

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jessica M. Mosher-Knoshaug for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on February 24, 1999. Title: From Weakness to Wisdom: Jane Austen Transforms the Female of Sensibility Tradition.

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The eighteenth-century female of sensibility was characterized by delicate nerves that allowed her to feel her surroundings and enabled her to choose virtue over vice more consistently than males. While females were considered virtuous, their “innate” delicacy or weakness became their dominant trait and the true focus of male admiration. Although critics have already observed that Jane Austen’s novels work against this idealization of feminine weakness, not one has recognized exactly how Austen transforms the female of sensibility tradition. Austen dissociates a female’s delicacy from her virtue, making the primary source of virtue intellect and, in doing so, relocates male desire on to a female’s inner self. Her novels work in progression to achieve this goal. *Sense and Sensibility* exposes delicacy’s negative effects. Subsequent novels transform the sensibility tradition using two strategies. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, several relationships demonstrate the different ways a dissociation and relocation can occur. *Emma* and *Persuasion* employ the second strategy: the problem of illusion. The existence of a weak female as attractive proves only to be delusive and is ultimately rejected by the novels’ characters and readers. Hence, these five novels progressively use not only male and female interactions but characters’ and readers’ perceptions to eliminate the idea of feminine weakness in Austen’s fictional world.

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**From Weakness to Wisdom:  
Jane Austen Transforms the Female of Sensibility Tradition**

by

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Jessica M. Mosher-Knoshaug, Author

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Introduction   |             |
| The Dissociation of Female Virtue from Delicacy and Illness:<br>Jane Austen's Creation of a New Female Heroine and a New Form of Male Desire ..... | 1           |
| Chapter 1  |             |
| The True Range of Sensibility's Possibilities:<br>Female Debility and Vice Attract Rakes and Men of Feeling .....                                  | 29          |
| Chapter 2  |             |
| <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> and <i>Mansfield Park</i> :<br>Away from Delicacy, from Surface to Depth .....  | 63          |
| Chapter 3  |             |
| Problem of Perception:<br>Illusion and Reality in <i>Emma</i> and <i>Persuasion</i> .....  | 88          |
| Conclusion   |             |
| Jane Austen's New Female Heroine:<br>Sensibility Perfectly Transformed .....   | 119         |
| Endnotes .....   | 128         |
| Works Cited .....  | 130         |

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents. Both my mother and father instilled in me the idea that education is important and should be a priority (Austen and Wollstonecraft, I imagine, would be proud). The images are still fresh in my mind of my mother sending me up to my room after school to study and my father reading Austen's and Dickens's novels to me at bedtime. Without them, this thesis and its ideas would not exist.

From Weakness to Wisdom:  
Jane Austen Transforms the Female of Sensibility Tradition

Introduction

**The Dissociation of Female Virtue from Delicacy and Illness:  
Jane Austen's Creation of a New Female Heroine and a New Form of Male Desire**

When readers think of Jane Austen, many picture her most daring and robust heroines, those like *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet who, on a morning's walk, crosses "field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity," arriving at her destination with her "face glowing with the warmth of exercise" (PP 32).<sup>1</sup> Many also remember a male onlooker's reaction to that glow, Fitzwilliam Darcy's "admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion," an admiration that leads to a romantic attachment and then marriage (33). But what does a reader make of Austen's delicate and unhealthy female characters, whose weakened constitutions also attract a male's admiration? When Elizabeth's own sister, Jane, lies in bed with "a sore-throat and head-ache" the same morning Elizabeth makes her way across fields, Mr. Bingley's attention appears to focus on her debility. Even more perplexing is John Willoughby's and Colonel Brandon's devotion to Marianne Dashwood during her many ailments in *Sense and Sensibility*. If the reader searches to understand why this "unhealthy" attraction exists in Austen's novels, he/she will discover that eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century fiction commonly portray males desiring delicate, and most often sickly, females. For example, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* abounds with Mr. B's passionate reactions to Pamela's kneelings and swoons. Lawrence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* also presents a male narrator who is emotionally then sexually moved by females in distress. When the narrator, Yorick, encounters a female who has an "unprotected look of distress" that "first won [him] to her interest," he "[pities] her from [his] soul" (19). A feeling of pity immediately evokes an erotic



sensation, caused by “the pulsations of the arteries along [his] fingers [pressed] across hers” (19). Similarly, later in the novella, when Yorick encounters a “disorder’d maid” who has “lost her husband” to death, and lost her daughter to the streets, he again experiences an erotic feeling: his “pulse beat[s] languid ” (114).

But that Austen’s works are similar to Richardson’s and Sterne’s in their presentation of the debilitated female is perplexing. Why would Austen present a demeaning female stereotype when she must have realized, as Elizabeth’s creator, how inviting Elizabeth’s healthy and witty character is? While I will attempt to answer this question, I think that it is first important to consider how other critics have addressed Austen’s use of female delicacy and/or illness. Most discussions of female weakness in Austen steer away from scrutiny of male reaction to it. For example, Pamela Steele sees illness as a metaphor for a “way to moral enlightenment” (156). For Marianne Dashwood, Steele suggests a nervous fever transforms her character from an irrational, self-destructive one to a reasonable, benevolent one. Other approaches include viewing delicate females as foils for stronger ones: David Monaghan contrasts “soft and yielding” female characters, like Jane Bennet, to those who are not only healthy, but have ““quickness of observation”” and ““judgment,”” like Elizabeth Bennet (107). Analyses concerning eighteenth-century medicine in relation to female illness also exist. Toby Olshin argues that Marianne Dashwood’s consistent poor health, from colds to “putrid fevers,” is a sign of Austen’s distrust for eighteenth-century approaches to the treatment of illnesses: clinical, the use of apothecaries and “heavy dosages of drugs,” and romantic, the use of “water, food, and air cures” (315-17).

Nevertheless, there are a few exceptions to the general critical neglect of Austen’s interest in male reaction to female delicacy. But, as we shall see, most arguments are dissatisfying. One of these arguments is authored by Laurie and Richard Kaplan. Focusing on *Sense and Sensibility*, the Kaplans contrast the John Dashwoods’ inappropriate reluctance to provide financial assistance for

Mr. Dashwood's widow and daughters to Brandon's, Willoughby's, and Mrs. Jennings's moral response to Marianne's bouts of illness (121-22). However, while noting that Brandon and Willoughby are attracted to Marianne's flushed cheeks, the Kaplans give more emphasis to the moral soundness in the males' arrivals at Marianne's bedside (119). Thus, the Kaplans downplay any erotic satisfaction that the males may have toward Marianne's illness.

Claudia Johnson, like the Kaplans, concerns herself with *Sense and Sensibility* and argues that "the physical degeneration of the injured heroine . . . is profoundly wished" because males "require a constant supply of pitiable objects that redeem their moral status" ("A 'Sweet Face as White as Death'" 169). But Johnson also suggests that males find a female's debility sexually attractive. She indirectly compares *Sense and Sensibility* to Marquis de Sade's *Justine*: The display of Justine's "sufferings, tears, and supplications" causes Severino to exclaim that he has "never enjoyed . . . a finer spectacle" (qtd. in Johnson: 172). Johnson suggests that debility allows males to feel pleasure because it is a "reflection of their own power" (171). But while Johnson touches on the erotic sensations males have for distressed females, the heart of her argument centers on Austen's refusal to condemn Marianne to death after being ill-used in love by Willoughby, a stereotypical sentimental occurrence in eighteenth-century novels because it was deemed that a female had "no reason for being once she bec[ame] damaged property" (162). Therefore, Johnson argues that Austen's critique of an ideology that requires "the suppression of woman's health" is complete since Marianne does not die (164). Because of this, Johnson does not consider the implications of Brandon's marriage to Marianne. Focusing on Marianne's survival, Johnson overlooks that male attraction to female weakness is perpetuated by Brandon's love for Marianne.

Gloria Gross takes a somewhat different approach and does not limit herself to one novel. Gross insists that *Sense and Sensibility*'s Marianne, *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price, and *Emma*'s Jane Fairfax all use "bouts of sickness, irrespective of severity or cause" to "bring refractory

young men to their knees” (195). Gross believes that these females are “motivated by personal ambition and sanctified likewise by social convention” (195). Gross overlooks, however, several important factors: romantic Marianne is far from desiring dull Brandon and cannot wish to “snag” him with a calculated delicacy; Fanny Price is not admired by Edmund for her illness as he constantly urges her to exercise; and Jane Fairfax is engaged to Frank Churchill *before* her emotional distress takes effect. Austen’s exploration of male reaction to delicacy is much more complex than Gross realizes. Two other critics, John Wiltshire and Anita Gorman, also consider a range of different illnesses, from Mr. Woodhouse’s hypochondria in *Emma* to Mrs. Smith’s handicap in *Persuasion*, but only mention male reaction to female delicacy sporadically. A number of their points are worth considering, though. For *Mansfield Park*, Wiltshire implies that the source of Edmund’s love stems from Fanny’s frailty and passivity (*Jane Austen and the body* 84). He notes that Edmund enjoys treating Fanny “as the weaker sex” (71) and that he views her as “the unspeaking subject,” a vessel whose purpose is to envelop his feelings and never disclose hers (107). Here, Wiltshire repeats Gross’s error when failing to realize that Edmund’s wish that Fanny exercise and that she speak her mind specifically contradict the idea that Edmund desires a traditional female of sensibility. In the case of *Persuasion*, Wiltshire attempts to place the female in a positive light. He notes that Wentworth’s reaction to Anne’s apparent frailty, seen in her inability to cope with her rambunctious nephew, is a symbol of a male’s dissociation of female self-effacement from her domestic duties in childrearing: when Wentworth lifts the child off Anne’s back, he “relieves Anne’s body through the agency of his physical contact with the body of the child” (*Jane Austen and the body* 172). While Wiltshire’s analysis empowers the female sex, his later argument does not. Wiltshire argues that the act of Wentworth lifting Anne into a carriage because of her oncoming fatigue is a sign of his sexual attraction (173). Although Wiltshire may not realize it, his analysis suggests that Anne’s fatigue is attractive to Wentworth. To support

Wiltshire's initial idea that Anne and Wentworth are positive characters, another analysis of Wentworth's actions must exist.

Like Wiltshire's, Gorman's analysis of Austen's use of illness seems less than convincing. Gorman insists that Brandon's attraction to Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility* is a healthy one because their marriage is a reflection of "real" and sensible love. Yet Gorman's argument is unsound because she also acknowledges that Brandon loves Marianne in the same manner he loved unhealthy Eliza Williams, "her pale hand," "hollow eye" and "sickly skin" capturing Brandon's heart (55). Gorman, like Gross, also wrongly insists that Frank Churchill's attraction to Jane Fairfax in *Emma* is due to her manipulation of him through her illness (79, 111). Finally, in *Persuasion*, Gorman insists that Wentworth's ultimate attraction to Anne is her need for his care. She insists that "weakness and illness . . . provide the environment for Frederick Wentworth to touch Anne, to care for her, and to suggest the depth of his feeling for her" (121). Gorman does not realize that Anne's weakness not only fails to attract Wentworth, but that it is really only an illusion.

The relative critical neglect of Austen's exploration of male reaction to female weakness and the inadequacies of the critical analyses of it both derive from the failure to recognize the importance of the eighteenth-century idea of a female of sensibility as a context for understanding much of Austen's strategy in depicting male-female relationships. As we shall investigate in more detail in the following two sections of this introduction, a female of sensibility embodied both a positive and a negative side: although she radiated virtue, a benevolent character, she represented weakness. In other words, a female of sensibility's delicate nervous system allowed for a greater sense of feeling that enabled her to judge, more easily than males, between virtue and vice. On the less positive side, her unique anatomy weakened her body and mind: frail nerves plagued her constitution and prevented intellectual contemplation. The female's positive *and* negative traits were deemed admirable to eighteenth-century males, from authors to physicians to theorists. As we

shall see in my argument, Jane Austen, unlike most of her contemporaries, detested the idea that females could only be virtuous if they were delicate as much as did Mary Wollstonecraft, an eighteenth-century feminist.<sup>2</sup> While physical manifestations could confirm inner virtue, it seemed that a female's distress, regardless of its possible connection to virtue, was the main source of male attraction. One of the most extensive studies that compares Austen's and Wollstonecraft's viewpoints is by Margaret Kirkham, who emphasizes their interest in addressing the lives of single, middle-class females and defying contemporary male advice for these females. Kirkham explains that one victim of Wollstonecraft's and Austen's criticism is Dr. Fordyce. His essay *Sermons to Young Women* (1766), where he urges females to appear delicate and frail in order to display angelic or "good" qualities, is what both feminists primarily attack. Kirkham notes that "in both Wollstonecraft and Austen there is the same objection to the sentimental treatment of girls as 'angels'; it makes them less than rational human beings and invites hypocrisy, since everyone who has much to do with them knows that girls are not really much like angels anyway" (44). Overall, Kirkham insists that Austen's works share with Wollstonecraft's a "liberationist principle" and that "as a feminist moralist, Jane Austen is in agreement with Wollstonecraft on so many points that it seems unlikely she had not read *Vindication* and approved of much of it" (34).

My analysis of Austen's novels suggests that Austen, like Wollstonecraft, wished to influence society to view females in an admirable manner. Austen's fictional voice truly echoes Wollstonecraft's, insisting that a female's "weakness [exciting] tenderness" in a male, a "sickly delicacy" that may "secure [a] husband's affection," is far from being respectable and is, rather, condemnable (Wollstonecraft 112). Although many critics have recognized that Austen's novels work against the female of sensibility tradition, none have realized how Austen actually achieves her goal of transforming it: she rejects the female of sensibility's negative side and keeps her positive side. Austen understood that if she dissociated a female's delicacy from her virtue, rejecting the former and keeping the latter, the female of sensibility could become a wholly positive

female figure. The dissociation would allow two positive changes, one concerning the female self and the other concerning society's perception of her. First, Austen would be able to make the female strong in mind, character, and body, and, in making her so, would be able to transfer the primary source of female virtue from her delicate anatomy to her intellectual depth. While it is true that a robust constitution replacing a frail one would help prevent immoral acts that could result from a delicate nervous system (for example, a female's illness, such as hysteria, could cause her to act inappropriately), reason would truly guarantee a virtuous character. Second, in turn, with the source of virtue now being the mind, a relocation of male desire to a female's inner being would truly take place. While Anita Gorman is one critic who understands Austen's respect for inner beauty, using *Mansfield Park's* heroine as an example (176-77), she does not understand the importance in its relation to Austen's alteration of the traditional female of sensibility image.

Furthermore, because critics fail to recognize how Austen alters the female of sensibility and male desire for her, they also overlook how Austen's goal makes the novels closely interrelated. While it is again Gorman who comes closest to noticing the interrelations among Austen novels through her recognition of Austen's mockery of the female of sensibility, Gorman does not realize that Austen's novels do more than just mock the weak female: they work together to transform the female of sensibility tradition. Hence, Gorman misunderstands how females of sensibility and their illnesses are used in Austen's novels. For *Sense and Sensibility* Gorman fails to see that Marianne's weak initial *and* final character, as well as what two very different males consider Marianne's primary source of attraction, establish the need for the female of sensibility idea to be altered and that subsequent novels accomplish this task. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* change the female of sensibility figure for the better not only through a dissociation of female delicacy, or illness, from virtue, but through a relocation of male desire on to a female of sensibility's depth.<sup>3</sup> In these four novels, Austen uses two strategies to accomplish the transformation. The first in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* presents several different

females and relationships to show that there are a variety of ways to achieve movement from surface to depth. The second in *Emma* and *Persuasion* deals with the problem of illusion, where the illusion of the weak female as attractive is rejected and Austen's modern female is appreciated. Hence, unlike what Gorman and many other critics believe, these latter four novels do not portray illnesses as sources for relationships. Instead, illnesses prevent relationships from blossoming.

Before continuing my discussion, it is important to consider an argument similar to mine that focuses on another eighteenth-century author. The relocation of male desire from surface to depth is at the heart of Nancy Armstrong's influential argument in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that "the modern individual was first and foremost a female" (66), only in Armstrong's view this revolutionary relocation occurs in Richardson, not Austen. It is Pamela, Armstrong argues, who stimulates a new male desire. However, while Pamela exhibits both the positive and the negative sides of sensibility in paradigmatic form, Armstrong concentrates on the former to the exclusion of the latter to make her case. This indicates that Richardson gives us the female of sensibility but that Austen gives us the first modern female who is virtuous because of reason, not delicacy, and respected as such. Whether this female is also the first modern individual is another matter for another time.

However, to understand fully the female of sensibility that Austen wishes to redefine in order to relocate male desire, we must first place the idea of female sensibility in a historical context. In doing so, we will look at Armstrong's view of the positive side of the female of sensibility and at her application of her theory to *Pamela*. My second section argues that Armstrong's analysis is incomplete. Here I use G.J. Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* to explain the negative side of the female of sensibility. I then present my own analysis of *Pamela*, arguing that Armstrong overlooks what Austen most likely saw herself when she read it. The third section of this introduction discusses sexual ideology, using Armstrong's application of Foucault's theory of sexuality. Understanding that sexual ideology is historically created, we are

able to understand why Austen believes that through her fiction she can alter the female of sensibility stereotype and the source of a male's attraction for her. The final section restates my thesis and includes an overview of subsequent chapters.

The rise of sensibility took place during a time of social upheaval, when the longtime reigning aristocracy was losing its prestige to the rising lower working classes. Janet Todd in *Sensibility* explains that the Glorious Revolution of 1688, by deposing James II, signaled the end of a king ruling by a divine right because parliament, in effect, took the place of God, deposing one king and replacing him with another (10-11). Thus, as Todd states, William of Orange's "arrival largely deprived kingship and aristocratic hierarchy of their divinity" and "a basic equality was, from that time onwards, felt ideally to obtain in the state" (11). Todd notes that by the 1700s a group called the Dissenters became a powerful "force for political reform and, while the development of their religious beliefs was in the main away from sentimental towards rational faith, their libertarian concerns were reinforced by the sentimental interest in the deprived" (11). Society was in need of new rules that "outlined domestic procedures that were practical for people of less means and prestige," and upper-class females were the reformers' target (Armstrong 61). Most aristocratic females spent their time in idleness, their minds inactive as they only fantasized about their next purchases and how their servants would display their wealth through the presentation of meals for guests (Armstrong 72). There was also a call for a reform of manners, especially a reform of aristocratic libertine rakes who were deemed "problem men" as philanderers and abusers of females; rakes were "amoral males who pursued their own appetites" (Barker-Benfield 38). Aristocratic rakes, as men of prestige and wealth, believed it their right to ravage females of lower classes. Females, to them, were considered objects, whose virginity could be taken or bought. Both of these ideas are colorfully displayed in *Pamela*, with Lady Davers as the stereotypical aristocratic lady and Mr. B the stereotypical aristocratic rake.



The idea of sensibility was believed to be the solution for reform. In 1616 the definition of sensibility referred to a person's "capacity of sensation and emotion," a sensitivity that allowed a person to have an acute sense of his/her surroundings (*OED* 981-2). By 1750 sensibility was associated with morality:

the scientists who were responsible for the establishment of sensibility . . . as [a] physiological and psychological concept--notably Albrecht von Haller and Robert Whytt--were also keenly aware of the moral connotations of these terms, and of implications which they felt their discoveries had for the redefinition of man as a spiritual being. Although Haller and Whytt differed widely--and publicly--on certain points, both believed that their experimental demonstrations of sensibility as a physiological process provided evidence for the existence of a soul, and for man's capacity to function as a moral being. (Brissenden 39)

The public and many eighteenth-century scientists believed that a person's sensory organs and physiology (nerves) allowed him/her to act upon their surroundings in a morally accepted way. Benevolent actions were based on what a person "felt" because nerves were thought to be connected to the soul, indirectly linking nerves to what the soul represents: that is, feeling. In fact, theorists at the time, such as the Earl of Shaftesbury (Howard Jones 83) and David Hume, believed that while reason could be a guide to acting morally (for example, to check uncontrollable emotions) it was primarily the soul, or the heart, that led to moral decisions: "feeling was necessarily the primary element in the process which led to the formation of moral sentiment" (Brissenden 24).

While sensibility's definition appears to be gender neutral, females were more commonly regarded as "creatures of greater sensibility" than males (Barker-Benfield 27). The female was considered to be a "creature" of sensibility because of her unique anatomy. According to eighteenth-century thought "the degree of physical sensibility in a human organism depend[ed] directly on the delicacy and elasticity of the walls of the nervous fibres" (Brissenden 44), and females, as physician George Cheyne (1671-1743) insisted, by "God and science," were

determined to have “finer, weaker nerves” (Barker-Benfield 24). Finer nerves allowed females to be more sensitive to their surroundings than males, to be able to judge between virtue and vice and take the correct path. In other words, a female’s greater level of feeling because of her more delicate nerves and powerful heart, not her reason, was the basis for her decisions. Hence, females were deemed the “true” reformers of society, and literature of the time, such as conduct books and sentimental novels, emphasized the duty of a female of sensibility. Eighteenth-century females were assigned the responsibility of teaching others virtue, teaching them how to be frugal, how to be courteous, how to show sympathy for persons in distress, how to be moral, and so on (Armstrong 65-68). Not only were females considered the reformers of society, but also of the domestic household exhibiting modesty and hospitality. Overall, it was as though the virtue of a female of sensibility gave the female sex “an alternative form of value to that of . . . money and rank” (113). A female’s virtue, being part of her gender, allowed her to be respected by any level of society, thus permitting her to transcend social boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

It is precisely this female power achieved through virtue that Nancy Armstrong analyzes in Richardson’s *Pamela*. Armstrong labels *Pamela* the novel that best represents how the female sex came to be admired for something other than her flesh. Because upper-class men, such as Mr. B, viewed females as objects to be bought or taken, Armstrong believes that Mr. B expects to find the traditional object of flesh when he repeatedly attacks Pamela (Armstrong 112). Armstrong contends that Pamela’s virtuous voice is startling to Mr. B because it makes her more than a “body”; she becomes, rather, a human being (117). It is this virtue that Armstrong insists Mr. B begins to crave. Hence, Armstrong argues that because of Pamela’s virtue, male desire for a female is directed “away from the surface of the female body and into its depths” (120). Not only does she remark that Pamela’s virtue accomplishes the relocation of male desire, but that her letters filled with virtue, which Mr. B reads, also transform Mr. B into a moral being: “he internalizes her moral

authority, her conscience becomes his, his speech is indistinguishable from her writing, and she has achieved a form of power over him" (124).

Armstrong furthers her argument in favor of Pamela as the ideal female of sensibility by analyzing Pamela's role in her marriage to Mr. B. Armstrong argues that Pamela's virtue alters the role of leadership in the household. Because of her good character, Pamela assumes a position that was traditionally male: she controls Mr. B's servants. Armstrong writes that "not even the odious Mrs. Jewkes proves to be beyond the power of Pamela's redemptive example" (126). Armstrong asks her reader to think of Pamela's household as representing the start of a new sphere based on social relationships in domestic and gendered terms, with the authority of the relationship primarily female rather than male. Armstrong remarks that Pamela's, a simple servant's, ability to relocate male desire, to reform a rake, and to take control of the domestic household offers a universal representation of the female as a virtuous and emotional subject (118, 133-34). Because of all of these reasons, Armstrong views Pamela as the female who best represents the "first and foremost" modern individual (66).

As we can see, Armstrong focuses her feminist argument on Pamela as a powerful model of female sensibility because of Pamela's virtue. She has characterized Pamela's virtue as a strength. And, it is undeniable that according to sentimental tradition, Pamela's virtuous sensibility is admirable. I, myself, am not denying its appeal. In fact, *Pamela* was found in church pews and recommended by priests as educational and respectable reading material for young women and men alike. Yet as I shall argue in the following section, Barker-Benfield's historical analysis of what the idea of sensibility truly meant for females lets us see why Pamela, as a female of sensibility, is not as admirable as Armstrong believes, why she is not the first modern female. It will be clear why Austen feels Richardson's novel is incomplete and why, in her own fiction, she takes on the task of redefining the female of sensibility and relocating male desire.

Although Barker-Benfield, like Armstrong, notices that females were claimed to be “naturally the moral superiors of most men,” he also notices that they were considered so only because of “delicate nerves” (24). This idea of “delicate nerves” is important because it causes the idea of sensibility to be a double-edged sword. While the notion of the female of sensibility elevated the female in one sense, it belittled her in another, as George Cheyne writes: those “born with weak nerves” could never “expect the same Force, Strength, Vigour and Activity” as those born with “strong Fibers and robust Constitutions” (20). Similarly, eighteenth-century medical expert Mandeville in his *Treatise of Hypochondriack and Hysterick Passions*

declared that women, unlike men, were born deficient . . . . Women’s ‘spirits’ were inherently less than men’s and their nerves were thinner, more delicate and softer. The effects permeated women’s constitutions; women’s vaunted ‘delicacy’ reflected the weakness of their nervous systems, also termed ‘delicate’. (Barker-Benfield: 26)

Not only could females’ constitutions be naturally weak because of these delicate nerves, but because the nerves were so sensitive, when confronted with threatening situations, females could display temporary signs of unhealth, such as fainting and tearful palpitations. That females’ “‘more delicate’ parts” were considered to be “‘sooner disorder’d or broken’” than males’ was frequently depicted in eighteenth-century literature (Barker-Benfield 8). Sporadic unhealth, characterized by “headache[s], fatigue, upset-stomach[s], fainting, screaming, or loss of appetite,” colored sentimental novels (Gorman 5).

Physical weakness was paired with mental inferiority. While theorists, like the Earl of Shaftsbury, assigned to females of sensibility a strong heart, thus having “more feeling, more passion, than any other human creature,” they also “deemed women naturally incapable of ‘strong reason’” (Barker-Benfield 118). While this belief again seemed acceptable to male theorists, because, as we have already discussed, feeling was the primary source for virtue, the idea actually had very negative implications. First, it indicated that the female could not read material that

required in-depth contemplation which also meant she would never really be able to educate her mind fully. Mandeville insisted that “women were ‘unfit . . . for abstruse and elaborate thoughts, all Studies of Depth, Coherence and Solidity, that fatigue the Spirits and require a Steadiness and Assiduity of Thinking’” (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 26). Second, a lack of reason implied that the female was susceptible to her emotions. If we recall, the theory of virtue, while placing the heart as its source, did not eliminate reason. Reason was believed necessary to check a possible overindulgence in emotions that could arise from the heart being dependent on such delicate nerves. Hence, without the ability to rationalize, a female’s emotions might get carried away when reading inappropriate romances or might cause her to faint when reading about distressing situations. This danger not only further limited what females could read but also required them to be guided by those who had reason: males. Educational theory urged “parents and teachers” to use “no Monstrous, Unnatural, or Preposterous Fictions to divert [females] with, but either ingenious fables, or real histories” (Barker-Benfield 106). Recommended authors were sentimental poets, whose works were considered “imaginatively female” (Armstrong 103), and/or sentimental novelists, whose works promoted “a certain refinement of mind as part of a moral code including the duty to parents; ties of friendship and of love; the virtues of justice, of prudence, of economy; the exertions of generosity, of benevolence, and of compassion,” subjects not requiring much contemplation and considered easy for the female to comprehend (Armstrong 147). Moreover, the idea of a weak brain was associated with mental illness. Without male supervision, a female, reading material not recommended by conduct books, could get so emotionally distressed that she could become hysterical or even mad. An 1809 medical journal titled *Ackermanns* explains females’ vulnerability to mental derangement: hysteria “is frequently occasioned by emotions of the heart and passions of the mind . . . . The cause of females chiefly being attacked with hysterics, would appear to depend upon the delicacy of their organisation, the quickness of their perceptions, and their requisite sense of feeling ” (qtd. in Laurie and Richard Kaplan: 126).

Ironically, as Austen shows, particularly in *Sense and Sensibility*, it seems that the ideology of a female's weaker body and mind aligned with a strong heart could endanger her virtue: not only might uncontrollable passions lead to immoral acts, but if a form of illness became too severe, a female, no longer in control of her body or mind, might be tempted by vice. John Mullan recognizes the apparent contradiction in the definition of the female of sensibility, the idea emphasizing "privilege and ailment": a body could be "stubbornly virtuous or manifestly debilitating" (*Sentiment and Sociability* 223). Mullan adds that "the association of feeling with affliction should warn us against presuming that sentimentalism derives from an optimistic creed of benevolence or humanitarianism" ("Sentimental Novels" 250). Janet Todd herself notes that sensibility could in fact be "destabilizing . . . and detrimental to Christian precepts" because "when embraced, often had a decadent quality about it, a self-indulgent physicality and self-contemplating vanity" (63). It could even "become excessive and self-destructive; it [could] declare itself reclusive, and retreat into the, sometimes histrionic, postures of melancholy" (Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability* 201). Delicate females could be "'capable of running into the same Indiscretions or Excess of Sensual Pleasures'" as rakes (Barker-Benfield 24).

What Barker-Benfield describes calls for a reexamination of Richardson's *Pamela*. Armstrong bases her argument on Mr. B's attraction to Pamela's character, her virtue, relocating the desire of the male onto the female's inner self. I would like to argue, to the contrary, that it is Pamela's outer self, her body, associated with her weakness and vulnerability, that sexually attracts Mr. B. That this idea is present in Richardson's novel is not surprising considering Richardson was Dr. Cheyne's patient and publisher (Todd 79) and that he considered "the supreme spectacle . . . innocence wronged": a female in distress (75). My argument makes *Pamela* seem less revolutionary than Armstrong claims because I show that while virtue may exist in Pamela, a relocation of male desire to a female's inner virtuous self is not accomplished. The definition of the female of sensibility is to blame. Because Pamela is characterized by virtue *and* delicacy, Mr. B

becomes sexually addicted to her delicate constitution *instead* of her virtue. In fact, I believe Mr. B regards Pamela's virtue as an obstruction to his gaining complete access to and control over her debilitated body. Pamela's will to maintain a virtuous character causes her to rebel. Just when he thinks she is physically weakened to the point where he will have access to her body, she again refuses his advances. Contrary to what Armstrong argues, I believe Pamela's rebellion does not cause Mr. B to relocate his desire on to Pamela's inner character. Instead, Mr. B desires to destroy this stubborn morality and encourage her delicate weakness. Understanding that a virtuous female has a weak anatomy, Mr. B realizes Pamela's weak nerves are so sensitive that any vicious act against her virtue will render her almost hysterical. In these distressed states, Pamela's physical delicacy will be more emphasized than her virtuous conduct. Moreover, Mr. B will not cease his attacks until Pamela reaches a state where her physical distress is at its greatest because it is characterized by mental and character weakness. Here, Mr. B achieves, at least for a moment, what he truly yearns for: frailty without virtue. Only when he is certain she is this completely debilitated state, will Mr. B feel sexually satisfied. Thus, Mr. B is aroused by a delicate and submissive female figure, not by a virtuous one. In *Pamela*, then, and as Janet Todd notes, "the sensitive body in women is inevitably sexualized for onlookers" (100).

To establish that Mr. B does indeed find pleasure in Pamela's distress, mostly characterized by sentimental swooning and crying, we must first briefly investigate how Mr. B reacts to Pamela's defiance of him and then how he reacts to her weak submission. Repeatedly, Pamela, aloud and in the letters that Mr. B confiscates and reads, reminds Mr. B that she would "so contentedly return to [her] Poverty again, and think it less Disgrace to be oblig'd to wear Rags, and live upon Ryebread and Water, as [she] use to do, than . . . be a Harlot to the greatest Man in the World" (Richardson 49). Mr. B typically reacts angrily to Pamela's rebellion, calling her "a little Slut" (57) and a "little witch" for whom he "has no patience" (48). On the other hand, Mr. B's reaction is quite different when Pamela's emotional and physical distress is evident, making her

appear susceptible to his control. One of Mr. B's first displays of his terrifying power, when he commands her never to disclose any information about his sexual advances, ends with Pamela falling "down on [her] knees" and asking him to "pity a poor distressed Creature" (41). With this submissive action on Pamela's part, Mr. B seems "to be mov'd" (41) and reacts sexually, as he then attempts to kiss her "Neck and Lips" (42). A second, similar scene occurs when Mr. B publicly humiliates Pamela in front of his accountant, Mr. Longman. When Pamela, in distress, falls to her knees to say that she "has been a very ungrateful Creature to the best of Masters . . . . [and] deserves to be turn'd out of [his] Family with Shame and Disgrace," Mr. B is a "little mov'd," and taking a "Handkerchief out of his Pocket," hides his tearful face while looking out the window (75-6). Although this second scene does not immediately lead to a sexual advance, it does in part contribute to a further expression of Mr. B's romantic emotions that can be linked to sexual feelings, when he declares his love for her (83).

Because Mr. B only desires Pamela's complete debility, Mr. B continues to cause situations that make Pamela's distress more apparent than her virtue. He confines Pamela in Lincolnshire, where she is hidden away from society and not allowed to communicate with her parents (108). He assigns to her a cruel housemaid, Mrs. Jewkes, who repeatedly verbally and physically abuses her (116). He sends her letters that suggest further cruelty on his part, insisting that he will get revenge for her refusal of his advances: "*even what she most fears, [will] be done to her*" (145). Specifically attacking her chastity, Mr. B hints to Pamela that he will give her hand in marriage, against her will, to Mr. Colbrand, a "Giant of Man," "scraggly," with "great staring Eyes," "two huge Whiskers," a "monstrous wide Mouth," "long yellow Teeth, and a hideous grin" (148). Furthermore, Mr. B, disguised as Pamela's chambermaid, attacks her until she faints (176). Much of the time Mr. B has access to Pamela's journal, whose perusal allows him to enjoy doubly her reactions to the situations with which he has pained her. When he cannot find her letters, he attempts to search for them under her petticoat. That her letters are near her flesh suggests that Mr.



B is interested not in what Armstrong insists to be a “body of words,” but in words that describe her bodily distresses: he “longs to see the Particulars of [her] Plot, and [her] Disappointment, where [her] Papers leave off” (201). Janet Todd explains that in sentimental fiction, the letter authored by a female, especially in Richardson’s novels, is to be considered “an analogue to the sensitive female body, showing fragmentation and instability under stress” (86).

Mr. B will not stop his vicious acts until he is sure that Pamela’s tears are a sign of a complete breakdown. Pamela’s suicide scene shows Mr. B that he has won the battle of seduction. It not only reveals Pamela’s physical delicacy, but it most importantly reveals that Pamela’s mind and virtuous character are weakening. In all aspects, Pamela’s debility is completely exposed. In an attempt to escape, Pamela falls from a wall. A brick she loosens causes a “Blow upon [her] Head,” and the fall causes her to break “[her] Shins and [her] Ankle” (Richardson 151). Now physically distressed, Pamela crawls to the pond and because of the “hard Usage [she has] Reason to expect from [her] dreadful Keepers,” is tempted to “throw [her]self in without Consideration” (151). Pamela’s suicidal contemplation indicates that Mr. B’s actions have broken Pamela to the point of unreason; because of Mr. B’s repeated “Persecutions,” she no longer has the ability to fight back and instead debates losing consciousness forever (152). Furthermore, this contemplated suicide indicates that Pamela’s character, one whose virtue allowed her to resist Mr. B’s advances, is blemished. Just the thought of suicide is a sin in God’s eyes, something that even Pamela herself acknowledges during this scene. Upon reading this contemplated suicide letter, Mr. B realizes that Pamela is completely delicate and vulnerable. This realization allows Mr. B to experience a sexual climax reminiscent of Yorick’s in *A Sentimental Journey’s* when he himself is presented with a debilitated maiden: Mr. B “seem’d so mov’d, that he turn’d away his Face” (208).

When analyzing Mr. B’s behavior, Armstrong does not consider the above scene to be as crucial as the one she labels the contract scene. When Pamela refuses Mr. B’s marriage contract, where he offers Pamela money, shelter, and clothes in exchange for her love (Richardson 164-68),

Armstrong believes Mr. B's desire is relocated on to Pamela's inner self (116-17). But if this were true, then Mr. B would cease his torture of Pamela after this scene. Because Mr. B's true desire for Pamela is based on her physical, mental, and moral debilitation, not on her virtuous inner self, Mr. B does not change his treatment of her until her complete weakness is apparent. It is Pamela's contemplated suicide that finally demonstrates his torture of her is no longer necessary. Because she is in a state of delicacy, he has achieved his goal and can make her his submissive wife. Although many would like to categorize Mr. B as a man of feeling, he is really a satisfied rake, appearing docile and benevolent only because he, as Pamela's husband, will be able to control and ravage Pamela's flesh.

In this third section, we are left to question how a female's delicacy came to be attractive to a male, as it is for Mr. B, and we can find an answer in understanding sexual ideology as theorized by Foucault. Armstrong herself bases her argument on Foucault's theory of sexuality and, in agreement with Foucault, explains that sex has never been independent of sexuality because they are fused by human experience (Armstrong 11). In other words, history creates the idea of sexuality which is the basis for understanding sex; what we know as biological is actually historical. In fact, as Foucault acknowledges, sexuality's "representation determines what one knows to be sex, the particular form sex assumes in one age opposed to another, and the political interests these various forms may have served" (qtd. in Armstrong: 11). Armstrong adds to Foucault's theory by focusing on the female sex and the element of desire. Specifically, she concerns herself with how historical changes affect what males consider attractive in females.

While I agree with Foucault and Armstrong that sexual ideology can be historically explained and that it influences how the sexes are to be perceived, I do not think that male desire in the eighteenth century was altered to favor the female as much as Armstrong claims. We must remember that Armstrong's argument is based on limited insight, on the positive side of the female

of sensibility. The lack of insight into sensibility's negative side causes Armstrong to regard prematurely and incorrectly sensibility's effects on females as positive and empowering. Armstrong does not consider and thus does not question the two sides of female sensibility. I believe that the movement of sensibility was concerned with a less-than-revolutionary sexual ideology, where a female's virtue was purposefully associated with her delicacy so that this weakness could be valorized. Taking Barker-Benfield's historical account of the age, I will argue that the female of sensibility was deemed weak in body and mind for two reasons: this assumption guaranteed that stronger and more reasonable males would retain power after the movement accomplished its goals of reform, and it assured reformed rakes, with their new "softer" side, that they could still appear dominant to weak females.

First, to attach a female's virtue to an apparent defect or delicacy ensured that females would not be so influential and dominate males in the long run. In fact, as we have noted, even during the age of sensibility when a female's virtue supposedly allowed her to be admired, her weak constitution and mind made her dependent on a male's guidance. Therefore, the power that sensibility allowed females was already limited. And, as soon as the positive side of sensibility achieved reform, the negative in sensibility was emphasized, thereby eliminating all power to which females were entitled. Even though Armstrong does not see this emphasis as a direct result of sensibility's negative side, she notes a change in female treatment in nineteenth-century literature. This literature eradicated any power sensibility's virtue may have given to females specifically by exaggerating sensibility's defect: "with the ascendancy of the middle classes, it would no longer do for the ideal woman to represent an emergent form of power" (Armstrong 56), so books, such as *Oliver Twist* and *Vanity Fair*, viewed womanly power as a "demonic force--manifest in a madwoman--that would define these women as anti-heroines and undesirable wives" (53). Such females in the nineteenth century were generally viewed as suffering from hysteria or madness, the effects of delicate nerves. Thus, females of sensibility were deemed virtuous but delicate because

males of the sensibility movement never intended to give females respect, never seriously regarded females as role models, but only as temporary models for reform. Hence, while contemporary critics, such as Armstrong, see the virtue of sensibility as a certain breakthrough in sexual ideology for females, eighteenth-century males saw the delicacy of sensibility as attractively debilitating because it guaranteed male power.

A second reason explaining why sensibility's virtue was aligned with delicacy is connected to what sensibility implied for society's males. As we recall, the age of sensibility also wished to reform eighteenth-century males into "men of feeling," males who could no longer rule females with force or wealth. As a result, I believe males needed another method of maintaining superiority which they found in gender: the natural strength of a male and the innate weakness of a female. As Barker-Benfield notes, physician George Cheyne "wished to reconcile the pre-historical origins of the body to the account in Genesis of Eve's creation out of Adam's rib" (Barker-Benfield 24). Cheyne suggested that a body's "original *Stamina*, the whole *System* of the Solids, the Firmness, Force, and strength of the Muscles, of the Viscera, and great Organs" were "owing to the Male" (Cheyne 96). Thus, even as men of feeling, males were the natural protectors of delicate females because they were presumed to be biologically superior.

This demeaning sexual ideology was incorporated in the same literature that praised the virtue of a female of sensibility. In fact, *Pamela* becomes a novel that best reinforces this sexual ideology. Most importantly, the messages in novels such as *Pamela* were meant to influence readers' actions. As Janet Todd explains, "in all forms of sentimental literature, there is an assumption that life and literature are directly linked, . . . through the belief that the literary experience can intimately affect the living one. So literary conventions become a way of life" (4). Males reading material from medical journals, sentimental novels, and newspapers, were to be influenced by words that glorified a sensitive male's strong health and a virtuous female's weak body. Novelist Frances Brooke declares "in *Emily Montague* (1769) that . . . virtue may command

esteem, understanding and talents admiration, beauty, a transient desire, but 'tis sensibility alone which inspires love'" (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 28). Another novelist, Henry Mackenzie, comments on how delicacy affected male onlookers: "'It is by such private and domestic distresses, that the softest emotions of the heart are most strongly excited'" (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 143). An eighteenth-century anonymous male author further notes that "'feebleness to which the tender frame of women is subject, [is], perhaps, more seducing than her bloom. The *healthy* flower looks superior to protection, and expands itself to the sun in a kind of *independent* state; but nursing that which *droops* (sweetly dejected) and is ready to fall upon its bed, our care becomes more dear, as it becomes more *necessary*'" (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 345). *The Spectator*, no. 247, also idealizes a female's delicate appearance as attractive: it recommends that a virtuous female "should always show 'that gentle softness, tender fear, and all those parts of Life, which distinguish her from the other Sex; with some Subordination to it, but such an Inferiority that makes her still more lovely'" (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 309). In fact, when males were confronted with healthy females of sensibility, they seemed repulsed. Dr. Gregory states,

We so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a corresponding delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way she is little aware of. (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 293)

It was truly sensibility's delicacy, in the form of consistent poor health or sporadic illness, and not necessarily sensibility's morality or virtue, to which eighteenth-century males were attracted. Male readers could become much like Richardson's Lovelace, who believes Clarissa's "'emotions [are] more sweetly feminine after the first few moments'" of her distress, and that when she trembles, and he is able to catch her in his arms, it signifies the most erotic or "'precious moment'" (qtd. in Barker-Benfield: 345).

Not only were males' characters and behavior toward females meant to be affected by this sexual ideology presented in literature, but females' characters and behaviors towards males were as well. So influenced by the repeated idea in sentimental novels and conduct books that females indeed had a weakened disposition due to their greater sensibility, parents restricted girls and males confined females to the home. The result was the female weakness desired by patriarchal society as explained by Mary Wollstonecraft: "the sedentary life which [girls were] condemned to live, whilst boys froli[cked] in the open air, weaken[ed] the muscles" (129) and destroyed "the powers of digestion" resulting in females displaying "infantine airs" (155). Wollstonecraft insisted that male theorists and physicians such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Dr. John Gregory "contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been" (103). Not only were females dependent on males because of their weak bodies, but because of their weak minds. "According to Wollstonecraft's analysis of gendered sensibility, 'everything' that females saw or heard from their infancy served 'to fix impressions, call forth emotions, and associate ideas, that [gave] a sexual character to the mind'" (qtd. in Barker- Benfield: 208). In other words, because females of sensibility were told that their primary trait was the gift of feeling rather than reason, they adopted that idea. Hence, "fragile in every sense of the word, [females were] obliged to look up to a [male] for every comfort" (Wollstonecraft 155).

Given this state of affairs, we can now briefly return to Mr. B's treatment of Pamela and understand it in light of the influence of this sexual ideology. *Pamela*, we can argue, represents the stereotypes of males and females perfectly not only in how they were to carry themselves, but how they were to perceive one another. Mr. B is attracted to Pamela's distress because it allows him, as a man who can no longer establish control through force as a "man of feeling," to establish control through gender, the innate weakness of a female, while also ensuring that he is the naturally stronger and wiser being. This assurance allows Mr. B to appear to be a reformed man of feeling,

desiring a female's virtue, when he really is only still a rake, ready to pounce on Pamela's physical and mental delicacy. Barker-Benfield best explains this idea:

Pamela's power of conversion was derived from a female gender style manifest in tearfulness, fainting, and physical weakness -- that is, her distinctively susceptible nervous system. This style was presented as women's refinement of manners, linking women together as well as promising to maintain their subordination. It signified their apparent power to refine and civilize men, while contributing to the reassurance of men that their . . . delicacy was still 'manly.' (251)

Lastly, this final section allows us to reemphasize what Austen's novels suggest she understood: for "the culture of sensibility's elevation of the value of marriage, of mothering, of the home, and of the whole domestic life" *really* to "correspond to the elevation of women," the current ideology of sexuality needed to be changed in favor of a virtuous, reasonable, *and* healthy female (Barker-Benfield 239). The female of virtuous and weakening sensibility was a created idea only meant to repress females, and Austen attempted to destroy it in her fiction. That Austen would take on such a task of changing sexual ideology in her works is not surprising. Austen, as Anita Gorman notes, was familiar with sexual ideology and did everything in her power to belittle it. Surrounded by her mother's hypochondria, which was a "source of vexation" for Austen, Austen "fought back by holding illness, fears about illness, and ineffective treatment up to ridicule" (17). Furthermore, Austen was not the only one writing against female sensibility at the end of the eighteenth century. Even her favorite authors, such as Maria Edgeworth, were incorporating such ideas into their texts. It is likely that she consciously joined the group of other female writers and even male writers, such as William Godwin, who also viewed the tradition of sensibility as negative.

Hence, when Armstrong states Austen's "*Pride and Prejudice* began where *Pamela* ended" (135), in the sense that *Pamela* constructed a "female subject [that] could step forth as an

object of knowledge” and created a new form of male desire that could later be taken for granted (134), she fails to see that *Pamela* upholds a type of female and a form of male desire that Austen rejects. *Pamela* forces Austen to revise the object of male desire by dissociating virtue from delicacy so that a female’s weakness, or delicate surface, is not the basis for her virtue nor for a relationship. While Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* exposes the negative aspects of the sentimental novel and its heroines of sensibility, her final novels, such as *Persuasion*, present an alternative, a strong and modern female of sensibility who is virtuous primarily because she uses her mind. It is this depth characterized by an intellectual virtue to which males become attracted. Overall, in taking on the task of creating a new female, it is as if Austen fulfills Wollstonecraft’s call to women to “labour by reforming themselves to reform the world” (Wollstonecraft 133).

*Sense and Sensibility*, discussed in chapter 1, presents heroine Marianne Dashwood as a victim of sensibility’s negative side. She presents two very different Mariannes, one representing a female of “extreme” sensibility and the other representing a female of “docile” sensibility. For both Mariannes, it is as if Austen emphasizes Pamela’s negative qualities of sensibility to show that they make the female a negative figure. Delicacy dominates their minds, characters, and bodies. Marianne as the “extreme” female of sensibility is characterized by a strong heart instead of a strong mind; she is easily fooled by sentimental fiction. She creates reality out of fantasy. Further, her delicate and uncontrollable emotions cause her to be immoral. She commits indecent acts with lover John Willoughby and even contemplates suicide. Marianne’s delicacy even causes her to indulge in irrational acts, leading to bodily harm and serious illnesses. She becomes idle and domestically unproductive. For the “docile” Marianne, her mind, character, and body are dependent on and supported by a male. She is her husband’s shadow. Therefore, Austen demonstrates that delicacy only causes negative side effects and attempts to persuade her audience to reconsider the definition of the female of sensibility. If the eighteenth-century female really was supposed to be a powerful and influential domestic and societal figure, then she needed the use of



her mind to guarantee good character and needed a robust constitution to be productive. What is even more interesting about this novel is Austen's mockery of delicacy's similar effect on Marianne's very different male admirers who resemble Mr. B's two sides: Willoughby, a rake, whose immoral character is supposed to be reformed by a female's virtue, and Brandon, a man of feeling, whose benevolent character is supposed to be drawn to a similarly virtuous female. While Armstrong argues that *Pamela* dramatizes the attraction of males to sensibility's virtue, Austen shows in *Sense and Sensibility* that the focus of a male's admiration really rests on a female of sensibility's delicate constitution, her surface. Therefore, Willoughby is not reformed, and Brandon does not marry virtuously. Overall, Marianne mirrors Pamela, representing a female of sensibility's weakness, and Willoughby and Brandon combined mimic Mr. B, attracted to a female's debility. Austen reminds us of how sensibility truly operates, its defect dominating characters and relationships, and, in doing so, calls for reform.

After *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen uses several strategies that allow her to move away from female delicacy and towards virtue, away from surface and on to depth. All of the ensuing relationships show a dissociation of virtue from delicacy but show different ways a male appreciates or activates the dissociation. In *Pride and Prejudice*, one of the novels discussed in chapter 2, Austen presents a heroine, Jane Bennet, who is benevolent but who seems to initially attract her mate because of a bout of illness. Importantly, though, health is emphasized more than illness in this novel, and there is a lapse of time between the initial romance and the marriage, allowing Jane to recover and Bingley to admire her healthy appearance and countenance. But this relationship does not yet accomplish Austen's goal of moving from an appreciation of female surface to depth. We discover that this relationship is focused on a surface attraction. Austen shows that an admiration of health does not necessarily mean an admiration of female depth. Hence, Austen presents two more relationships that move away from surface and concentrate on depth. The first again appears in *Pride and Prejudice* with Elizabeth and Darcy. While Darcy

appreciates Elizabeth's good health, he also desires her wit and benevolence. Thus, an admiration of depth as well as surface, a lesser priority, is achieved. Although Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship is admirable, Fanny Price and Edmund Bertram's relationship in *Mansfield Park* achieves what Elizabeth and Darcy's does not. Darcy's admiration of Elizabeth is simply an admiration of virtue and intellect also associated with good health. Thus his attraction to her is an appreciation of this combination. On the other hand, Edmund is not simply an admirer of Fanny's whole being because she incorporates the female of sensibility's traditional definition: she is delicate as well as benevolent. Edmund becomes a catalyst that is able to dissociate Fanny's delicacy from her virtue. While he is disgusted with her weakness, he admires her virtue that is, with his encouragement, achieved with her independent mind. Edmund, even when tempted by Mary Crawford's surface health, realizes that the depth of a female is what really matters. Therefore, Austen suggests that only by presenting the female of sensibility's negative *and* positive sides and having a male choose the positive, a reversal of what occurs in *Sense and Sensibility*, could a change in the male perception of the female of sensibility really occur. Hence, for both relationships, reason, not delicacy, is considered a source of virtue and this depth is found attractive.

In her last two novels, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, Austen uses a different strategy. Chapter 3 shows that both of these novels address the problem of perception regarding the female of sensibility stereotype and a male's attraction to it. *Emma*'s female protagonist and reader are led to believe that romances will be based on poor health and good character, such as in the relations between Jane Fairfax and Mr. Dixon, Harriet Smith and Frank Churchill, and Harriet and Mr. Elton. If we have understood what Austen has presented to us in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Mansfield Park*, the end of the novel should not surprise us as it does Emma. The poor health of these female characters is only a sign of emotional distress, not real illness, and it is

not the source of male desire. Like Emma, the reader should adapt to Austen's new world and understand that the existence of and attraction to female delicacy is an illusion.

The main focus of this last chapter is *Persuasion*. This novel presents a strong heroine and hero, Anne Elliot and Captain Frederick Wentworth. While the reader knows that Anne is a picture of good health, of "bloom," of good moral character, and of intellect, Wentworth's initial perception of her indicates the opposite. He is duped by his belief that she is the weak female stereotype. Only later does he realize and admire her strength of mind, character, and body. Because Wentworth rejects his illusion and cherishes reality, Austen's mission of redefining the female of sensibility and relocating male desire is complete. A marriage of equality marks the ending of *Persuasion*, where Wentworth places a priority on Anne's intellectual and virtuous depth while also appreciating, but to a lesser extent, her healthy surface.

Chapter 1  
**The True Range of Sensibility's Possibilities:  
 Female Debility and Vice Attract Rakes and Men of Feeling**

Most critics are guided by the title of *Sense and Sensibility* and analyze it in its representation of sense, “natural understanding, intelligence” or “a practical soundness in judgment” (*OED* 977-78) and/or sensibility, the “power or faculty of feeling, capacity of sensation” as a guide to conduct (*OED* 982). Usually, critics see Elinor symbolizing sense and Marianne representing sensibility; Elinor’s mind and Marianne’s heart are contrasted. While Elinor’s sense is admired by some and chastised by others, Marianne’s sensibility seems to be at the center of a greater controversy because of the extremes to which her sensibility takes her. Some appreciate Marianne’s power of feeling while others reject it.

Some view Marianne’s initial sensibility as positive because they see it as a means for escape from society’s restrictions. Thus, they typically refer to what they consider to be her acquired sense at the end of the novel as a disappointing societal brainwashing. Although Edward Shoben understands Marianne’s sensibility to be at times dangerously uncontrollable, he asserts that “Marianne’s spontaneity, enthusiasm, and loyalty contrast favorably with the money-grubbing, class-bound, and dully mediocre segment of society within which she moves” (530). Shoben insists that because Marianne rejects a society that does not support individualism, she is sadly punished: “divorced from culture and unrestrained by internalized norms of judgment and conduct, [Marianne] becomes cripplingly alienated” (533). Shoben believes her ultimate tame character is a result of this punishment (533). Agreeing with Shoben, Karl Kroeber states that “until brainwashed in the concluding chapters of *Sense and Sensibility*” (10), Marianne attracts the reader because her “intense personal feelings” (14) reject a “rigidly patriarchal society” (11). He explains that “women in Austen’s novels confront a world in which they can expect to be

victimized” (15). Because Marianne has an interest in following her own feelings, regardless of society’s warnings, she initially avoids victimization and, in doing so, “defends, as does our Bill of Rights, the sanctity of the individual” (18). Lastly, Nina Auerbach believes Marianne’s sensibility drives her to find “freedom from convention” but that Marianne makes a mistake in believing that Willoughby can be her guide (“Jane Austen and Romantic Imprisonment” 18). Sadly, Auerbach adds, Willoughby’s “desertion abandons her to the deeper grip of convention, in the form of the damp presence of her ultimate husband, Colonel Brandon” (18).

On the other hand, there are critics who perceive Marianne’s sensibility as negative, stating that it causes her to be irrational, leading to the self-destruction of her mind and body. Therefore, these critics praise Marianne’s “wiser” character at the end of the novel. Gila Reinstein asserts that in the end of the novel, Marianne no longer “abandons herself to quivering passions and irrational intuitive judgments” (270) and, along with her reasonable sister, is able “to add to the pleasure and happiness of those immediately around [her] as well as to [her] society in general” (283). In agreement with Reinstein, Eva Brann insists that “the best modification of Marianne’s sensibility comes from her developing capacity for self-control and good sense. Until the sickness that reforms her she is ever a girl of violent feelings” (132). Alistair Duckworth argues that “the major limitations of Marianne’s sensibility . . . are that it places excessive faith in the self’s inner ability to reach moral decisions intuitively and rejects entirely the need for living within conventional limits” (29). Therefore, he also praises Marianne’s newfound character: “Marianne . . . comes to the recognition of the need for self-discipline” (35).

Yet, the separation of the novel into two Mariannes, one positive and one negative, blinds us to what Austen is attempting to do with her portrayal of Marianne as a female of sensibility. While it is true that Marianne exhibits two different characters, neither of these opposing characters can be viewed as positive and the two cannot be separated into one of sensibility, the other of sense. Rather, Marianne’s two sides are both negative and each represent a different kind

of sensibility, one kind rendering her more irrational than the other. These two sides of Marianne are to be understood in light of Austen's dissociation of a female's virtue from delicacy and relocation of male desire. In order to demonstrate this, I must briefly digress to Richardson's *Pamela*. As we recall from the introduction, Richardson makes Pamela virtuous as well as delicate, and it is this virtue that allows Nancy Armstrong to categorize Pamela as a positive female character. My own argument focuses on Pamela's delicacy, a delicacy that debilitates her and that attracts Mr. B, convincing me to view Pamela as a negative female character. I believe that Austen, too, understood Pamela to be a negative female figure and because she did, used *Pamela* as a stepping stone for her first published novel in order to change the stereotype surrounding the female of sensibility. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen exposes delicacy's negative effects on females and on males' attractions to these females. She exposes what Richardson unintentionally suggests in *Pamela*. Hence, we can explain the two Mariannes and their courtships with two males, John Willoughby and Colonel Brandon, in terms of Austen's manipulation of Richardson's *Pamela*.

Marianne's two opposing characters, her first during her relationship with Willoughby and the second during her marriage with Brandon, correspond to Pamela before and after she marries her own Mr. B. The first Marianne can be referred to as a female of "extreme" sensibility, and it is this Marianne who dominates the novel. She is also the focus of this chapter's first section. How does this Marianne compare to Pamela? As we recall from the introduction, while Richardson suggests that delicacy can lead to immorality, with Pamela's contemplated suicide, he primarily portrays Pamela as virtuous. And, although Richardson repeatedly shows how Pamela's delicacy leads to her swoons and shrieks, and even at one point causes a broken ankle, Pamela never becomes permanently debilitated. She actually regains her strength quite rapidly no matter what the circumstance. Hence, in *Pamela*, Richardson tries to combine delicacy with virtue and health, but in Marianne, Austen implies that with delicacy, virtue and health are not possible. Marianne's

delicate mind and passionate heart make her a self-indulgent and careless person. Furthermore, Marianne's health is plagued by her delicacy. In the end, a serious fever permanently alters her physique. As we shall see in more detail shortly, the female of sensibility as she is defined is overly emotional, selfish, and sickly.

Section two of this chapter presents Austen's criticism of male reaction to a delicate female of sensibility. Here again Austen establishes her criticism through an alternative to *Pamela*. Willoughby resembles Mr. B before he marries Pamela, and Brandon represents Mr. B after he marries Pamela. Willoughby is a rake and Brandon is a man of feeling. As we recall from the introduction, while a rake was to be reformed by the virtue of a female of sensibility, a man of feeling was to appreciate a female of sensibility for her virtue. Armstrong argues that both happen in *Pamela*: Mr. B is completely reformed by Pamela's virtue and, as a man of feeling, also desires it. But Austen shows that a female of sensibility's delicacy allows neither to occur in *Sense and Sensibility*. Because Marianne is characterized by delicacy rather than virtue, Willoughby's attraction to Marianne will not accomplish his reform. Marianne's delicacy also attracts Brandon and reveals that he is only a man of feeling in disguise because he appreciates a female for her surface instead of her depth. Hence, Austen portrays both of these males as negative figures because they fall in love with Marianne for her delicate constitution. Austen proves that because delicacy dominates Marianne, just as it does Pamela, a relocation of male desire for virtue is not yet possible.

Section three discusses what critics believe to be Marianne's "sensible" character and analyzes her relationship with Brandon. Marianne's ultimate character may be different from her initial one but it is not because she is an emblem of sense. The "new" Marianne represents the "docile" female of sensibility. She is virtuous as well as delicate. We could say that Pamela, after she marries Mr. B, is also a "docile" female of sensibility. As Armstrong argues, it appears Richardson makes Pamela's mind and heart reasonable and moral enough to allow her take

command of the household. But Austen again unveils the truth about the true “docile” female of sensibility. While Austen does not give us details on Marianne’s marriage to Brandon, we can deduce that Marianne is virtuous because her irrational heart is tamed by Brandon’s reason. He assigns to her literature to keep her on a moral path. If she has any moral influence on the household, then, it is due to a male. Not only are her mind and character dependent on a male, but she counts on Brandon for physical support. He encourages her weakness by doting on her and regulating her activities. Hence, as the “docile” female of sensibility, Marianne is Brandon’s shadow. Altogether, Brandon’s opinion and treatment of Marianne mimics Mr. B’s opinion and treatment of Pamela. While not at first obvious, Mr. B, like Brandon with Marianne, enjoys caring for Pamela as though she were his meek child in order to guarantee his own manliness.

Overall, Austen presents all of sensibility’s possibilities, from the portrayal of different female stereotypes of sensibility in Marianne, extreme and docile, to the presentation of different male stereotypes in Willoughby and Brandon, rakes and men of feeling, to establish that a dissociation of delicacy from virtue is necessary if the female is to be viewed as a respectable figure and if male desire is to be located to her inner self, her depth. While Armstrong sees the need for male desire to be relocated onto a female’s depth, she fails to realize that Richardson’s *Pamela* does not accomplish this because, there, virtue is still combined with delicacy. Only when delicacy is removed from the female of sensibility will male desire focus on a female’s inner self. This is Austen’s goal, not Richardson’s.

When *Sense and Sensibility* first opens, Marianne’s trust in sensibility does seem admirable and commendable, as she is so passionate in and devoted to how she lives her life. She is a female with musical talents, regularly playing the piano for an audience as well as herself (SS 35, 83, 145), and at one point, she is so “wrapt up in her own music and her own thoughts” that she forgets “that anybody [is] in the room besides herself” (145). Her world of feeling also includes



reading some material recommended by conduct books: Marianne reads Cowper and Thomson (92) and admires “Pope no more than is proper” (47). Works by authors such as “Young, Goldsmith, Thomson, Gray, Parnell, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Southey” and “Pope” (only the “ethical parts” of his poetry) were appropriate because they included “imaginative” information that was strictly female (Armstrong 103). Marianne’s vision of the world also adopts a familiar romantic perspective, as she views her new home, Barton Cottage, “defective” because the “building [is] regular, the roof [is] tiled, the window shutters [are] not painted green, nor [are] the walls covered with honeysuckles” (SS 28). She also spends her time outdoors, taking long walks through nature, tantalized by the beauty that surrounds her: “the high downs” invite her “to seek the exquisite enjoyment of air on their summits” (41) and the autumn leaves “driven in showers about [her] by the wind” inspire feeling in her soul (88). As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar remark, Marianne’s “sensibility links her to the Romantic imagination” as she is “fanciful, imaginative, emotionally responsive, and receptive to the natural beauty of trees and the aesthetic beauties of Cowper” (156). Therefore, it is easy to understand why critics would view her passion as liberating. But we must look at Marianne’s passion in its whole, at how it influences her character throughout the novel, to understand why what critics consider as Marianne’s individualism should actually be referred to as Marianne’s conformation to societal ideology. Marianne’s persona fulfills societal ideology because it embodies the less familiar side of sensibility, an “extreme” or untamed sensibility. In order to see how Marianne’s initial character represents the extreme female of sensibility, we will analyze how her delicacy affects her capacity to use her mind and act rationally, to display a virtuous character, and to maintain a healthy constitution.

That Marianne’s mind is characteristic of an “extreme sensibility” is apparent when we briefly review eighteenth-century sexual ideology and then see it in relation to how Marianne is influenced by the romantic literature she reads. Although the dominant idea of the age of sensibility was that a female’s delicacy allowed her to be virtuous, we remember from the introduction that

this same delicacy was the source for many supposedly unattractive and undesired side effects.

Because Austen's novels suggest she suspected that these were no side effects but the actual and desired result of the combination of delicacy and virtue, she exposes this truth in Marianne:

Marianne is the real female of sensibility, negative in all aspects. Austen begins her criticism with delicacy's effect on the female mind. Since it was acknowledged that passions of a female's heart proved stronger than her mind, a female's mind, without male guidance, could be particularly vulnerable to the romance found in certain literature (Armstrong 100). A medical report in an 1810 Ackermann's *Repository* states, "the romance which nightly steals from slumber, and harrows up [a female's] soul with the ideal vision . . . exert[s] a powerful influence on the susceptible and finely-wrought female mind" and can "induce . . . a disjointed association of ideas" (qtd. in Laurie and Richard Kaplan: 126). An eighteenth-century physician, Thomas Trotter, writes about the ease with which a female mind can easily be corrupted with fantastical ideas:

The mind that can amuse itself with love-sick trash of most modern composition of this kind, seeks enjoyment beneath the level of a rational being. It creates for itself an ideal world, on the loose descriptions of romantic love, that leave passion without any moral guide in the real occurrences of life. To the female mind in particular, as being endued with finer feeling, this species of literary poison has been often fatal; and some of the most unfortunate of the sex have imputed their ruin chiefly to reading of novels. How cautious then ought parents to be in guarding against the introduction of these romances among their children; so calculated to induce that morbid sensibility which is to be the bane of future happiness; which to prevent is the task of a correct education; which first engenders ardent passions, and then leaves the mind without power to resist or subdue them. (90)

Returning to Marianne, we see that she embodies the above stereotype. First, she is vulnerable because she does not have a reasonable male guide. Marianne is guided by her mother, who is an emblem of irrational sensibility, constantly giving herself "up wholly to . . . sorrow" and "seeking increase of wretchedness" (SS 7), and Willoughby, who, embodying romantic feeling, is also not qualified in areas of reason. She ignores any advice reasonable Elinor gives her. Second, while it is true that Marianne mostly reads the material recommended by conduct books, a closer look shows

she reads Scott, who is not on the recommended list, as well as Pope, whose works, as indicated above, are not always ethical. Moreover, because she lacks a male guide, her interpretation of the reading is not guided by male reason, further threatening her ability to interpret information properly. Hence, what we see developing in Marianne is something similar to Trotter's insulting idea that females have only a "gay vivaciousness and quickness of imagination" (Armstrong 99). By demonstrating that a weak mind does not empower the female of sensibility, Austen, like Wollstonecraft, wishes to persuade her female readers to educate their minds so that they may be able to discern between fiction and reality on their own and truly become positive figures.

Literature's effects on Marianne are best represented in her relationship with Willoughby. When Willoughby carries her home because of a sprained ankle, Marianne regards "his person and air" "equal to what her fancy had ever drawn for the hero of a favourite story" (SS 43). In her perception, he becomes what she has imagined her perfect lover to be, someone so unlike Elinor's Edward Ferrars, whom she has previously criticized: Willoughby's figure is "striking," he has "all that spirit, that fire," needed to "satisfy [her]" (17). When they read books together, he reads them with the same passion she so desires, and he admires in them what she herself cherishes: "the same books, the same passages were idolized by each . . . He acquiesced in all her decisions" and "caught all her enthusiasm" (47). It is certain that just as Marianne believes Willoughby to be the perfect hero, she also believes that he sees in her the perfect heroine and feels the same affection for her that she feels for him. Her reaction to his cold behavior when she travels to London indicates that this idea is in her thoughts. In a letter addressed to Willoughby, Marianne writes: "if I am to learn that you are not what we have hitherto believed you, . . . that your behavior to me was intended only to deceive, let it be told as soon as possible" (188). What results is that Marianne's fiction *does not* become a reality, and while Willoughby gives Marianne the impression of being a courtly lover, he is actually a rake. Willoughby's sudden departure from Barton Cottage early in the novel leads to his complete abandonment of Marianne in London. In this light,

Marianne truly develops into what Wollstonecraft calls “a woman of sensation,” with “novels, music, poetry, and gallantry,” “naturally [relaxing] the other powers of the mind, and [preventing] intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others,” to be “content with its own station,” and to “calm the passions” of the heart (154). But Austen’s criticism of sensibility’s negative effects on females does not end with Marianne’s display of a weak mind, an inability to repress fantastical illusions, because Austen’s criticism is dramatized also by how delicacy affects Marianne’s character.

We see that Marianne’s extreme sensibility prevents her from acting virtuously. With Marianne, Austen shows that a female’s virtue is not innate; she shows that the delicacy is a source instead for immorality. It is suggested by *Sense and Sensibility*’s content that Austen understood that males knew reason to be the primary source for virtue and that they only insisted delicacy to be the primary source so that females would always be dependent on them for guidance. By undermining patriarchal ideology in this fashion, Austen once more calls for females to develop their minds not only so that they can be virtuous but so that they can be independently virtuous.

We can consider Marianne’s character immoral by understanding David Hume’s eighteenth-century perspective on morality: in *Enquiry Concerning Human Morals*, Hume attempts to define what would be considered “good” character and suggests that while virtuous conduct includes committing acts that please oneself, it is largely a social construct and thus includes acting benevolently towards others (30-1). But Marianne is not kind to herself, nor is she kind to others. As Marilyn Butler explains, Marianne, as a female of sensibility, “believes in the innate moral sense”: because the age of sensibility considered man to be “naturally good,” it was thought that “his actions when he [acted] on impulse [were] likely to be good also” (187). As Butler also recognizes, the idea of sensibility had a “tendency to idealize human nature” (188). Marianne, focusing on her own “innate” feelings, is selfish and narcissistic, traits that cause her to wound herself as well as family members. Her behavior shows what Austen, as Ian Watt notes,

believes: “we must beware of how our moral judgment, and indeed our whole consciousness, can be colored by our self-regarding impulses; even pride in one’s own sensibility might well be a form of selfishness” (45). Hence, Marianne’s passion, while it seemingly allows Marianne to rebel from the confines of society, ultimately proves to be less admirable: Marianne’s unruly and passionate heart makes her embody the patriarchal ideology of the helpless female.

Marianne’s narcissism, her pride in her romantic character, is apparent in her open criticism of others, like Brandon. While she herself exclaims that Brandon “has no brilliancy, his feelings no ardour, and his voice no expression,” she wholeheartedly agrees with Willoughby that “Brandon is just the kind of man . . . whom everybody speaks well of, and nobody cares about; whom all are delighted to see, and nobody remembers to talk to” (SS 50). Marilyn Butler also notes that Marianne and Willoughby typically form “a unit of sensibility” that attacks and insults others; they become “grossly self-indulgent in their romantic ideals,” revealing an “unattractive arrogance” (187). With Willoughby, Marianne commits other acts that show her unattractive self-indulgence. For one, she accepts a horse as a gift without even considering the burden of debt it would be on her almost penniless mother (SS 58). Then, again with Willoughby, Marianne carelessly ignores other members of their social group as she flies off with him one day in a carriage outing (67). As we shall see later in this discussion, this carriage ride also suggests Marianne and Willoughby share an indecent sexual encounter, which would accentuate her immorality. The eighteenth-century “code of propriety” insisted that females remain sexually innocent until marriage (Poovey 25-26).

Even after Willoughby breaks Marianne’s heart, Marianne is still selfishly rude to others. On the carriage ride to London she sits “in silence almost the whole way, wrapt in her own meditations, . . . scarcely ever voluntarily speaking, except when any object of picturesque beauty within their view [draws] from her an exclamation of delight exclusively addressed to her sister” (160). Elinor is forced “to atone for this conduct” and to take “possession of the post of civility” by

“behav[ing] with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings” (160). Yet once more, indulging in her emotions, Marianne wishes to leave Mrs. Jennings’s London house immediately after Willoughby’s final good-bye, not taking into account Mrs. Jennings’s kind hospitality and feelings (191). And, at Lady Middleton’s, Marianne’s hate for card games is made public. She insults her host openly, stating that she “detest[s] cards” and would prefer to play the piano (144). Here, again, Elinor feels the need to provide an excuse for Marianne’s behavior, stating that Lady Middleton’s piano is tempting because it is one of the finest (144). And when Marianne feels Elinor’s drawings have been insulted by Fanny Dashwood, she does not resist an outburst, crying, “this is an admiration of a very peculiar kind . . . . It is Elinor of whom we think and speak” (235). Rudely, she exclaims to Elinor, so that all observers can hear, “Don’t mind them. Don’t let them make you unhappy” (236). Marianne’s disposition is indeed not far from how John Hardy regards it: Marianne’s loyalty to her heart does not give her that “reserve needed for preventing unfair judgment” and treatment of others (24).

Marianne’s weak mind and strong heart even make her commit acts that lead to dangerous illnesses. Her weak states not only threaten her life but cause her mother and sister much anxiety and pain. At one point, Marianne places herself “half dressed, . . . kneeling against one of the window seats,” with the “cold, gloomy morning” air blowing on her bare skin (SS 180) and, in several other instances, she scales areas that are “more of wilderness than in the rest, where the trees [are] the oldest, and the grass [is] the longest and wettest,” “in her wet shoes and stockings” (306). These acts lead to headaches, sore throats, and a dangerous fever. As Pamela Steele states, “Austen illustrates the foolishness and selfishness of Marianne’s indulgence in ‘sensibility’ by making her become, physically, a menace to herself and others. The metaphor is implicit in Elinor’s words when she speaks of her own sorrow as though it were indeed an infection: ‘I have borne it . . . without spreading it farther’” (154). Further, just the acts themselves suggest an attempted suicide, in itself an immoral act. The idea that persons already suffering from nervous

complaints should be wary of exposing themselves to and taking walks in foul weather was well-known eighteenth-century medical advice. Ackermann's medical journal in 1811 warned that "persons of delicate habit . . . should observe great caution in not suffering themselves to be allured by [the] young and gay season into long evening walks, or be induced by the noontide warmth to put on lighter raiment'" (qtd. in Laurie and Richard Kaplan: 122). Altogether, Marianne displays what Mullan observes as sensibility's dangers: many of sensibility's victims "collaps[ed] under the pressure of . . . feelings" ("Sentimental Novels" 250) and became immoral.

In this more extreme side of sensibility, we can realize the connection between Marianne and Pamela, a connection that Armstrong neglects to acknowledge because it would render her argument in favor of Pamela's sensibility questionable. While it is true that Marianne's delicacy causes her to be less virtuous than Pamela, they both still share a common act of immorality. Just as Marianne takes walks in foul weather and stands half-naked in front of an open window when already ill, Pamela almost throws herself into a pond. Both acts suggest suicidal contemplation. Yet Pamela's sole act of immorality is this one and, while being significant, is an isolated case because Richardson, unlike Austen, is not as concerned with focusing on the possible debilitating and immoral side of sensibility. In fact, as a male, he probably did not wish to present delicacy as a problem because it was an ideology that assured a male's superiority to a female, as theorized in my introduction. It is as though Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* acts like a detective, investigating a female's virtue and delicacy and then exposing the real result of this combination, that delicacy causes quite the opposite of what the sensibility movement upheld as truth. Thus while Richardson indirectly suggests but does not criticize that a dependency on delicate nerves, feeling, may lead to immoral acts, Austen adopts that idea and dramatizes it as a bitter reality.

Just when we believe that Austen has finished painting a negative picture of the female of sensibility, she adds another shocking element: bodily illness. Not only was a female mind considered weak enough to create false situations and uncontrollable enough to commit immoral

acts, but, as Thomas Trotter suggested, the frustration of her imaginings could be detrimental to her health, sometimes even “fatal.” Physician Nicolas Robinson also believed that females were prone to fits due to their uncontrollable passion and their weak minds: “fits generally proceed from great Grief, Disappointments, unsuccessful attempts at Love, or some other huge Passion,” passion and disappointment most likely originating from imaginative “illustrative fabrication,” which is “too mighty for the weakly Mortal to encounter” (qtd. in Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*: 232). Harold Merskey in *The Analysis of Hysteria* explains the eighteenth-century’s beliefs concerning a female’s weak mind and her body: with “weaker texture of [the] . . . brain and nerves,” females are “more subject to violent passions, whilst psychological causes could also provoke attacks” (9). Interestingly, we would not initially consider Marianne to be unhealthy by the way Austen first introduces her. Marianne regularly walks miles from her house, something not very common of a female of sensibility because of her delicacy (SS 40). But after the action of these first few chapters, Marianne becomes consistently ill. Her passionate heart soon envelops her and her grief concerning her unrealized dreams escalates. The fact that Austen allows for an initially strong female to become unhealthy shows the extent of the sensibility’s negative influence: females of sensibility, in all aspects, were doomed by delicacy. Austen demonstrates that delicacy should be condemned, not condoned.

The less serious bouts of illness that Marianne first displays can be compared to what Dr. Charles Heberden in his 1802 book *The History and Cure of Diseases* calls female hysteria, or *Hystericus Affectus*, precisely created by a female’s weak nerves. Heberden describes the illness as the following:

A sense of fullness in the throat, and of suffocation, is excited with as little material cause, as far as the senses can judge . . . . A giddiness, confusion, stupidity, inattention, forgetfulness, and irresolution, all show that animal functions are no longer under proper command, and that the mind is controlled by some foreign power. The comforts of sleep are in a great measure denied . . . for they are harassed with terrifying dreams. Restlessness, wandering pains . . . sometimes overpowers them . . . . Women . . . are much



more apt to cry, and to fall into convulsive laughter, or to lose their voice, or to utter violent shrieks. (224-8)

Marianne's hysteria is first noticeable after Willoughby's departure from Barton Cottage.

Marianne's sudden outbursts, or "violent shrieks," and her restlessness are the symptoms that most resemble Heberden's description of the mental illness. The eve after Willoughby's departure, when Marianne joins Elinor and her mother for dinner, "her eyes [are] red and swollen," and when her mother reaches over to squeeze her hand, Marianne "bursts into tears and [leaves] the room" (SS 82). Elinor notices that Marianne "[is] awake the whole night," weeping, and the following day Marianne forbids "all attempt at consolation," spending "whole hours at the pianoforte alternately singing and crying" (83). Although the "violence of affliction . . . [sinks] within a few days into a calmer melancholy," her "employments" are "solitary walks and silent meditations" with "occasional effusions of sorrow" (84). When visiting Mrs. Jennings in London, Marianne's evenings are spent restlessly, as Heberden suggests of victims of hysteria, "walking backwards and forwards across the room, pausing for a moment whenever she [went] to the window" (166). Marianne's "stupidity" is obvious in the already mentioned half-naked stance in front of an open window, allowing the cold air to chill her body. The "suffocation" that Heberden also notes is evident when Willoughby sends his final letter to Marianne, signaling his detachment from her, and Marianne is "almost choked by grief," screaming "with agony" (182).

Marianne's hysterical condition also includes constant headaches, fatigue, and what we could consider anorexia. Heberden links headaches to hysteria by asking, "Is [a headache] not most common in women, and often joined with hysteric symptoms?" (95). In turn, Heberden links headaches to other symptoms, such as "shiverings, cold sweats, fainting, . . . light-headedness" and "great disorders of the stomach" reducing appetite to a minimum (94-95). Likewise, for many days Marianne has not "had any appetite": it has been "many nights since she had really slept," and she is stricken with "an aching head, a weakened stomach, and a general nervous faintness"

(SS 185). She can barely stand on her own two feet, as Elinor catches her from falling onto the floor from her bed (185). While Marianne slowly regains her strength, she is still prone to throbbing nervous headaches (197, 219, 236), and, still displaying other symptoms connected to hysteria, she has outbursts of emotion (236). Elinor herself understands how sensitive Marianne is and, fearing more distress, attempts to keep her from even “hearing Willoughby’s name mentioned” (214). Marianne’s symptoms do indeed fit Heberden’s description of hysteria so well that we cannot imagine Marianne to be anything other than a stereotype of extreme female sensibility.

Marianne’s more serious illnesses, her sprained ankle and putrid fever, are also stereotypical symptoms of female sensibility gone awry. Her sprained ankle results from her romantic, foolish mind that leads her to test propriety: she runs through the hills as though she were a romantic heroine, flying through the trees to meet a lover until she tumbles to the ground (41-2). Marianne’s more serious and longer-lasting illness, what physician George Cheyne’s calls a “nervous fever,” is also caused by Marianne’s mental weakness: her heart persuades her to take romantic walks with wet shoes and stockings, causing her to have chills and a sore throat. Cheyne adds that a nervous fever commonly attacks females of sensibility because of their “weak Nerves or Fibres” (228):

The *Rigour* and *Chilliness*, tho’ not so strong or violent at first, . . . [are] longer, more slow and imperceptible; the *Burning Heat* afterwards is not so intense, nor the *Headach* and *Sickness* so great, . . . but rather a continued *Sickishness*; the *Pulse* is . . . small, . . . and sometimes interrupted; the *Sleep* resembles a *Lethargick* Dosing or Dreaming, with Startings . . . . In short, the *Fever* rather creeps in, than attacks or surprizes, and the *Duration* of the *Exordium* or first Stage, is more slow and tedious, . . . insomuch that it is sometimes six, seven, or perhaps nine Days before it comes to its *State*, by which any one may judge of the *Duration* of the whole . . . ; In its *State* (especially the middle Time of that) the *Head* is stupid, confused, and incapable, rather than delirious . . . . During this whole *Period*, uncertain Fits of Coldness and Rigour, with succeeding Glowings, and broken, coldish, faint Sweats, and constant *Exacerbations* towards Night . . . by Turns, a *lethargick* Dosing; or watching *Coma*, with staring Eyes, their White turn’d outwards . . . . Towards the End of this *Fever*, they either sleep, as it were, into the Arms of Death, or if a *Crise* happens, it is either into a meer *Languor*. (228-30)

Like Cheyne's description, the fever creeps up on Marianne initially as a cold: as already noted, she has a sore throat and a cough with aching limbs. Soon the fever takes its toll and causes her to shiver uncontrollably. She is forced to lie languidly on the sofa, then permanently in bed (SS 306-07). Although on the third day of her illness she seems to improve, she again falls into the restless sleep which Cheyne describes, and utters "frequent but inarticulate sounds" as her pulse becomes "lower and quicker than ever" (311). On the fourth day, when her mother is summoned, Marianne remains in a heavy stupor, while repeatedly shouting, "in feverish wildness" (310), her mother's name. Not until the evening does Elinor see "the amendment" in her constitution arrive, with a peace radiating from her "breath, her skin, her lips" (314). Marianne's recovery, while never complete, takes about the same amount of time Cheyne assigns to it, about nine days. Although some critics, such as Anita Gorman (33) and Robert Utter (164), would argue that Marianne's character does not represent extreme sensibility because she never faints, they do not consider that Marianne's last illness includes what they define as fainting: "losing consciousness." Further, and most importantly, this loss of consciousness performs the same function as fainting in how it affects male audiences: as we shall see later in this discussion, it suggests "weakness and dependency" to which onlookers are attracted (Gorman 25).

Many critics believe that Marianne's illnesses are intentionally created by Marianne herself, as either a form of masochism or a form of rebellion. Philippe Séjourné insists that because Marianne has a "desire to be in love before she is in love," "she has loved before she knew she was loved," and because her "solitude is largely a solitude that she herself creates," she is "almost masochistic" (151, my translation). Tony Tanner says that Marianne is "sick, sick with the intensity of her own secret passions and fantasies" that are her means of escape from the falsity of society, the "social masquerade" (84). Although I agree that Marianne may realize what she is doing when she is doing it, fulfilling the requirements of a sensibility that she is certainly familiar with, it is hard to say that she consistently has the power to control her sickness. I tend to see

Marianne's illness as does Elinor. When Elinor notes that Marianne "would have been ashamed to look her family in the face the next morning, had she not risen from her bed in more need of repose than when she lay down in it" (SS 83), she acknowledges that Marianne understands what is required of a female of sensibility. But Elinor later states that Marianne is "without any power" to take "command of herself" (82). In other words, Marianne is so influenced by the idea of delicacy in the notion of sensibility, that, while first knowingly conforming to it, she later becomes its victim. Marianne's delicacy assures that her "mind [can] not be controuled" (85) and, because of this fact, she has no choice but to "court misery" (83). In fact, if Marianne were in control, she probably would try to fulfill what the ideology *said* it considered as ideal, virtue combined with delicacy.

We should recognize that debility is also a side of sensibility that we see in Pamela, with her many tears, shrieks, and swoons, but is not often recognized as a representation of Pamela's character. Many, like Armstrong, characterize Pamela as virtuous and overlook the implications of her poor health. Yet just as Austen makes Marianne's immorality much more obvious than Pamela's, she makes Marianne's illnesses much more dangerous and apparent than Pamela's so that we cannot miss characterizing Marianne as unhealthy. Austen suggests that if the female is characterized by delicacy, she will be plagued by poor health. Further, Marianne's unhealth, unlike Pamela's, is not associated with virtue. As we already know, Marianne selfishly indulges in her own despair, feeling sorry for herself, and causes her own debilities. Hence Austen demonstrates that it is a fallacy to valorize distress because of its supposed connection to virtue; the connection, most often than not, does not exist. Moreover, Marianne's unhealth allows Austen to criticize yet another one of the eighteenth-century's ideas about females of sensibility. Austen also shows that if delicate nerves caused illness, which they most often did, they would prevent the female from being the domestically productive and influential figure she was supposed to be.

Now, we could assume that this kind of female character, who is debilitated in mind, character, and body, would be attractive to no one. To assume this would not be surprising since, in theory, the attractiveness of a female of sensibility was supposedly based on her ability to be virtuous and her ability to perform domestic duties. Yet, it is here that Austen continues to present the scandal of sensibility, where she exposes the truth of what was really desired. Not one but two males are attracted to Marianne: Willoughby and Brandon. Because Marianne has no virtue, at least not until the very end of the novel, and is not in good mental or physical health, it cannot be the virtue or the health to which the males are drawn. Both males admire a delicate female, one inferior to a male. Further, Austen would reject Gloria Gross's suggestion that a female purposely uses illness to seduce males (Gross 189). Austen locates the discussion on seducing a man with illness in the first few pages of the novel so that she is certain the reader gets the message. When Sir John suggests that Marianne's sprained ankle has captured Willoughby's attention, Marianne denies she is intentionally using her debility to seduce him. She states that she abhors the phrases "setting one's cap at a man" or "making a conquest" because their meaning is "most odious" (SS 45). As her mother states, "catching" a man "is not an employment to which [her daughters] have been brought up" and denies any attempts "of either of [her] daughters" seducing men (44). While we may be suspicious of Marianne's and Mrs. Dashwood's frankness, their ideas seem to be aligned with Austen's thoughts about the attraction of illness as a facet of male sexual ideology. Thus, the culpability of being loved for her weak body belongs to the males, not Marianne.

Before we analyze these male characters, we must note that here again we are reminded of the similarities between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pamela*. Mr. B., as a rake and then as a man of feeling, resembles both of *Sense and Sensibility's* males, and, as my argument in the introduction states, like them is attracted to a female's delicacy instead of her virtue, her surface instead of her depth. Yet, there is again a major difference between Richardson's *Pamela* and Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*. While Richardson's *Pamela* advances delicacy and virtue in females as a package

to which males should be attracted, Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* criticizes the idea. Austen makes it her goal to expose the demeaning truth of what the idea of the female of sensibility really entails, something that Richardson does not intend to do in *Pamela* and something that Armstrong does not realize is present in *Pamela*.

That Willoughby loves Marianne for her delicate constitution, her surface, is not surprising considering that he is, like Mr. B before he marries Pamela, an eighteenth-century rake, a trait recognized by Mrs. Dashwood (SS 350), Brandon (209), and even Willoughby himself (322). The *OED* defines a rake as a "man of loose morals and immoral character" (123). Barker-Benfield describes how he was considered immoral. As we recall from the introduction, rakes were believed to be "amoral males who pursued their own appetites" (Barker-Benfield 38). They were hungry for female flesh, and, because they were, it was not uncommon to find them ravaging the chastity of females. As Burnet's *Life of Rochester* shows, rakes believed that females were "Luscious Creatures, whom the Heavly Powr's / Made to delight" males (qtd. in Barker-Benfield 44). Willoughby himself is the "seducer" of the innocence of Miss Eliza Williams, Brandon's adopted daughter, just as Mr. B is the seducer of Sally Godfrey's innocence (SS 207). Hence, since rakes were thought to be "'morally' loose" males (Barker-Benfield 49), the intentions of the sensibility movement were to restore morality and to "persuade men to find and elevate their softer feelings of piety" (66). Through exposure to sentimental literature and plays, through reformation of vulgar alehouses, through the pastime of hunting, thought to be a "rustic sport" that was "'honest and industrious,'" and, most importantly, through the influence of a female of sensibility, with her virtuous soul, these males would be reformed (96). But what is surprising is that *Sense and Sensibility* does not show the reformation of a rake through practices such as hunting and reading romantic literature or through the companionship of a female of sensibility. Austen's novel defies what *Pamela* suggests. In *Sense and Sensibility*, a rake's carnal desires are ironically aroused by the reformers' methods, precisely because they accentuate a female of

sensibility's delicacy instead of virtue. The idea of the female of sensibility allows for rakish males still to desire females for superficial reasons.

Marianne first meets Willoughby when he carries her home because she has a sprained ankle. Thus their first encounter is based on her debility, and their relationship progresses accordingly. The rescue itself is worth exploring in light of its relation to hunting and how hunting emphasizes female weakness. When Willoughby first sees Marianne, he is carrying a gun, implying that he is out hunting (SS 42). When Willoughby runs to Marianne's side, it is as if he performs the same movements he would when spying an injured prey, one whose flesh tantalizes his desire to possess it: Willoughby "put[s] down his gun" and "[runs] to [Marianne's] assistance" (42). One might argue that a hunter would not "assist" his prey, but this act cannot be compared to assistance: like a hunter, Willoughby is taking his prey home to be able to feast on it at a later time. Marianne is a prey that needs to remain alive, yet in a debilitated state, because it is Marianne's delicacy that Willoughby enjoys. Later in the novel, the symbolic significance of hunting becomes even more evident: Marianne's position at Willoughby's side with his "favourite pointer" dog at her feet implies that the dog is "pointing" at the prey (72). Furthermore, in London, not wanting to be noticed first, as a hunter would not want to be noticed by his prey, Willoughby hides behind buildings, as he would trees in a forest, and spies on Marianne in order to decide when he can spring upon her (326). Ironically, hunting, a pastime that was believed to reform the appetites of men, only encourages Willoughby's appetite for Marianne's delicate flesh. Austen's criticism of this supposed reformation idea is clear: the methods of sensibility intended to rehabilitate men resulted in what they were supposedly trying to avoid.

We find that Willoughby is attracted to Marianne's weakness as he visits her frequently during the following days. Margaret, Marianne's youngest sister, even calls him Marianne's "preserver" (46). But to think that Willoughby is helping Marianne recover is incorrect. The implications of the word "preserving" not only refer to the nurturing of something or someone, but

refer to guaranteeing that it or they will remain the same. This is exactly what Willoughby wishes. Willoughby is not captivated by anything else but Marianne's "tenderness" and finds it difficult to "[resist] such attractions" (321). He is attracted to what Marianne represents, a stereotype of sensibility, the "perfection in woman" (379). Willoughby's view of Marianne is based on Marianne's representing delicate females as a whole, a generic female of delicate sensibility. In fact, he uses only superficial words to describe her: she is "a lovely person" with "interesting manners" and "astonishing" behavior (319-20). Willoughby's attitude towards and description of Marianne remind us of what Thomas Gisborne in *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* believes about females: "In order to facilitate women's divinely implanted capacity to yield to men's needs, providence has created them all from the same fluid materials" that "drastically diminish 'female diversity in action'" and cause females to be "'scarcely distinguished' from one another" (qtd. in Sulloway: 11-12). Hence, Willoughby views females as homogeneous and sees Marianne as a familiar object of seduction, not an individual partner in an emotional companionship.

Moreover, if Willoughby did consider Marianne to be more than an object of delicate sensibility, then what develops shortly after their initial encounter would not occur: Willoughby seduces Marianne. Their carriage ride reminds us of Lawrence Sterne's questionable carriage ride in *A Sentimental Journey*. Just as we are left wondering what it is that Yorick and the Marquesina di F\*\*\* do during their carriage ride (58), we are left marveling over what it is that Marianne and Willoughby actually do: go to Willoughby's house, Allenhurst, or remain in the carriage and commit improprieties (SS 67-69). But just as simply we can guess that Yorick has a sexual encounter with the Marquesina (this relation "gave [him] more pleasure than any one [he] had the honour to make in Italy" [58]), we can deduce that Willoughby has one with Marianne during their own carriage ride. First, we understand that their time away from the group has not been spent at Willoughby's aunt's house, Allenhurst, but alone in the carriage. When Mrs. Jennings tells



Willoughby and Marianne she knows where they have spent the morning, Marianne acts embarrassed. Her cheeks “colour” because she is thinking that Mrs. Jennings guesses the truth. And, Willoughby, also believing that they have been found out, admits the truth: “we had been out in my curricle” (67). Then, they both discover that Mrs. Jennings thinks they went to Allenham. Because Marianne is not expecting this answer, she turns “away in great confusion” (67).

Second, we know that their time in the curricle led to indecent acts (but probably not intercourse because of the lack of privacy in an open-air curricle) not only because of Marianne’s embarrassment, but because of Marianne’s determination to convince Elinor that they spent time at Allenham. For a female to go unchaperoned to a male’s estate is indecent enough, but it is even more improper for her to remain alone in a carriage for a long period of time. Marianne opts to convince Elinor that she did the lesser of two evils, knowing that she did the greater of them. When Elinor first questions her, Marianne’s response is defensive: “Why should you imagine, Elinor, that we did not go there, that we did not see the house?” (68). Second, Marianne feels the need to describe the house to Elinor. We know that Marianne is fabricating her visit because of the time it takes her to come up with a description and because the description is so general. She needs “ten minutes earnest thought” before her imagination kicks in (69). When Marianne mentions rooms, a sitting room and a corner room, they are rooms that could be in any large house. And, she says nothing unique about them, again playing it safe. She uses adjectives such as “pretty,” “beautiful,” “delightful,” and “bold” (69). Moreover, Marianne’s devotion to Willoughby after he leaves for London also suggests that she has indulged in sexual acts. Marianne’s belief in having the right to write to Willoughby in London and her belief that his attachment to her is based on “all that ha[s] passed” between them imply a serious romantic relationship (186). We can confirm that Marianne and Willoughby have engaged in sexual relations by his own reaction to the affair. It is only a few days after the carriage ride that Willoughby leaves for London. Because Willoughby has achieved

his erotic desire, he has no need to stay near Barton Cottage. The affair that had been planted in his mind when he first saw her lying so vulnerably on the ground has been realized.

We can again make a comparison here between *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pamela*.

Willoughby, after seducing Eliza, seduces Marianne, just as Mr. B, after seducing Sally Godfrey, tries to ravage Pamela. Yet, as we can see, there is an apparent difference: Mr. B does not fulfill his desires with his second prey until about the middle section of *Pamela* after he is married, while Willoughby fulfills his in *Sense and Sensibility*'s first few pages while still unwed. This difference results from Pamela's virtue. Pamela's virtue forces Mr. B to torture her into delicate submission before he can ravage her. In *Sense and Sensibility*, because Austen demonstrates that delicacy prevents virtue, Willoughby finds no obstructions to approaching Marianne sexually. He does not need to find methods to subdue Marianne as Mr. B needs to do with Pamela because Marianne is already in an attractive and delicate state.

Appropriately, Willoughby's absent attention is only recovered during a second and more serious illness. While Gloria Gross and I disagree that Marianne's intention is to recapture Willoughby's heart with her illness, we do agree that "it appears that bouts of sickness, irrespective of severity or cause, serve to bring refractory young men to their knees" (Gross 195). We see that the only reason Willoughby arrives "hell-bent" at the Cleveland home is because he believes Marianne to be in danger of death: when he discovers that Marianne is actually out of danger, Willoughby adds that if he "had . . . known as much a half an hour" before his arrival, he might have reconsidered his visit (SS 318). But since the attractive idea of Marianne as unhealthy and weak has resurfaced and because Marianne is still in a somewhat delicate state, he is led to declare his love for Marianne, stating "that at this moment, she is dearer to [him] than ever" (330).

Many critics have doubted Willoughby's sincerity when he reveals his love for Marianne to Elinor. For Claudia Johnson, Willoughby's declaration is simply an act: he "imagines a detailed deathbed scene starring himself" and he assumes that "Marianne's dying words pay homage to his

potency" ("A 'Sweet Face as White as Death'" 167). Gila Reinstein states that "when he comes to confess to Elinor he uses the vocabulary of Lovelace. He scourges himself verbally, but in his melodrama, he seems as insincere as ever . . . . He must convince himself of his remorse by using high-flown diction" (281). Reinstein gives "'O God! what an hard-hearted rascal I was'" and "'Thunderbolts and daggers'" as examples of this diction (281). Yet, what seems like insincerity to these critics, does not seem so to Elinor, the best judge of character in this novel, she who understands Brandon to be a benevolent man and she who herself believes Willoughby to be a rake (SS 55). Because of his speech, Elinor sees Willoughby in a different light: "Willoughby, he, whom only half an hour ago she had abhorred as the most worthless of men, Willoughby, in spite of all his faults, excited a degree of commiseration for the sufferings produced by them, which made her think of him as now separated for ever from her family with a tenderness, a regret, rather in proportion, as she soon acknowledged within herself" (333). Later, Elinor notes that if anyone could have been there to hear Willoughby speak, and "been under the influence of his countenance, and his manner," his/her "compassion would have been greater" (349).

Willoughby's effect on Elinor, a female who is not considered to be emotional but reasonable, suggests that we need to see Willoughby's clichéd language differently. Although I may view Willoughby's words in a slightly different manner than Elinor, we both believe that Willoughby's love is genuine. The difference is Elinor probably thinks that Willoughby loves Marianne the individual whereas I believe that Willoughby loves Marianne for what she represents. Willoughby, like Marianne, is victim of the romantic stereotype and speaks as though he is performing in a play or reading a novel of romance. His words may not be his own, derived more from a fictional script, but his passion for Marianne at this moment cannot be doubted. His emotions may not be for Marianne the individual but Marianne as a symbol of romance, a symbol of sensibility, a stereotype of illness. A hero of romance desires a heroine of delicate sensibility, and at the moment that Willoughby admits his love for Marianne, Marianne is once again that weak

female. He knows that her “sweet face” is “white as death,” and it is an erotic “comfort” for him to imagine her this way (327). In fact, Willoughby’s emotions only drift away with Marianne’s recovery. With Marianne no longer expressing distress, Willoughby diverts himself by living “to exert, and frequently to enjoy himself” with his “horses and dogs, and in sporting of every kind,” which again implies the erotic symbolism of the hunt (379). Austen, here, also attacks modes of rake reformation: sentimental theatrics and fiction reinforce that female weakness is attractive. Altogether, Willoughby’s initial and final character demonstrate that neither the female of sensibility nor any reformation methods were solutions to cure a man of vice; they perpetuated the notions of female debility and of the body as attractive and ignored the intellect and character possible in a female.

An even more serious criticism of the age of sensibility’s treatment of females comes from Brandon’s reaction to Marianne’s illnesses. We are a bit more surprised that he would be attracted to Marianne’s surface instead of depth, that her delicacy would arouse him, because Brandon can be considered the eighteenth-century “man of feeling.” He is what many, such as Nancy Armstrong, consider Mr. B to be after he marries Pamela. Men of feeling were moral and as such were able to feel for others and display their virtues “in action” (Mullan, “Sentimental Novels” 243). Brandon is described by Elinor as “a sensible man, well-bred, well-informed, of gentle address, and . . . possessing an amiable heart” (SS 51). He is known for his many virtuous acts, such as his gift of the living at Delaford manor to disinherited Edward Ferrars (282), his adoption of his lost love’s child, Eliza (209), and his fetching of Mrs. Dashwood during Marianne’s fever (311). As Elinor states, “his character . . . does not rest on one act of kindness . . . . To Mrs. Jennings, to the Middletons, he has been long and intimately known; they equally love and respect him” (337). We would believe that Brandon would choose a wife because of her virtue, a trait that should be attractive to the man of feeling. But Brandon chooses to love Marianne, an immoral female. While Marianne’s physical delicacy could indicate that she is virtuous, it is appropriate to

think that a man of feeling would only regard delicacy as a confirmation of a character that he already knows to be moral, that he would place a priority on getting to know a female's virtuous character rather than only settling for a possible physical expression of it. Yet Brandon does not make any effort to get to know Marianne's inner self. Why? Because, although Brandon, like reformed Mr. B, is a man of feeling indicated by his benevolent actions, he, like Mr. B, considers a female's delicate constitution, her surface, instead of her virtue, the true source of attraction. Hence, while Brandon is mostly a man of feeling, he has a flaw in his character, a rakish quality. With Brandon, Austen demonstrates that because the eighteenth century placed so much emphasis on surface delicacy as a confirmation of female virtue, male attraction ultimately focused only on and gave priority to female distress. An analysis of how Brandon comes to know Marianne and how he reacts to her illnesses will provide evidence of his desire for her surface.

Throughout the whole novel not once is a conversation between Brandon and Marianne recorded. The conversations that involve Brandon are usually between him and Elinor. Because of their closeness many, such as John Dashwood (223) and Mrs. Jennings (284-85), believe that they are courting. It seems only logical to outsiders that a man of feeling would attach himself to a female whose thoughts and emotions he knows. But, the real state is different. While Brandon talks to Elinor, he is caught staring at Marianne's weak surface: he comes to "look at Marianne and talk to Elinor" (169). While his conversations with Elinor treat various subjects, his talk at Mrs. Jennings's London home is always filled with questions and comments concerning Marianne's poor health: "Is your sister ill?" (162); Marianne "looks unwell" or "out of spirits" (172). Gloria Gross, realizing that Brandon's first love, Eliza, also was unwell, indicates that Brandon is typically "transfixed by wasting-away teenaged girls" (195). Debilitated females captivate his attention. Elinor even notices that Brandon's gaze upon Marianne and concern about her health are indirect signs of a romantic attachment: "Colonel Brandon's partiality for Marianne, which had been

discovered by his friends, . . . became perceptible to Elinor, when it ceased to be noticed by them” (SS 49).

That Marianne’s delicacy evokes Brandon’s erotic feelings is apparent in his more active reactions to her illnesses as well. Elinor often notes that when Brandon realizes Marianne is distressed, he becomes “more thoughtful and silent than he had been before” (164). Because Brandon is always deep in thought over Marianne’s delicacy, we can reasonably infer that he is planning how he will be able to win her body. In fact, Brandon’s sudden departure to London can be viewed as part of his plan to pry Marianne out of Willoughby’s claws. Brandon tells Willoughby’s aunt about Willoughby’s inappropriate seduction of Eliza and their illegitimate child. Although we are not told that Brandon informs Mrs. Smith, it is suggested by Willoughby to be true (320), and we can believe it is true since Brandon normally acts as Eliza’s guardian. When Brandon divulges the information to Mrs. Smith, it guarantees that Marianne will be abandoned by Willoughby because Willoughby either has to marry Eliza or lose his inheritance from Mrs. Smith, forcing him to find a wealthy wife. Willoughby’s abandonment of Marianne gives Brandon exclusive access to prey on Marianne’s weak body plagued by illness.

Other, more obvious instances of Brandon’s reactions to Marianne’s distress also exist. Many times we see Brandon rushing to Marianne’s side when she becomes emotionally hysterical. When thinking of her unhappiness, Marianne’s “spirits [are] quite overcome, and hiding her face on Elinor’s shoulder, she burst[s] into tears” (236). While “almost everybody [is] concerned,” it is Brandon who rises from his chair to tend to her needs. His passion for her at this moment of distress is so great that he is not even aware of how he has acted: he rushes to her “without knowing what he did” (236). His pulse beating so fast, his desire almost exploding at the sight of such debility, he feels his carnal impulse project him forward to hold her in his arms. When Marianne falls seriously ill with a fever, Brandon, when thinking of “every melancholy idea,” is also erotically moved by her illness (310). The picture of Marianne on her death bed evokes in him

the same reaction as Willoughby's, as he rushes through a thunderstorm to retrieve Marianne's mother with the intention to profess his deep love for Marianne during the carriage ride (336). Brandon's display of intense emotions for Marianne at the peak of Marianne's illness further implies that it is Marianne's delicate surface to which he is attracted. We could say that Mr. B's sexual reaction to Pamela's ultimate weakness, her contemplated suicide, resembles Brandon's and Willoughby's erotic reactions to Marianne's near-death experience. We could even add that Mr. B marries Pamela after he reaches his sexual climax, just as Brandon marries Marianne after he reaches his own. Both men of feeling marry their object of desire. While the marriage between a female of sensibility and a man of feeling was a favorable outcome for the age of sensibility, the marriage was supposed to be based on virtue. But because delicacy still characterized the female of sensibility, a marriage based on virtue, Austen suggests, was impossible.

So far, I have considered Marianne's extreme sensibility and the reaction to her by different males. Marianne is the new Pamela, and as such, Marianne exposes the true effects of delicacy on the female mind, character, and body that Richardson only suggests are possible. Willoughby and Brandon combined mimic Mr. B, yet both of their behaviors toward Marianne prove incorrect what Richardson presents as possible. Willoughby, the rakish side of Mr. B, is not reformed because he takes advantage of female delicacy. Brandon, the caring side of Mr. B, is primarily a man of feeling but displays one rakish quality: he considers females to be attractive because of their innate weakness. He does not prioritize a female's virtuous depth over her delicate surface. Austen has exposed delicacy's negative effects in hopes that her reader will see why a dissociation of delicacy from virtue has to occur for a female to gain respect. Only after delicacy disappears from the female of sensibility can a relocation of male desire onto a female's depth occur. Only then can rakes be reformed and men of feeling avoid hypocrisy. Now we must understand how the rest of *Sense and Sensibility* sends this same message.

Even though Marianne's final character is much different from her initial one, her ensuing relationship with a male, Brandon, is still based on the delicacy of her character. After her illness, Marianne is transformed into the "ideal" or "docile" female of sensibility. As such, she is not only still weak minded, but weak in body. She only acquires a strong and benevolent character because she has guidance. She turns to a male, a source of reason, and religion to prevent herself from becoming irrational and overindulgent. Brandon advises her to read material found in his library. He gives her books of a more "modern production," most likely conduct books teaching her to control her emotions (SS 343). We see that with the help of Brandon, Marianne still cries but cries silently, "conceals her distress" (348), and only occasionally succumbs to hysterics that are quickly subdued (353). Now that her emotions are controlled, she is able to be virtuous (344). Marilyn Butler rightly argues that Marianne turns to "self-criticism in the Christian spirit" (192). Marianne criticizes herself for not appreciating Mrs. Jennings's "unceasing kindness" and not recognizing the "merits" of "the Middletons, the Palmers, [and] the Steeles" (SS 346). She also uses male guidance and religion to become a domestic wife, who quietly and delicately cares for others as well as her husband. She will "practise the civilities, the lesser duties of life, with gentleness, and forbearance" while never again having "the smallest incitement" to leave her house (347). Hence, for Marianne's mind, character, and body to function properly, she must rely on an outside *male* source; therefore, unlike what critics such as Gila Reinstein, Eva Brann, and Alistair Duckworth believe, Marianne's final character does not represent an admirable and independent female of reason but represents a delicate and dependent female of sensibility.

Interestingly, a controversy surrounds Brandon's ensuing marriage to Marianne like the one surrounding Marianne's initial and final character. The same critics who approve of Marianne's final character praise her marriage to Brandon, and the ones who detest Marianne's final character despise the marriage. Anita Gorman's analysis summarizes the positive opinions of Marianne's and Brandon's marriage. Gorman believes that when Marianne marries Brandon, she is



marrying him for “real, rather than false love, the love of a man whose ‘dearest wish is for other’s good’” instead of a man, like Willoughby, whose wish is “for his own good” (58). Their love is based on reason. Critics who dislike Marianne’s marriage to Brandon are not only those presented in the beginning of this chapter, Edward Shoben, Karl Kroeber, and Nina Auerbach, but also Tony Tanner and John Wiltshire. Tanner and Wiltshire believe that Marianne’s marriage to Brandon is a sort of punishment. Marianne, according to Tanner, is a romantic “like Keats,” who “believes in the ‘holiness of the heart’s affections’” (99). He sees her illness as taming her “for citizenship,” and the resulting marriage to moral citizen Brandon proves that “romantic feelings are utterly nonviable in society” (99-100). Wiltshire, like Tanner, is greatly disappointed in what he thinks Marianne’s marriage to Brandon signifies: “the novel’s failure to acknowledge, to give space to the sexual energies it releases in the character of Marianne” (*Jane Austen and the body* 58-59). Wiltshire believes that even if Marianne’s “romantic ideology” seems a little tamed after her illness, she is still sexually passionate ( 51).

A similar controversy exists for Pamela’s and Mr. B’s marriage. As we know, Armstrong has a positive critique of Pamela’s marriage to Mr. B. Armstrong views Pamela as a powerful domestic female because of her virtue and, because she does, believes that her marriage to Mr. B is based on a mutual respect. Gwendolyn Needham is a critic who negatively views Pamela’s marriage to Mr. B for the same reasons proposed by Wiltshire and Tanner against Marianne and Brandon’s marriage: male dominance and lack of passion. Mr. B is “more the lord and master of his wife than of his servant”; “his ‘exactly nice’ nature, his insistence on every ‘punctilio’ due to him, and above all, his strong ego, ever sensitive to the slightest hint” imply that “respect and affection” are “owed to him and deserved by him” (468). Needham adds that Pamela’s “repeated gratitude and praise . . . continually soothe his ego,” thus characterizing her as a submissive, rather than respected wife (468). Some critics, then, see the marriages as positive, radiating true love and

respect, and others see them as negative, suggesting the loss of Marianne's and Pamela's individuality and sexual passion.

While I tend to side with critics who view the marriages negatively, I cannot say we agree for the same reasons. None of the above critics notice that both marriages involve negative passion. The marriages exist because of the males' passion for the females' delicacy. They are based on males' attractions to a specific kind of female, a delicate one, and therefore demean the female sex. Brandon rejoices in and craves for Marianne's delicacy because it gives him power. When Marianne begins to recuperate, Brandon becomes like Willoughby, Marianne's "preserver." This word can also be used here as the "preservation" of an illness. This preservation of and concern with Marianne's delicacy instead of virtue can be understood and explained in terms of Brandon's own health. Brandon represents a man of feeling who is in danger of becoming too effeminate, one of the dangers of the reformation of men's manners, as Barker-Benfield notes in his chapter "The Question of Effeminacy." Marianne herself notices Brandon's complaints of "aches, cramps, rheumatisms, and every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the feeble" (38). Brandon, thus, would require someone more feeble than himself to make him feel like a male, and Marianne is a perfect candidate. He truly wishes to "preserve" Marianne's illness to make himself feel superior. Not until he notices that her illness has permanently affected her, that it has been "weakening in its kind," proven by "a pale hand" and "altered looks," does Brandon confirm his "peculiar obligation" to Marianne, desiring to become her husband (SS 340). Therefore, when Brandon and Marianne marry, we cannot expect a relationship where Brandon wishes for Marianne to get stronger, but a relationship where they both will dwell on their ill-health. Even Mrs. Dashwood notices that a "gentleness" mutually characterizes them (338). Marianne's prediction that Brandon's wife will be his nurse is realized except that both wife and husband will take on a nursing role, feeding on and nurturing each other's delicacy (38). One can imagine that just as Marianne is forced to lean on Elinor's arm when she finally has recuperated enough for a

small walk outside, she will be forced to lean on Brandon's arm as well (344). Because it is her weakness that Brandon cherishes, Marianne will be "authorised to walk as long as she [can] without fatigue," guaranteeing that she will never rebuild her health (344).

Mr. B, like Brandon, adores treating Pamela as though she were weaker. Because he can no longer dominate her with wealth or force, he must assert his superiority with his innate strength. Raymond Hilliard, while not connecting Mr. B's actions with his passion for Pamela's delicacy, understands that Mr. B enjoys being a strict patriarchal figure: after laying down rules that she must follow, he scolds Pamela "like a disobedient child because she fails to meet him on time at the Darnfords" (214). Mr. B even takes on a father-figure role: he curiously has the same dress size as Pamela's father (*Pamela* 264), and he competes with her father for her attention (246). Mr. B also typically provides refuge for Pamela during Lady Davers attacks on Pamela. He reads to her as though she is incapable of reading herself (234), and he supports her financially, even writing her into his will (404).

We would have to agree with Claudia Johnson who notes that a female's display of both the delicacy and virtue of sensibility "can be understood as an inward accession to the rules of authority rather than as an act of resistance against them" ("A 'Sweet Face as White as Death'" 161). Johnson suggests that Marianne's debility, like that of Richardson's Pamela, is a "twisted testimonial to male power" because "the physical degeneration" of a heroine (162) "reinforce[s] established social arrangements" where males are superior to females (169). In her marriage to Brandon, Marianne submits to the patriarchal rules of delicacy as does Pamela with Mr. B. Their marriage is based on illness and will only *seem* like incorporating "happiness" because of Brandon's own joy in marrying Marianne, not the other way around. Austen states that Marianne, "with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily . . . give[s] her hand to" a man "who still [seeks] the constitutional safeguard of a flannel waistcoat" (SS 378). Marianne must *learn* to love an unappetizing image of an infirm husband (379). She must learn to

love the “flushed cheek, hollow eye, and quick pulse of a fever” (38). The ending to *Sense and Sensibility*, like its beginning, fulfills a stereotype of a romance based on the ideals of weak sensibility, leaving us with a sour taste in our mouths. The marriage fulfills Lord Halifax’s advice to his daughters:

That there is Inequality in the Sexes, and for the better Oeconomy of the World, the Men, who were to be the Lawgivers, had the larger share of Reason bestow’d upon them; by which means your Sex is the better prepar’d for the Compliance that is necessary for the better performance of those Duties which seem to be the most properly assign’d to it . . . . Your Sex wanteth our Reason for your Conduct, and our Strength for your Protection: Ours wanteth your Gentleness to soften, and to entertain us. (8)

In summary, when Walton Litz declares that Austen has “unwittingly” failed in *Sense and Sensibility* by making her characters “the victim of conventions” and by fashioning them as “literary stereotypes” (82), I am precisely saying the opposite: Austen succeeds in destroying the admiration of sensibility’s conventions that Richardson first portrayed in *Pamela* because Austen presents stereotypes in such a negative and realistic light. Both of Marianne’s characters, the female of extreme and the female of docile sensibility, dramatize Austen’s belief that delicacy should never have been associated with virtue because of its uncontrollable and demeaning side effects. The Marianne of extreme sensibility is independent but has an uninformed mind, an immoral character, and a debilitated constitution. The Marianne of docile sensibility is virtuous but weak and powerless. Although the age argued that the female was innately moral, it contradicted itself by recommending the use of male reason to guarantee female virtue. For the female truly to be a powerful figure, as the age of sensibility argued she was, she needed the gift of good health but primarily the use of her own mind in order to be independently moral and domestically productive.

Austen's criticism of the female of sensibility's delicacy extends to her treatment of *Sense and Sensibility's* male characters. Contrary to Litz's belief, Willoughby's and Brandon's characters and their reactions to female delicacy do not fulfill the stereotypes they initially represent. Because Austen shows that delicacy is the dominant trait in a female of sensibility, Willoughby remains a rake and Brandon rejects what a man of feeling was supposed to desire. Austen demonstrates that the presence of delicacy causes males to desire a female's surface instead of her virtuous depth. In my next chapter, we see an evolution towards Austen's goal: a dissociation of a female's delicacy from her virtue and a replacement of delicacy with health and intellect not only allows the female to be a positive figure but alters males' perception of her for the better. By making reason the primary source for virtue, the focus of male desire is automatically removed from the surface and relocated on to a female's rich inner depth. Therefore, when Karl Kroeber insists that future heroines, "with Fanny Price [as] an interesting exception, are more like Marianne," copying her individualism and narcissistic passion (15), he does not realize that future heroines are more able to suppress that passion which so negatively characterizes and debilitates Marianne and are able to do so because of what Fanny's character and its appeal to Edmund signify. In Austen's subsequent novels a new world emerges that is largely female empowering, a world Armstrong would so like to assign to Richardson's *Pamela*.

Chapter 2  
*Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*:  
 Away from Delicacy, From Surface to Depth

*Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth Bennet is perhaps Austen's most popular heroine and *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price her least. Elizabeth and Fanny, however, are more closely related than heretofore perceived. What draws the two females together is Austen's dissociation of female virtue from delicacy which strategically shifts the focus of male desire from surface to depth. Occurring in different but complementary ways, this shift is apparent in Elizabeth and Fitzwilliam Darcy's relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* and in Fanny and Edmund Bertram's relationship in *Mansfield Park*.

While *Pride and Prejudice*'s main focus is the blossoming relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, its first few chapters are concerned with another couple, Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley. In order to understand how a male's admiration shifts to a female's depth, we must first realize how Jane and Bingley's relationship contributes to this shift in male desire. Jane Bennet's illness recalls Marianne's debilitation. Like Marianne, Jane walks through the pouring rain and as a consequence gets a "sore-throat and head-ache" (PP 30). Within a day, she becomes "very feverish" (33), and she gets slowly worse (37,40); she must stay in bed for four days (she arrives Tuesday, gets sick Wednesday, and does not leave until Sunday (59)). Her condition seems to be as serious as Marianne's, and Jane, like Marianne, is called an "invalid" (47). During her fever, Jane is nursed by her sister, Elizabeth, as is Marianne by Elinor; the apothecary urgently arrives as in *Sense and Sensibility*; Jane's mother, like Marianne's, is sent for; and finally, Charles Bingley, like Willoughby and Brandon with Marianne, visits Jane periodically during her illness and later builds a fire to keep her warm (35, 54). Some critics even consider Jane's illness to be the start of Jane and Bingley's romantic relationship. Anita Gorman believes it is "pivotal" in bringing Jane closer to Bingley, leading to their marriage (110). A closer analysis, however, shows that Jane's illness

does not produce this effect and signals the beginning of Austen's change in the object of male desire. In fact, this scene reinforces Deborah Kaplan's opinion of *Pride and Prejudice*: "*Pride and Prejudice*, like Austen's other fictions published between 1811 and 1818, evinces her continuing efforts to revise the implausible conventions, including female characterizations and relationships, that generally purveyed domestic femininity in the eighteenth-century courtship novel" (183). With Jane's illness, Austen reminds us of the stereotypical reaction to the stereotypical female of sensibility, but she does so only to subvert both.

Unlike Marianne's illness, Jane's is not the novel's focus. It only occurs in the first 50 pages of the novel where Elizabeth's and Darcy's relationship is already the main concern. Interestingly, in focusing on Darcy and Elizabeth, Austen introduces her new vision of the female of sensibility and male desire: Darcy's positive response to Elizabeth's healthy body, intellect, and virtue (*PP* 33, 39, 46). Further, while we understand Jane's fever to be as serious as Marianne's, as explained above, the concern about it is not as great. Conversations at the Bingley household only briefly mention Jane's illness, and Elizabeth is always part of them. That Elizabeth, the doting sister, remains more present to the reader than Jane suggests that Jane's situation is not the novel's focus. Most importantly, while it is true that Bingley is concerned about Jane, his attention to her is not immediate; the reader does not see Bingley's concern until Jane has been ill for a couple of days (35). Further, Bingley is more interested in remaining in the sitting room and enjoying its social atmosphere than tending to Jane. He assigns to a housekeeper the care of Jane, whom he carelessly refers to as "the sick lady" (40). Moreover, we later see that Jane's illness does not seduce him, as Marianne's seduces Willoughby and Brandon. We may doubt this idea when Bingley suddenly leaves Netherfield, as Willoughby leaves Barton, for we might think that like Willoughby with Marianne, Bingley's attention fades because Jane is no longer seriously ill. Yet, we discover that unlike Willoughby with Marianne, Bingley thinks about Jane's *good* health during his absence. When Elizabeth encounters Bingley in London, he does not recall Jane's pale

appearance on her sickbed, but her healthy “smile of sweet complacency” and a “glow of such happy expression” at the ball (95), even remembering the exact date when they last danced, the “26th of November” (262). Hence, Bingley remembers Jane’s liveliness rather than her illness and returns to her believing that she is “as handsome as she had been” (337).

That Bingley consistently refers to Jane as “the most beautiful creature” that he has ever “beheld” (11) matches the description of Bingley as “good-looking and gentleman-like” (10). Hence, with Jane’s beautiful smile shining upon him when he returns from London, Bingley is permanently captured (340). The resulting marriage is one where two individuals representing health unite. Gilbert and Gubar’s claim that Jane is a symbol of “docility” and “gentleness” and that she is rescued in the end for these traits by her “prince charming” (157) is misleading. Jane is not to be regarded as a typical delicate female of sensibility, while Bingley should not be considered a stereotypical fairy-tale hero. In fact, my analysis of Bingley complements Susan Kneedler’s. While she calls him a “new-fashioned [form] of manhood” because of his innocence and modesty (Kneedler 153), I call him so because of his unusual attitude towards the female sex: Bingley regards a healthy body as a positive trait.

But, is this marriage completely satisfying? Gilbert and Gubar’s negative opinion of the Jane and Bingley marriage is justified, but they have not pinpointed effectively why the marriage is dissatisfying. Marvin Mudrick comes closer when he remarks that Jane and Bingley’s relationship is mainly based on a relatively superficial love because their love is “simple, straightforward, and immediate” (83); they are “smitten” by each other “at first glance” (Mudrick 83). Because the marriage is largely based on a physical attraction, there is still a focus on the female body as the source of love. The body is healthy, not weak, and to that extent the object of male desire is changed, but the focus of male desire remains the female’s external surface rather than her internal depth. Austen accentuates this shortcoming by juxtaposing Jane and Bingley with Elizabeth and



Darcy. It is Elizabeth's healthy surface that first seduces Darcy's eye, but it is her moral depth that induces his love.

Because Elizabeth is attractive both physically and psychologically, she is usually regarded as Austen's most popular female character. Gilbert and Gubar admire Elizabeth's willingness to hike "along muddy roads" and think that she is witty, "talkative, satirical, [and] quick at . . . articulating her judgments" (157). And, many, such as John Hardy, also have admired Darcy because of his appreciation of Elizabeth's healthy surface as well as her depth (37, 48). Moreover, while critics have generally failed to see Elizabeth and Darcy in the context of Austen's dissociation of female virtue from delicacy, this failing has not prevented them from analyzing with considerable insight how their relationship develops.<sup>5</sup> Critics understand that after initial reactions on the surface level, both male and female eventually learn how to perceive the inner worth of the other. Initially, according to Elizabeth, Darcy is marked by pride and wealth and will choose a wife based on these surface attractions. What Elizabeth does not realize is that Darcy desires a female's witty and virtuous depth. As John Hardy notes, Darcy admires a female with "conversational powers of intelligence" (48-9). Darcy's own mistake in perception derives from his presumption that Elizabeth will jump at the chance to marry him the first time he asks her, at a point in time when she still does not know his true character. Ironically while Darcy desires depth, he does not initially perceive Elizabeth's fully. Critical analyses that understand why their relationship is delayed also indicate that the corollary of Austen's shift of the focus from surface to depth is a foregrounding of the problem of perception, which will be our main focus in chapter 3.

In the case of Fanny, by contrast, failure to see Austen's dissociation of female virtue from delicacy has led to serious misreadings of *Mansfield Park*. Fanny's critics either consider her Austen's least admirable heroine because of her delicacy or are ready to brand her Austen's Christian heroine because of a delicacy that permits virtue. Both views are inaccurate.

Gilbert and Gubar's critique of Fanny is just one of the many negative ones that exist. They state that "trapped in angelic reserve, Fanny can never assert or enliven herself . . . . A model of domestic virtue – 'dependent, helpless, friendless, neglected, forgotten' – she resembles, Snow White not only in her passivity but in her invalid deathliness, her immobility, her pale purity" (165). Sharing their distaste for Fanny, Nina Auerbach argues that "there is something horrible about her, something that deprives the imagination of its appetite for ordinary life and compels it toward the deformed, the dispossessed" ("Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm" 211). David Monaghan also views Fanny in a primarily negative light. He believes that Fanny's "lack of self-assertion constitutes a serious deficiency because it ensures that she is unable to exercise any influence and hence to do anything to halt the gradual corruption of the Bertram family" (109). While Marilyn Butler attempts to shed some positive light on Fanny's debility, in her belief that Fanny's feebleness is a "device to make her less perfect, more 'human', and therefore more appealing," she thinks, like other critics, that this tactic is a failure because readers expect to admire a heroine for her boldness, not her passivity. Butler adds that this unexpected and imperfect heroine causes the reader not to emulate but to scorn her (248-249).

Other critics admire Fanny's inner character for moral soundness. Some even link her morality with her frailty, thinking that morality is only possible because of this weakness. Pamela Steele regards *Mansfield Park* as a novel that associates "debility with moral soundness," where Fanny, "held back so often by fatigue and shyness, . . . has time to think" and because she does, she "develops an acute moral sense" (158). Mary Poovey also paints a positive picture of Fanny's delicacy associated with her virtue. Poovey finds Fanny's passive selflessness, suggestive of the eighteenth-century "proper lady," uplifting in a world dominated by selfish people such as Henry and Mary Crawford (212). Poovey insists that by rewarding inactive Fanny with Edmund's love while punishing active Henry and Mary with humiliation and poverty, Austen "purg[es] ideology of inequities and self-interest that currently make the expression of individual desire dangerous to

society” (214). Tony Tanner adds to Poovey’s admiration of both of Fanny’s sides by arguing that Fanny’s “immobility” is not a symptom “of mule-like stubbornness or paralyzed fear, but a measure of her integrity, her adherence to her own clear evaluation of how things stand” (157). Lionel Trilling, whose argument will be introduced in more detail shortly, also states that “Fanny’s debility lies at the very heart of the novel’s intention” because her debility allows her to be a moral figure (129).

For the first group, then, delicacy prevents an admiration of Fanny’s sound internal character. Her morality is cast aside as unimportant. For the second group, delicacy allows for virtue, so both are deemed respectable. Thus, one group views Fanny negatively and the other views Fanny positively. But by regarding Fanny in this manner, both arguments miss how Fanny is a crucial part of Austen’s strategy to dissociate virtue from delicacy and relocate male desire to a female’s depth. Fanny symbolizes the stereotypical female of sensibility: she is negatively delicate and positively virtuous. Therefore, Fanny’s character should not be fully rejected or appreciated. Her delicacy makes her unattractive but her virtue makes her admirable. Austen makes Fanny delicate and virtuous so that the reader, like Edmund, can negate her for the former and desire her for the latter. Kenneth Moler, although not relating his analysis to Austen’s dissociation, anticipates how Fanny should be viewed and is viewed by Edmund: “Fanny Price is physically frail, temperamentally diffident, socially naive to a degree that it requires Portsmouth to correct,” but “surrounded by people who are emotionally apathetic, who shrink from emotion, who are manipulative or self-gratifying . . . . Fanny demonstrates emotional strength and health” (151-52). By considering Fanny in this light, Edmund exemplifies Austen’s relocation of male desire through his own dissociation of female virtue from delicacy. Hence, Austen reevaluates the female of sensibility stereotype by having Edmund’s appreciation of Fanny’s depth occur only when he dissociates her delicacy from her virtue. Not only does Edmund reject female delicacy and admire

virtue, but he actually attempts to change the source for virtue in females of sensibility -- instead of delicacy, Edmund fulfills Austen's desire and urges for it to be reason.

I must reemphasize that it is Austen, not Richardson, as Armstrong argues, who relocates male desire from surface to depth. With Elizabeth and Fanny Austen presents two surfaces, one healthy and attractive, the other frail and unattractive, but in both cases it is depth rather than surface that the male ultimately desires. In one case, depth is desired in addition to surface; in the other, it is desired despite surface; but in both, the object of male desire is relocated from surface to depth.

The main focus of the remainder of the present chapter will be *Mansfield Park* rather than *Pride and Prejudice* since, as noted earlier, failure to see Austen's dissociation of virtue from delicacy has resulted in serious misreadings of Fanny and her relationship with Edmund. In the presentation of Fanny and Edmund's relationship, it is necessary to include Edmund's relationship with Mary Crawford. Because of Mary's presence, Edmund learns a valuable lesson: he learns how to dissociate liveliness from benevolence and to consider female depth and its qualities before female surface. My discussion will be divided into four sections. The first section introduces Fanny's poor health and includes Edmund's rejection of it. The second section presents Mary's good health which is contrasted to Fanny's frailty. It also discusses Edmund's favorable treatment of Mary's constitution but negative treatment of Fanny's debility. Section three talks about Fanny's virtuous character and Edmund's respect for her virtue that stems from intellect. Mary's immoral character, which is contrasted to Fanny's benevolence, is discussed in section four. This section also includes Edmund's reactions to both characters: Edmund's desire for good health initially causes him to justify Mary's immorality and to be attracted to her even though he admires Fanny's virtue. At the end of the novel Edmund comes to valorize a female's deeper self over her

appearance. Hence, he rejects Mary's surface because of her vice and desires Fanny's depth despite her unattractive physique.

Fanny is a model of "ideal" sensibility with a "natural" delicacy defining her constitution (MP 407). When we are first introduced to Fanny, her physical self resembles Marianne's after her fever, a permanently invalid state. Fanny is described as "delicate and puny," "small [for] her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty" (11-12). She frequently stays inactive, and when she finally attends balls, frequently tires (118). Even at a later ball, after we believe that Fanny is recuperating from exposure to fresh air at the Mansfield estate, she becomes "breathless," placing "her hand at her side," only after a few dances (279). Up until the end of the novel her "frame and temper" are referred to as "delicate and nervous," indicating that her nature is genetically and permanently weak (391). It is important to note here a topic that will be discussed at more length at a later time: Fanny's delicate disposition is aligned with a natural inner virtue, further fulfilling the "ideal" stereotype of the female of sensibility. Fanny lacks pride, her character instead dominated by "self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" (SS 19). Marilyn Butler notes that these traits are indicators of Christian character (222). When Edmund first encounters Fanny, he perceives her virtue as well as her delicacy. According to Lionel Trilling, Fanny's constitution *as well as* her disposition should be found attractive by readers familiar with such Christian sentimental heroines as Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Pamela*: "Fanny Price is overtly virtuous and consciously virtuous. . . . The shade of *Pamela* hovers over her career" and just as "*Clarissa*'s sickness and death confirm her Christian virtue," so does Fanny's "debilitated condition" demonstrate her benevolence (128-29). While I cannot argue with Trilling's link between Fanny's and *Pamela*'s similar poor health and good character, I disagree with his belief that Austen, like Richardson, affirms "the peculiar sanctity of the sick, the weak, the dying" (129). Austen does not make Fanny the debilitated moral center of *Mansfield Park* to reinforce the message that Richardson's *Pamela* sends. While Fanny and *Pamela* are similar in delicacy, the reaction that

Fanny evokes in a male is much different from the reaction Pamela evokes in Mr. B because Fanny's weakness not a source of erotic pleasure for Edmund. We can prove Edmund's lack of interest in frail females by his negative reaction to Fanny's weak disposition as well as by his positive reaction to Mary Crawford's good health.

During Edmund's first documented encounter with Fanny, Fanny is in a fit of tears, distress that Mr. B habitually finds exciting in Pamela and that Willoughby and Brandon find enticing in Marianne. Yet Edmund, instead of attempting to ravage her, as does Mr. B with Pamela, and instead of doting on her tears, as do Willoughby and Brandon with Marianne, attempts to ease her distress as soon as possible: Edmund offers a solution for her homesickness by giving her paper to write to her beloved brother, William (*MP* 16). It seems that during this first encounter, Edmund decides to help Fanny break free from what makes her "unworthy," her "inferiority of age and strength," through acts that can only benefit her health (17). He assigns to her a health regimen, frequent walks and horseback riding every morning, as exercise is "good for [her] health" (28). That Edmund would recommend horseback riding as exercise for Fanny is not unusual since eighteenth-century physicians considered it the most appropriate form of exercise for those, male or female, with a "nervous temperament," as Thomas Trotter indicates: "the value of exercise on horseback, is so well known . . . in the prevention and treatment of nervous . . . diseases . . . . The motion and action which are communicated by riding, to the organs of digestion and respiration, are of the most salutary kind" (253). Hence, Fanny's condition worsens when she does not ride as often as she should (73). After picking roses in the hot sun, Fanny lies exhausted on the couch (73). Edmund hopes to rid her of a headache by giving her a glass of Madeira wine, thought to be a common cure for bouts of illness (Olshin 319), while also insisting that Fanny should resume her horseback riding diligently to prevent this condition from recurring (*MP* 47). Austen almost seems to satirize Fanny's weakness by making her health dwindle because of such a

simple job as picking roses. Her health is certainly unlike Elizabeth's and the reader, like Edmund, must categorize Fanny as a female of delicacy.

Nevertheless, unlike Austen's earlier male characters, Edmund's devotion is to the *improvement* of her health and not to the assurance that it will remain poor. His own comments to Mrs. Norris reinforce this idea. When Fanny finds herself ill during the latter episode, he states to his aunt that he wishes "Fanny had half [his aunt's] strength" (73). Edmund, then, can be called Fanny's "preserver," but its meaning is the opposite of what it implies for Mr. B, Willoughby, and Brandon. Edmund is the "preserver" of Fanny's body because he desires to promote her good health. Margaret Kirkham also recognizes Edmund's reactions to Fanny's poor health as a sign of his unwillingness for it to remain so delicate: "Austen did not admire physical weakness, ill-health, or ignorance in young women" and "the relevance of this to Miss Price is obvious. Austen created, in her, a heroine whom the unwary might take for something like the Rousseauist ideal of the perfect woman, but she expects her more discerning readers to see through it . . . . The true hero is never shown as encouraging Fanny in her partly self-imposed fragility and timidity, although he is kind to her when he observes her genuine tendency to tire easily"; a "proper reading," Kirkham adds, is viewing Fanny as Edmund sees her (104).

Edmund's lack of admiration for Fanny's delicacy is confirmed with the introduction of Mary Crawford, who is the extreme opposite of Fanny. Mary is a symbol of exterior health and beauty in *Mansfield Park*. We are told she is "remarkably pretty" (*MP* 41) because she has a "lively dark eye" and a "clear brown complexion" (44). Just the idea of "dark" features reinforces the idea that Mary is healthy because of what the eighteenth-century considered to be a strong and robust woman: according to Robert Utter and Gwendolyn Needham, to be "brown" was typically to be a "feminized version of the man" (201), as the "'eyes black as sloe' clearly connot[ed] boldness" (198). Mary's symbolic brown hue does indeed accompany liveliness. Mary is "gifted by

nature with strength and courage” and has “energy of character” (*MP* 69). She shows her vigor in her ability to endure daily walks and to ride a horse without fatigue: Mary is “active and fearless,” and “strongly made, she seem[s] formed for a horsewoman”; she “surpass[es] her sex in . . . her unwilling[ness] to dismount” (67). We are even told that “resting fatigues [her]” (96). This statement comically reemphasizes the great difference between Fanny’s fatigue and Mary’s energy. Therefore, if Edmund were truly romantically intrigued by Fanny’s delicacy, he would be repulsed by Mary’s buoyancy. Yet, this is far from being the case. Edmund’s first words about Mary focus on her exterior beauty, on her surface, indicating his obsession with good health: he notes that “she has a wonderful play of feature” and “it is her countenance that is so attractive” (63). In fact, what we see developing with Edmund’s delight in Mary’s constitution is Edmund’s tendency to neglect his role as Fanny’s preserver. He becomes intrigued by what really attracts him. In agreement with John Hardy, Edmund is so “captivated by . . . liveliness” that he would prefer to devote his attention to a female who displays good health instead of debility (60).

There are several instances where Edmund’s favorable reaction to Mary’s strength is contrasted with his negative reaction to Fanny’s weakness. The comparisons begin with the most obvious, the differences with which Mary and Fanny are able to ride the same horse. When Fanny rides, she does not have the strength to mount or dismount the horse, while Mary has no trouble springing down from her horse, at the same time exclaiming she is “very strong” (*MP* 68-9). Edmund’s words to Mary indicate his admiration of a strong constitution. Knowing that Mary is walking home even after this long horse ride, Edmund states, “I wish *you* may not be fatigued by so much exercise” (68). It is as though when Edmund emphasizes the “you” he is making an underlying statement about Fanny. While he knows that Fanny would be extremely fatigued after such a ride, he wishes that Mary can validate his hope that she is different from Fanny, that she is much hardier. With Mary’s coquettish confirmation, he is satisfied. But Edmund is not the only one who notes the differences between Mary and Fanny. The coachman, who has also watched



Mary ride, repeats Edmund's admiration of Mary's health: "It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding . . . . I never see one sit on a horse better. She did not seem to have a thought of fear" (69). As a result, for a short time, Edmund favors Mary because he desires more displays of her good health. Observing that while Fanny rides for "health," Mary only rides for "pleasure," he urges Mary to ride Fanny's horse (70). It even takes Edmund a few days to break free from Mary's influence and give the horse back to Fanny. While Mary's rides are more appealing, Edmund wishes good health for all females and finds if Fanny's health is to improve, she must ride.

That Edmund prefers healthy constitutions is further demonstrated in his walk with Mary and Fanny in the "wilderness." Again, Edmund must choose between debilitation and strength. When Fanny wants to rest, Mary wants to continue marching, exclaiming she is "not at all tired" (94). Because good health captivates Edmund, he insists that Fanny remain behind so that he may continue his walk with lively Mary. Utter and Needham rightly view this scene as a reference to Austen's dislike for female ill-health. They exclaim, "and that, girls, says Jane Austen to her 'fair' readers, is as far as the delicate air gets you in real life" (209). In fact, I believe that Edmund gets so enthralled by Mary's liveliness that his thoughtlessness for Fanny's ill-health becomes more prominent later in the novel. When Fanny is sent to Portsmouth, she loses the health she has gained at Mansfield: "her face [is] less blooming than it ought to be" (*MP* 410). Even though Edmund is aware of her condition through Mary's conversations, he does not send for her. In fact, the only long letter he writes to Fanny at Portsmouth focuses on Mary, only briefly mentioning that if Fanny is to be sent for, his father would be the one to arrange the trip home (423). Therefore, Austen demonstrates in Edmund's reaction to both females that the source of male desire is no longer delicacy, but liveliness and good health. Fanny's delicacy renders her unattractive to Edmund.

But what Fanny lacks in health she makes up in character, and, as we shall see later, this rich depth does draw Edmund near. Fanny's character truly fulfills, as Peter DeRose insists, the traditional virtues of English Christianity: "the importance of self-knowledge, the repudiation of pride, of rational self-control, of practical common sense, and of discipline, duty, and sacrifice" (DeRose 38). Fanny's self-knowledge is apparent in her consistency in her secret love for Edmund. Knowing she will marry for love, she is never tempted to marry for riches, as is Mary Crawford. Furthermore, Fanny's pride is ultimately nonexistent when compared to the Bertrams or Crawfords especially in her desire to wear a simple, less flashy necklace instead of an intricately designed, brilliant one at the Netherfield ball (*MP* 262). Her rational self-control is found in her patience with Mrs. Norris's frequent orders, her refusal to show jealousy at Mary's many promiscuous and hypocritical advances toward Edmund, and her patience with the incessant noise in the living quarters at Portsmouth (398). Finally, her discipline, duty, and sacrifice can be seen in all the above situations but are also apparent in Fanny's devotion to her principles when choosing not to participate in what she believes is an amoral play, *Lover's Vows*, even though joining would bring her closer to Edmund (147). Moreover, what John Hardy notes as Fanny's "keen insight" to virtue allows her regularly to perceive situations and analyze people's actions around her. She is able to judge these situations or actions as morally sound or sadly corrupt (64). One such example concerns a rehearsal of *Lover's Vows*. When Fanny notices Henry flirting with Maria Bertram, who is already engaged to Mr. Rushworth, she finds it highly improper and also cruel since it makes Mr. Rushworth wallow in misery (163). Further, Fanny sees in Mary a woman of "cold-hearted ambition" in her quest for financial prosperity through marriage and refers to Henry as a representative of "thoughtless vanity" in his capturing hearts only to boost his ego (436).

Edmund's positive treatment of Fanny's moral character further reveals that a perpetuation of eighteenth-century sexual ideology is absent from *Mansfield Park*. Unlike Richardson's Mr. B, Edmund views Fanny's virtue as the only means by which he can be attracted to her; her delicacy

is only negative in his eyes. Further, Edmund's attraction to Fanny's goodness seems only appropriate given Edmund's own natural virtue as a future clergyman, always seeking "most fairly for utility, honour, and happiness to himself and all his connections" (21). To illustrate Edmund's approval and admiration of Fanny's virtue, we can look at Edmund's treatment of and interaction with Fanny. Immediately after his first encounter with Fanny, although Edmund notices her weak frame, he recognizes and urges others, especially his sisters, to realize that Fanny's "good-nature" outweighs her bodily weakness (17). Because of her "affectionate heart," he even labels her his true "friend and companion" and, as such, frequently confides in Fanny, agrees with her opinions, and asks her for advice (26). For example, Edmund shares the thought with Fanny that the play acted at Mansfield is an inappropriate, "highly injudicious" undertaking and that he will try to "dissuade" his brothers and sisters from acting (125). When Mrs. Norris tries to convince Fanny to act, Edmund and Fanny show their common bond. When Fanny refuses, he quickly defends her, recognizing her good judgment: "It is not fair to urge her in this manner . . . . Her judgment may be quite . . . safely trusted" (147). Even Peter DeRose places Edmund and Fanny in the same category, saying that they, "unlike the others" who "merely ridicule Edmund's objections and Fanny's scruples," have "recollection of principle" and initially choose not to act in a play that represents the breaking of moral codes (48). Later, when Edmund is forced to act in order to prevent acquaintances from filling open roles, he asks Fanny for her "approbation" (*MP* 155). Edmund has so much trust in Fanny's "grateful and tender-hearted" nature that he calls her "the perfect model of a woman" (347). In fact, when the play is finally terminated by Sir Thomas's return, Edmund is sure to tell him that Fanny's devotion to her own moral principles never wavered: he says to Sir Thomas that "her feelings have been steadily against it from first to last" and, because of this, he "will find in Fanny everything [he] could wish" (187).

Furthermore, it is only with Edmund's acknowledgment and support of Fanny's character that Fanny's morality blossoms to the degree we see mentioned above. In order to develop Fanny's

character to a higher level, Edmund takes the role of educator. He becomes Fanny's "guardian" (355). He always tries "to make her good qualities understood, and to conquer the diffidence which prevented their being more apparent" (22). Here we can again compare Edmund to Mr. B and Willoughby. Edmund, like Mr. B with Pamela and Willoughby with Marianne, wishes to enhance in Fanny what seems desirable. But what these men view as desirable is highly different. Edmund desires Fanny's virtue while Mr. B desires Pamela's debility and Willoughby Marianne's.

Therefore, while males attracted to female delicacy create situations to provoke distress, Edmund creates an environment for Fanny that evokes virtue. Edmund's actions are revolutionary, for they indicate that a man, while acknowledging weakness in female's constitution, only desires goodness in her disposition. Moreover, while the notion of Edmund's "proper direction" of Fanny reminds Gilbert and Gubar of female "obedience" and "self-abasement" to a patriarchal rule, a closer look at Edmund's treatment of Fanny's education reveals a break from this ideology (165). This rejection of patriarchal rules is disclosed by the answer to the question, what in Fanny's character does Edmund admire as a source for virtue? Is it Fanny's heart or something else? While Edmund acknowledges Fanny's "affectionate heart," he recognizes Fanny's intellect. He insists she is naturally "clever," has "good sense," and possesses a "fondness for reading" (*MP* 22). Edmund is far different from the other Bertrams who view Fanny as "prodigiously stupid" (18). In Fanny's education, then, Edmund encourages the development of her mind, believing that reason will allow her to have an even stronger "desire of doing right" (17). Hence, Edmund not only defies the stereotype of male desire by appreciating Fanny for her depth of character instead of her weak surface, but also contradicts the idea that a female's virtuous depth is based on her delicate nerves and strong heart. In other words, Edmund takes the traditional delicate female of sensibility who is supposedly virtuous because of her frail nerves and alters that idea. In this light, we see once again how Edmund's view of Fanny represents a new form of male desire.

It is important to recognize that a female's *need* of reason to maintain her good character does not suggest an alteration in the "ideal" stereotype female of sensibility. As we recall from the introduction and first chapter, because females were incapable of reason they were dependent on males to keep them on a moral path. We are reminded of Brandon's guidance of Marianne in *Sense and Sensibility*. His reasonable influence tames her character. Knowing Brandon's character, he probably gives her books that are considered strictly "female" and appropriate for the female mind. An alteration in sexual ideology *does* occur, though, when Edmund encourages Fanny to develop the independent use of her mind so that she can maintain her moral character without the help of a male. This is suggested through what Edmund gives Fanny to read. The literature can be considered largely "male," its authors not sentimentalists. Edmund assigns to Fanny Crabbe's *Tales* and Johnson's *Idler* (MP 156), texts written by strict rationalists and moralists, whose content, filled with messages of moral and reasonable patience, differs greatly from that of the recommended reading material typically assigned to females (DeRose 49). Therefore, when Fanny frequently escapes to her attic room, she indulges in books that will guarantee her virtue because they feed her mind. Because of "Edmund's tutelage," DeRose insists that Fanny "develops a life abundantly filled with recollections which enrich her experiences and guide her moral judgements" (41). Indeed, Fanny's education allows her, as Ellen Gardiner also notices, to develop an intellect of her own making (152). In Portsmouth, Fanny takes on the male role of subscriber, a "chuser of books," and uses them to educate her sister, Susan (MP 398). DeRose refers to Fanny's relationship with Susan as symbolic in the "context of moral education" (56). The acts of becoming a subscriber and assuming the role of tutor, educating a female in reason, both acts normally considered male, suggest Fanny's migration away from Edmund's control. She has assumed independence of mind to act morally and teach others what she has learned.

Another of Edmund's measures to help Fanny find intellectual and moral freedom teaches her to use her own voice, a voice that he believes radiates with virtue. Edmund creates situations

that disclose Fanny's virtue. Unlike previous Richardson and Austen males who cause females' distress, Edmund truly wishes to elicit Fanny's inner self. When Fanny is told she will be moving to Mrs. Norris's house, Edmund tells Fanny that the move will encourage her to be more vocal: "*Here*, there are too many, whom you can hide behind; but with *her* you will be forced to speak for yourself" (*MP* 27). He adds that being with Mrs. Norris will be "good for [her] mind" (27). When the Crawfords ask Fanny about her brother, Fanny, who "would rather have . . . Edmund tell the story," is forced by Edmund to tell it herself because of his determined silence" (60). Even when Edmund ultimately defends Fanny's judgment in her refusal to join the play, he initially only gives her "an encouraging smile," so that she may voice a moral opinion on her own (146). Fanny's developing reason and virtuous voice become apparent in a conversation with Mary, where Fanny controls the whole conversation, recognizing that memory is for some "so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient," while for others, "so bewildered and weak" (209). Fanny's focus on memory is not to be considered random: memory was thought to be an important element for acting morally. In Rambler no. 41, Samuel Johnson writes that "'memory is the purveyor of reason, the power which places those images before the mind upon which the judgment is to be exercised, and which treasures up the determinations that are once passed, as the rules of future action, or grounds of subsequent conclusions'" (qtd. in DeRose: 40-41). Thus, Fanny's voice can be connected to the morality Edmund expects to find, a morality that stems from her head.

We further see Fanny's moral voice in her reactions to Henry. One of Fanny's boldest responses is found in her reaction to Henry's speech on becoming a clergyman. Henry explains that he would not mind being a clergyman as long as he had time off. When Henry looks for a complement from Fanny, she only responds that his recognition in his speech of his fault, his inconstancy, makes it "a pity [that he] did not always know [himself] as well as [he] seemed to . . . at that moment" (*MP* 343). Fanny's criticism of Henry's lacking constancy is connected to her

criticism of his immorality, constancy, as written previously, a requirement for a Christian soul. Henry believes, as Mary Poovey notes, that “morality is simply a matter of convenience” (213).

Ironically, Fanny’s responses concerning Henry are not always what Edmund wishes to hear, especially in her refusal to marry Henry. Many critics believe that Edmund’s need to persuade Fanny into accepting Henry’s proposal is based on his desire to control her mind. For example, while Gardiner sees Fanny as an intellectual figure, attributing Fanny’s accurate perception and individual “critical authority” to her “poaching” of male ideas in the literature she reads, she also views Edmund’s attempt to persuade Fanny to marry Henry as Edmund’s inability to accept Fanny’s independent decision making (152). Gardiner adds that Edmund believes “women should be seen and not always heard” (160). We already know that Edmund *does* wish for Fanny’s moral voice to be heard. We can also demonstrate here that Edmund’s disappointment in Fanny’s decision not to marry Henry, contrary to what Gardiner suggests, is also based on his wish for her virtuous voice to be heard. According to Edmund, if Fanny accepts Henry, then she will be able to become a tutor of virtues. Edmund states that Fanny’s good character would be able to redeem Henry. Because of Henry’s “disadvantag[ed]” education, Edmund believes that “Crawford’s *feelings*. . . [have] hitherto been too much his guides” (MP 351). Fanny, who is primarily virtuous because of *reason* will “supply the rest” upon marrying Henry (351). In other words, in coaxing Fanny to be a female guide, Edmund places Fanny in a superior category to Henry’s. He believes Fanny’s intellectual virtue will be of service to reform one of society’s corrupt males. While some may say this is not unusual or revolutionary on Edmund’s part, considering females of sensibility were thought ideal in the reformation of rakes, it is important to see that these reforming women were thought to influence rakes through feelings, through their hearts, not through their minds. Edmund suggests that Fanny can do quite the opposite of the “usual” by educating Henry’s passions with her mind. Therefore, Edmund’s disappointment in Fanny’s refusal of Henry is based on his wish to project her moral voice, to see Fanny become a

powerful and reasonable figure. While it is true that Edmund has been Fanny's guide, he now desires her out of the nest he has provided for her, wishing her to use her acquired intellect to help others become as virtuous as she. But the reader can be assured that Fanny's refusal still reflects her virtuous character even though Edmund may not believe it does. Fanny is already in love with her soul mate, a person similar to her in character, Edmund himself. Therefore she will remain true to her emotions, displaying virtuous self-knowledge.

I would like to reemphasize that female reason is a source of virtue in *Mansfield Park* because Austen desires to alter sexual ideology's claim that the true source of a female's virtue is her delicate nervous system connected to her feeling soul. Making Edmund the catalyst for Fanny's growing intellect does not suggest traditional and repressive patriarchal tutorial authority, as Gubar and Gilbert would like to believe (165), but a migration away from it precisely because it is a male who wishes for a female to use her mind freely and independently. Yet, questions still remain: if Edmund is so attracted to Fanny's virtue, why does he throughout most of *Mansfield Park* wish to marry Mary instead of Fanny? It is true that Mary's health captivates Edmund, but could this captivation overpower his attraction to Fanny's virtue? That Mary would be Edmund's first choice is even more perplexing when we realize that Mary's inner character does not mimic her beautiful physical appearance. Tony Tanner is only one of many to dislike Mary because of this flaw. For him, Mary's character represents the loss of traditional and pure values that Fanny embodies: Mary has been "spoilt and subtly corrupted by [her] prolonged immersion in the amoral fashionable London world," a world "governed only by the considerations of money," a world "given over to cold deception, manipulation and exploitation" (150). And Mary's bad side is not hidden from Edmund. In fact, it is consistently directly contrasted with Fanny's good character. The reader might believe that just as Edmund has preferred Mary's health over Fanny's, he would favor Fanny's virtue over Mary's, that he would neglect Mary. We would think he would act like the revolutionary male he is and choose Fanny's depth. Surprisingly, while Edmund *does*



constantly recognize Fanny's virtue during these conversations, he is *not* repelled by Mary's poor character. Instead, during these situations, we repeatedly see Edmund's desire to place Mary in a positive light.

Two conversations dramatize Mary's immorality, Edmund's recognition of Fanny's virtues, and his justification of Mary's poor character. The first is Mary's open criticism of her uncle, whom she chastises for the renovation of his estate while she was his guest: she pretentiously complains of the "dirt and confusion" and of the lack of "walk[s] to step on, or bench[es] fit for use" (57). Edmund's initial reaction is disappointment. He is "sorry to hear Miss Crawford, whom he was so much disposed to admire, speak so freely of her uncle" (*MP* 57). Her speech does "not suit his sense of propriety" (57). When Edmund relates this outburst to Fanny, she notes that Mary's reaction was very "ungrateful," and Edmund finally agrees with her that it is an act of "impropriety" (63). Edmund, who is then deep in thought, finally finds an explanation for Mary's character that in his mind excuses her impropriety: Mary has been poorly educated (64).

A second instance, in which Mary's virtue is found doubtful and Fanny's is acknowledged, involves Mary's opinion on matters of religion. Mary finds religious practice a nuisance due to the "obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, [and] the length of time," adding that it is a process that "altogether is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes" (87). Mary's dedication to the church should be only established on her own terms: if it is "convenient," eliminating the strict attendance and formality (87). Both Fanny and Edmund are mutually shocked by Mary's words. They turn to each other in silence, Fanny "colour[ing]" in anger and Edmund needing "a little recollection" before he can respond (87). Yet, again, Edmund justifies Mary's behavior as a result of her "lively mind" (87). Continuing this conversation a little later, Mary states that a "clergyman is nothing" because nothing is "to be done in the church" (92). She even tells Edward that he is "fit for something better" and to "go into the law" (93). Edmund attempts to explain to Mary that

religious men are “the guardian[s] of religion and morals,” that they are “the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life” (93). Fanny is quick to agree with Edmund, allowing him once again to notice her recognition of good principles. He says to Mary that he wishes she could understand him as Fanny does (93). Yet even though Edmund again becomes very “thoughtful,” he is quick to try to “reason with [Mary],” hoping that she is not as bad as he perceives (96).

But his reasoning leads nowhere. Soon after this conversation, Mary states that a “clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish — read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife” (110). Edmund, understanding Mary’s response as an insult towards the church, as well as towards himself, answers that she is ignorantly reiterating “what [she has] been told at her uncle’s table” (110). Edmund briefly recognizes what Tanner suggests, that Mary is a product of her environment: she comes from a home where any commitment to religion is thought “insignificant” since no power of wealth is associated with it (155). John Hardy notes that Mary’s language surely shows Edmund that she has “contempt for what [he] holds so dear” (61). Just as Edmund is disappointed with Mary, Fanny is as well, and Fanny takes on the role of defender of Edmund’s occupation. Fanny states that her brother, William, owes much to the “chaplain of Antwerp,” who has met him with “great kindness” (*MP* 110-11). She further argues that a “sensible man . . . cannot be in the habit of teaching others their duty every week . . . without being the better for it himself” (112). Edmund’s respect for Fanny’s virtuous response is obvious in the way he himself defends Fanny. When Mary tells Fanny that she will never find such a clergyman of good humor and that if she marries one, she will surely find herself arguing with her mate, Edmund looks at Fanny “affectionately,” stating, “the man who could often quarrel with Fanny . . . must be beyond the reach of any sermons” (112). An obvious bond is established between Edmund and Fanny, making the reader think that this time, surely, Edmund will forget

Mary in favor of Fanny. But, ultimately the opposite occurs: Edmund justifies Mary's retorts as the result of "good humour" (112).

As already suggested, many critics puzzle over Edmund's attraction to Mary because she is indeed so callous. In fact, when the novel was first published, several readers, such as Fanny Knight, "could not think it natural that Edmund should be so much attracted to a woman without principle like Mary Crawford" (Austen *Minor Works* 432). But, most critics, if they do attempt to understand Edmund's preference for Mary, argue that it is a result of Edmund's failing perception. They insist that Edmund is blinded in order to make Fanny the important knowledge center of the novel. Gardiner insists that Austen has caused Edmund to "lose credibility" in order to make a female the dominant interpreter of society, to make a female usurp a male's role (158). Tanner thinks Edmund's flawed vision and Fanny's insight makes Fanny responsible for preventing the "complete usurpation and demolition" of the traditional world (149).

But I disagree with these critics to the point of Edmund's being blinded at all. I believe Edmund sees Mary's defects. He sees Mary's defects and tries to justify their existence because of what he truly desires in a woman. In fact, Edmund seeks in Mary what Darcy gets in Elizabeth. Edmund wants not only for a woman to be virtuous, but for a woman to be in good health. We know that Edmund's first words about Mary focus on her exterior, and it is only after he is so captivated by what Tanner calls Mary's "surface attractiveness," that he realizes that her inner self is not as attractive (154). Because he so desires the combination of good health and good character, Edmund consistently tries to find ways to make her immoral conduct not as bad as it seems so that he can marry a morally and physically healthy woman. We recall that every time Mary acts "improperly," Edmund is deep in thought. It is as though he is taking a moment to digest her words and then casts them off, excusing them as a result of her uninformed mind, a flaw that with his reasoning he hopes to change. Edmund wants, as Mary Poovey notes, Mary's "'liveliness' and beauty to merit their own ethical yardstick" (215). We cannot, as I think Austen would not,

criticize Edmund for his attraction to a healthy woman. Who can blame him for wanting a woman to run through fields without spraining an ankle, to ride a horse without being tired, and to walk through the rain without catching cold? Who can blame him for not falling in love with distressed and pale Fanny when he first sets his eyes on her? There is nothing wrong with the attraction to a healthy surface. But, I believe that where we can blame Edmund, as Austen I believe does, is in how he approaches and becomes attracted to a healthy female. Edmund has based his decision to love on superficial appearances, something that in her dissociation of delicacy from virtue and relocation of male desire, Austen has attempted to obliterate. Edmund, although he appreciates good character, has placed a female's surface as a priority in his quest to find a mate. In order for Austen to show that giving priority to a female's exterior is not appropriate, whether the fascination is with delicacy or good health, she makes a male realize this fallacy without anyone else's aid. While many chastise Fanny for not being bolder, for not asserting boldly her disapproval of Edmund's succumbing to Mary's surface rather than her depth, Fanny keeps silent so that Edmund can realize this fallacy on his own. Austen realizes that knowledge achieved by the self is the most powerful and everlasting. This type of revelation will guarantee that a male will no longer look upon a female's exterior as her only attraction and thus change sexual ideology in Austen's world permanently. Austen's own words seem to issue from Fanny's mouth: "We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be" (*MP* 412).

In Edmund's last encounter with Mary, "the charm is broken" (456). He sees in her "no reluctance" to act horribly (456). He witnesses a disposition stemming from an "evil that lies yet deeper" than her "cruel nature" in a "corrupted, vitiated mind" (456). Edmund sees the devil in Mary's character and turns to Fanny's virtue. He turns to someone whom he acknowledges is "a very different kind of woman" from Mary. In Fanny, he finds a "friendship" to which he can "cling" (460). He is persuaded that a friendship and her "warm and sisterly regard" for him can be "foundation enough for wedded love" (470). We know that by saying this, Edmund refers to their

marriage as grounded on virtue because friendship to him, mentioned in the beginning of the novel, means a relationship based on “good sense,” a “sweet temper,” a “grateful heart,” and “kindness” (26). Edmund states that Fanny’s “mental superiority” and her “disposition, opinions, and habits,” make her “only too good for him” (471). While it is true that Edmund intends to act still as Fanny’s guardian, “loving, guiding, protecting her, as he had been doing ever since her being ten years old,” he is doing so in order to “preserve” her condition so it does not worsen, even hoping that someday she will become healthier (470). In thinking this, Edmund does not desire Fanny’s delicacy, but wishes to eradicate it. Further, in thinking about Fanny’s health, Edmund is not prioritizing a female’s external self. Edmund has already made the choice to separate delicacy from virtue, to cherish Fanny’s virtue and consider it the source of attraction for their marriage. With Edmund’s self-motivated return to and perception of Fanny, another step has been taken to accomplish Austen’s task in dissociating a female of sensibility’s virtue from her delicacy. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park*, male attraction to a female’s surface is finally subordinated to an attraction to her depth.

In conclusion, it is important to consider that many critics view Fanny and Edmund’s marriage as dissatisfying. They think Edmund never becomes attracted to Fanny because the marriage occurs too suddenly. John Hardy states that even when Edmund decides to marry Fanny, the “terms in which he does so are merely his attempt to create the grounds for a factitious kind of intimacy” (81). He adds that “the reader is virtually left to infer how [Edmund’s] ‘close and peculiar interest’” in Fanny “will ensure their future happiness” (81). Atma Ram also suggests that the hasty marriage is not based on romance: Edmund “comes to Fanny, not like a lover,” but like a man who is “flying from something he dreads” (33). Yet, I tend to agree with Juliet McMaster, who notes that throughout *Mansfield Park* “the reader is constantly informed of how [Edmund’s] love for Mary and his love for Fanny grow together,” and because of this fact, Edmund undergoes

an “unconscious courtship of Fanny” (142). As discussed in the juxtaposition of Mary’s character to Fanny’s, even though Edmund focuses his attention on Mary, he never fails to acknowledge Fanny’s good sense and good heart. While it is true that he is attracted to Mary because of her liveliness, his admiration for Fanny never fades. What I believe occurs is what Edmund says himself, “that a man, before he has quite made up his own mind, will distinguish the sister or intimate friend of the woman he is really thinking of, more than the woman herself” (*MP* 116). As Tony Tanner states, by marrying Fanny, Edmund has found his “true mate” (154). Their union represents virtue. Based on reason and feeling, both the male and female share this trait and both recognize it in the other. Hence, Edmund and Fanny’s marriage becomes much more closely linked to Elizabeth and Darcy’s. Austen has taken marriage to a higher level than that of Bingley and Jane, who have based their own marriage on external beauty.

Altogether, Austen has set the stage for subsequent novels. She has dissociated a female’s virtue from delicacy, changed the perception that females only need to be delicate and sentimental in order to be virtuous, and placed a priority on a female’s inner character. Edmund has chosen to overlook Fanny’s delicacy in favor of her virtue, has encouraged Fanny to develop her mind, and has learned in his relationship with Mary that an emphasis on good health is less important than one on good character. Through these relationships, Austen teaches the reader that surface, whether frail or healthy, is not a reliable indicator of inner worth. Nor is surface female frailty a reliable basis for predicting male desire. Now that Austen has accomplished a relocation of male desire, what is left for her to do is deal with the idea of perception.

### Chapter 3

#### Problem of Perception: Illusion and Reality in *Emma* and *Persuasion*

In this final chapter, I will analyze both *Emma* and *Persuasion* in light of Austen's relocation of male desire accomplished in complementary ways by Darcy's perception of Elizabeth and by Edmund's perception of Fanny. For her last two published novels, Austen uses the problem of perception to dramatize from new angles her dissociation of delicacy from virtue and her relocation of male desire. In *Emma*, both Emma Woodhouse and the reader are presented with situations in which female delicacy appears to arouse male desire, and these appearances prove to be illusions to the embarrassment of Emma and perhaps the reader as well. The issue of sensibility, then, is not so much focused on the character of Emma as it is on her perception of her environment and the reader's comprehension of the text. In *Persuasion*, Captain Frederick Wentworth's perception of Anne Elliot is the focus. As long as Anne appears to be a weak female figure, he is repulsed. When this appearance proves illusory, his love for Anne is rekindled.

Many of *Emma*'s critics attempt to explain Emma's inaccurate assumptions about Mr. Elton, Mr. Dixon, and Frank Churchill in terms of her lack of self-knowledge, thus categorizing *Emma* as a novel about the protagonist's self-discovery. According to Walton Litz, Emma's "errors of judgment are functions of her fundamental lack of self-understanding" so that "the basic movement of *Emma* is from delusion to self-recognition" (133). Litz suggests Emma must recognize that she has too lively an imagination. Mark Schorer also believes that Emma "comes into a partial self-recognition" at the end of the novel because she recognizes that her ego prevented her from questioning her own assumptions (110). Yet another critic, Tony Tanner, believes Emma's "most difficult task" is coming "to know the person she partially knows and partially mystifies and misrepresents to herself – namely Emma" (199). He argues that Emma's foolishness only stands in the way of enlightenment. Thus, many believe that *Emma* is like a bildungsroman,

ushering Emma through a series of educational situations to teach her who she really is. While I agree that Emma discovers truths, I believe that her initial poor judgments are less a result of her not knowing herself than of her thinking within the framework of the assumptions of the sexual ideology that Austen challenges. Critics fail to see the source of Emma's errors because they neglect Austen's strategy of dissociation of virtue from delicacy and the relocation of male desire. When Emma assumes that Elton and then later Frank will marry Harriet Smith or that Dixon and Jane Fairfax have a secret love affair, she is mistaken because her assumptions are based on age of sensibility ideas that are not viable in Austen's fiction.

Harriet is a stereotypical female of sensibility. She is what Marilyn Butler calls "innocent, and in all her instincts 'good'" but with shortcomings that are "apparent in her speeches, ill-judging, indecisive, beneath rationality" (267). She fits Robert Utter and Gwendolyn Needham's angelically blonde and blue-eyed female of sensibility, "whose coloring [makes] mental or physical activity unnecessary" (195). Harriet is indeed what Austen calls "screwed out of health" by Mrs. Goddard's traditionally passive boarding school (*Emma* 21). When Mr. Elton presents himself at Hartfield, Emma is ready to make sparks fly between him and Harriet by believing that Harriet's sore throat will guarantee Mr. Elton's love (109). But Harriet's illness does not seal the match and instead encourages Elton to accompany spirited, brunette Emma to a dinner party after which he proposes instead to her (129). Even though shocked, Emma still continues to believe that relationships will bloom at the slight hint of female distress. Emma is certain that Jane's secret admirer is the married Mr. Dixon (218), whose love blossomed for Jane when he saved her delicate frame from being "dashed out to sea" during a "water-party" (160). Of course, Emma discovers she is again wrong when Jane ultimately marries Frank Churchill. Lastly, Emma focuses her attention on Harriet and Frank, again believing that a romance has sprouted when Frank saves Harriet, "trembling and conditioning," almost fainting, from a gypsy attack (334). Like a love scientist, Emma declares that



a fine young man and a lovely woman thrown together in such a way, could hardly fail of suggesting certain ideas to the coldest heart and the steadiest brain . . . . Could a linguist, could a grammarian, could even a mathematician have seen what she did, have witnessed their appearance together, and heard their history of it, without feeling that circumstances had been at work to make them peculiarly interesting to each other?— How much more must an imaginist, like herself, be on fire with speculation and foresight!— especially with such a ground-work of anticipation as her mind had already made . . . . It seemed as if everything united to promise the most interesting consequences. It was not possible that the occurrence should not be strongly recommending each to the other. In the few minutes' conversation which she had yet had with him, while Harriet had been partially insensible, he had spoken of her terror, her naiveté, her fervor as she seized and clung to his arm, with a sensibility amused and delighted; . . . . Every thing was to take its natural course, however, neither impelled nor assisted. (335)

Here, Emma's true beliefs about any romantic relationship are revealed, but in all such situations, her conceptions are unfounded. We cannot say that Emma's faults are based simply and solely on her inability to understand herself because her ego is too great, her imagination is too active, or her foolishness is too overpowering. Emma is basing her judgments about relationships on the ideas created by the patriarchal world, thinking that these ideas reflect reality. Not surprisingly, when Armstrong turns from *Pamela* to *Emma*, she fails to see that Emma is blinded by "age of sensibility" ideas that, as we remember from previous chapters, Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Trotter, Dr. Cheyne, and Dr. Heberden supported. Because Armstrong believes that Richardson establishes a new form of male desire, she also believes that Austen only needs to present relationships according to this new form (134). But, unlike what Armstrong argues, it is Richardson who forces Austen to alter the female of sensibility stereotype and relocate male desire. *Emma* accomplishes this goal, in part, through the exposure of her illusions.

Readers who see through Emma's illusions, however, may themselves fall victim to illusions about Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill. The reader could easily imagine Jane to be an even more delicate figure of sensibility than Fanny Price since Jane appears to be a victim of tuberculosis. Jane's own mother "[sank] under consumption," making it very likely that Jane is

infected with the same disease (*Emma* 163). Not only is Jane described as sickly, having “grown thin” and “looking very poorly” (162) upon her arrival to Hartfield, but the reader is constantly reminded of her poor appetite during her stay: she is said to eat “nothing” (237). According to Heberden, these are classic symptoms of tuberculosis, where the patient is “wasting of the flesh and strength” and has a “loss of appetite” (371). Further, Jane is chronically ill, suffering from headaches, fatigue, and the occasional cough (*Emma* 263, 363, 373, 379, 389), the cough especially a sign of tuberculosis (Heberden 371). In fact, when Jane moves to Hartfield, she further fulfills the requirements of the consumptive invalid, searching for a place of “recovery” (*Emma* 166). Susan Sontag, who has done an extensive study on cancer and tuberculosis patients in her book *Illness as Metaphor*, notes that “the TB sufferer was . . . a wanderer in endless search of the healthy place” (33). Jane’s features also indicate that she is a typical frail female, having, like Harriet, light eyes, “deep grey” and pale skin (*Emma* 167). Even Jane’s character suggests she is a female of sickly sensibility: she is reserved, “wrapt up in a cloak of politeness” (169), and displays only “blooming sweetness” and grace (219). Gilbert and Gubar argue that Jane is “quiet, unwilling to express her needs or desires” and is “totally passive” (157) and to Ralph Stewart Jane is “rather colorless” (97).

Therefore, at first glance, the reader is under the assumption that Jane, like her predecessors, once again portrays delicacy’s negative effects. And, if we consider that Frank Churchill is engaged to Jane throughout these displays of debility, we might believe Churchill to be attracted to her weakness. When knowing that Frank himself was seriously ill as a child, having a “lingering illness of his mother’s,” we may be reminded of Colonel Brandon’s rheumatism (*Emma* 16). Like Brandon with Marianne Dashwood, Frank may be attracted to Jane’s weak frame to make his own appear stronger and more manly. Jan Fergus has even argued that Frank deliberately causes Jane distress: Frank’s flirtations with Emma are “designed to torment Jane” (83). If this is true, then Frank becomes much like Mr. B, causing distress to a female in order to feel erotically

satisfied. At a Hartfield ball, it appears that Frank even dotes on Jane's delicacy as he hovers over her with an umbrella (*Emma* 321), holds her arm to support her weak frame (323), searches frantically for her shawl (329), and tries to seat her in a draft-free area (330). Frank's gift-giving of the pianoforte to Jane is yet another clue that he may feed on her delicacy. According to Susan Sontag, TB victims were talented in the arts, their sickness allowing a passionate creativity: TB was "the artist's disease. The melancholy character -- or the tubercular -- was a superior one: sensitive, creative" (32). Jane, as a possible TB patient, is "mistress of music," and Frank's gift could represent his desire for the outward display of Jane's illness (*Emma* 215). Further, it is worth acknowledging that Frank's adopted mother, his wealthy aunt, Mrs. Churchill, is an invalid and that at every bout of sickness, Frank rushes back to dote on her. In fact, his long absence from Hartfield is due to his inability to leave Mrs. Churchill's bedside. It is very likely that Frank has an Oedipus complex, where his love for his adopted mother and the illness that defines her is transmitted to his love for Jane. Even Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar insist that Mrs. Churchill "displays an ominous resemblance to Jane Fairfax, . . . who is also subject to nervous headaches and fevers . . . . So it is quite fitting that polite Jane Fairfax becomes the next Mrs. Churchill and inherits the lady's jewels" (174).

Yet, are we really to believe that Frank and Jane's marriage is based on Frank's attraction for Jane's delicacy, her surface? Would not Austen scold us for thinking this way? Are we to be like critics who have become as deceived as Emma because they have failed to see the dissociation of virtue from delicacy? We can only conclude that there must be a more logical explanation for their love affair. Not only does a reinvestigation of Jane's illness and the above situations prove that illness is not the source of their love, but the last chapter of the novel confirms it. The depth of a female as the source of attraction prevails. While John Wiltshire also understands Jane to be a possible victim of tuberculosis, noting that "the fear of TB" is "'the standing apprehension of the family' that apparently motivates her aunt's continual fussing," he also believes that Jane's bouts

of illness are far less severe than the reader is led to believe (*Jane Austen and the Body* 136).

Jane, in fact, is not at all seriously ill, and instead her colds, fevers, and frailty can be attributed to her emotional turmoil. As Wiltshire states, “there is evidence that behind the heroine’s story . . . is another of increasing . . . tension and pain” (137). Jane’s symptoms actually stem from her secret engagement to Frank Churchill, where she is unable to expose their romance because of her embarrassed class status. Realizing this secret relationship, the reader, who may have doubted Jane’s health, can review the scenes where Jane is ill and see that her unhealthy conditions are a direct result of her repression of emotions. Her “odious” composure at the end of chapter 22, volume 2 is due to Frank’s departure from Highbury (*Emma* 263), her fatigue at Mr. Knightley’s is due to Frank’s tardiness (363), her coughing fit during and her hysteria after their outing to Box Hill stems from her anger at Frank and Emma’s flirtation (379), and, finally, her loss of appetite and “deranged” behavior in chapter 19, volume 3 is the result of yet another one of Frank’s departures from Highbury, which makes her, in despair, accept a governess position (389). Jane’s good health is apparent in her frequent walks in Highbury, even during foul weather. Jane is seen “wandering about the meadows, at some distance from Highbury, while she is supposedly sick in bed (391), and she is known to regularly walk in the rain to the post office (293-95). If Jane were truly ill, Trotters’s warnings that wet shoes and stockings endanger the health of those with weak frames would come true (Trotter 79).

Furthermore, unlike previously argued, Jane’s true character does not mimic the weak and passive character of a female of sensibility. Critics forget that Jane is only temporarily passive. Her reserve only lasts as long as she experiences emotional turmoil; her true character is apparent after the secret is exposed. While she is still, as Marike Tamm notes, “truly modest,” Jane is talkative, cheerful, and forward (401). When Emma visits the Bates’s, Jane rushes “eagerly forward” to greet her with an “offered hand” (*Emma* 453). Emma notes that she “had never seen her look so well, so lovely, so engaging”; in Jane, she sees “consciousness, animation, warmth,”

“everything which her countenance or manner could ever have wanted” (453). We must realize that *this* is the Jane with whom Frank first fell in love. Jane’s frailty and passivity are not traits that he desires, and this idea is reinforced by his admiration of her liveliness at the end of the novel. He notes her “most uncommon complexion,” her rosy “colour,” and admires her “dark eyelashes and hair,” which, as we noted in chapter 2 with Mary Crawford, suggests robust health and lively character (478).

Therefore, the reader can also be assured that Frank’s attention to Jane has nothing to do with the appearance of her debility. First, the claim that Frank causes Jane’s distress is unfounded. Frank is too preoccupied with his own worries to deal with causing Jane anxiety. In many scenes he is haunted by his own inability to communicate with Jane. When Frank returns from a visit to his aunt’s, he visits Emma in perturbed spirits, probably wondering when he will next see Jane: “he was not calm; his spirits were evidently fluttered; there was a restlessness about him” (316). At the ball, Frank is again restless, “looking about, . . . going to the door, . . . watching for the sound of other carriages,” anxious for Jane’s arrival (320). When Frank finally arrives at Knightley’s strawberry-picking party, after Jane has left because of his tardiness, he is “out of humour” (364). A dispute has just occurred on her walk away from the party and his walk to join the party. The dispute not yet resolved, Frank is again “silent and stupid” during the carriage ride to the Box Hill outing (367). That Frank does not intentionally cause Jane distress is evident from his surprise at Jane’s debilitated condition immediately after the secret is exposed. Frank writes in his letter of apology to his father that he was shocked to find Jane in such a state. He asks to be pitied when he finally discovers “how ill [he] had made her,” seeing her “wan, sick looks” (443).

Other explanations exist for actions that appear to show his admiration for Jane’s debility. Frank’s apparent doting on Jane at the Highbury ball occurs because he is mimicking Miss Bates’s actions. In order to get close to Jane without anyone getting suspicious, he must become Miss Bates’s assistant and, like her, pampers Jane. We can also look at his actions as ones that would

prevent Jane from getting ill. Because he repeatedly keeps her warm and away from drafts, he, like Bingley and Edmund, could be labeled a “preserver” of *good* health. Frank’s pianoforté gift can be explained in terms of his desire to be romantic. Because Frank cannot express his love for Jane in any other way, the gift allows him to show his feelings indirectly. He chooses a piano because this romantic instrument provided an occasion for their first confessions of love (242). As Wiltshire states, the piano “signifies passion” (“*Mansfield Park, Emma, Persuasion*” 72). Lastly, Frank’s attention to his adopted mother seems only to annoy him: the more Mrs. Churchill calls him away on grounds of weak nerves, the more Emma notices his agitation when he returns to Highbury. It is as though Frank marries healthy Jane in order to escape what Mrs. Churchill represents: sickness and permanent debility. Some critics, such as Leland Monk, even suggest that *Emma* is a murder mystery, where Frank, receiving Jane’s letter explaining she has accepted a governess position and broken off their engagement, murders Mrs. Churchill that same morning (342-43). If this is true, the act of marrying Jane becomes even more significant. Not only does Frank’s murder of his mother symbolize the killing off of Wollstonecraft’s detested and weak female, but Frank’s marriage to Jane makes way for a new generation of females who will no longer linger on the couch and demand attention for their frailty.

At the end of *Emma*, Austen again plays with the reader’s mind. When Frank compares Jane’s likeness to a delicate angel’s in a conversation with Emma (*Emma* 479), are we to reject everything we have learned about Austen’s world of the new female? No. As Patricia Beer notes, Frank is “insincere and the onlookers are mistaken” (59). Just as he has teased and lied to Emma about what he thinks of Jane, he is again doing it now, laughing at his idiotic and disrespectful ways of concealing their engagement in the past. His words are to be taken ironically. Frank is mocking the idea of an angelic wife while desiring instead just the opposite (*Emma* 479). We can confirm that Frank’s attraction to Jane is in fact healthy by investigating the contents of Austen’s last published novel, *Persuasion*. The idea that weakness is unattractive prevails. In this novel,

Wentworth discovers both the illusion of a weak female and the reality of a revolutionary one. His disdain for what he mistakenly perceives to be Anne's weakness and his admiration for the reality of Anne's strength combine to reaffirm emphatically Austen's relocation of male desire.

Altogether, it is as though after we have passed the test of *Emma* that we are deemed worthy of reading *Persuasion*.

I shall argue my thesis in these three major sections. The first section considers Wentworth and what he desires in a mate. While what concerns him most is a female's healthy and lively mind, one that is able to theorize and hold its ground, he also craves a benevolent character and healthy body. But Wentworth does not initially think that Anne embodies these positive qualities because his perception of her is temporarily clouded by his past vision of her. Wentworth's perception proves to be an illusion, and we can confirm it is an illusion by how Austen presents Anne to the reader, the focus of the second section. Anne is just as reasonable, benevolent, and healthy, if not more, than Austen's other most-admired female characters. The third section presents Wentworth's new perception, which evolves through his observation of Anne's nursing abilities at Lyme. This section also covers Wentworth and Anne's silent courtship, a courtship that suggests they have a mutual and romantic attachment. Because their courtship results from their mutual affection more obviously than any previous courtship in Austen's work, Anne and Wentworth's marriage, as Nina Auerbach indicates in "O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*" is the symbol of the new era for females.

Many critics agree that Wentworth represents a revolutionary male of the nineteenth century. Tony Tanner discusses the new "gentleman" of the century. He notes that the "honorific term 'gentleman'" has changed with the rise of the lower classes (217). No longer does a true gentleman stay idle nor does he live his life according to what he will inherit. Nina Auerbach refers to this new gentleman as a "self-made man," representing Austen's new emphasis on the

“importance of productive labor as fulfillment in itself” (“O Brave New World” 120-121).

Wentworth not only fulfills the qualifications of this new man by making a living through the military, but shows his ability to deal with the realities of the outside world, surviving tempests and dangers on board ships (*Persuasion* 66). Because of this, Gene Ruoff writes that “Wentworth is Jane Austen’s first conventionally heroic hero and, with the exception of Mr. Knightley, her only conventionally masculine hero. Wentworth is a warrior, a self-made man, and an outsider” (59).

We see that the navy life Wentworth has adopted also opposes old traditions of reserve and formality: at the Harville’s dinner party in Lyme, Anne notices “the character of the navy -- their friendliness, their brotherliness, their openness, their uprightness”-- and adds “that she was convinced of sailors having more worth and warmth than any other set of the men in England; that they only knew how to live, that they only deserved to be respected and loved” (*Persuasion* 99).

Auerbach understands that Anne “becomes aware that naval society thrives on everything aristocratic society suppresses” (“O Brave New World” 120). Overall, the character of Wentworth can be respected, and we can assume that Austen’s description of him contains no ironic tone: he is “a remarkably fine young man, with a great deal of intelligence, spirit and brilliancy” (*Persuasion* 26).

We can further respect Wentworth for what he desires in a female: he does not hold onto old traditional and stereotypically created values that Mr. B, Willoughby, and Brandon idolize. His treatment of females makes him most resemble Darcy and Edmund. For him, while good health is a benefit, the inner person of a female is most important. Intellectual and virtuous depth is a priority to any kind of surface. Wentworth searches for a female who fits Anne’s description: “a strong mind, with a sweetness of manner” (62). If this is so, we may ask, why, when Wentworth returns to Kellynch after almost 8 years, does he not court still unmarried Anne? Instead, Wentworth seems to admire Louisa, who is nowhere near Anne’s person. But this mystery can be easily resolved by understanding how Wentworth first views Anne when he returns to Uppercross. He



does not see her as the reader sees her; rather, he sees an illusion. Wentworth's perception of Anne is based on past events, on her refusal to accept his hand in marriage. For him, the reasons for this refusal made and still make her the weak female of sensibility, embodying a weak mind and poor character. And, when Wentworth is again presented to Anne, she seems to have lost her bloom. Hence, this last defect only adds to his illusion that she is a delicate female. That Austen makes Wentworth perceive Anne in this fashion is strategic on her part. Her new man is repulsed by the old stereotype of delicacy.

When Wentworth's proposal was refused, he believed and he still believes it to indicate Anne's weak mind, her inability to use reason to confront situations. He understands that Anne's decision was not her own. As we recall, Lady Russell persuaded Anne to refuse him on the basis of rank: "she was persuaded to believe the engagement a wrong thing -- indiscreet, improper, hardly capable of success, and not deserving it" (*Persuasion* 27). While the reader realizes that Anne's refusal was based on her respect for her mother-figure and that Anne has since learned not to be so easily persuaded even by someone she so cherishes, Wentworth still views Anne's mind as lacking strength (246-47). To Wentworth, Anne was and still is unable to stand her ground. She is unable to defend values she holds dear to her heart. We know that Wentworth still has this opinion of Anne when we listen to his conversation with Louisa Musgrove. Understanding that Anne is within hearing distance, he indirectly suggests that he wishes not be associated with females who lack the firmness of mind he so admires. He tells Louisa that his "first wish for all, whom [he is] interested in, is that they should be firm"; a female he admires should "cherish all her present powers of mind" (88). Ironically, Anne's firmness of mind is apparent to the reader after this speech, for her reason controls her emotional reaction to Wentworth's painful words. She acts quickly and joins a larger crowd that will provide the "silence and solitude" that her "spirits wanted" (89). Other scenes, as we shall see, also demonstrate her ability to reason. But, unlike the reader, Wentworth has yet to see Anne's imposing intellect.

Moreover, Anne's past actions suggest that she lacks the sweetness of character that Wentworth cherishes: "she had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure" (61). According to Wentworth, not only did Anne cause pain to someone she loved, but did so because she placed importance on superficial societal concepts of wealth and prestige. In another conversation, this time between Wentworth's sister, Mrs. Croft, and himself, he proves he still thinks negatively of Anne's character. The subject of the conversation is the presence of females aboard navy ships. Wentworth insists that "there can be no want of gallantry, . . . in rating the claims of women to every personal comfort high"; he hates "to hear of women on board" (*Persuasion* 69). Mrs. Croft is astonished at Wentworth's claim, assuming that Wentworth, in stating this, believes all females to be "fine ladies, instead of rational creatures" (70). Wentworth, unwilling to discuss the subject any further, leaves his chair hastily. Critics such as Claudia Johnson regard Wentworth's words in the same light as Mrs. Croft and categorize him even worse than Sir Elliot: "Wentworth's tenacity in holding 'unbending' opinions . . . place him in the unflattering fellowship of none other than the Elliots themselves" (*Jane Austen* 157). But Johnson as well as Mrs. Croft have misread Wentworth's words. Wentworth does not truly believe that females do not belong on ships. In fact, Mrs. Croft even notes that Wentworth has, in the past, never disputed her presence on board her husband's ship and that he has willingly invited Mrs. Harville and her female relatives on board for a trip to Plymouth (69). Hence, Wentworth's words have to be considered as bitterly sarcastic. He is aware that Anne is again within hearing distance and, thus, his angry words are directed at her. He means to address females, such as Anne, who deem themselves above life on a ship, who believe that they are above lower-class navy men. In fact, later in the novel, Anne admits that she used to be ignorant, believing "sailors to be living on board without anything to eat, or any cook to dress it if there were, or any servant to wait, or any knife or fork to use" (64). Even Nina Auerbach casts Wentworth's speech aside as a sign of

Wentworth's bitterness at Anne's character and insists that Anne, like Mrs. Croft, "will be 'liberated' after her marriage. She will go to sea" ("O Brave New World" 127). While Wentworth may still believe Anne's character to be marked with her disdain for those of less-privileged classes, we will see that Anne thinks highly of the navy and disregards hypocrisy and rank. Further, she would not place society's prejudices over her caring treatment of loved ones. But Wentworth has yet to experience Anne's virtuous character.

What even further discourages a relationship to develop immediately after Wentworth's return is Anne's apparent loss of health. Wentworth does not see the "extremely pretty girl" Anne once was, but finds her "so altered he should not have known [her] again" (*Persuasion* 60). While her poor health does not determine his resulting rejection of her, it, combined with a weak mind and poor character, only adds to his refusal to court her. It is as if this appearance of frailty confirms Wentworth's idea that Anne is a delicate female of sensibility. Two situations prove that Anne's apparent frailty repels Wentworth. The first occurs when Wentworth assists Anne by pulling her nephew, little Charles Musgrove, off her back. Many critics, like Anita Gorman (120) and Penny Gay (27), believe Wentworth's actions suggests his love for her. They both refer to him as Anne's "rescuer." Yet, any romantic feelings associated with Wentworth's assistance do not make sense. It is not an act that rekindles their relationship. While John Wiltshire argues that Wentworth's removal of the child symbolizes a dissociation of the self-effacing qualities of nursing with the female sex (*Jane Austen and the body* 172), I believe it represents also another kind of dissociation. When Wentworth pulls the child off Anne's back, he wishes to remove the idea of delicacy from a female of sensibility's body. This same idea is portrayed when he quickly lifts Anne into a carriage to take her back to Uppercross (*Persuasion* 91). In fact, Wentworth's reaction to what he perceives to be Anne's delicacy is much like Charles's treatment of Mary's hypochondria. Charles continually begs Mary to stop paying attention to her fictive sore throats and start paying attention to their rambunctious children (44). He is so impatient with her claims of

being fatigued one day on a walk in the Uppercross fields that he drops “her arm almost every moment” (90). Ultimately, Charles avoids his wife by hunting or visiting with others (37, 130, 164, 165). If Gloria Gross’s argument about females attempting to use illness to attract males is applicable, we might expect it to apply to Mary in *Persuasion*. Yet Mary’s attempts at manipulation are ineffective. In Austen’s new society, it is no longer acceptable that a male feeds off a female’s weakness. Therefore, just as Wentworth is not attracted by delicacy and does not wish for it to be associated with females, so also Charles. It is important to note that although Wentworth believes Anne to be sickly, he has again misjudged her. Anne is actually quite healthy in mind, character, and body. Wentworth reacts to the woman he *thinks* she still is, not the woman the reader *knows* her to be. He sees an illusion created by his own impressions of her.

The reader, unlike Wentworth, sees the situation for what it really is. First, he/she sees Anne’s firmness of mind in her use of reason. Anne uses her reason to prevent suffering, to take charge in distressing situations, and to become a guide. She even uses her reason to share her knowledge with other individuals and to join in worldly conversations, engaging in topics that have nothing to do with morality. We see that Anne’s use of reason surpasses Fanny’s – Fanny primarily uses reason to act morally while Anne uses reason not only for moral purposes but to live everyday life. It is appropriate that Austen’s last novel emphasizes the intellect possible in a female mind. Austen demonstrates that for a female to become a true and productive member of society, she needed to be able to rely on reason, not delicate nerves, at any moment and for any situation.

Some critics believe that Anne is unable to avoid suffering, her passivity an indication of her pain. Juliet McMaster argues that Anne is a “passionate woman constrained to appear passive and unawakened,” whose “severe repression” of an “intense love” for Wentworth “results in . . . almost masochistic self-denial” (191). Jan Fergus agrees with McMaster by remarking that Anne “clearly suffers from burying her unhappiness” because she “has had no outlet at all for her pain at

losing Wentworth" (77). Anita Gorman argues that the "faded Anne Elliot" "patiently . . . endure[s]" the lost years between her and Wentworth (123), and Andrew Wright refers to Anne's near past without Wentworth as "a decade of unhappiness" (145). Yet, are we really to believe that Anne's mind has allowed and still allows her to wallow in a state of misery that seems comparable to Marianne's even though Anne's emotions are hidden? It is more probable that while Anne has certainly been saddened by past situations, the effects have only been temporary, as she has learned to control any masochistic emotions through reason. Anne is not a vocal or silent sufferer but a calm and rational human being. She is much more like Nina Auerbach's view of her: Anne is an "emotional barometer," escaping the "dangerous and productive disease" of exaggerated feeling ("O Brave New World" 116-17).

From the very beginning, Anne is portrayed as a rational being, incapable of drowning herself in sorrow. While hearing that Wentworth may be arriving in Kellynch gives her a slight "pain," she takes frequent walks that help "dispel the agitation of the idea" (*Persuasion* 30). She only hopes that future meetings with the Crofts will "not involve any particular awkwardness" (31). While the discussion of Wentworth's arrival at the Musgroves is "a new sort of trial to Anne's nerves," she decides that she "must enure herself" from any painful recollections (52). Although Anne is shocked when hearing that Wentworth thinks her "so altered he should not have known [her] again," she does not wallow in misery, but thinks the words are of "sobering tendency," "allay[ing] agitation" (60). These words set her mind to rest because they suggest that nothing will come of their encounter; consequently, his words "make her happier" (61). Anne even declines to visit Uppercross to avoid placing herself in a situation that may cause her pain (77). Even later, when her meetings with Wentworth become more frequent, but there is still a doubt in the nature of Wentworth's feelings for her, Anne tries "to be calm, and leave things to take their course; and trie[s] to dwell on [an] argument of rational dependence -- 'Surely, if there be constant attachment on each side, [their] hearts must understand each other ere long'" (221). As Marilyn

Butler argues, “Anne’s nervous impatience, her acute state of suspense, is beautifully countered within her own consciousness by her mature knowledge that she and Captain Wentworth must eventually make their feelings known” (279). To clarify further Anne’s ability to avoid suffering, Anne can be contrasted with Captain Benwick, who silently indulges in his pain. Captain Benwick should be the one regarded as masochistic: he is always in a “melancholy” state, mourning his dead wife by reading the romantic poetry of Scott and Byron (*Persuasion* 107). If Anne, like Benwick, also suffered over her lost love, then she would not be so willing to give Benwick advice to control his emotions, telling him to read works that teach how to endure losses without suffering (101). Hence, Anne is indeed what Isobel Grundy calls an “anti- sentimental” heroine. Grundy believes this not only because of Anne’s dealings with Benwick, but because of her ability to laugh at an ideology claiming that females are naturally prone to sorrow: Anne’s “growing capacity for humour” when faced with this ideology, especially when Mrs. Musgrove openly mourns the loss of her son, reveals that Anne not only refuses to accept the ideology, but that she herself is not a solitary sufferer (9). In fact, the father of reason, Samuel Johnson, can best describe Anne’s reasonable character: “the great remedy which heaven has put in our hands is patience, by which, though we cannot lessen the torments of the body, we can in great measure preserve the peace of mind, and shall suffer only the natural and genuine force of an evil, without heightening its acrimony, or prolonging its effects” (187-89). As Johnson indicates, a reasonable person will only suffer what is necessary and then prevent any future suffering with patience and intellect. Anne is this person.

Anne’s intellect again shines through in the role of caretaker, where, unlike anyone else in the novel, she is able to deal with distressing situations; rather than fainting, as Pamela or even Marianne would do, she reasons her way through these events. One distressing situation arises when little Charles Musgrove breaks his collarbone. While the child’s own mother, Mary, falls to hysterics, Anne “has every thing to do at once” (*Persuasion* 53). She sends for the apothecary,

finds little Charles's father, notifies friends, and controls the servants and Mary's younger child, all the while soothing the invalid as well as his mother (53). The second incident is Louisa Musgrove's fall and concussion. When everyone else is unproductive, lost in their "sobs of grief," Anne gives out orders, assists Louisa, and calms others (110-11). But, it is not only when tragedy strikes that Anne is able to give rational advice. The Musgroves commonly use Anne as their confidant: Mary complains about her in-laws and Mrs. Musgrove criticizes Mary's motherhood skills. Instead of throwing more fuel onto the fire, Anne "soften[s] every grievance, and excuse[s] each to the other" and "give[s] them all hints of the forbearance necessary between such near neighbors" (46). Anne's logic truly guarantees that peace will prevail in unusual and quotidian situations.

Not only does Anne prove she has a reasonable mind in her capability to avoid pain and to take charge in distressing situations, but, as indicated above with Anne's advice to Benwick, Anne can be considered reasonable because she is an effective guide. While Fanny also assumes a traditionally male role in the tutoring of her sister Susan, Anne goes further than Fanny in preaching "patience and resignation to a young man whom she had never seen before" (101). Anne, herself even feeling "the right of seniority of mind, . . . venture[s] to recommend a larger allowance of prose to his daily study" (101). Because Anne, as Alison Sulloway notes, "reads both solid prose and poetry, and she seems to know what to read for pleasure, what to read for moral medicine, and when each is appropriate" (123) she fits the qualifications of a guide for those who are hopelessly lost, even those of the opposite sex, such as Benwick. In agreement with Sulloway, Anne is "like the ideal governesses and tutors, from Astell to Locke to the moderate feminists": she gives "exact advice about specific bad habits" (136).

One last example dramatizes Anne's ability to reason. Anne typically comments on what could be defined as male topics. While Anne's speech with Captain Harville is most popular among critics as an example of Anne's wit and intellect, many subtle indications before this speech also show her to be an intellectual female of sensibility. Understanding that the Kellynch estate is

in jeopardy, Anne believes the measures taken to rectify the situation are ineffective. Anne wishes to put aside the material things that her vain father so desires. She wants “more vigorous measures, a more complete reformation, a quicker release from debt, a much higher tone of indifference for every thing but justice and equity” (*Persuasion* 12). Helping Lady Russell take charge of the estate, she displaces the traditional sexual role, where the male head of household always took charge of monetary matters. Anne also is aware of the current changes in society, where the lower classes are rising, industry is taking over the countryside, and the navy is occupying the southern part of England to defend against France. While many in the household, especially males, are ignorant of the navy’s importance for England, Anne lets her listeners know that it is the navy “who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and privileges which any home can give” (19). It is most interesting to realize what Anne knows about the situation of her female sex. She realizes that in order really to function in this world, a female has to give up silly crafts and superficial education that the Musgrove girls do and have: “she would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments” (41). Anne understands that an education focusing on reason, even if it must be taught at home, is the only way that a change in female treatment by males will ever occur.

Anne also directly voices her opinion about male perception of the female and supports it well. It is only appropriate that Austen’s last female should utter words that support Austen’s goal of changing the idea of the frail and weak-minded female of sensibility. In Anne’s speech with Captain Harville, Anne attacks the idea males have of females’ weaker frames. She tells Harville that even though a male may think himself “more robust, . . . he is not longer-lived” (233). Here, Anne tells Harville that hard evidence proves male ideology incorrect: facts show that the female is biologically superior. In this same speech, Anne also acknowledges males’ claims that females are plagued by “inconstancy” but again proves this idea incorrect: the “privilege [she] claim[s] for [her] own sex . . . is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone” (235). In other



words, while males may believe females to have weak minds that cause inconstancy, Anne insists that females have strong minds because they are able to have longer-lasting feelings than even males. Anne understands and indirectly tells Captain Harville, the voice of the male sex, who “shall never agree” with a female upon the question of sexuality, that the image of female as weak in body and mind is created by males’ literature (234). As Nina Auerbach remarks, Anne voices the primary concern of Mary Wollstonecraft. Because of inferior education, a female’s voice is repressed and so perception of her is determined by males: “society’s conventional view of women is dictated by men, because better education allows men to write all the books” (“O Brave New World” 126). If females had a voice, as does Anne, society would see that patriarchal ideology is an illusion. Hence, when Gene Ruoff notes that “the great triumph of *Persuasion* lies in its having created a woman who belies the myth of female inconstancy,” I find myself agreeing with him (61). I can only add to Ruoff’s argument that *Persuasion*’s even greater triumph is that its female disposes not only of the idea of female inconstancy, but of female frailty. Altogether, Anne’s being and her words place doubt in Lord Halifax’s argument that “men’s bigger and hardier bodies created bigger and hardier brains, and that women’s soft curves were predictably analogous to their soft, small brains” (Sulloway 32).

Anne’s rational mind not only helps her live everyday life, but guarantees her virtue. Because of her strong mind, emotions are never to disturb her and cause her to be immoral. Reason permits control and allows her “sweetness of character” (*Persuasion* 5). Although many, such as Marilyn Butler, believe Anne’s virtuous behavior connects her to Fanny, especially in being “a perceptive bystander” (283), there is a difference in how they achieve virtue. While Fanny uses reason to be maintain good character, she originally relied on her delicate nerves to be virtuous. Further, Fanny was dependent on a male to show her the true source of virtue. Although Austen uses the word “sweet” to describe Anne’s character, the word often used in eighteenth-century fiction to describe traditional females of sensibility (Todd 5, 7), Anne’s “sweetness” has no

connection to delicacy. Austen is not only changing stereotypes but altering the meaning of words that describe stereotypes: because Anne's virtue is derived from reason, Austen shows that "sweetness" is connected to intellect, not sensation. Moreover, unlike Fanny, Anne learned to use her mind independently from male guidance. We shall see that Anne's virtue is apparent in her acute perception of dishonesty, in her self-knowledge, in her disregard for hypocrisy and rank, and in her treatment of herself, friends, and family.

Anne proves to have a high degree of mental perception, which enables her, unlike anyone else in the novel, to pick up clues indicating dishonesty or viciousness. When the Musgrove sisters reluctantly but politely ask Mary to go on a walk, it is not Mary but Anne who sees through their polite facade. Anne decides to join the crowd to make it more agreeable (*Persuasion* 83). While Andrew Wright argues that Anne is tempted by Mr. Elliot's advances (149), I believe her perception of him from the very beginning prevents any romantic feelings. When Anne first meets Elliot she suspects dishonesty: "she had the sensation of there being something more than immediately appeared, in Mr. Elliot's wishing, after an interval of so many years, to be well received by them" (*Persuasion* 140). She also suspects Mrs. Clay's intentions in moving to Bath with her father (34-5). The end of the novel proves Anne's suspicions correct. Elliot wishes to marry Anne only because he "cannot bear the idea of not being Sir William" (207), and Mrs. Clay moves to Bath with Sir Elliot only because she hopes to marry Sir Elliot for prestige (228). Mr. Elliot and Mrs. Clay are truly humans "without heart or conscience," are "designing, wary, cold-blooded being [s]" (199). In fact, Margaret Kirkham believes that with Anne, "Jane Austen went further than in any previous novel to ensure that she should be seen unmistakably as the central moral intelligence of the novel" because Anne's "view of things is better to be relied on than [*sic*] that of any other character" (151).

Anne has self-knowledge achieved through recognition of faults. As we recall, Lady Russell had persuaded her to ignore her heart, to refuse Wentworth's proposal in marriage. While

Anne later tells Wentworth that she would not have changed her initial decision because her moral character motivated her “strong sense of duty” to a woman who took the “place of a parent,” she would have reconsidered shortly after, obeying her sense of duty also to that of her own heart (*Persuasion* 246-47). Anne also recognizes that her respect for a person should not prevent her from questioning that person’s judgment. To prove that Anne gained self-knowledge, that she has “learned romance as she [has grown] older” (30), and that she is now devoted to her own emotions and opinions, she rejects Lady Russell’s choice of Mr. Elliot as the object of her love. John Hardy notes that only by Anne’s refusal to acknowledge Mr. Elliot as a suitable husband “can Jane Austen demonstrate the true moral worth of her heroine -- her fine discrimination, that she remains truly possessed in herself of what is dearest to her, that she has both heart and mind to reject the plausibly meretricious, the merely fair-seeming” (119).

Anne’s treatment of Mrs. Smith illustrates her disregard for hypocrisy and rank. Her genuine character is contrasted with that of all the Elliots who are only concerned with meeting their distant royal relatives, the Dalrymples. While the Elliots urge Anne to avoid “low company, foul air, disgusting associations” and join them to visit “royalty,” Anne escapes to Mrs. Smith’s apartment. Anne insists that she does not choose her company based on “birth and good manners” (150). Rather, her “idea of good company . . . is the company of clever, well-informed people, who have a great deal of conversations” (*Persuasion* 150). Hence, appreciating her conversations with Mrs. Smith, Anne is not bothered by her friend’s condition: a “poor, infirm, helpless widow” living in the scandalous “West-gate buildings” (157). What is important to Anne are not airs and wealth, but true spirit and friendship characterized by meaningful and intellectual conversations.

Anne’s goodness is evident not only in her refusal to submit to social rules but also in her caring attitude towards others. Arguing that in caring for others she forgets her own needs, many critics have categorized Anne as a self-effacing character. Gilbert and Gubar insist that Anne, in the beginning of the novel, is a “nobody,” who “has deteriorated into a ghostly insubstantiality”

(175) while Judith Terry remarks that “Anne is condemned to a daily existence among those with such different attitudes and interests that she can only function as a sounding board for their problems” (134). Likewise, Jan Fergus notes that Anne’s “self-effacement and willingness to interest herself” in others are the reasons why she is liked by the Musgroves (78). But while Anne certainly nurtures others, it is not fair to say that her actions are completely selfless. It is important to reinvestigate some of her actions to see how they also reflect self-fulfillment. Further, if the acts are both selfless and self-gratifying, we can still conclude that Anne is virtuous because, as we remember from David Hume’s definition of morality in chapter 1, a person who is moral combines nurturing his/her own needs as well as others’ needs. Hence, a few of the instances where critics believe Anne is so self-effacing that she is “ghostly” need to be redefined. Anne’s devotion to Mary Musgrove is not only to be explained in terms of Anne’s sincere care for her sister, but of Anne’s romantic feelings for Wentworth. For example, when Anne is summoned by Mary to be her caretaker, Anne does so because her stay gives her a greater chance of running into Wentworth. With the Crofts as new tenants of Kellynch-hall, Anne secretly hopes that Wentworth will “in a few months more, . . . be walking” in the same grove of trees near Kellynch in which she is walking (*Persuasion* 25). Another time, when Mary begs Anne to allow her to stay behind in Lyme with Charles, Anne not only submits to Mary to calm her nerves, but she silently rejoices because this sacrifice allows her to take Mary’s seat in the carriage beside Wentworth (115-116). Further, as a “sounding board,” Anne’s heart is soothed upon hearing information about Wentworth’s whereabouts and romantic situation. When visiting Mary’s house after the trip to Lyme, Anne hears amongst the “voluntary communication” that Wentworth has departed from Louisa’s side to go to Plymouth (133). Later, amidst Mary’s complaints, Anne learns that Wentworth is not to marry Louisa (165). During a walk with Mr. Croft, she hears that Wentworth “had never thought of this Miss [Louisa] for himself” (173). Therefore, while Anne is everybody’s confidant and friend, she is also her own.

Not only does Anne's mind and character embody traits that Wentworth desires, but so does her body. When Sir Elliot views Anne as "faded and thin," having lost her bloom at an early age, the reader does not conclude that Anne is like her weak predecessors (*Persuasion* 6). Anne's suspected debility, unlike Pamela's, Marianne's, and Fanny's, is only an illusion. Her loss of rosy cheeks is not a sign of poor health but, if anything, a sign of older age. Anne's good health is apparent in her daily activities. In direct contrast to a description of her weakness, a loss of bloom, we are told that Anne takes a "daily walk to Lady Russell's" (32). Anne does not even postpone a walk because of foul weather. In Bath, Anne eagerly gives her seat in a Barouche to Mrs. Elton, preferring to walk in the rain even with thin-soled boots (174). Later, Anne even walks in the rain to a White Hart gathering (229). Because Anne is not plagued by delicacy, she understands that a little rain cannot harm her health. Anne not only enjoys the exercise her walks allow, but craves the fresh air and the beauty of nature that benefit her body and mind: "her *pleasure* in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn" (84). The improvement of Anne's looks at Lyme finally parallel her true healthy nature, as Sir Elliot finds her "less thin in her person, in her cheeks" and "her skin, her complexion, greatly improved -- clearer, fresher" (145). When Lady Russell arrives in Bath, she, too, finds Anne "improved in plumpness and looks," "blessed with a second spring of youth and beauty" (124). Jacqueline Reid-Walsh also notices Anne's good health, stating that "Austen, like a fairy godmother" is "imbuing Anne with a return of youth and beauty," giving her a "permanent glow" (223).

No critic argues against Lyme being the location where Wentworth finally realizes that Anne still embodies all that he searches, where reality supersedes illusion. In Lyme, Anne's behavior, as Andrew Wright remarks, makes "a profound impression" on Wentworth (*Persuasion*

148). Her care for Louisa Musgrove indicates that she is the reasonable, virtuous, and healthy subject for whom he searches. Hence, Anne's nursing, what we recall many critics refer to as self-effacing, turns out to be again self-fulfilling. Since Wentworth is most interested in "firmness of mind," we will begin by seeing how the role of nursing reflects this part of her being. When Louisa falls, Wentworth becomes irrational and panics: he cries out in despair, "Is there no one to help me?" and yells in the "bitterest agony" "Oh God! her father and mother!" (110). While everyone else is as dumbfounded and confused as Wentworth, Anne thinks quickly and gives the appropriate indications on how to treat Louisa. She tells Captain Benwick to fetch a surgeon, she persuades a few to carry Louisa into the inn, and "attending with all the strength and zeal, and thought, which instinct supplied, . . . trie[s], at intervals, to suggest comfort to others, trie[s] to quiet Mary, to animate Charles, to assuage the feelings of Captain Wentworth" (111). It is the crowd who looks to Anne "for directions" (111). Indeed, Anne's mind surpasses that of Wentworth and of everyone else, regardless of sex. Marilyn Butler also understands this episode to reflect Anne's reason and Wentworth's recognition of it: "Anne's behavior reveals to [Wentworth] . . . strength, which includes self-forgetfulness, self-control, and the ability to act" (276).

Not only does the nursing role prove that Anne has a firm mind, but it fulfills the two other requirements for which Wentworth is searching: Anne is virtuous and in good health. At Lyme, Anne's "sweetness of character" cannot be missed by Wentworth. Anne helps Louisa out of the kindness of her own heart, as she has helped little Charles and Mary through their ailments. Mary Poovey understands that Anne's "competent attendance on the stricken Louisa [are] instrumental in reanimating Wentworth's love" (230). Further, it is significant that Anne is not the one who is ill in this novel, but the one who consistently assists others who are. Even before this incident, Anne's good health is apparent to Wentworth: "she was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been

blowing on her complexion” (*Persuasion* 104). It is this health, this bloom, that Wentworth perceives when Anne rushes to Louisa’s side.

Overall, Louisa’s fall makes apparent the qualities that she herself lacks and that Anne embodies. Her fall dramatizes her lack of a firm or strong mind, her yielding to childish fancies and flirtatious fantasies, while implying an existing incapacity to ward off the negative effects of bumps and scrapes (109). As Wentworth would be by any weakness, he is repulsed by Louisa, and breaks off any future contact with her. Because Wentworth notices that Anne’s care for Louisa indicates Anne’s firmness of mind, her strength of character, and her good health, his love is rekindled. After the crisis has passed, Wentworth understands that “no one is so proper, so capable as Anne” (114). Illusion is cast aside for reality. As Judy Johnson writes, the incident at Lyme transforms Wentworth’s perception of Anne: “Anne is no longer a bitter memory, a slight acquaintance with a sensible mind and an injured heart; she is a woman whose person is lovely and remarkably sensuous” (55).

It is important now to analyze Wentworth and Anne’s ensuing relationship because it is a further indication of Austen’s success in dissociating female delicacy from virtue. This courtship goes further than any other to prove that because the female is no longer weaker than the male, or perceived as such, it is an equal relationship with mutual affection. But some critics regard their courtship as dissatisfying because of the way Austen presents it. Because the courtship is characterized by glances, touches, and indirect discourse instead of obvious declarations of love, it is believed that Anne’s emotions are repressed. Although Tony Tanner does acknowledge that there is a “correlation between the delicacy of the [subtle] approach and the value and quality of the ensuing union,” he believes that this is a reflection of Jane Austen’s dedication to social codes by which “you cannot speak ‘openly’ and ‘directly’ about such important matters as your feelings of love, to the person you love, until you have achieved a certain intimacy” (238). Likewise, John Hardy finds this subtle approach displeasing, insisting that *Persuasion* “highlights the difficulty of

communication where circumstances and feelings keep two people apart, and the effect of this is to make Anne's isolation seem even more intense " (112). While direct communication does not occur, it does not prevent intimacy and it does not cause Anne to feel isolated. What critics overlook is that Anne and Wentworth's silence allows for subtle looks, gestures, and indirect speeches made by herself as well as by Wentworth, subtleties that prove to be much more powerful indicators of their mutual devotion than direct speech ever could. If their declaration of love were forthrightly expressed in direct discourse, then the reader would not feel the mounting sexual tension and equal romantic attraction between them. Judy Johnson agrees that only these subtleties allow Austen to "demonstrate more than a casual, polite interest in the warm sensations of love between the sexes; her prose may not 'throb fast and full,' as Brontë would have it, but indeed, the blood does rush to the surface in surprisingly vibrant and seductive, though understated ways" (45). These subtleties also indicate that their marriage will not be one-sided as are Pamela and Mr. B's and Marianne and Brandon's. That both the male and female show signs of affection proves that they will both contribute to the relationship. Austen presents four major scenes that foresee that Anne and Wentworth will have a successful marriage.

The first encounter is a chance meeting in Bath, and it is dominated by blushes and awkward movements. Anne is visiting with Mr. and Miss Elliot and Mrs. Clay, when she notices Wentworth walking down the same street. When they meet face to face, they both look "quite red" (*Persuasion* 175). Anne, in fact, is afraid that "she was betraying the least sensibility of the two" (175). Yet, the reader, as well as Anne, sees that Wentworth is just as embarrassed. His movements are awkward, abrupt, and his speech is muffled. He continually looks at her, then hastily looks away. Anne notices that "it was Captain Wentworth [who was] not comfortable, not easy, not able to feign that he was" (176). Penny Gay, her focus on the blushes interchanged between Anne and Wentworth, understands that the blush is "one of the most important means by which Jane Austen indicates, with perfect decorum, the thrill of sexual attraction" (18). It is



apparent, as the narrator states, that even though they then separate rapidly, their encounter shows in both “agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery” upon discovering themselves and their emotions again (*Persuasion* 175). Their declaration of love has already begun.

Their second encounter is at a concert. When Wentworth sees Anne, he is shy and hesitant. But Anne, refusing to be ignored, uses her body to signal that she is still interested. Since she is the “nearest to him,” she makes “yet a little advance” (181). Further, Anne’s gentle ““How do you do?”” brings “him out of the straight line to stand near her, and make inquiries in return” (181). The rest of this encounter focuses on indirect speech and subtle glances as indicators of romance. Wentworth, now that Anne has made the first move, will make his own through speaking to Elizabeth Elliot. Anne learns that Wentworth is indirectly reminiscing about their own relationship when he envies Benwick and Louisa’s engagement as possible because of “no opposition, no caprice, no delays” (182). Both turn to each other, embarrassingly acknowledging their mutual “sudden recollection” of the past (182). As Anne reddens, Wentworth must clear his throat. Judy Johnson again notes the significance of this blushing: “Anne’s cheeks are hot, her blood stimulated at the very possibility of being near the man who is still bewitching attraction” (47). Next, Wentworth makes certain Anne knows that he no longer cares for Louisa, labeling her an inferior creature to Benwick’s last love (*Persuasion* 183). Then, Wentworth, again through indirect speech, discloses his lingering love for Anne. Referring to Benwick’s recent attachment, he states that “a man does not recover from such a devotion of the heart to such a woman! – He ought not -- he does not” (183). Both Anne and Wentworth again have an awkward moment. Anne, who is “beginning to breathe very quick,” brings Wentworth back to “consciousness” as he speaks “no farther” (183). Yet, this declaration is cut short as Wentworth is whisked away by the arrival of Lady Russell and Mr. Elliot. It is now Anne’s turn to make a move, and her silent love for Wentworth is shown through glances. While she is seated with Mr. Elliot and Lady Russell, she

attempts to catch his eye, but “her eye [can] not reach him” (186). Finally, “her eyes [fall] on him,” but he seems withdrawn (188). Determined that she will “not quit that room in peace without seeing Captain Wentworth once more, with the interchange of one friendly look,” Anne changes seats. Finally, as she catches his eye, she sees that he is “grave” (189). This glance and Wentworth’s rapid exit prove to Anne that Wentworth is “jealous of Mr. Elliot” (190). Therefore, through indirect speech and awkward glances, Anne and Wentworth have communicated their love for one another but have not confirmed it because of Mr. Elliot’s presence.

The third silent encounter, then, must include Anne’s own declaration that she is not attached. This is done at Mary and Charles Musgroves’s hotel. Wentworth, upon returning from hunting with Charles, finds Anne visiting Mary. This silent encounter is her opportunity to secure Wentworth as her own. The opportunity arises when Charles declares that he will not reschedule tickets to a concert just because Mr. Elliot is out of town. When Charles says, “What is Elliot to me?” Wentworth indicates he wants to know Anne’s own reaction to Mr. Elliot’s attendance. Just a glance of his eye implies this to Anne: Charles’s “last words brought his inquiring eyes from Charles to herself” (224). Anne takes her cue and states that “she has no pleasure in the sort of meeting” (224). Wentworth is relieved and feels it acceptable to move towards Anne. Her avowal of love makes him feel bold enough to bring up their past relationship, saying “It is a period, indeed! Eight years and a half is a period!” (225). Yet, the continuation of this indirect speech on love is again put off. Wentworth, out of his love for Anne, takes a card from Elizabeth to attend a party the next night. When he accepts, he does it so that he can be allowed into Anne’s household, into Anne’s life once more. But Anne mistakes his actions, believing that he is somewhat attracted to Elizabeth when he accepts the invitation (227). When Anne catches his eye, he blushes. To him, it is a blush of love for Anne; she has caught him desiring to court her. But to Anne, this blush indicates that she has caught him paying attention to Elizabeth (227). While here he shows passion, Anne shows jealousy.

But, the next and last meeting ensures that their silent courting has not been done in vain. This encounter at the White Hart is dominated by Anne's indirect speech. Anne notices that Wentworth is listening to her speak to Captain Harville again by his gestures and looks: "his head was raised, pausing, listening," turning "round the next instant to give a look -- one quick conscious look at her" (231). Anne's ensuing speech is not only a feminist one, where she argues for the strength in body and mind of a female, but it is a declaration of her love for Wentworth. Knowing that he is listening, she indirectly tells Wentworth she loves him when stating that the female sex loves "the longest, when existence or when hope is gone" (235). Wentworth, in turn, passionately responds to her in a note: he "offer[s] himself to [her] again with a heart even more [her] own, than when [she] almost broke it eight years and a half ago" (237). Her words "overpower" him (237). He tells her that his love, like hers, has never been "inconstant" (237). It is appropriate that Wentworth would be so moved at this point because Anne's words do, as he suggests, represent the empowerment of the female sex. Her voice defines the new female of sensibility, who is certain to feel, to have a heart, and be constant to her feelings, but who like Anne is certain also to have good health and a strong, firm mind. Thus Wentworth's words not only serve to bring Anne and him together, but symbolize a male's appreciation for and erotic attraction to a new female of sensibility. Unlike Mr. B, Willoughby, and Brandon, who are led to declare their love for females during their weakest state, Wentworth discloses his feelings for a female when she is at her strongest. In this relationship, where both female and male are strong in body, character, and mind, there will be no inconstancy of feeling on either side.

Hence, unlike what Andrew Wright argues, that Anne and Wentworth's marriage is based on prudence, Wentworth having money and Lady Russell's approving of the union, the marriage is actually based on respect and passion (150). I must agree with Nina Auerbach, who notes that the marriage will follow the example of the Croft's, where a wife is respected for her robust health, her

companionship, and her intellect. Auerbach writes that “if the navy is Jane Austen’s vision of a brave new world, Mrs. Croft is her tactful and subtle portrait of the ‘new woman,’” we can expect the Wentworth marriage to follow in their footsteps with Anne emulating Mrs. Croft (“O Brave New World” 123). On a side note, it is interesting that Auerbach considers Anne and Wentworth’s marriage to be so positive and Fanny and Edmund’s so negative. She does not realize that both marriages symbolize a movement of male desire from surface to depth: just as Edmund desires Fanny’s intellect and virtue, so does Wentworth in Anne. Perhaps one important difference between the two relationships is that Wentworth wants a female to use her mind for more than just making moral decisions.

Not only does Anne and Wentworth’s naval marriage display a mutual respect for each other’s depth and a strong romance because of this respect, but this private union means something for society, a permanent change in ideology. Therefore, I would have to disagree with Tony Tanner who argues that their union is “not a sign of any larger reestablished harmony” because “Anne’s marriage to Wentworth signifies nothing larger than their own refund and reconstituted happiness in love” (245). Instead, I agree with Gilbert and Gubar who state that the marriage symbolizes “an egalitarian society in which men value and participate in domestic life, while women contribute to public events, [a] complementary idea that presages the emergence of an egalitarian sexual ideology” (181). As Julia Brown Prewitt notes, Anne and Wentworth’s final walk of intimacy in the busy streets of Bath where they discuss their plans of marriage and their love, implies that Austen wishes that all of society’s marriages could become like this one (170).

But what do we make of Benwick and Louisa’s marriage? Benwick falls in love with Louisa as he nurses her back to health. We are to view it as Anne views it, as a joke. Upon hearing that “Benwick sits at [Louisa’s] elbow, reading verses, or whispering to her, all day long,” Anne “[cannot] help laughing” (*Persuasion* 218). Their marriage is a mockery of what existed in the past and is considered unrealistic in Austen’s fiction. Isobel Grundy also sees the comedy in this union,

writing that it “involves Benwick . . . forswearing eternal fidelity to the dead” and “involves Louisa in a transformation of personality which is attributed to her fall, but which looks nevertheless like satire on the way girls were expected smoothly to adapt themselves to the eventually chosen husband’s requirements” (14). In Austen’s fiction, the illusions that patriarchal writings created have been dispelled. Not only has Austen succeeded in altering the female-of-sensibility stereotype, presenting powerful female figures such as Elinor, Elizabeth, Emma, and now Anne, but, in dissociating a female’s delicacy from her virtue, she has permanently relocated male desire onto a female’s depth. We now must consider how Anne best represents the female of sensibility that Armstrong wishes to locate in *Pamela*. We know that Anne has surpassed her less-admired female predecessors in reason, virtue, and/or health. While it is true that, in doing so, Anne resembles Austen’s most favored heroines, we will see in the following conclusion that Anne even surpasses these females by embodying traits that none of them wholly embodies. Therefore, just as Wentworth can be considered Austen’s most revolutionary male, Anne can be regarded Austen’s most revolutionary female.

## Conclusion

### Jane Austen's New Female Heroine: Sensibility Perfectly Transformed

In the novels I have discussed, we can regard Austen's dissociation of virtue from delicacy and relocation of male desire occurring in three stages. *Sense and Sensibility* marks the first stage, where the need for a change in the definition of the female of sensibility and a relocation of male desire are established. In writing *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen rewrites Richardson's *Pamela* to emphasize delicacy's negative effects. In her female of "extreme" sensibility state, Marianne's mind, character, and health remind us, to a certain extent, of Pamela's. But Pamela's uncontrollable emotions, virtuous but suicidal character, and bodily distresses are no comparison to Marianne's irrational passion, immoral *and* suicidal character, and repeated illnesses. When Marianne is the female of "docile" sensibility, she also resembles Pamela. But, again, Pamela's submission to Mr. B is not as apparent as Marianne's mental, emotional, and physical inferiority to Brandon. It is clear that the female of "docile" sensibility is virtuous because of her dependency on a male. Hence, with Marianne, Austen exposes the truths of delicacy's effects. Both Mariannes demonstrate that delicacy is not and should not be considered a source of virtue if the female is to be a positive figure. For the female to be positive, she needs to educate her mind as a source for virtue which will liberate her from male guidance. *Sense and Sensibility* also suggests that delicacy interferes with male appreciation of a female of sensibility's depth. Austen again alters *Pamela* to portray this idea. As we recall, Willoughby represents Mr. B's rakish side and Brandon Mr. B's man of feeling side. But, unlike Richardson, Austen does not allow for reformation of a rake through the influence of a female of sensibility and does not suggest a man of feeling appreciates a female of sensibility for her virtue. Austen urges that female delicacy makes it unlikely for a rake to be reformed and a man of feeling to appreciate a female for her virtuous and intellectual depth.

If reason instead of delicacy is made the source of virtue, it will encourage male desire to focus on female depth.

*Pride and Prejudice* and *Mansfield Park* mark the second stage, where a relocation of male desire is established by the dissociation of female virtue from delicacy and by intellect being emphasized as the primary source of virtue. In *Pride and Prejudice*'s Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley, Austen shows that any surface, even a healthy one, is not a primary qualifier for a deep relationship. Instead, she presents two other relationships, one in *Pride and Prejudice* and one in *Mansfield Park*, that allow movement of male desire from surface to depth. Elizabeth is a female with a healthy surface and witty depth, and Darcy, while appreciating her surface, prefers her depth. Fanny is a female with a frail surface and an intellectual and virtuous depth, and Edmund, dissociating her delicacy from her virtue, desires the latter rather than the former. Edmund's desire is also motivated by his relationship with Mary Crawford, during which he learns to place a priority on depth over any kind of surface, even healthy, as a source of attraction. Hence, just as we learned from Jane and Bingley's relationship in *Pride and Prejudice*, we learn in Edmund and Mary's relationship that to replace female delicacy with good health is not enough to encourage a relocation of male desire. Emphasis must be placed on a rich depth characterized by virtue made possible by the use of reason. Hence, it is Austen's Darcy and Edmund, not Richardson's Mr. B, who symbolize the relocation of male desire from surface to depth and who emphasize the importance of intellect, not delicacy, to be the source of virtue.

*Emma* and *Persuasion* signal the final stage and present the dissociation and relocation from a new angle: the idea of perception. Characters, and even sometimes the reader, are duped by illusions of a delicate female of sensibility and male desire for her. In *Emma*, the female protagonist accepts the stereotypes and lives in a world of illusion. The reader is also tested by situations that seem to perpetuate the stereotypes. But, in the end, both Emma and the reader discover reality where a dissociation and relocation exist. In *Persuasion*, the male protagonist at

first is deluded by illusion. He mistakenly thinks that Anne is the delicate female. His rejection of this illusory Anne dramatizes Austen's relocation of male desire. In the end, he realizes that Anne represents all that he desires, a firm mind, sweet character enabled by intellect, and a strong constitution. Wentworth's love for this powerful female figure is reborn.

Hence, when Armstrong insists that *Pamela* best represents the powerful and respectable female of sensibility and that it demonstrates a relocation of male desire onto a female's depth, I must disagree. While Armstrong is correct in admiring this "modern" female of sensibility and new male attraction for her, she does not realize that *Pamela* portrays neither. The female of sensibility and form of male desire that she describes appear in Austen, not Richardson, who does not realize what is necessary to create both. Austen understands that a dissociation must occur before a female can be strong in mind, character, and body and before a male can desire a female's depth. Furthermore, it is in Austen's last completed novel that the female who best represents this powerful and "modern" female of sensibility appears. *Persuasion* portrays most fully what Armstrong thinks Richardson's *Pamela* displays.

It is apparent that *Persuasion*'s Anne Elliot differs from most of her less-admired female predecessors: Pamela, the virtuous yet delicate female; Marianne, the sickly female of the heart; Fanny, the reserved, delicate female. Anne only embodies Fanny's positive inner qualities, her use of reason to be virtuous and to guide others. While Anne resembles the two Janes in an exterior that only suggests frailty, her character, more than theirs, emphasizes the use of reason to act virtuously and to approach everyday life. Anne most resembles Austen's well-liked female characters, such as Elinor Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse. As we saw in chapter 3, she, like them, is primarily healthy, benevolent, and witty. Yet, a closer look at Anne's being reveals that she even exceeds these most-liked predecessors with a combination of traits that none of them wholly embodies. Anne's reasonable mind, virtuous character, and good health reach higher levels than Elinor's, Elizabeth's, and Emma's. Anne also surpasses these predecessors in



her alteration of traditional female roles: her use of reason in nursing makes it a skill that requires more than a virtuous female heart, and her active participation in courtship defies the idea that the female should passively wait for a male's advances. Altogether, these characteristics make Anne, more than any other Austen female heroine, independent of a male. Armstrong's argument that a female of sensibility's virtue gives her independent power in the household is best represented not in *Pamela* by virtue of Pamela, but in *Persuasion* by virtue of Anne Elliot.

As we recall, Anne's intellect allows her to become a guide for a male, Captain Benwick. While Elizabeth is never given the opportunity to be a guide, Elinor and Emma are, but both fail. Elinor attempts to guide Marianne, but her advice is ignored, and Emma attempts to guide Harriet, but gives the wrong advice. Hence, Anne surpasses all of Austen's female heroines not only in that she attempts to tutor a male rather than a female, but that her pupil respects her sound advice. Furthermore, Anne surpasses her predecessors in other male roles she assumes. Anne and Lady Russell take care of the finances of the Kellynch estate, usually a male's responsibility. Only Elinor comes closest to Anne by letting her opinions be known about her mother's expenses. Unlike Anne, Elinor does not control the future of an estate. Furthermore, Anne regularly converses with males on topics concerning contemporary events and the female sex. As we recall, Anne is aware of the turmoil between England and France and shares her ideas with her father and his lawyer. Anne also directly confronts Captain Harville on the situation of the female sex. She is also not afraid to share her opinions with a male she hardly knows. Margaret Kirkham agrees that "no other Austen heroine is shown putting a feminist viewpoint so plainly, and she does it not within the confines of a family, to a brother or sister, but conversing as a friendly equal with one of Wentworth's brother-officers" (147). On the other hand, Austen's past heroines never speak about world events. They do speak, however, about the female situation. When Elizabeth refuses Mr. Collins, she does so because of what he thinks of the female sex: she begs him to "not consider [her] . . . as an elegant female intending to plague [him], but as a rational creature speaking the

truth from her heart” (109). Elizabeth recognizes that Collins is a man who believes in Dr. Fordyce’s advice for females and, as such, regards Elizabeth’s mind as weak and his own as dominant (*Pride and Prejudice* 107). Emma herself voices her opinion on marriage, stating that a female should not be expected to accept a proposal just because a male wants her to (*Emma* 64). But, for both arguments, a flaw exists. Elizabeth’s objection is only in passing, and the male she is addressing ignores her words. In fact, his answer to her objection reinforces what sexist males believe of females: “you are uniformly charming!” (109). Collins considers her to be a frivolous female who does not know what she desires. Emma’s theorizing is based on her own intentions for Harriet’s future, Harriet accepting Elton instead of Martin. Therefore, her own argument is not based on her concern for the female sex but on her desire to get her own way.

Anne’s virtue directed by her reason sets her apart from Elinor, Elizabeth, and Emma. As we recall, not only can Anne perceive dishonesty in others, but she knows when she has acted wrongly. She has acquired a higher self-knowledge because of this realization. Furthermore, Anne has achieved this revelation without the help of a male guide. It is true that Elinor’s clear perception as well as her understanding of herself cannot be disputed. While it takes Elinor some time before she realizes that she has been overly reasonable with her emotions, she comes to a revelation, like Anne, on her own. For Elizabeth and Emma, it is a different story. Not only do they lack accurate perceptions because of a lack of male guidance, but their perceptions negatively affect their virtuous characters. Elizabeth’s lack of insight towards Darcy makes her willing to accept the worst about him, information that Wickham so generously shares. As Tony Tanner notes, because of Elizabeth’s “violent condemnation of Darcy and the instant credence she gives to Wickham, no matter how understandable the former and excusable the latter, Elizabeth is guilty of ‘Wrong Assent, or Error’” (106). Emma, too, proves to have blurred vision and, as a result, a poor character. Emma’s inaccurate perception of Martin as unworthy of Harriet causes her to play with his future happiness as well as Harriet’s. Moreover, Emma believes that she is superior enough to

Miss Bates that she can openly criticize Miss Bates's babbling mouth (*Emma* 370). Both Elizabeth and Emma do not have clearer perceptions or clearer understandings of their blemished characters until a male leads them to accurate perception and self-knowledge. It is not until Elizabeth reads Darcy's letter that she realizes her perception of him is inaccurate and regrets her criticism of him: she exclaims, "How despicably I have acted . . . I, who have prided myself on my discernment! -- I, who have valued myself on my abilities! . . . Till this moment, I never knew myself" (*Pride and Prejudice* 208). Emma, like Elizabeth, requires Knightley as a guide to correct her perception and change her unkind behavior. Knightley scolds Emma for her conduct with Martin and Harriet early on in the novel, which makes her begin doubting her perceptions. But where Knightley's reprimands really take effect concerns Miss Bates. Immediately after Knightley tells Emma about his disappointment in her character, Emma sees her flawed perception and acquires self-knowledge: "she was vexed beyond what could have been expressed -- almost beyond what she could conceal. Never had she felt so agitated, mortified, grieved, at any circumstance in her life. She was most forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart" (*Emma* 376). As a result, Emma goes out of her way apologize to Miss Bates, calling on her repeatedly and bringing her niece tea to soothe a cold (377-391). Hence, unlike Anne, Elizabeth and Emma have clearer perceptions and a greater self-knowledge only by the end of the novels and because of a male's influence.

While chapter 3 demonstrates Anne's liveliness, we must question if Anne's good health is unique. Certainly it is not the first time Austen has presented a rosy-cheeked female. Elinor, Elizabeth, and Emma are all healthy. But there is a difference in how Anne's buoyancy is displayed. Unlike Elinor, Anne is not overly prudent and understands that a walk in the rain can do no harm. But, unlike Elizabeth, Anne is not overly daring and will not unnecessarily risk her health by jumping through fields in stormy weather. Anne's exercise habits are even different from Emma's. While Emma does take long walks, they are not part of her daily routine. Anne can

regularly walk longer distances than Hartfield's surrounding shrubbery typically provides for Emma. We can conclude that Anne embodies normalcy: she is not too reserved nor too adventurous, but uses her mind to understand what is reasonable and what is not. Austen is not using Anne to create shock or to mock convention, as she does with the other females mentioned, but to show how a normal and healthy female lives her life.

Anne's superior intellect, character, and good health are not the only traits that set her apart from her predecessors, that make her independent from a male's influence. Anne alters the concept of nursing as well. I am not the first person to understand the new idea surrounding nursing in *Persuasion*. John Wiltshire says that *Persuasion* "puts nursing in a new light by assigning nursing functions, or something equivalent to them, to the heroic male" (*Jane Austen and the body* 170). He explains that Wentworth does the unusual by caring for Mrs. Musgrove, the "grieving mother," and nursing "Benwick through the worst of his grief" (170-71). While Wiltshire's argument notes a change in the traditional idea of nursing, he overlooks how Anne herself contributes to yet a more significant and empowering change. Anne makes nursing positive for the female because she puts to use many qualities in its exercise. Anne proves that nursing not only requires a caring and selfless heart, but necessitates a rational mind and a healthy constitution. Therefore, when Wentworth states that only Anne can fulfill the role of nurse, it is because she is much more than a female body. As Marilyn Butler notes, through Anne's nursing, the reader, as well as Wentworth, can conclude that Anne is a female embodying "hidden richness, perfection, and strength" (278). A female, not a male, is solely responsible for this shift in ideology.

Anne also rises above her predecessors by her involvement in courtship. Typically, proper etiquette required a female to wait for the male to approach her romantically. For example, at a ball, it was traditionally found acceptable that the male was responsible for approaching a female, and, ideally, the female was to accept his advances "with gratitude" (Handler 68). *Pride and Prejudice* also demonstrates this conduct book idea in a heated conversation between Charlotte and

Elizabeth. Elizabeth “properly” cautions against being too forward with a male. While she states that it is permissible for a female to have feelings for a male, it is the male who must confront the female to discover these feelings: “if a woman is partial to a man, and does not endeavor to conceal it, he must find out” (*Pride and Prejudice* 22). But in *Persuasion*, this advice offered by Elizabeth Bennet is not taken. Anne Elliot again assumes a male role and aggressively approaches Wentworth. One example of this is Anne’s control over the gaze. Robyn Warhol indicates that traditionally the male looked at the female, her external self (25). But, as Warhol acknowledges, Anne changes this idea. We remember Anne’s determination at the concert to get Wentworth into her line of vision, her desire to catch his gaze, and her realization, as she looks at his gestures, that he is listening to her during her conversation with Captain Harville. Further, Anne adds a new element to the gaze. Warhol explains that a male usually gazed upon and admired the female in a debilitated state: “sentimental novels . . . emphasize the emotions inspired in men . . . by the spectacle of the heroine’s suffering body” (26). But Anne does not look upon Wentworth as an object, but a subject. As Warhol notices, Anne “looks to communicate and understand” (31). Hence, the gaze is not only controlled by Anne but also rendered positive by Anne. Anne is also a revolutionary female in her gestures and indirect speeches. As we remember, Anne is the one to step out of line to attract Wentworth’s attention at the concert, she is the one to disclose that she has no interest in Elliot, and she is the first one to admit her love for Wentworth during her talk with Harville. Therefore, Anne defies the stereotype of the female of sensibility yet in another manner. She is not a passive female who waits for the male to make advances or declare his love. She is a female who pursues, independently from a male’s guidance, what she desires.

Altogether, Anne becomes Austen’s most admirable female of sensibility. She is a female who embodies all that Armstrong wishes to see in Pamela. With Anne’s strength of mind, character, and body, she is the “modern” female that Pamela does not represent. Anne establishes complete independence, and her marriage to Wentworth will reflect this independence. Anne will

take control of the household because of a virtue that is made possible by her intelligent mind and good health. Furthermore, although Anne is not the first female whose depth is respected by a male, Wentworth's appreciation of her depth finalizes Austen's goal. With *Persuasion*, Austen emphatically reaffirms her relocation of male desire through her dissociation of delicacy from virtue.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout my thesis, I will use abbreviations for a few of Jane Austen's novels: *SS* will stand for *Sense and Sensibility*, *PP* will stand for *Pride and Prejudice*, and *MP* will stand for *Mansfield Park*.

<sup>2</sup> In "O Brave New World: Evolution and Revolution in *Persuasion*," Nina Auerbach urges that a new world is created by heroine Anne Elliot and refers to Anne as Wollstonecraft's ideal image of a woman: "In Jane Austen's canon, only the heroine of *Persuasion* is able to achieve the freedom to be rational, and therefore human, that Mary Wollstonecraft had envisioned twenty-five years before" (124). Barker-Benfield also links Wollstonecraft and Austen in their attitude toward Reverend Polwhele's poem, *The Unsex'd Females* (1798). Polwhele attacks women who "'Blend mental energy with Passion's fire / Surpass their rivals with the power of the mind / And vindicate the Rights of Womankind'" (382). "Responding to the position Polwhele represented, Austen vindicated women's power of the mind. In this she was at one with Wollstonecraft, who in her novel *Mary* of 1788 had aimed to display 'the mind of woman'" (383). Finally, Mary Poovey's study links Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen together as women writers who are concerned with "the process of a young girl's maturation, and, more important, with the complex relationship between a woman's desires and the imperatives of propriety" (172). She also emphasizes that in Austen's novels, her "aesthetic choices . . . can be seen as 'solutions' to some of the problems that neither Wollstonecraft nor Shelley could solve" (172).

<sup>3</sup> *Northanger Abbey* seems like Austen's experimental novel, a novel with a different style. Ivor Brown writes that "dark villainy and sinister, seductive scoundrels were in vogue," and that Austen's *Northanger Abbey* was possibly a result of her amusement at this "new trend in sensational fiction in which Mrs. Radcliffe (1764-1823) excelled" (923). While the novel's content in some aspects *could* be incorporated into my argument, its gothic theme seems to be its main focus. For example, we could argue that Catherine Moreland is in part a female of sensibility because of her wild imagination. Her mind is incapable of suppressing fantastical ideas. And, we could say that Mr. Thorpe is only interested in Catherine's surface because he ignores her voice, ignores that she has any depth, and that Mr. Tilney is interested in a female's virtuous and intellectual depth but, upon recognizing that he will never find such a female, spends his time mocking weak-minded females, such as Catherine: primarily, he feeds their minds with awesome and sinister ideas about old abbeys and watches them indulge. Even though an argument such as this one may fit into my thesis, I believe Austen's *Northanger Abbey* works more to suppress the wild imagination associated with the gothic than to transform the female of sensibility tradition.

<sup>4</sup> Even though sensibility was gendered to be female, it indirectly targeted a certain group of females, those from the lower classes, to be prime examples of virtuous sensibility. Armstrong, like Todd, believes that the source of sentimental fiction, fiction that displays the importance of sensibility, was created by the reforming class because the fiction indirectly meant to further their rise and respect in society. According to Armstrong, even though conduct "books did not presume to represent a more desirable [female] but simply [outline] domestic procedures that were

practical" (61), females from the lower classes were indeed most desirable because they were not marked by "the haughtiness" of aristocratic ladies (72). Thus if the desirable female was one of "discretion, modesty, and frugality," which best described females of lower classes, then possibly "the authors of these educational books for women turned the virtues of the new woman into a language resonating with political meaning" (73). The female of virtuous sensibility gave the lower classes as a whole something on which to claim dignity and importance with which they could rise in society and form the middle classes. Because Armstrong claims that the ones responsible for influencing and creating the modern world are the modest females represented in these works, she proudly claims that "the modern individual was first and foremost a female" (66).

<sup>5</sup> The following critics all admire Elizabeth for her health and intellect, note Darcy's admiration for these traits, but also understand that their relationship does not develop until Elizabeth overlooks her prejudice against Darcy: Margaret Kirkham (91-92); Walton Litz (84-111); Mary Poovey (194-202); Tony Tanner (103-141).



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