue of quiet heroism and forbearance.

19 In the case of Lucy Steele and Mrs. Norris, that torture might arguably be malicious in nature, but neither Lucy nor Mrs. Norris would regard themselves as villains. Mrs. Norris sees herself as a liberal-minded and judicious aunt. Lucy is looking after her own interests. They are not cardboard villains.

For Elizabeth Bennet, Marianne Dashwood, Catherine Morland, and Emma Woodhouse, the resolution of the story comes only once they experience a revelation about their own faults (Lewis 107), after which they are rewarded with their happy-ever-after.

Yet Austen thoroughly enjoyed the excesses of novels. In *Emma*, Austen found a way to marry her love of burlesque to her commitment to realism. She was doing many amazing things in *Emma*—with her path-breaking use of free indirect discourse, her distinctive idiolects and her dexterously embedded clues about the Churchill/Fairfax romance—but she also had fun with the tropes of sentimental novels. A recurring device in her novels is for her characters to disclaim the romance of novels, only to discover that real-life can be somewhat like a novel. In *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney is not a murderer, but he is a tyrant. In *Sense and Sensibility,* Willoughby is not the sentimental hero, it is Colonel Brandon who has loved and lost and suffered. Harriet Smith is not the misplaced daughter of a peer, but Jane Fairfax is a Cinderella. Devotion and heroism is to be found, if we look for it. We are not all called upon to endure slander and peril and villainy. The everyday heroism we are called upon to practise consists of fulfilling our duties with a cheerful spirit and practicing courtesy and forbearance toward one another. Thus, Emma Woodhouse Knightley will continue to put up with Mrs. Elton and Miss Bates as part of her happy ever after in Highbury.

I conclude that we should take Austen at her word about the kind of novel she wanted to write and the kind of novel she did not want to attempt. Austen may have wished to write a best-seller, but she could not and would not write a sweeping historical drama like Jane Porter's *Thaddeus of Warsaw,* or a didactic conduct novel in the vein of Hannah More, even though she knew *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* was selling like hotcakes. She could not write an angst-filled tale of people in high life or a tragic drama about a female's lapse from virtue. Other female authoresses took their readers to battlefield scenes and inside bordellos—Austen never did. Other authors discussed the harrowing lives of enslaved people toiling on West Indian plantations. Austen never did. With two brothers in the navy, she was hardly ignorant or indifferent to the tragic cost of war. She would have been well-informed on the anti-slavery debate. It was simply that her muse was a comic muse. She did use her characters to demonstrate good or poor conduct. But a dedication to nature and probability in fiction meant that she did not see how improbable scenarios and cartoon villains—who are "completely depraved & infamous [with]

hardly a resemblance of Humanity left in them" ("Plan of a Novel," *LM* 228)—could teach anyone how to bear the vicissitudes of real life.

She knew where her genius lay. She was, to her very bones, a satirist and humorist. Her famous letter to the Prince Regent's librarian, George Stanier Clarke, serves as her manifesto:

> I could not sit seriously down to write a serious Romance under any other motive than to save my life, & if it were indispensable for me to keep it up & never relax into laughing at myself or other people, I am sure I should be hung before I had finished the first chapter. No—I must keep my own style & go on in my own way; and though I may never succeed again in that, I am convinced that I should totally fail in any other. (*Letters* 312).

Appendix A: *Rosella* as an influence on *Emma*

Scholars such as Kauvar (218) have compared the parodic elements of *Emma* to *The Female Quixote*, arguably the best-known of the parody novels still read today, but I think that comparisons to the more obscure *Rosella, or Modern Occurrences* (1799) are even more apt. Mary Charlton's *Rosella* centers around two women, Selina Ellinger and Sophia Beauclerc, who attempt to mould the titular heroine into an ideal sentimental heroine, just as Emma Woodhouse manipulates Harriet Smith. Sophia and her friend Selina do more than misinterpret the intentions of any eligible young men who stray within Rosella's orbit—just like Emma Woodhouse, they actively interfere. Charlton comments on the action with cool irony, interspersed with rare editorials. She uses free indirect discourse to describe the deluded thinking of Sophia and Selina (Dale 11). For example, Sophia and Selina assume that Rosella is destined to marry Lord Morteyne, the nobleman next door. Sophia orders Rosella to drive her carriage past his property every day. The narrator tells us Sophia:

> almost wished the horses to take fright (a little) or the carriage to overturn (gently) that an accident so opportune might create heroic services, an obligation of eternal gratitude in return for them, and all those tender sentiments which a charming heroine and a handsome hero must experience from such a touching adventure (65).

Charlton employs the same "must" in free indirect discourse which Mullan points to as a reflection of Emma's insistence on bending reality to her vision ("introduction." *Emma:* xvi). For example, the Martins, "though very good sort of people, must be doing [Harriet] harm" (*Emma* 23).

Mr. Knightley warns Emma that Mr. Elton will not marry a girl of unknown parentage. He "knows the value of a good income as well as any body. Elton may talk sentimentally, but he will act rationally" (*Emma* 70), i.e., he will choose a wife from a respectable family, with a dowry. Like Emma, Sophia rejects such cold-blooded considerations: "A man must be a sordid wretch, if in seeking a wife, he considers situation, family, and fortune!" (*Rosella* 232).

Charlton's narrator ironically refers to Selina's boring, unloved, husband as her "*caro sposo,*" who "had the brutal quality of having opinions of his own, and of chusing to abide by them in defiance of entreaty, persuasion, or argument" (36). The hyperbole of "brutal" is similar to Austen's occasional use of hyperbole, such as a "private dance, without sitting down to supper" being "an infamous fraud upon the rights of men and women" (*Emma* 273).

The arrival of a pianoforte for Jane Fairfax in *Emma* resembles the mysterious delivery of a beautiful harp in *Rosella.* The narrator hints that Lord Morteyne replaced Rosella's harp because his guests damaged it, but Sophia and Selina hail the gift as "indubitable proof of [his] attachment" (64).

As with most heroines, both Emma and Rosella must suffer through a final misunderstanding before their happy ending. Emma realizes too late that she is in love with Mr. Knightley, and she fears he will marry Harriet. Too late, she wants to supplant Harriet as the romantic heroine instead of being the matchmaker. In *Rosella*, the heroine briefly loses the man she loves because he mistakenly believes she is engaged to another. Charlton and Austen use narrative passages with striking similarities in terms of tone, topic, and sentence structure as both heroines resolve to face up to a cheerless future:

> What now were [Rosella's] views? To endeavour, by retiring within the limits of the sphere to which her orphan state had reduced her, to lose the unfortunate celebrity the eccentric conduct of Miss Beauclerc had procured her; to try, by the aid of reason and prudence, to banish the remembrance of those gay hopes she had once cherished; with a perception naturally distinguishing, and an acute idea of propriety, to live in the centre of affectation, morose tyranny, absurd

> pretensions, and squabbling ill-humour; and with a mind energetic and reflective, to endure perpetually the prattle of folly, and the scorn of the contemptible (273).
>
> Hartfield must be comparatively deserted; and [Emma] left to cheer her father with the spirits only of ruined happiness… what would remain of cheerful or of rational society within their reach?... and the only source whence any thing like consolation or composure could be drawn, was in the resolution of her own better conduct, and the hope that, however inferior in spirit and gaiety might be the following and every future winter of her life to the past, it would yet find her more rational, more acquainted with herself, and leave her less to regret when it were gone. (460-1).

Both authors use a rhetorical question, both heroines hope to be rational (Rosella's "reason"), and both intend to conduct themselves with propriety. Rosella's quadruplet of resolves (*to lose, to try, to banish, to resolve)* includes putting up with her small-minded chaperone Mrs. Methwald. Emma likewise despairs of enjoying cheerful or rational society in the future. She finishes with a triplet of resolves for self-improvement. Fortunately, both heroines receive marriage proposals from the men they love soon thereafter.

Just as in *Northanger Abbey*, *Rosella* balances the comic possibilities of being deluded by novels with the reassurance that a sensible person can read them without harm. The titular heroine picks up some of Sophia's novels and is soon bored by their sameness and prolixity: "a continuation of crying and trembling, according as the superb pen of the writer varied from pathos to horrors, and from horrors to pathos, throughout several volumes, she found far exceeding any curiosity she could feel to learn in which of the damp dungeons, all over-run with spiders and black beetles, the most lucky of the heroine's three or four dozen lovers found a clean spot to throw himself at her feet" (121).

Although there is no record of Austen having read *Rosella*, it seems to be quite probable. We know she enjoyed parodies and comedy, and the plot and stylistic similarities between *Emma* and *Rosella*, noted in this Appendix, suggest that Austen was familiar with this work.

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