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Paige Safchik March 25, 2021

Must We Mortify?: Jane Austen, Gender, and the Uses of Shame

by

Paige Safchik

Dr. Paul Kelleher
Adviser

Department of English

Dr. Paul Kelleher

Adviser

Dr. Laura Otis

Committee Member

Dr. Judith Miller

Committee Member

2021

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By

Paige Safchik

Dr. Paul Kelleher

Adviser

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Abstract

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Gendered shame pervades Jane Austen's canon. This thesis investigates Austen's representations of gendered shame in three novels and their three respective heroines: the pedagogical relationship between Catherine and Henry in *Northanger Abbey,* the humiliating upbringing of *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny*,* and Emma's perceived shamelessness in *Emma*. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes in "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," misogyny taints Austen criticism in that critics seem to take satisfaction in the shaming, punishment, and moral instruction of Austen's heroines. At times, critics even argue that Austen herself is deserving of shame. Extending Sedgwick's inquiry, this thesis combines textual analysis with critics' and readers' responses, as well as the insights into shame's function provided by Silvan Tomkins' affect theory. I examine these three novels to argue that, while shame is central to Austen's work, the novels themselves actively *criticize* patriarchal ideals, namely the right of men to morally instruct and humiliate women.

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To my friends who, over many years, have listened to countless ruminations on Austen, *Clueless* and feminism.

To my grandfathers. One who wrote passionately and often. One who epitomizes the patience necessary to complete a project like this one.

To my grandmothers. One who made sure to add an Austen quote to my birthday card. One who taught me to love libraries, who said upon hearing my thesis page count, “Oy vey! I think people will only read the beginning and the end!”

And to Jack, who read every word many times. Even the ones in the middle.

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## Introduction

The final minutes of my Methods of Literary Study class were approaching, and my professor started to introduce that week's homework: Nancy Armstrong's "The Affective Turn in Contemporary Fiction." He mentioned that, to reach her final destination of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the well-known critic opened by analyzing a Jane Austen novel. My ears perked up. I had just spent a summer abroad in England, taking a class on Austen's oeuvre, walking past the Pump Room, visiting a museum selling "I Heart Darcy" pins.

As soon as possible, I started reading the article, eager to hear a critical take on Austen. Armstrong briefly examines "an affective event" (444) in *Northanger Abbey* in which Henry Tilney, aware of Catherine Morland's love for gothic fiction, intimates that Catherine will discover gothic-like objects at the Abbey. Catherine finds nothing of the sort and, realizing that Henry was mocking her, becomes embarrassed. I remembered the comical scene well: Catherine expects to find a dagger or torture device and merely comes across an old laundry list. Armstrong writes, "Henry's power to make Catherine wince with shame at her own behavior removes her from the spectacle of humiliation by folding her into a dialectical relationship with him" (446). Immediately, this "power" seemed unbalanced to me – could Catherine wield the same power over Henry? Armstrong concedes, "True, this relationship subordinates Catherine to Henry, but she is nonetheless rescued from the position of the third person that makes her the butt of his joke. She assumes the self-corrective role of an autonomous subject, as Austen heroines invariably do" (447). Huh?

Armstrong swiftly moves on to Ishiguro's Hailsham, but my mind was stuck at the Abbey, pondering the gendered implications of her argument: Catherine needs to feel shame to become an autonomous subject, to mature "as a member of an elite class of self-sovereign

citizens" (Armstrong 446). If a (relatively harmless) joke made Catherine "wince with shame," what can be said about the remainder of her relationship with Henry? Is there another way to interpret this scene, other than assuming it is one that exists for Catherine's own good? Above all, I wondered, was this humiliation really *necessary?*

Unbeknownst to me, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick had the same thoughts on flaws in Austen criticism, articulated famously in her 1991 essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl." In the midst of addressing onanism in *Sense and Sensibility*, Sedgwick illuminates what she calls the "exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson" (833). Sedgwick found that Austen critics, in describing female characters being shamefully disciplined, actually contributed to this very spectacle. Yes, everyone must learn in order to grow, but Sedgwick describes this moral lesson as a punishment that satisfies the reader. Crucially, these critics imply that Austen's girl *needs* the lesson, that the heroine's journey would be incomplete without it, and they seem to take pleasure in observing the lesson.

As Sedgwick suggests, many critics see the shame in Austen's novels as absolutely indispensable, and she uses Tony Tanner's sentence structure to make this point: the heroine "*has to be tutored…ha[s] to learn…has to be disabused* of her naïve and foolish 'Gothic' expectations…*ha[s] to learn to see…*" (833; Sedgwick's emphasis). This notion is even extrapolated to Austen herself: the figure of "'Jane Austen,' in these narratives, is herself the punishable girl who 'has to learn,' 'has to be tutored'" (Sedgwick 834). While fraught with problems, Austen criticism does not lessen the author's popularity. But *because* Austen is irrefutably part of the Western canon, the misogyny tainting Austen criticism is, arguably, even more alarming. With so many of us assigned Austen as required reading, the *way* we read her matters. Sedgwick's essay is meant to intervene and "interrupt this seemingly interminable scene

of punitive/pedagogical reading" (834), and I believe there is more work to be done in this regard.

So, how exactly does shame relate to pedagogy, to gender, to reading and to discipline? To connect these elements, I turn to the insights of affect theory. According to Silvan Tomkins, psychologist and developer of affect theory, affect is a biological, bodily response to stimuli. We are not always aware of affect; awareness turns affect into a feeling, and "a feeling plus memory of prior similar feelings is an emotion" ("Nine Affects…"). There are two positive affects (enjoyment-joy, interest-excitement), six negative affects (fear-terror, distress-anguish, anger-rage, shame-humiliation, disgust, dissmell), and one neutral affect (surprise-startle). Indicated by the two words representing four of the affects, affects can vary in intensity dramatically depending on the experience. In Tomkins' view, shame is omnipresent in our lives, occurring any time a positive affect is thwarted. Indeed, he compares shame to salt: while the latter might conjure images of table salt, salt is also present, for instance, in sweat and in the ocean. Similarly, shame is much more than huge scenes of humiliation – it is everywhere.

As we are constantly trying to maximize the positive affect and minimize negative affect in our lives, shame needs to be sufficiently uncomfortable, so we learn to avoid experiencing it. In *Affect Imagery Consciousness*, Tomkins explains that shame, unlike other affects, generates "self-fulfilling prophecies" (364). If one has a shameful experience with a stranger, for example, "this experience may generate expectations and fantasies which will intensify my alienation from him the next time I see him" (Tomkins 364). As a great motivator, reminding us how to act and what to avoid, shame is inherently pedagogical.

From this conclusion arises intergenerational shame and the cyclical effects of shaming. We can be shamed by another, internalize this shame, and pass it on as a lesson to a third person,

and "when these three actors are child, parent, and grandparent, this mechanism provides a perfect vehicle for the transmission and preservation of social norms from generation to generation… the evocation of the shame of the other and its evocation of the shame of the self provide powerful negative sanctions against the transgression of shared social norms" (Tomkins 404). As I demonstrate in my second chapter, this "mechanism" operates prominently in *Mansfield Park*. Here, Tomkins does not assign normative value to these social norms, nor the motivations of the older generations beyond a survival instinct. But what if these shared social norms happen to be misogynistic? What if mothers and grandmothers internalize shame and pass this on to younger generations, only to perpetuate patriarchal norms? The problem arises when shameful punishment is doled out inequitably – when only the *Girl* is Taught a Lesson. This is why Sedgwick takes issue with critics arguing for shame's utility in Austen's novels.

As social creatures dependent on others to survive, humans rely on interpersonal relationships, which render us desperate to fit in and abide by social codes. Shame can take on a "contagious" (Tomkins 403) quality, creating secondhand humiliation for someone else's transgression. Tomkins proposes that we can experience vicarious shame as "the human being is capable through empathy and identification of living through others and therefore of being shamed by what happens to others" (407). While the interpersonal transfer of affect may be an obvious consequence of empathy, Tomkins also imagines affective bonds beyond human-to-human. He notes, "To the extent to which the individual invests his affect in other human beings, in institutions, and in the world around him, he is vulnerable to the vicarious experience of shame" (407). In *Banned Emotions,* Laura Otis summarizes this flexible component of Tomkins' theory: "A person can love a man, a woman, or a child; a garden, a book, or a pair of shoes" (17).

I use these principles of Tomkins' affect theory to contend that, with affective investment in a book, this shame-producing identification can easily occur between reader and character.

This transfer of affect implicates readers in the dynamics of shame, and this transfer is especially powerful when Austen "invites us into [a character's] head and heart" via free indirect discourse (FID) (White and Smith 6). A key element of Austen's craft, free indirect discourse (or speech) is a narrative tool in which the narrator speaks in the voice of a character (White and Smith 3). According to Laura Mooneyham White and Carmen Smith, "Austen's employment of FID was revolutionary, for while earlier authors had used it to some degree, it remained to Austen to take advantage of the wide range of how FID could be deployed to manipulate our ironic understanding of her characters. [In comparison,] FID's use in the eighteenth-century European novel was rudimentary" (4). In their data-mining project called *Austen Said,* a program meant to find patterns in Austen's diction, White and Smith found that Austen's exploration of FID's capabilities posed unique challenges: "we were able to uncover many peculiarities in Austen's narrative voice that would remain elusive even to the careful reader, peculiarities that only become evident through the act of making a choice about who is speaking every word" (4). Therefore, to the average Austen reader, *who* is speaking at any given moment is not always straightforward, complicating with whom readers are meant to identify. As Ashly Bennett notes, **"**The interpretive demands made by the ambiguity of voice… ask the reader to distinguish and straddle these positions, as we are invited both to identify and variously and unstably to *identify with* the shamer and the shamed" (386; original emphasis).

Apart from free indirect discourse, the novel form itself is often associated with self-recognition and emotional attachment that crosses reader-character boundaries. Thus, we return to Austen, the moments of searing shame throughout her novels, and how we react to them. I am

fascinated by what makes readers and critics uncomfortable, and by what makes many critics "nod approvingly" (Johnson, Introduction xiii) when the heroines are shamed, often by male characters. While Sedgwick was responding to more recent criticism, I believe it is important to examine contemporary reactions when available; as B.C. Southam writes in his introduction to *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, Austen was, in her lifetime, "a critic's novelist—highly spoken of and little read" (2). The early reviews Austen received were largely positive, but Sedgwick proves that there is merit in questioning even explicit praise.

This thesis investigates Austen's representations of gendered shame, taking critics' and readers' responses into account along the way. Although there are (sometimes large) discrepancies between the year of composition and the year of publication, I will address three of Austen's novels chronologically as she wrote them, specifically to track how the author's representations of gendered shame changed over time. Gendered shame pervades Austen's canon; for my purposes here, I have chosen to focus on *Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park*, and *Emma.* While we have access to some of Austen's personal writing, her sister Cassandra "destroyed many of Austen's letters and censored numerous others; moreover, the letters that did survive at times convey contradictory opinions and…almost always employ a decidedly ambiguous tone" (Poovey 173). For this reason, I am choosing to avoid speculating about the author's personal beliefs. Rather than declare Austen a conservative or radical, I will allow the texts to speak for themselves. In doing so, I aim to argue that, while shame is central to Austen's work, the novels themselves actively *criticize* the right of men to morally instruct and humiliate women.

My first chapter focuses on *Northanger Abbey* (written in 1798, published posthumously in 1817) and its discussion of the comparison between tormenting and instructing. Through close

reading of the main characters' interactions, I juxtapose Henry's lecturing and mocking with Catherine's astute observations, painting a picture of pedagogical shame. While there are few contemporary reactions to *Northanger Abbey*, those that exist provide interesting insight into perceptions of General Tilney, bolstering the case for Austen's vindication of Catherine's intuition regarding the realness of gothic novel conventions.

In my second chapter, I analyze the shame that is diffused throughout *Mansfield Park* (written between 1811-13, published in 1814) and Fanny's life as she is the only Austen heroine whom readers meet at a young age. I investigate the effect of this diffusion on Fanny – self-shaming due to her mistreatment – and on the reader's perception of the heroine. As she is conditioned to adhere strictly to the gentry's moral code, Fanny's shaming reveals glaring inconsistencies in patriarchal values. While the other chapters analyze memorable, stand-out moments of shame, this chapter instead carefully analyzes Fanny's upbringing, demonstrating how shame gradually compounds at the intersection of class and gender.

My final chapter examines *Emma* (written between 1814-15, published in 1815), a novel written toward the end of Austen's career. Many critics view Emma's shamelessness as a literal character defect, and a particularly frustrating one at that. Tomkins can help us understand these critical reactions. As he observes, "Shamelessness in a child or spouse or friend may evoke deeper shame than the circumstances themselves, since this is often interpreted as a character defect in the other" (407). This chapter considers the misogynistic (and, in Claudia Johnson's view, sometimes homophobic) criticism of *Emma* that revolves around the titular character "getting away with" her many faults. The novel's most conspicuous moment of shame—the scene at Box Hill— makes readers viscerally uncomfortable; I focus on Knightley's response to this scene to make sense of this vicarious humiliation. Ultimately, this chapter attempts to

determine if Emma truly evades a necessary lesson, or if she merely possesses the shamelessness associated with men.

## Chapter One: The Pupil Shamed

> *"All of Jane's modern biographers…reproduce the portraits of her brothers and her aunts and her cousin and the men who may (or, more probably, may not) have wanted to marry her, and the confused, contradictory opinions of people who barely knew her, in the belief that somehow, by combining together every scrap, something will take shape—an outline, a silhouette, a Jane-shaped space…The more determined our pursuit, the more elusive Jane becomes. Where should we look for her?"*
>
> - *Helena Kelly, "The Authoress"*

When it comes to Jane Austen's (1775-1817) political leanings, competing notions abound. Whether employing her personal life or her novels as evidence, critics have argued that Austen was a staunch conservative, a groundbreaking radical, or perhaps something in between. Entering that crowded debate, however, requires answers to far simpler questions that are still unsettled in Austen criticism. What was the author's level of consciousness when it came to her artistic genius and the political atmosphere of her time? If her six major novels merely represented a skilled hobby, did she have any interest in how she would be read by contemporaries or regarded by posterity? If we are to take the word of her older brother Henry, her first biographer, Austen was simply too unassuming to view herself as an accomplished author. Published in 1818, months after his sister's passing, Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice of the Author" accompanied the posthumous publication of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Its rhetorical aim is apparent: to assure all readers that Jane led a proper life, "not by any means a life of event" (Austen-Leigh 138). Safeguarding her reputation was sensible as "Proper women were modest, retiring, essentially domestic and private. Authorship of any kind entailed publicity, thrusting oneself before the public eye – thus loss of femininity" (Fergus 5). Women profiting from authorship, according to Jan Fergus' *Jane Austen: A Literary Life*, created a shameful publicity that required an extreme excuse such as "desperate financial need, preferably to support aged parents, a sick husband or destitute children" (6). To avoid the

appearance of this impropriety, Austen and many fellow women authors published their works anonymously during their lifetimes (Fergus 5).

Henry's sketch of his sister, while laudatory, attempts to reimagine Austen as an extremely talented writer, yet not a professional, calculated one. Despite good intentions, the notice effectively flattens the author's agency. This narrative has endured, and thus "The myth of Austen's 'unconsciousness'" (Johnson, Introduction ix) was born. Henry claims that Jane "became an authoress entirely from taste and inclination. Neither the hope of fame nor profit mixed with her early motives…She could scarcely believe what she termed her great good fortune when 'Sense and Sensibility' produced a clear profit of about £150. Few so gifted were so truly unpretending" (Austen-Leigh 140). In actuality, Austen's incredulity at making a profit is unlikely; writing to her brother Frank in July of 1813, Austen remarked that *Sense and Sensibility* "has brought me £140 besides the Copyright…I have now therefore written myself into £250 – which only makes me long for more" (Fergus ix). Far from unpretending, Austen longed for more financial success. Further, there is great irony that Henry's note should be attached to *Northanger Abbey*, in which Austen defends her chosen genre and begs for novelists to receive adequate praise:

> And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens, -- there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them. (Austen, *NA* 23)[1]

Indeed, with Henry practically granting this "general wish" in order to avoid his sister facing posthumous shame, Austen's eulogy distorts the truth and damages her legacy. By defending his

[1] My in-text citations will refer to *Northanger Abbey* as *NA*.

sister's virtue to contemporary society, Henry's notice marks the formation of a narrative outlining the limits of acceptable womanhood, a narrative that has also been extended to the novelist's characters. Austen wrote brilliantly, but *of course* she was unaware of her own ability. Catherine is an avid reader, but she is obviously too naïve to separate her reading from her reality. Fanny is morally upright, but she needs to be disciplined to gain her conscience. Emma is intelligent, but she has to be put in her place. Beginning with Henry Austen, a long tradition of Austen commentary has regarded these statements as givens. The message is clear: women, real and fictional, need humbling, punishing, and shaming.

In her editor's introduction to *Northanger Abbey*, Claudia L. Johnson draws attention to the use of "only" as both a diction choice in this defense of the novel and as a concept used to characterize Austen. As Austen wrote *Emma*, she corresponded with her niece Anna who was writing a novel of her own. While the novel never materialized, Austen's advice has survived and undoubtedly colors her authorial reputation: "You are now collecting your people delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life. Three or four families in a country village is the very thing to work on" (Austen-Leigh 76). While "three or four families in a country village" is widely understood as Austen delineating her fictional realm, a simplification that aligns with Henry's account, Fergus argues that Austen was advising her niece to fully develop core characters before introducing others (3). Still, as Helena Kelly emphasizes, while we know the basic facts of Austen's life, she remains a "shadowy" figure in many ways, compelling critics and biographers to fill in the blanks ("The Authoress" 12). This educated guessing cannot be separated from biases, whether ideological or financial; the employees at The Jane Austen Centre in Bath, for instance, attempted to convince my tour group that Austen loved her time living in the city, despite documented evidence to the contrary

(Tomalin 171). In other words, for those who believe in (or want to believe in) Austen's lack of consciousness and pretention, "three or four families in a country village" makes sense as the boundaries of the author's interest and capability. Known for her use of understatement, "Austen is thus in some legitimate and resonant sense an artist of 'only' – one who attempts to contain, delimit, modulate, and subtilize" (Johnson, Introduction viii). Yet in Austen's self-assured handling of gothic tropes, *Northanger Abbey* "is obviously bragging rather than demurring," using "understatement (the heroine is reading *only* a novel) as a form of overstatement and aggrandizement (novels have *only* genius, wit, and taste to recommend them)" (Introduction viii).

*Northanger Abbey*'s intricate parody of the gothic novel – itself a testament to Austen's authorial consciousness – is also importantly more than *only* a parody, more than it first appears. Johnson's introduction to the novel includes the heading "Gothic or Anti-Gothic?" and, of course, Austen's first novel accepted for publication is more nuanced than either/or (Introduction ix). Discussing both *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's juvenilia, Johnson explains that, "Like most eighteenth-century novelists and poets, Austen initiated her career by parody… Her [early fiction was] a workshop, where the would-be artist first set hand to the tools of her trade, identifying operative structures and motifs, and then turning them inside out in order to explore their artificiality and bring to light their hidden implications" (*Jane Austen* 29). While a literary workshop filled with tools would be far beyond the purview of the Austen depicted in her brother's "Biographical Notice," the real-life Jane Austen's genius is palpable in her subtle parody. Rather than an unaltered addition to the gothic genre or a lengthy mockery of the unrealistic motifs of gothic fiction, *Northanger Abbey* intervenes into a highly politicized space.

What would one find in the gothic novels of the late eighteenth century, those which formed Austen's understanding of the genre? Along with supernatural phenomena, these stories included "Lustful, tyrannical, and rapacious fathers, corrupt morals, and other diabolical villains work[ing] their evil upon forlorn heroines far away from the reach of reason, restraint, or effectual aid, in secluded castles full of trap doors, hidden panels, dank dungeons" (Johnson, Introduction ix). Scary characters, settings, and objects are all at play, and because Austen spoofs the latter two, many critics have concluded that *Northanger Abbey* is an "anti-gothic" parody meant to mock those who see reality in the gothic. But while poking fun at the ridiculousness of gothic props, Austen also crafts terror-inspiring characters, subtly making a case for the truth embedded in the gothic formula.

As Catherine reads and adores Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*, *Northanger Abbey* is particularly a parody of Radcliffean gothic, further complicating critical consensus as "the political valence of [Radcliffe's] gothicism is not so clear" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 33). Despite Radcliffe's conservative politics, her novels' "symbolic 'meaning' is the progressive one: her innocent heroine, pure, passive, acutely sensitive, is acted upon by the evil, all-powerful tyrants who govern the world about her" (Butler 30). As Johnson notes, this "[Classic gothic imagery] would seem implicitly to serve the progressive agenda to protect the powerless and the feminine from the abuses of a decaying but still powerful patriarchy," meaning that "reform-minded novelists" found the gothic to be an accurate representation of reality (*Jane Austen* 32). However, according to Marilyn Butler, Radcliffe's politics led her to fall short of questioning or exposing her own society, always depicting evils in "a past century, and [in] Southern Europe; her typical tyrants are aristocrats of the Spanish type, narrow cold abbesses, or monks associated with the Inquisition" (30). Butler suggests that these choices

preserve the sanctity of English society and Christianity; if these frightening scenarios were to occur, it would not be *here* among *us*, Radcliffe seemingly suggests. However, this distance is precisely what Austen's parody rebukes. As Johnson observes, "*Northanger Abbey* does not refute, but rather clarifies and reclaims, gothic conventions in distinctly political ways…and in the process it does not ridicule gothic novels nearly as much as their readers" (*Jane Austen* 34), specifically those readers who viewed gothic novels as pure escapism completely detached from their daily lives.

Thus, we are left to determine what Austen intends when she appropriates gothic elements. Astutely observing her society— a society that compelled her brother to rewrite her legacy lest her prowess be deemed inappropriate—Austen grafted pieces of the gothic onto her own world. While the "trap doors" and "hidden panels" stand out as gothic allusions, the horrors of patriarchy are all too real and persist in the world Austen inhabited. Thus, I will argue that Austen's interest in depicting patriarchy does not mean that Austen endorses patriarchal ideology, even in its more "moderate" or "benevolent" forms. Further, her depiction of gendered shame does not imply that Catherine "*has to be disabused* of her naïve and foolish 'Gothic' expectations" (Sedgwick 833), but rather compels us to develop gothic expectations of our own.

When *Northanger Abbey*'s heroine first meets John Thorpe, her brother's friend and her friend's brother, the conversation turns to her favorite topic: gothic novels. Catherine recommends *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, to which John replies, "Not I, faith! No, if I read any, it shall be Mrs. Radcliff[e]'s; her novels are amusing enough; they are worth reading; some fun and nature in *them*" (Austen, *NA* 32; original emphasis). Catherine, virtually an expert on the subject at this point, kindly corrects him – "Udolpho *was* written by Mrs. Radcliff[e]" – but, importantly, she does so "with some hesitation, from the fear of mortifying him" (*NA* 32; my emphasis).

Catherine's hesitation is notable because, in large part, she is rarely offered the same courtesy when she is lacking knowledge. At the start of the novel, there are simply many things that Catherine does not know; the picture of innocence, the heroine comes from an extremely sheltered upbringing in Fullerton with little education and no adventure (*NA* 8). Even after traveling to Bath with the Allens, Catherine has a self-proclaimed "small circle of friends" (*NA* 79). Given this background, her intellectual knowledge and her innate intuition vary in development, and she frequently must rely on the latter to guide her actions.

Enter, Henry Tilney. Gracing the Lower Rooms with his "pleasing countenance…very intelligent and lively eye" and almost "handsome" appearance (*NA* 14), Henry ends Catherine's social drought in Bath with welcome flirtation. Their first conversation displays the pleasure in gentle embarrassment that is commonplace in heterosexual courtship. After they dance, Catherine suppresses laughter as Henry asks traditional questions about her time in Bath. He then says, assuredly, "I know exactly what you will say [in your journal tomorrow]: Friday, went to the Lower Rooms; wore my sprigged muslin robe with blue trimmings—plain black shoes—appeared to much advantage; but was strangely harassed by a queer, half-witted man, who would make me dance with him, and distressed me by his nonsense" (*NA* 15). While Catherine is not distressed, she is certainly thrown off, and her attention is captured, both intentional effects of Henry's "queer" behavior. Catherine counters, "…perhaps, I keep no journal," but Henry insists on the existence of this stereotypically feminine journal: "Perhaps you are not sitting in this room, and I am not sitting by you…Not keep a journal! How are your absent cousins to understand the tenour of your life in Bath without one?" (*NA* 15). Later, Henry asks what she is thinking, and "Catherine coloured, and said, 'I was not thinking of [any]thing'" (*NA* 17). Henry requests that she not tell him, "for now we shall soon be acquainted, as I am authorized to tease

you on this subject whenever we meet, and nothing in the world advances intimacy so much" (*NA* 17). Beyond asserting social power and showing off his cleverness, advancing intimacy is the clear purpose of Henry's teasing. However, as affect theory suggests, shame varies in intensity; while Henry's pursuit of Catherine falls on the lesser side of the shaming spectrum, it nonetheless introduces the dynamics of shame into their relationship. Beginning with flirtation and developing into the painful severity of Henry's later monologue, their relationship depicts a gradual escalation of gendered shame.

Poking fun at someone can demonstrate romantic interest, but the teasing in courtship between a man and woman can only be unidirectional, especially in the public setting of the Lower Rooms. Even as Austen demonstrates that certain forms of shame are less serious, this (lightly mocking) flirtation still involves a man embarrassing a woman because he has the power to do so. Austen immediately uses irony to highlight that, even if she had the ability or desire to match Henry's wit, Catherine could not have reciprocated. While Catherine wants to continue their "acquaintance," whether she dreams of Henry "cannot be ascertained" (*NA* 18). If Catherine does dream of her suitor, the narrator hopes "it was no more than in a slight slumber, or a morning doze at most; for if it be true, as a celebrated writer has maintained, that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman's love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her" (*NA* 18). Austen alludes to Samuel Richardson here, referencing a phenomenon clarified in *Northanger Abbey*'s explanatory notes: "During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, most popular tracts about the education and conduct of modest young women forbade them to form (let alone declare) romantic attachments without being formally applied to by a gentleman who has first secured the permission of her father" (361n). Unable to

*form* a romantic attachment, let alone flagrantly display interest through teasing, Catherine is firmly the shamed rather than the shamer, even in seemingly innocuous ways.

In *Romance, Language and Education in Jane Austen's Novels*, Laura G. Mooneyham characterizes the couple's relationship as "that of teacher to pupil. This is as it should be: Catherine is in need of teaching and Henry is the appropriate person to teach her" (19). One unformed and impressionable, the other learned and confident, they certainly embody these roles, seemingly upholding the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson. The spectacle is complicated, however, by the novel's fascination with the similarities between tormenting and instructing. Henry believes, as Tony Tanner believes, that Catherine "*has to be disabused* of her naïve and foolish 'Gothic' expectations" (Sedgwick 833). To amuse himself, he vividly paints a scene of horror when describing the Abbey, priming her to think of him when nothing horrific materializes. He asks, "…are you prepared to encounter all the horrors that a building such as 'what one reads about' may produce? — Have you a stout heart? — Nerves fit for sliding pa[n]els and tapestry?" (Austen, *NA* 114). Henry then describes what a young lady might encounter in such a place – "a gloomy chamber" where "some cousin or kin died…about twenty years before," one vaulted room containing "a dagger, in another a few drops of blood, and in a third the remains of some instrument of torture" (*NA* 116). Henry's description is so extensive that, "too much amused," he "could no longer command solemnity either of subject or voice" (*NA* 116). Catherine "gr[o]w[s] ashamed of her eagerness" and claims she is "not at all afraid" (*NA* 117), but, even in his mocking, Henry certainly has not abated her gothic vision of the Abbey.

While Henry's joke represents a moment of relatively benign flirtation, the punchline is Catherine's foolishness. To read the novel as Mooneyham does, shame works as it "should,"

reminding Catherine to doubt her conflation of gothicism and reality. As I have established, shame *is* pedagogical: an avenue, though an uncomfortable one, to knowledge. But, crucially, shaming instruction is not necessarily instructive. Most of Henry's "lessons" are delivered in such a way that they intend to produce shame – teaching Catherine to adjust her expectations, to use different words, or to avoid jumping to conclusions based on fiction – but he does not teach entirely to improve her mind. Acting as superior by virtue of his gender, he takes amusement in her embarrassment and deems Catherine "too valuable an object of irony to wish to change her into an equal partner" (Mooneyham 18). While Henry may seem to be a natural teacher, he is not a benevolent one. Austen's subtle irony makes it clear that his shame-inducing moral instruction rests on shaky ground: he is frequently wrong.

An analysis of *Northanger Abbey*'s gendered shaming must begin with the distinction between "to torment" and "to instruct." Henry is obsessed with proper diction, "The self-appointed monitor of Catherine's language…" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 44), and therefore employs irony to correct her whenever possible. As he takes a walk with Catherine and his sister Eleanor, he objects to Catherine calling *Udolpho* "nice," insisting that the adjective has a much narrower meaning (neat, refined, delicate) than she intends (Austen, *NA* 78). This sets the scene for a pivotal exchange, which starts with the discussion of history as a genre. Eleanor enjoys history and Catherine finds it dull: to take time to write long history books, "to be labouring only for the torment of little boys and girls, always struck me as a hard fate" (*NA* 79). Henry, again concerned with word choice, says historians can torment people of any age, clarifying, "I use the verb 'to torment,' as I observed to be your own method, instead of 'to instruct,' supposing them to be now admitted as synon[y]mous" (*NA* 80). Mooneyham asserts that Henry's ego is bolstered by "Catherine's complete approval of his every word" (21), but I find that evaluation far too

absolute. In this instance, with these crucial words, Catherine pushes back, grounding her response in her unique experience with six younger siblings: "You think me foolish to call instruction a torment, but if you had been as much used as myself to hear poor little children first learning their letters…you would allow that to *torment* and to *instruct* might sometimes be used as synon[y]mous words" (Austen, *NA* 80; original emphasis). Catherine's point is politely hedged – "might sometimes" – but she resists Henry's diction policing, nonetheless.

Let's return once more to Henry's trickery regarding the Abbey and the story he crafts, promising a violent storm and mysterious tapestries. As Catherine realizes what occurred, Austen clues us in on the heroine's thoughts through free indirect discourse: "How could she have so imposed on herself? — Heaven forbid that Henry Tilney should ever know her folly! And it was in great measure his own doing…" (*NA* 126). In the same breath, Catherine blames herself and Henry for her humiliation. Afterward, she finds Henry, "and his immediate hope of her having been undisturbed by the tempest, with an arch reference to the character of the building they inhabited, was rather distressing" (*NA* 127). And thus, the teacher approaches the pupil after the lesson to ensure it was imparted, delighting in and joking about her distress. As Johnson notes, "Catherine's tendency to equate the verbs 'to torment' and 'to instruct' seems less confused given the humiliating upshot of her lesson in the gothic at Henry's hands" (*Jane Austen* 39). It is easy to imagine why Catherine might find these words synonymous: as the novel's naïve student, she is the one on the receiving end of both verbs.

After the torment-instruct debate, Austen cleverly illustrates that there is shame in lacking knowledge, and that instruction *can* look a lot like tormenting. Eleanor and Henry begin to examine the country landscape through the lens of drawing, an art which Catherine knows little about. As Sedgwick and Adam Frank note in "Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading

Silvan Tomkins," "Without positive affect, there can be no shame: only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush" (22). Enjoying the Tilneys' company, Catherine is a "hopeful scholar," interested in their conversation but unable to participate as an equal until she learns more (Austen, *NA* 81). This joyous atmosphere enables the shame that follows. As such, "She was heartily ashamed of her ignorance," but the narrator calls this "A misplaced shame. Where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant…a woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can" (*NA* 81). Austen's irony seeps through, suggesting that women who know less are more attractive to men, more a judgment of shallow men than intelligent women. This narration also speaks to the desirability of pedagogy within heterosexual courtship. To men, Austen suggests, the less intelligent a woman is – and therefore more malleable and shame-able – the better.

Young, learning, and growing, "[Catherine] presents a wide field of opportunity for a man wishing to project himself upon the empty slate of another personality" (Mooneyham 19). Henry happily does just this. Catherine says she lacks artistic knowledge, and "a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which [Henry's] instructions were so clear…" (Austen, *NA* 81). By the end of the lesson, Henry was "Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once…" (*NA* 81), insinuating that Catherine is incapable of retaining a wealth of information. So soon after the torment-instruct debate, Austen's pointed reference to "instructions" is not a coincidence; Henry's lessons are undergirded by patriarchal beliefs, inherently a torment for Catherine, his student. According to some critics, this pedagogical relationship is, as Mooneyham puts it, just "as it should be" and Catherine's shameful lessons are well-deserved. Marvin Mudrick, for one, says Henry "is witty, lively, talkative, didactic, and his common sense does rescue Catherine finally from delusion. He seems,

in fact, the only perceptive person in the book" (48). Lively, talkative, and didactic? Certainly. But is Catherine delusional and Henry the only perceptive character?

Despite her naivete and Henry's way with words, Catherine boasts a moral superiority and a strikingly accurate intuition. When it comes to the novel's largest moment of shame, as I will address in a moment, Henry is in the wrong, and Austen makes this apparent. The "process of loving chastisements" (Johnson, Introduction xiii) that characterizes their relationship soon turns not-so-loving**,** indicating that the pervasive humiliation was never justified.

When she finds out Mrs. Tilney is dead, Catherine, influenced by her gothic reading list, suspects something strange happened to her, and General Tilney's oppressive, domineering personality only heightens suspicion. Unintentionally, she begins accumulating relevant clues: the General dislikes his wife's favorite walking path, he does not seem to care about her portrait, he will not let Catherine approach the room where Mrs. Tilney died, Eleanor was not present when her mother passed, and so on. Catherine first concludes that the General must have been cruel to his wife, and then, as she learns more, that he might have murdered her. Unlike her preconceived notions about the Abbey, Catherine's imagination **is** not merely running wild. There **are** too many troubling details available to her: "Catherine sometimes started at the boldness of her own surmises, and sometimes hoped or feared that she had gone too far; but they were supported by such appearances as made their dismissal impossible" (Austen, *NA* 139). Fascinatingly, when Henry finds her snooping around his mother's quarters, Catherine "raised her eyes towards him more fully than she had ever done before" (*NA* 145), in direct contrast with the physical indicators of the shame affect, lowering one's eyes and bowing one's head (Tomkins 358). I believe Catherine's eye contact is a testament to her certainty, but also an acknowledgement of the awkwardness of the situation. Knowing that Henry might be shocked or

offended—or indeed, that he might launch into a lecture—she attempts to defy being shamed for her convictions.

Of course, Henry is repulsed by her insinuations and dismisses them as pure foolishness in a scathing monologue:

> Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of the suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you—Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing; where every man is surrounded by a neighborhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open? Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting? (Austen, *NA* 145)

As part of her growth, "[Catherine] must discover for herself the characteristic ways in which human evil manifests in polite English society" (Nardin 63), yet Henry obstinately argues that such a society makes gothic evil unthinkable. According to *Northanger Abbey*'s explanatory notes, Henry, evoking the paranoia of English society at the turn of the century, references "The Gagging Acts of 1795, [which were] aimed at pro-reform writers and groups [and] made it possible to arrest anyone overheard criticizing the monarchy on grounds of treason, hence the sense that English subjects are subject to 'voluntary spies'" (371n). Interestingly, Henry's reaction is to cite a variety of institutions: Englishness, Christianity, education, laws, civilian surveillance networks. He mounts a philosophical defense of his position, one that suggests that in their place and time, Catherine's ideas are completely nonsensical. In having Henry speak the words, "Remember that we are English, that we are Christians," Austen is clearly taking a jab at Radcliffe and her readers' perceived distance between themselves and the gothic. By asking if such crimes "could…be perpetrated without being known," Henry, strikingly, does not jump to the defense of his father or his character; he explains that social, political and religious forces

would prevent his father from getting away with it. In repeating "your own," Henry implies that Catherine scarcely thinks for herself, or does not think too deeply or with reason – shaming her into believing her ideas are baseless.

If this monologue seems eerily reminiscent of what has recently been termed "mansplaining," it is because Henry's speech follows the basic principles: a man explaining something to a woman in a "condescending, overconfident, and often inaccurate or oversimplified manner" ("Mansplain"). Clearly, this is a demeaning occurrence that has transcended time. In "Jane Austen and the Timeless Tradition of Mansplaining," Kelly Coyne draws the connections between this monologue and Rebecca Solnit's "Men Explain Things to Me": "Solnit points out that there is a real danger to mansplaining: 'It trains' women 'in self-doubt and self-limitation just as it exercises men's unsupported overconfidence.'" Henry's blistering speech has the intended effect of instilling self-doubt: "They had reached the end of the gallery; and with tears of shame [Catherine] ran off to her own room" (Austen, *NA* 146). Catherine privately reflects on her error of judgment, chalking it up to gothic-induced delusion. For those believing a Girl Being Taught a Lesson is the novel's only appropriate outcome, the story could very well end here. Hearkening back to Sedgwick's article, Johnson adds, "For readers who believe that one central purpose of *Northanger Abbey* is to teach the heroine a lesson for thinking the worst of the General… the novel is basically over once Catherine takes her instruction from Henry rather than Ann Radcliffe, when she accepts his reproof, his forgiveness, and his love" (Introduction xiii). And yet, Austen does not end the novel with Catherine's tears of shame, or her self-abasement.

The reason for Henry's roundabout monologue is that, regardless of the specifics, Catherine's hunch is actually right. Henry admits as much: "I will not pretend to say that while

[my mother] lived, she might not often have had much to bear, but though his temper injured her, his judgment never did. His value of her was sincere; and, if not permanently, he was truly afflicted by her death" (Austen, *NA* 145). If the General's temper is not evidence enough of his cruelty, his treatment of Catherine demonstrates his character. As Johnson notes, "Henry, as we have seen, discredits gothic novels because he believes that English 'law' itself, as well as the pressure of 'social and literary intercourse'…enforces decency" (*Jane Austen* 43). Yet no social norm, law, or code prevents General Tilney from violating a core tenet of hospitality: when the controlling patriarch realizes that Catherine is not, as he thought, wealthy, he believes Catherine has lied to the family and abruptly sends her away from Northanger and home to Fullerton. Banishing a house guest is even more despicable when, as Eleanor points out, Catherine must go on "a journey of seventy miles, to be taken post by you, at your age, alone, unattended!" (Austen, *NA* 166).

An unsigned *British Critic* review of *Northanger Abbey* from 1818 is quite telling as the author asserts that "Some of the incidents in [the novel] are rather improbable, and the character of General Tilney seems to have been drawn from imagination, for it is not a very probable character, and is not [portrayed] with our authoress's usual taste and judgment" (Southam 92). Author Maria Edgeworth made a similar comment, that "packing off the young lady without a servant or the common civilities…is quite outrageously…out of nature" (Southam 15). B.C. Southam claims that these comments emanate from the idea "that Generals do not behave like this and it is wrong to suggest that they do" (15). But even if the General's actions are less than perfectly realistic, I would argue that Austen makes this choice to bolster Catherine's accusations. Just like the contemporary reviewers, Catherine has trouble making sense of the transpiring events precisely because General Tilney is "so polite, so well-bred, and heretofore so

particularly fond of her!" (Austen, *NA* 167). The subtext is that such a personality or upbringing is antithetical to incivility, echoing Henry's argument about the restraining power of their country and era. But, not restrained by his background or his country's avowed moral principles, "General Tilney appears to believe that [pledges made to dependents] do not matter and can therefore be flouted without inviting the embarrassments of social reproach which Henry believes… restrain the insolent from abusiveness" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 45). Henry's "neighborhood of voluntary spies" is nowhere to be found when General Tilney shirks all responsibilities as a host. In other words, while the General's actions are "as incomprehensible as [they are] mortifying and grievous" (Austen, *NA* 167), they prove that Catherine's intuition prevails over Henry's reasoning, and that gothic elements exist around us. Yes, Catherine's trek home is shameful, but Austen is also heaping shame on the man who threw her out with no explanation, with none of "the common civilities."

While Austen inarguably paints the General's conduct in a negative light, Butler refutes the idea that his behavior "at least in part vindicates Catherine's intuition. The central piece of evidence cited [for this vindication] is that the General, Montoni-like, turns Catherine out of Northanger Abbey, and thus proves to be a villain after all. But an act of rudeness is not villainy" (178). Austen's word choice, however, makes it quite clear that the General was not just being rude. Writing with free indirect discourse, which blurs the line between the narrator's assessment and Catherine's thoughts, Austen labels the General's decisions "mortifying and grievous." As defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, both adjectives carry associations of bodily harm. Mortification – the act of causing someone to feel humiliated – is derived from classical Latin *mort-* or *mors*, meaning death. As such, mortification's obsolete meanings include "to deprive of life; to kill, put to death," as well as "to destroy or inhibit the vitality, vigour, activity, or potency

of; to neutralize the effect or value of…to deaden (pain), to dull (colour)" ("Mortify"). Therefore, unlike "embarrassing," "mortifying" specifically has strong physical *and* emotional valences, much like Tomkins' affects. "Grievous" has similar connotations, all of which were in use in Austen's time: "Of things, events, accidents, etc.: Bringing serious trouble or discomfort; having injurious effects; causing hurt or pain…Of a disease, wound, or pain: Causing great suffering or danger…Of a fault, crime, sin, etc.: Involving a grave degree of guilt, deserving heavy penalties…Atrocious, flagrant, heinous" ("Grievous"). With these two words, Austen masterfully bridges the gap between the excessive gothic elements and their real-world resonances. To mortify, in this case, is not to cause literal death, but to incite a scorching social pain, to diminish Catherine's sense of self; indeed, the heroine concludes that *she* must have done something "to offend him" (Austen, *NA* 167). In this sense, the obsolete meaning of "mortify" is not so obsolete, after all, just as gothic conventions are not entirely unrealistic and divorced from natural life. Austen thus argues that these supposedly inoperative concepts, thought to be dead, can suddenly come to life, a terrifying resurrection produced by patriarchal villainy.

The General's mortification of Catherine was clearly an "intentional affront," an example of "actual and natural evil" (Austen, *NA* 167). Unlike in the case of the ominous settings and objects, "alarms concerning the central gothic *figure*, the tyrannical father, [Austen] concludes, are commensurate to the threat they actually pose" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 35). Contrary to Butler's stance, the General does not need to murder or physically harm Catherine to be a villain or tyrant, to represent the rot, corruption, and hypocrisy of patriarchy. Those who create and enforce a patriarchal code of ethics – such as hospitality rules that dictate that the General must protect Catherine while she is his guest, or, at the very least, ensure she has a safe journey home

– do not even abide by those ethics. Despite the reactions of contemporary reviewers, the General's treatment of Catherine represents a social evil that, however improbable, is never entirely impossible in a patriarchal society.

If the plot does not sufficiently indicate that, to some extent, Catherine was right about her host and was thus undeserving of Henry's most patronizing lecture, Austen indicates this truth in the narration: "Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel, that in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, nor magnified his cruelty" (*NA* 183). After Henry visits Fullerton to explain the miscommunication, Catherine privately confirms her moral superiority, one of the many instances of "wisdom she unwittingly articulates throughout the novel" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 44). Therefore, gendered shame punctuates *Northanger Abbey*, but, as Austen's irony ensures by the end of the novel, it certainly does not triumph.

## Chapter Two: A Crying Shame

*"All who think deeply & feel much will give the Preference to Mansfield Park"*

*– Mrs. Carrick,* "*Opinions* of Mansfield Park: *Collected and Transcribed by Jane Austen"*

Because Austen declined to sell the copyright of *Mansfield Park* to publisher Thomas Egerton and therefore shouldered the financial risk herself, Fergus concludes that Austen "was prepared to risk an unfavourable response from the reading public" (141). This authorial confidence is understandable given the thirty-eight largely positive "Opinions of Mansfield Park" which Austen transcribed from her conversations and correspondence, as well as the novel's immediate commercial success. In fact, "Austen's family and friends received *Mansfield Park* almost as well as *Pride and Prejudice*," extremely popular at the time, and the first edition of the former sold out more quickly than that of the latter (Fergus 149). Today, however, *Mansfield Park* is by no means as popular as *Pride and Prejudice*. Indeed, in *Those Elegant Decorums* published in 1973, Jane Nardin claims "*Mansfield Park* is at present Jane Austen's most unpopular novel" (82). Fergus calls it "her most controversial work" (145). Johnson notes, "For years, the sobriety of *Mansfield Park* prompted the question, 'What's wrong with Jane Austen?'" (*Jane Austen* 94). It's irrefutable: an "unfavourable response from the reading public" has taken hold.

What accounts for this disparity? Interestingly, Austen's mother's take on the novel reflects the most common modern issue with the text: its protagonist. Austen noted, "My Mother— not liked it so well as P. & P.—Thought Fanny insipid" (Southam 49). Nardin suggests that distaste for *Mansfield Park* has two main sources, Austen's condemnation of play-acting and Fanny Price's insufferable personality. Nardin writes, "Sickly, timid, humorless,

sometimes self-righteous, often very severe in her moral judgments of others, Fanny is generally felt to be a highly unattractive character" (82). Fanny's character – shy, overcritical, physically weak, anxious – feels *unnatural* to us, but contemporary readers, at least those divulging their thoughts to Austen, saw their life in the text. As transcribed by Austen, one Lady Gordon wrote,

> 'In most novels you are amused for the time with a set of Ideal People whom you never think of afterwards or whom you the least expect to meet in common life, whereas in [Austen's] works, & especially in M P. you actually live with them, you fancy yourself one of the family; & the scenes are so exactly descriptive, so perfectly natural, that there is scarcely an Incident or conversation, or a person that you are not inclined to imagine you have at one time or other in your Life been a witness to, born a part in, & been acquainted with.' (Southam 51)

In fact, seven opinions commend Austen on her "natural" rendering of life (Southam 49). Therefore, we must acknowledge that Fanny's personality would not have been nearly as controversial at the time of Austen's writing; for instance, while Fanny's sickly nature is alarming to us, "Turn-of-the-century female conduct books copiously demonstrate that [Fanny's] extreme physical delicacy… is the most conventionally feminine thing about her" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 95). For modern readers, the closest experience we have to being "one of the family" is through Fanny and, to us, her character (in both senses) is simply unimaginable.

As in *Northanger Abbey*, Austen is showcasing the horror of reality and critiquing her society with an irony that often goes undetected. Fergus suggests that "Part of Austen's purpose in writing *Mansfield Park*…is to subject the domesticated social institutions of courtship and marriage to intense ironic scrutiny. Almost everyone agrees that this novel is her most profoundly political work, but so effective is her irony that most readers find the novel difficult" (149). In a very surface-level reading of *Mansfield Park*, one in which the reader becomes bored or frustrated with the protagonist and closes the book, it would be "difficult" to find likability in the moralistic, timorous, and overly modest Fanny, and even harder to comprehend why Austen

would spotlight such a personality – *especially* if one is comparing her to Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet. Such a reading, however, removes Fanny from her context, and thus renders a disservice to the complexities of the text. Such a reading also elides class difference, as Tara Isabella Burton astutely observes in "In Defense of Fanny Price": "The qualities of your typical Austen heroine—charming, forward, quick at learning—are rooted in privilege…And so Fanny is never given the chance to exhibit the qualities of a 'good' Austen heroine; she's told from childhood that she is dull, stupid, and inadequate until she herself internalizes [this view]." By missing Austen's irony, a reader might be tempted to assume that because Fanny has absorbed a moral code means that Austen herself is endorsing that code, rather than examining what might occur when a person from an inferior class status is dependent on social superiors who teach and enforce that moral code.

Johnson argues that a reductive, anti-Fanny reading of *Mansfield Park* represents the mentality of "Janeites," Austen superfans. This stance suggests "that Austen's earlier work is superior because it is frothy; it also implies that her responsibility is to delight us by creating a heroine we would all like to marry" (*Jane Austen* 94). This disappointment is even biographically extrapolated to argue that Austen's failure to craft a likable heroine "reflects a personal crisis, a conversion to evangelicism, a refusal of marriage, a bitter accession to middle age" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 94). Certain critics "contend, with high displeasure, that in *Mansfield Park* Austen turned her back on the health and high spirits of her previous novel and gave her blessing instead to a heroine beleaguered, retiring, and militantly dour" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 94). There is an important distinction between a blessing and a character study, an "exploration of the viewpoint of a heroine ideologically and emotionally identified with the benighted figures who coerce and mislead her" (*Jane Austen* 96). Rather than creating an embittering feminine

crisis, it seems that Austen's experience and success enabled her to embark on this very exploration. And if Austen turned her back on "health," it is to further expose societal ills: as Johnson puts it, "the language of disease permeates *Mansfield Park* [and] the problem is within the great house itself" (*Jane Austen* 96).

Furthering the notion that Austen in some way gives Fanny her blessing, Nardin speculates, "Perhaps Jane Austen's reason for having the narrator…take such a positive view of Fanny is simply that she is well aware of Fanny's unattractive personality traits and…she wishes to prevent the novel's readers from disliking Fanny too violently…" (106). It seems odd to suggest that readers are at risk of disliking Fanny "too violently," particularly given the emotional violence and abuse she faces at the hands of her family members. The idea that readers, too, can partake in the protagonist's bullying – becoming "complicit in the world of *Mansfield Park*" (Burton) – indicates that we must look at the novel in a different way. In a conservative reading of the text, Butler writes, "That Fanny is a failure is widely agreed…Fanny's real task is to excite emulation rather than sympathy—and for this reason the modern reader is justified in rejecting her as the fallible individual she looks like at first sight" (249). While we may not agree with the principles to which Fanny is staunchly committed, *Mansfield Park* begs us to muster sympathy for her situation, to, quite literally, attempt to understand where she is coming from.

Interestingly, *Mansfield Park* "is the first novel belonging exclusively to [Austen's] adulthood" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 95) and the maturity shows in Austen's significant departure from novelistic frothiness and her changing intellectual curiosity. Fergus sees a sharp distinction between Austen's first three and final three novels; in *Mansfield Park, Emma*, and *Persuasion*, Austen became interested in addressing "the complex power relationships between women and a

social world that reduces their options and makes them marginal. She is less interested… in portraying women like Elizabeth Bennet and Catherine Morland who…rather easily triumph over their circumstances – than in rendering the way that women are enmeshed in circumstance" (146). While we might prefer an Elizabeth or a Catherine, Fanny's story is a disturbing one of trauma. To deem her lackluster and dismiss the novel as uneventful is to miss the point. Fanny is central and her shame is key to how we feel about the novel – but, I would argue, we cannot "construe *Mansfield Park*…as a book about Fanny herself" (Burton). As a poor relation and a young woman, Fanny holds a fragile social position that showcases the fraught intersection of gender and class. But this outsider status uniquely allows her to act as a mirror, digesting what she is taught and reflecting it back perfectly, exposing contradictions, hypocrisies, and facades in a way that a true insider never could. As Fanny strains to act as she should even as her teachers abuse their power and break their own rules, Austen accomplishes a critique of the landed gentry by holding it to its own standards.

Unlike the earlier novels, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* did not garner a critical review in Austen's time. According to Southam, "The *British Critic* and the *Critical Review* had noticed the two earlier novels and they might…have been expected to mention the third. But perhaps the editors were doubtful of the novel's appeal. The love and marriage interest was strong in the previous books, and both open on a note of high comedy; whereas what romantic interest there is in *Mansfield Park* is delayed" (9) by the tragic tale of Fanny's youth. Pointing to an apparently unpleasant contradiction in Fanny's portrayal, Nardin asks, "how is one to resolve the apparent disparity between Fanny's status as a personality and her status as a moral agent?" (83). I would propose that there is, in fact, no great disparity to resolve; Fanny's personality *and* morality are products of her childhood. By postponing the

romance and dampening the comedy, Fanny's childhood is precisely what differentiates *Mansfield Park* from Austen's other novels, and therefore must be explored in more depth. In this chapter I will argue that Fanny's relentless shaming, one facet of her extremely traumatic childhood, engenders the personality traits that are now so reviled – her self-deprecation, self-righteousness, and extreme diffidence – and, in her thorough internalization of her childhood teachings, Fanny unwittingly exposes the untenable nature of gentry family values.

Because shame is essential to growth and occurs when any positive affect is impeded, we are all bound to experience it in our childhood and can likely recall monumental moments of shame. The circumstances of our upbringing can easily amplify these instances, as might occur if a child is moved from her home at the age of ten and placed in the care of family members who are determined that she feel lesser than her peers – in this case, her cousins. This is the fate of *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price, Austen's only heroine whose childhood is extensively depicted. In contrast, Catherine's childhood is outlined within the first several pages of *Northanger Abbey* from a distinct emotional distance. The novel's first chapter is a neat exposition that sets the stage for the coming action, almost wrapped up and tied with a bow. In fact, the entire purpose of this description is to convey that Catherine's youth was uneventful, not the beginnings of the typical heroine. The import of Fanny's childhood, on the other hand, cannot be overstated.

*Mansfield Park* opens with the fate of the three Ward sisters, who, after marriage, become Mrs. Price, Mrs. Norris, and Lady Bertram, respectively. By wedding Sir Thomas, Lady Bertram marries well, becoming "a baronet's lady" and gaining a "handsome" estate, Mansfield Park (Austen, *MP* 3). [2] Mrs. Norris marries a man without a fortune, but, under Sir Thomas' auspices, they are able to live at Mansfield's parsonage and receive an income. Unlike her

[2] My in-text citations will refer to *Mansfield Park* as *MP*.

sisters, Mrs. Price "married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections, did it very thoroughly" (*MP* 3). Just as Lady Bertram's marriage could "elevat[e]" her sisters, Mrs. Price's choice brings shame to the family, and Mrs. Norris writes her an angry letter explaining just this (*MP* 3). As the explanatory notes detail, with the "lowest hereditary titled order," "Austen places the Bertram family on the cusp of aristocratic life just as the Prices scrape into the professional middle-class income bracket" (393n), yet their difference in station is vast enough to sever their relationship for some time. About to give birth to her ninth child and in a precarious financial situation, Mrs. Price attempts to mend their friendship.

Mrs. Norris – who has absolutely no intention of personally housing or caring for her niece – compels her sister and brother-in-law to unburden Mrs. Price of her eldest daughter. Notably, this daughter Fanny shares her mother's first name as Mrs. Price is referred to as both Frances and Fanny. While not an unusual naming practice, this detail is also indicative of the shame that young Fanny is inheriting in her relatives' eyes, purely based on her mother's choices. For Sir Thomas, the situation requires remarkable nuance: he wonders "how to preserve in the minds of my *daughters* the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss Bertram*. I should wish to see them very good friends…but still they cannot be equals" (Austen, *MP* 9). This 'together but unequal' arrangement is a recipe for inducing the affect of shame; while the child will have proximity to fortune and material happiness, it will never be truly hers. As her female cousins will "always be different" in "rank, fortune, rights, and expectations," even the prospect of being "good friends" is thwarted by an unending,

unbridgeable power imbalance (*MP* 9). It is therefore significant that we witness Fanny's upbringing, allowing readers to trace personality traits back to her earlier (mis)treatment.

Though there are not necessarily striking moments of shame as in *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma*, mortification and shame are deeply woven into the fabric of *Mansfield Park*. While her cousins attend balls, Fanny's time staying at home with Lady Bertram "was unspeakably welcome to a mind which had seldom known a pause in its alarms or embarrassments" (*MP* 28). As readers, we too are subjected to endless "alarms and embarrassments." No character is spared. And yet, mortification is relative in *Mansfield Park*. This is not to suggest that it is any less powerful when Mr. Rushworth is "mortified and displeased" (*MP* 80) after being snubbed by Maria, but only that characters other than Fanny largely cannot experience the same degree of shame because their stakes are not as high. Fanny's constant shaming makes her feel utterly worthless – "it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to any body! — *Here*, I know I am of none" (*MP* 22) – something other characters do not and will not experience because of their class status.

Tom's reckless behavior is the perfect example of shame being tempered by privilege. As the eldest Bertram brother, Tom is poised to inherit the bulk of his father's wealth, but when Mrs. Norris' husband passes away, their "living" – the parsonage and the income it provides – was meant to pass to Edmund, Tom's younger brother. However, Tom's careless spending prevents this transition, and his father expresses his disappointment: "I blush for you, Tom…You have robbed Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his…" (*MP* 19). In blushing for his son, Sir Thomas implies that he would feel ashamed if he had conducted himself as Tom did, delivering a potentially painful reprimand. If Fanny were met with such an accusation of impropriety, she would inevitably internalize the

charge**,** allowing it to chip away at her self-esteem even further. Tom's reaction is the antithesis of this self-reflection: "Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, 1st, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; 2dly, that his father had made a most tiresome piece of work of it; and 3dly, that the future incumbent [of the parsonage] would, in all probability, die very soon" (*MP* 19). Tom physically gets away from his father, but he also has a *mental* escape from "alarms and embarrassments": his sense of self. His self-assurance acts as armor, allowing only "*some* shame and *some* sorrow" to reach him, and by justifying his actions to himself, he sidesteps the sting of shame.

So, perhaps Tom is just a confident person and Fanny is fundamentally insecure. But was Fanny born timid, self-abasing, and fearful? Or did her difficult circumstances—being plucked from her home and sent away from her beloved brother William, dropped at Mansfield Park, treated cruelly—generate these qualities? After Lady Bertram remarks on Fanny's pleasant appearance as she attends her coming-out ball, Mrs. Norris wonders, "what would she have been if we had not taken her by the hand?" (*MP* 213). Mrs. Norris implies that Fanny would have amounted to nothing if not for Mansfield Park's enhancements, but readers might imagine another meaning: what would Fanny have become if she were not raised to emotionally self-flagellate? While the nature vs. nurture debate cannot be conclusively decided through Fanny Price, there is no denying the impact of the latter. I believe that Fanny's personality is displeasing to readers because her moral steadfastness can read as dry *and* because it is extremely uncomfortable to see her shamers' conditioning at work. While we expect a heroine to fight back and stand up for herself, even if she stumbles – as in Catherine's defense of her suspicions and speculations – Fanny simply cannot, precisely because her personality was

cultivated to please and to always abide by the rules. Her humiliating education, priming her to be viscerally aware of her own social position and the fact that she is "not a *Miss Bertram*," makes her simultaneously self-effacing and judgmental of others.

Immediately establishing that Fanny feels intensely, Austen lends credence to a contemporary reader's suggestion that those who think and feel deeply will most enjoy the novel (Southam 49). Upon her arrival at Mansfield Park, ten-year-old Fanny is "*disheartened* by Lady Bertram's silence, *awed* by Sir Thomas's grave looks, and quite *overcome* by Mrs. Norris's admonitions. Her elder cousins *mortified* her by reflections on her size, and *abashed* her by noticing her shyness; Miss Lee *wondered* at her ignorance, and the maid-servants *sneered* at her clothes…" (Austen, *MP* 12; my emphasis). Through her mixing of active and passive voice, Austen is illustrating that Fanny feels deeply and is also being *made* to feel certain ways by others. The young protagonist faces a simply overwhelming mix of emotions – including mortification which, as discussed in the previous chapter, Austen employs with multiple intense meanings – and an assault on her positive affects from every direction. Fanny's upbringing demonstrates that shame compounds shame; because her cousins "abashed her by noticing her shyness," readers understand that Fanny is innately shy (or perhaps anyone would be under such scrutiny), but the shyness is worsened because it is cruelly highlighted.

Fanny's flustered state – "Afraid of every body, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying" (*MP* 11) – does not seem odd for a frightened child, but, years later, she seems arrested in this space of overwhelming negative affect. Her fear does not subside, her self-shaming only swells, her speech is often stalled because she cannot gain her composure, and so on. The one factor that dissipates is her "longing" for her former home as she ironically learns to love her

new environment, an attachment I will later examine in more depth. Later in the novel, Henry Crawford reveals that he has secured William a promotion in the Navy and attempts to propose to Fanny. Henry "used such strong expressions, was so abounding in the *deepest interest,* in *two-fold motives*, in *views and wishes more than could be told*" (*MP* 235; original emphasis), masterfully communicating, in a clear yet subtle way, exactly what he wants. Fanny has an unwavering answer: "No, no, no,' she cried, hiding her face" (*MP* 236). But her heightened and conflicting emotions – "She was feeling, thinking, trembling, about every thing…agitated, happy, miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry" – preclude her from forming an articulate response (*MP* 236). Embarrassed by the situation, Fanny says, "I can hear no more of this… but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must not listen to such—No, no, don't think of me. But you are *not* thinking of me" (*MP* 236). Interrupting herself and unable to find the right words, Fanny's verbal (in)expression stands in stark contrast with the confidence undergirding the speech of other women in the novel, specifically Mary Crawford. What might account for her prolonged childishness is what Tomkins calls shame-induced "self-fulfilling prophecies" (364). Met with shame when she has spoken up and desperately trying to avoid saying or doing the wrong thing, Fanny speaks very infrequently, and never in her own defense.

In other words, how Fanny speaks is heavily informed by how she is spoken to. From her childhood to her young adulthood, her family berates her with demeaning language. Julia and Maria, the Miss Bertrams, are astounded Fanny "cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia—or she never heard of Asia Minor—or she does not know the difference between water-colours and crayons!" (*MP* 15). Mrs. Norris implores Fanny, "Remember, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last" (*MP* 173). And before leaving for his Antigua property to manage his affairs in the slave trade, Sir Thomas kindly says that he hopes Fanny has the opportunity to see William,

"But he…ended his speech in a way to sink her in sad mortification…" (*MP* 26). Mocking a lack of growth, he says, "I fear he must find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten" (*MP* 26). Sir Thomas' farewell is an emotional rollercoaster as the patriarch opens with kind sentiment, and then, by mortifying Fanny, immediately "destroy[s]" and "inhibit[s] the vitality" he has just created ("Mortify"). A degrading spectacle that undoubtedly impacts her self-perception, this marks one of the many times the Bertrams bring Fanny to tears or to the verge of tears.

It is worth underscoring that Fanny's treatment is not confined to harsh words or mocking laughter. Far beyond verbal insults, the other characters repeatedly (and uncomfortably) survey her body, both to assess her appearance and her labor. In much Austen criticism, Fanny's treatment is framed as discipline, a necessary lesson, so it is helpful to understand early nineteenth-century English disciplinary practices and the intended effects of these practices. In *Centuries of Childhood*, Philippe Ariès details the history of discipline in the English educational system, in which "the eighteenth century…appears as a period of violence and brutality" (265). This "discipline of violence and humiliation," rife with floggings, led to an educational reformation in the 1830s spearheaded by Thomas Arnold (265). Even still, English schools maintained corporal punishment and imbued the practice with new meaning: "if the birch was retained, it was no longer simply as a punishment but above all as an instrument of education, an opportunity for the boy being flogged to exercise self-control, the first duty of the English gentleman" (265). This disciplinary theory enters the novel via Mr. Price; discussing Maria and Henry's affair, he claims, "if she belonged to me, I'd give her the rope's end as long as I could stand over her. A little flogging for man and woman too, would be the best way of preventing such things" (Austen, *MP* 345). According to the teachings of affect theory, corporal punishment

effectively imparts a lesson *because* it is so shameful, a melding of bodily harm and affective response. Therefore, it is understandable that Fanny's body becomes a central site of her shaming – a form of "corporal" punishment — yet not in the conventional sense.

B.C. Southam refers to the novel's opening as "the Cinderella story of Fanny's early life" (9), and, just like the fairytale, Fanny becomes an "unpaid semiservant" (Nardin 92). In fact, when Maria and Julia move out of Mansfield Park, "where is Fanny?' became no uncommon question, *even without her being wanted for any one's convenience*" (Austen, *MP* 160; my emphasis). In one memorable scene, Mrs. Norris accuses her niece of laziness – "That is a very foolish trick, Fanny, to be idling away all the evening upon a sofa" (*MP* 57) – before the "idling" is revealed to be the result of a headache. The headache, her aunts decide, must have been triggered from working outside in "heat [that] was enough to kill any body" (*MP* 59). On this extremely hot day, Mrs. Norris "sat three quarters of an hour in the flower garden, while Fanny cut the roses" (*MP* 57). Her aunts explain that Fanny "found it hot enough, but [the roses] were so full blown, that one could not wait" (*MP* 57), and, to Edmund's horror, Fanny had also walked across the property twice to deliver the roses, driven to exhaustion. Fanny's female cousins would never be asked to serve their mother and aunt through comparable menial labor, psychologically cementing Fanny's inferiority to the point that she sees no injustice in this arrangement.

Along with the dissection of her physical fitness (or lack thereof), Fanny's appearance is subjected to close scrutiny. Upon his return to England, Sir Thomas greets his niece with great affection, and "Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed…he led her nearer the light and looked at her again" (*MP* 139). Afterwards, Edmund reiterates his father's pleasure with Fanny's physical improvements: "Ask your uncle what he thinks, and you

will hear compliments enough; and though they may be chiefly on your person, you must put up with it, and trust to his seeing as much beauty of mind in time" (*MP* 154). Modern readers might be taken aback, uneasy that Fanny needs to tolerate her uncle discussing and complimenting her body, but Fanny is equally unsettled: "Such language was so new to Fanny that it quite embarrassed her" (*MP* 154). The narrator implies that Fanny will adjust to this "language" with time but, seeing as Fanny's biggest fears are "doing wrong and being looked at" (*MP* 209), it seems unlikely that being closely examined will ever become less mortifying.

All of this cruelty begs the question, how did Fanny survive her upbringing? While affects are often spurred by "close interpersonal relationships" (Tomkins 391), one can also form affective attachments "[to] institutions, and [to] the world around him" (Tomkins 407). Austen explores affective investments in place in *Mansfield Park*. Perversely, as she is subjected to unremitting shame by the inhabitants of the house, Fanny forms positive attachments to the house itself. After Fanny expresses that she does not want to act in *Lovers' Vows*, Mrs. Norris deems her a "very obstinate, ungrateful girl…considering who and what she is" (Austen, *MP* 116). Because "She could go there after any thing unpleasant…and find immediate consolation," Fanny retreats to her bedroom, the East room, a space that "nobody else wanted" (*MP* 119). She takes comfort in "Her plants, her books….her writing desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity" (*MP* 119); forged through the negative affect of shame, Fanny's positive attachment to her possessions and space initially seems encouraging, as if she has a sanctuary from her hardship. A closer examination, however, reveals that Fanny's room is an emblem of trauma rather than pure refuge:

> Every thing was a friend, or bore her thoughts to a friend; and though there had been sometimes much of suffering to her—though her motives had been often misunderstood, her feelings disregarded, and her comprehension [undervalued]; though she had known the pains of tyranny, of ridicule, and neglect, yet almost every recurrence of either had

> led to something consolatory; her aunt Bertram had spoken for her, or Miss Lee had been encouraging, or what was yet more frequent or more dear—Edmund had been her champion and her friend; —he had supported her cause, or explained her meaning, he had told her not to cry, or had given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful—and the whole was now so blended together, so harmonized by distance, that every former affliction had its charm. (Austen, *MP* 119)

It is clear that Fanny copes by "blend[ing]" the good and bad of her life. Although Lady Bertram shames Fanny, she sometimes defends her. Despite once "wonder[ing] at [Fanny's] ignorance" (*MP* 12), Miss Lee can also be supportive. Even Fanny's tears, the physical display of her emotion, fluctuate between being sorrowful and "delightful." Though Fanny had "sometimes much of suffering," these occasional instances of kindness are seemingly sufficient compensation.

But Austen does not let Fanny's suffering speak for itself, complicating the reader's understanding of the East room through diction and syntax. While "sometimes" lessens the suffering, "much" heightens it again, as if resisting Fanny's impulse to minimize her own trauma, and the repetition of "though" dismantles Fanny's feeling of solace. Fanny is "misunderstood," "disregarded," and "undervalued," and she knows pains of "tyranny," "ridicule," and "neglect." In "the whole" being "so blended together," Fanny can assuage her pain with happy memories, unable to dwell on the suffering. But conversely, Austen implies, kindness is equally tainted by Fanny's mistreatment. As I will address, even Edmund, her closest ally at Mansfield Park, can betray her, but these "friends" never will. It is not as if Fanny's beloved places and anthropomorphic objects are personal pleasures disconnected from her abusers; on the contrary, they are *reminders* of her abusers, intimately tied to her hurt and pain. As a result, it is deeply disturbing that she finds the East room endearing, that "every former affliction had its charm." Because her feelings for the East room are easily extended to the entirety of Mansfield Park, "dear to her heart, and…thoroughly perfect" (*MP* 372), Fanny

becomes the immovable object who never leaves the estate. She does not experience a "victory" (Butler 248) over her tormenters, but she survives her circumstances by turning her pain into charm. One gets the sense that any other approach, any futile resistance to her years of suffering, would have been simply unbearable.

Even in light of the harrowing words and deeds that drive Fanny to love the physical environment of Mansfield Park, some scholars assert that there is a trade-off of sorts, whereby Fanny is subjected to brutality and emerges stronger for it, showcasing the endurance that Butler believes "excite[s] emulation." In "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," Sedgwick quotes Nardin's "Children and Their Families in Jane Austen's Novels," in which Nardin writes,

> '…excessive discipline, though it causes suffering and creates some problems for Fanny and Susan Price, does indeed make them into hard-working, extremely conscientious women. The timidity and self-doubt which characterize Fanny, and which are a response to continual censure, seem a reasonable price to pay for the strong conscience that even the unfair discipline she received has nurtured in her' (Sedgwick 834)

If Fanny *needed* to pay this price to gain a strong conscience – although reframing "unfair discipline" as abuse instantly weakens this argument's premise – then victimhood is her only path to strength. On the receiving end of this humiliating discipline, Fanny is acted upon; she is not an agent in her right. As Sedgwick responds, "Nardin is remarkably unworried about any possible excess of severity" (834). Certainly, a complete lack of self-worth is more than "some problems." Rather than a crucible in which an independent "strong conscience" is forged, Fanny's "excessive discipline" conditions her into a restrictive, faithful obedience.

Extending Nardin's logic to its natural conclusion, Fanny should be appreciative for all she endured; however, the insidious side of gratitude plagues *Mansfield Park*. Repeatedly reminded that she must be grateful for all aspects of her new life, Fanny develops an omnipresent anxiety over what she does not naturally feel. This compelled gratitude uniquely displays the

intersection of class and gender expectations. While "Fanny is considered extremely lucky to be taken on as… a poor relation at Mansfield Park" (Nardin 92) and must act accordingly or risk being sent away at any moment, Mary Crawford believes Fanny will make "a sweet little wife; all gratitude and devotion" (Austen, *MP* 229). Gratitude is a requirement for all social inferiors; "in contrast to conservative writers such as West, More and Edgeworth, Austen explores the sinister aspects of benevolence and the burden of gratitude it places on a recipient" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 107). For instance, after a day spent at Sotherton, Mrs. Norris declares, "Well, Fanny, this has been a fine day for you…Nothing but pleasure from beginning to end! I am sure you ought to be very much obliged to your aunt Bertram and me, for contriving to let you go" (Austen, *MP* 83). As the outing is miserable for Fanny, left alone for extended periods of time and excluded from the central action, Austen's irony is unmistakable. Further, as Fanny's labor is so indispensable, she is replaced by her sister at *Mansfield Park*'s conclusion. The burden of gratitude is thereby passed on, creating a cycle of lower-class young women happily tending to every need of a gentry family: "Susan remained to supply her place.—Susan became the stationary niece—delighted to be so!—and equally well adapted for it by…an inclination for usefulness, as Fanny had been by sweetness of temper, and strong feelings of gratitude" (*MP* 371).

Perhaps more than any other emotion, gratitude (and Fanny's struggle to muster it) incites self-shaming. Fanny's relief from Sir Thomas' lengthy absence "and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins', but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve… [her failure to shed a tear] was a shameful insensibility'" (*MP* 26). Undeniably, Fanny's self-abasing posture ensures that shame is a part of her daily life; even without an unkind word being uttered, she is sufficiently

conditioned by the dictates of gentry morality to chastise herself at every turn. As Tomkins notes, "It does not matter whether the humiliated one has been shamed by derisive laughter or whether he mocks *himself*. In either event he feels himself naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth" (351; my emphasis). Far from being her own advocate, Fanny has been raised to be her biggest detractor. Though perhaps not their intention, the Bertrams can only delight at this form of self-policing, as it means that Fanny does their disciplinary work for them.

Aside from her self-critical thoughts, Fanny's abundant humiliation is evident through her physical shame response, particularly the blush. Along with averting one's eyes and covering one's face, the paradox of the shame response is that it very clearly betrays one's shame, a "self-defeating" measure, and "when the face blushes, shame is compounded. And so it happens that one is ashamed of being ashamed as of anything else" (Tomkins 360). In "The Blush of Modesty or The Blush Of Shame? Reading Jane Austen's Blushes," Katie Halsey investigates the gendered dimensions of blushing, especially as blushes can attest to feminine modesty *or* betray one's shame and guilt. Halsey explains, "By the time Austen published her first novel in 1811, the innocent blush…had long been established as a convenient…shorthand, by both eighteenth-century moral writers and novelists" (5). In the case of modesty, the "innocent blush" allows women to express genuine emotion "that the lips may be denied from uttering" (Halsey 4). As Halsey argues, however, the blush is still a signal that has to be read and is often misinterpreted by characters.

Because readers have a window into both characters' thoughts and appearances, we have unique insight into a blush's meaning. Fanny thinks far more than she speaks, so "we [as readers] are generally close enough to what Fanny has been feeling or thinking to interpret her colour better than [those] around her" (Halsey 5). Professing the evils of play-acting, "Fanny, averting

her face, said with a firmer tone than usual, 'As far as *I* am concerned, I would not have delayed [Sir Thomas'] return for a day…in my opinion, everything had gone quite far enough.' She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to any one; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed" (Austen, *MP* 177). Readers know that Fanny blushes from being embarrassed by "her own daring" (*MP* 177), but Henry sees only "decided beauty" (*MP* 179), an improved maturity rather than shame and fear.

Just as characters must decipher the valences of the female blush, *Mansfield Park*'s men must speculate about women's feelings when modesty dictates that they remain silent. Inquiring about Maria's willingness to marry Mr. Rushworth, Sir Thomas is not oblivious; he knows "Her behaviour to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold" (*MP* 157). He supposes that "She could not, did not like him" (*MP* 156). And yet "it was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain" (*MP* 157), so, reasoning away his daughter's potential unhappiness, he was "happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture" (*MP* 157). Of course, approving this loveless match, as the plot eventually reveals, leads to the deeper, more "embarrassing [evil]" of adultery. However, had Maria and Henry's affair never occurred, it is unlikely Sir Thomas would ever give another thought to his daughter's marital joy, selfishly occupied with staving off his own social shame. If Austen were straightforwardly endorsing the conservative ethos, patriarchal wisdom would reign supreme in *Mansfield Park*, going unquestioned. However, "*Mansfield Park* never permits paternalistic discourse completely to conceal or to mystify ugly facts about power" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 102). One such ugly fact is the pretense of choice for women, made clear by the actual absence of choice, as in Maria's marriage.

Fanny also lives in this Sir Thomas-knows-best climate, and, for the majority of *Mansfield Park*, she wholeheartedly submits to his authority. After she tires from dancing at her

coming-out ball, “Sir Thomas was again interfering a little with her inclination, by advising her to go immediately to bed. ‘Advise’ was his word, but it was the advice of absolute power” (Austen, *MP* 220). After cluing us in to the patriarch’s true (and disturbing) meaning, the narrator proceeds to question his motives: “Sir Thomas perhaps might not be thinking merely of her health. It might occur to him, that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness” (*MP* 220). Fanny’s unsuspecting obedience is clearly a feminine asset – just like her “gratitude and devotion” – that has been bred through her treatment at Mansfield Park. But as Johnson notes, this “persuadableness” is a fantasy because “the option of dissent which persuasion implies is not available to Fanny here or elsewhere” (*Jane Austen* 102). Whenever Fanny forms a dissenting thought, she assumes that she is wrong and amends her thinking. As opposed to Catherine’s heightened suspicion of patriarchal authority, Fanny is far too trusting, firmly believing “that guardians will think for and of her, only to discover instead that they are too full of their own, invariably wrong-headed, plans to think much about her at all. When she finds herself neglected or abused, then, she has no other recourse than to consider herself somehow at fault for having nursed an implausible sense of consequence” (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 103). Of course, she trusts their guardianship and their advice; as established, she is constantly made aware that she is exceptionally lucky to be in the Bertrams’ care.

If patriarchal authority is truly absolute power and female choice is merely a mirage, both laid bare by *Mansfield Park*, the family’s only saving grace would be the moral uprightness and benevolence of the patriarch. Unfortunately for the Bertrams, Sir Thomas is consistent only in his selfishness, revealing the threat of patriarchal tyranny supported by gentry ideals. Filling the brotherly void in Fanny’s heart, her cousin Edmund plays a crucial role in raising Fanny and

teaching her how to think: he "formed her mind and gained her affections" (Austen, *MP* 51). This closeness means "he had a good chance of her thinking like him" (*MP* 51) and they often make the same moral judgments. When Tom, Mr. Yates, Maria, Julia, Mr. Rushworth and the Crawfords decide to put on the play *Lovers' Vows*, it soon becomes clear that the activity allows the actors to do and say what would otherwise be explicitly improper. Edmund instantly bristles at the idea of Maria, engaged to Mr. Rushworth, taking part in such behavior and he asks, "But what do you do for women?" (*MP* 110). However, when Mary Crawford, his love interest, expresses the intent to act, "Maria gave Edmund a glance, which meant, 'What say you now? Can we be wrong if Mary Crawford feels the same?"' (*MP* 102). Edmund mentally "was obliged to acknowledge that the charm of acting might well carry fascination to the mind of genius" (*MP* 102). Though a humorous moment, herein lies the crux of *Mansfield Park*'s ideological argument. To Fanny, what is right and wrong is virtually written in stone, and to err within this binary could mean falling out of the good graces of the family that shelters, clothes and feeds her. Conversely, to the figures emboldened by their class privilege and the "absolute power" of patriarchy, moral fluctuation occurs with frightening ease.

Indeed, Edmund eventually takes a role in the play, despite "absolutely protest[ing] against" acting (*MP* 101), plunging Fanny into confused misery. She thinks, "To be acting! After all his objections—objections so just and so public!...Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong?" (*MP* 123). Valuing Edmund's virtue and perplexed by his change of heart, Fanny still does not make a decisive statement about Edmund's morality, expressing her reproach through the internal questions of free indirect discourse. When Mrs. Grant, the Crawfords' sister, cannot attend a rehearsal, Edmund even joins the others in pressuring Fanny to take Mrs. Grant's place: "Do Fanny, if it is not *very*

disagreeable to you" (*MP* 135; original emphasis). Again, presented with a choice that is not truly a choice, Fanny could conceivably be angry with Edmund, but she instead blames herself for attending in the first place. She frantically wonders, "Why had not she rather gone to her own room, as she had felt to be safest, instead of attending the rehearsal at all? She had known it would irritate and distress her—she had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished" (*MP* 135). In Fanny's eyes, she is rightfully disciplined for her mere proximity to wrongdoing.

If Sir Thomas and Edmund actually practiced what they preached, Edmund would not act or compel Fanny to act in *Lovers' Vows*, and neither would attempt to convince her to marry Henry. Working as they should, rules of female decorum "[render] women so quiescent and tractable that they sweetly serve in the designs of fathers or guardians without wishing to resist and without noting that they have no choice. In most of Austen's [other] novels, of course, fathers are not inclined to tyranny, nor are daughters trained to such ductility…" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 103). Austen conspicuously showcases the impossibility of these codes through the juxtaposition of the selfish rule of Sir Thomas and Fanny's perfect modeling of propriety. These elements of conservative thinking cannot reasonably coexist. To be the perfectly modest daughter, Fanny must live by Sir Thomas' conception of morality, yet, acting in his own interests, Sir Thomas has no problem shaming Fanny into betraying her ethics. Fanny is placed in an impossible position, made more hazardous given her class position: to obey is to disobey. Fanny is so "quiescent and tractable" that she has perfectly internalized everything that she has been taught; she has been influenced *so* thoroughly, in fact, that she cannot bend to accommodate selfish exceptions. And so the system of female manners, meant to hold society

together, falls apart. If Fanny assented to Sir Thomas' designs with no resistance, she would marry a man who, by Sir Thomas' standard, has compromised female manners and modesty.

When Henry Crawford proposes, Fanny rejects him because she has watched him act improperly (literally and figuratively) with the engaged Maria and watched him cause Julia's suffering. It is obvious: in Fanny's mind, formed by codes of propriety, Henry is no proper match, no matter his wealth or status. Butler suggests that "Unquestionably Jane Austen expects us to see the play as a step in Maria Bertram's road to ruin" (232), but, to Fanny, it is naturally part of Henry's road as well. When Sir Thomas arrives, Henry "retain[s] [Maria's] hand" as they walk off together, a pivotal moment in which acting very obviously yields to reality. These two actions alone demonstrate how both Henry and Maria are complicit in what Burton calls "quasi-adulterous" behavior, long before they actually commit adultery. While Fanny blames both parties equally, Edmund misogynistically shames his sisters. Though Sir Thomas is not aware of the extent of Henry's misconduct, as I will discuss momentarily, Edmund has presumably witnessed everything Fanny has. Austen has led us to believe that they have identical minds, but the teacher and pupil diverge when it matters most. Defending her rejection of Henry to Edmund, Fanny cites the fact that Julia thought Henry "was paying her attentions" (Austen, *MP* 274), manipulating her emotions. Edmund, perhaps willfully, misses her point, and speaks to *Henry*'s emotions: "I have heard before from some one of his being in love with Julia, but I could never see anything of it…I think it very possible that they might…be more desirous of being admired by Crawford, and might shew that desire rather more unguardedly than was perfectly prudent…it is clear that he had no pretensions" (*MP* 274). Cautiously implying that his sisters seduced Henry, portraying him as acted upon rather than the actor, Edmund implicitly reasons that female

immodesty *excuses* male impropriety. Fanny is "persuaded that [Henry] does not think as he ought, on serious subjects" (*MP* 275), and she will not be dissuaded.

Beseeching Fanny to accept the proposal, Sir Thomas and Edmund are entirely shocked by her reaction, feeling it to be out of character. When Mary Crawford tries the same persuasion, Fanny "escape[s] without reproaches" (*MP* 286), but Fanny does not have such luck with her uncle and cousin. Sir Thomas particularly upbraids her, dealing what he knows to be a devastating blow by sharing his profound dismay: "you have disappointed every expectation I had formed…I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit… [and] independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days… and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence…You think only of yourself" (*MP* 249). Austen's irony is, again, clear as day. Sir Thomas thinks only of himself and cares chiefly about wealth and status. Fanny had hoped that "to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled *dislike* on her side, would have been sufficient" (*MP* 248), but she is wrong, partly because her guardian is nowhere near as honorable as she imagines. Further, Fanny is precisely thinking of and protecting others; Julia and Maria were "so closely implicated in Mr. Crawford's misconduct, that she could not give his character…without betraying them" (*MP* 248). With Fanny's face "like scarlet" (*MP* 247), trying to "harden…herself" so as not to reveal her feelings for Edmund or any information about the Miss Bertrams, this represents a critical instance in which we are more privy than Sir Thomas to Fanny's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, at this moment, the reader, more than anyone in the novel, can best empathize, understanding the ultimate moral rectitude of Fanny's rejection of Henry.

Austen does much to undercut Fanny's love for her bullies, but her affection never fades. When Maria and Julia move to Sotherton, Fanny "wandered about the house, and thought of them, and felt for them, with a degree of affectionate regret which they had never done much to deserve!" (*MP* 160). Earlier, just as Sir Thomas reassesses Fanny's appearance, Fanny summons just enough courage to look at him, noticing on his face "the burnt, fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate" (*MP* 139). This reminds readers that Sir Thomas' source of income, and privilege, is the slave trade. It is Fanny's unwavering respect for the Bertrams and their values that leaves her so appalled when they blithely break their own rules and ask her to do the same. In this way, Fanny acts as a magnifying glass held up to the problems of gentry principles, but the shame embedded in her formative years, instilling a lifetime of inflated gratitude, means that she herself can never escape them. Crucially, she does not *want* to leave. The story ends with Fanny and Edmund married, moving to the parsonage at Mansfield Park. Though some scholars point to Fanny's "eventual [moral] victory" (Butler 248), there is an alternative sense of Fanny's imprisonment within the impossible contradictions of conservative mythology.

An intriguing effect of Fanny's shame-inducing education is the hegemony evident in her censure of Mary Crawford's shamelessness. Otis defines hegemony as "cultural practices through which the most powerful members of a society instill their worldview by teaching people to oppress themselves" (4). As discussed, Fanny has undoubtedly been conditioned to police her own thoughts and actions. Because patriarchy extracts value in pitting women against each other, Fanny's severely judgmental nature, engendered by her shaming, is also, notably, often directed at other women. Antithetical to Fanny's moral stature, Mary Crawford's personality is best emblematized by her unforgettably shameless inquiry, "What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?" (Austen, *MP* 113). This question stuns

the Mansfield Park residents into silence, and her uninhibited speech "poses the temptation of sexuality as well as the threat of social disorder" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 110). As such, it cannot be tolerated by Edmund and, by extension, Fanny. Nardin posits that "Fanny's resentment and jealousy lead her to be consistently unfair to the kindly and affectionate, if ill-principled, Mary Crawford" (107), but in addition to pure jealousy, Fanny also cannot fathom a woman behaving in this way. The one form of pseudo-power Fanny holds is her ability to criticize and shame Mary from a distance – "she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished… [it was] very ungrateful I think" (Austen, *MP* 50) – knowing that Mary has no regard for propriety. Mary is thus vilified for seducing and influencing others, and Fanny concludes that Edmund partaking in the play **"**was all Miss Crawford's doing" (*MP* 123). Displacing accountability for his affection, Edmund later declares that he was, in essence, spellbound and "the charm is broken. My eyes are opened" (*MP* 358). And yet, with wealth, "worldliness, [and a] willingness to transgress ostensible taboos" (Burton), Mary becomes a point of reference for Fanny's constraints. One woman is truly free because she can afford to feel no shame, and the other lives under the looming specter of mortifying disapproval. After Mary becomes a close companion for some time, Fanny concludes that she is "careless as a woman and as a friend" (Austen, *MP* 204). As I will examine, Austen's fascination with the idea of the "careless…woman" persisted and, one year after completing *Mansfield Park*, the author delved deeper into the liberating nature of shamelessness.

## Chapter Three: Shameless, Clever, and Rich

> **"***To many of this novel's most distinguished critics, Emma's want of feminine softness and compliancy is her most salient and most grievous shortcoming...[T]hough [one critic] complains that Emma 'plays God,' what he really means is that she plays man…"*
>
> *– Claudia L. Johnson, Jane Austen: Women Politics, and the Novel*

*Emma* includes a moment in which Austen strikingly writes in the language of Sedgwick's Girl Being Taught a Lesson. Had Sedgwick's essay existed in Austen's time, readers might have assumed the novel was making an allusion. Disappointing to the critics whom Sedgwick lambasts, however, the someone who "ought to be taught" is not the titular heroine, but a whole family, people on the margins of the story. Furthermore, the shamer is not a lecturing male, but Emma herself. While "The Coles were very respectable in their way… they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which the superior families would visit them. This lesson, [Emma] very much feared, they would receive only from herself" (Austen, *E* 163).[3] Fergus calls *Emma* "a great departure from the prior work" (151), *Mansfield Park*, but this is not entirely the case. Through *Emma*, the novel and its heroine, Austen continues investigating how female power and shamelessness manifest in a patriarchal society. Here, planning to impart a social lesson to an increasingly powerful family, Emma displays her vast privilege: she can (and does) inhabit the role of the shamer.

Though *Emma* "received more reviews than any other novel [Austen] wrote, most of them favourable," the critical attention did not match the copies sold (Fergus 159). Completed in "only 14 months," *Emma* was composed during what is now considered "the height of [Austen's] genius" (Fergus 156; Johnson, *Jane Austen* 126). Butler deems *Emma* "easily the

[3] My in-text citations will refer to *Emma* as *E.*

most brilliant novel of the period, and one of the most brilliant of all English novels" (274). Austen's genius in her depiction of female power is now widely agreed upon, but what specifically makes *Emma* so successful—its subversiveness or conformity? —is still contentious. Certainly, Walter Scott's 1815 review of *Emma* in the *Quarterly Review*, which was "the longest and best that Austen received in her lifetime" (Fergus 158), underscores Emma's power: Emma chooses to matchmake for others rather than herself, "either anticipating the taste of a later period of life, or, like a good sovereign, preferring the weal of her subjects of Highbury to her own private interest…" (Southam 69). Interestingly, *Emma* is dedicated to another ruler, to "His Royal Highness the Prince Regent," George IV (Austen, *E*). Austen despised the Prince Regent due to reports of his infidelity – she wrote, "'I shall support [the Princess of Wales] as long as I can, because she is a Woman, & because I hate her Husband'" (Fergus 160) – but she was obligated to dedicate the novel to him. Accordingly, "She…wrote the briefest possible dedication…and she [sent] an expensively bound copy to the Regent, who took no notice of it or the dedication and certainly sent no money" (Fergus 161). In light of Austen's disgust, "the inscription of a novel predominated by female power can conceivably look more like an act of quiet cheek than of humble submission" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 126). Yet, like any power, *Emma*'s female power is not explicitly "good," causing scholars to question if the heroine's unconventionality reaffirms or disputes beliefs about female authority.

As the title implies, "*Emma*… is more completely a novel about its heroine and her problems than any of Jane Austen's others…" (Nardin 116). Emma's "problems" are two-fold: the problems that arise in her daily life, and the problems in her character, the latter sometimes causing the former. Austen certainly anticipated readers complaining of character flaws; before writing *Emma,* the author allegedly said "'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself

will much like'" (Austen-Leigh 119). This famous statement, Johnson asserts, "has been treated more as an invitation to search out what is objectionable about Emma [rather] than as a calculated challenge to the judgments of her audience, for the criticism of Emma is freighted with alarming animosities" (*Jane Austen* 122). As I will explore, these animosities clearly "derive from a profound discomfort with female authority" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 122).

To understand this discomfort and refute these animosities, one must first grasp the uniqueness of Emma's social situation. *Northanger Abbey* opens with Catherine's mundanity, *Mansfield Park* with Fanny's lowly beginnings, and *Emma* with the heroine's remarkable milieu: "Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her" (Austen, *E* 5). Fergus notes, "The importance of a home for a single woman is insisted upon – but its unlikelihood is made clear" (155) through the comparative situations of other single women, namely Harriet Smith, Miss Bates, and Jane Fairfax. In Highbury, the "Woodhouses were first in consequence…All looked up to them" (Austen, *E* 7). The family "had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family" (*E* 108). Within the "comfortable home" of Hartfield, Emma is essentially head of household; her mother has passed away, and her father is a "valetudinarian" (*E* 6), truly concerned, above all else, with his health. While her love for her father is traditional, his "intellectual, physical, and even moral frailty" is not, necessitating "a dependence upon female strength, activity, and good judgment" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 124). As mistress of Hartfield, Emma, fortunately, is up to the task. Arguably more valuable than any other privilege is Emma's ability "to say, as no other Austen heroine does, that she is immune to courtship, to love and marriage" (Fergus 155). Aside from the freedom this affords her, this

privilege both forms and reflects Emma's sense of self. As Johnson detects, "Emma does not think of herself as an incomplete or contingent being whose destiny is to be determined by the generous or blackguardly actions a man will make towards her" (*Jane Austen* 124).

Emma is not in *need* of anything—pointedly, that includes marriage. Running through a list of the reasons that women want to marry, Emma finds nothing that pertains to her: "Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield" (Austen, *E* 68). Her situation is already striking. Catherine lacks fortune. Fanny lacks consequence. They both need marriage. Emma does not even need advice, much less the advice of absolute power; she is "not very well pleased with her brother[-in-law] for imagining her blind and ignorant, and in want of counsel" (*E* 89). The only outstanding reason to marry would be for one's happiness, and, in considering Frank Churchill, Emma decides "that he is not really necessary to my happiness. So much the better. I certainly will not persuade myself to feel more than I do" (*E* 207).

Though it is undeniable that she has far more power and far less constraint than any of Austen's other female characters, Emma's position at Hartfield still "combines power with constraint" as she is "her father's keeper" (Fergus 155). In Fergus' view, Emma is "seldom given credit for her better management of her father and Hartfield. She has more real work to do than other Austen heroines, and she does it well, almost effortlessly" (155). Fergus feels the need to give credit here to counteract the censure of Emma's less successful endeavors, namely her interference in Harriet Smith's life. From the start of the novel, Mr. Knightley, an old friend of the Woodhouse family, decries Emma's meddling, leading many readers to view him as the novel's voice of reason. The scholarship on Austen has often discussed Knightley's opprobrium

and his role as Emma's lecturer. While important, I intend to redirect the focus chiefly to Austen's treatment of Emma's relationships with women, all her social inferiors. These factors are closely related. Knightley's "lessons" typically regard Emma's treatment of other women; he disapproves of her matchmaking for Harriet, he is disappointed in her opinions of Jane Fairfax, and, most importantly, he (perhaps excessively) condemns her treatment of Miss Bates at Box Hill.

There is no arguing that Emma, emboldened by her class status, sometimes wields her immense power clumsily. But, to put it plainly, what else are readers to expect? With the likes of General Tilney and Sir Thomas in mind, Austen has demonstrated that wealthy men are apt to abuse their status, make mistakes, and bend the rules. And these men are *accustomed* to their elevated position. Knightley jokingly tells Emma, "I have still the advantage of you by sixteen years' experience…" (Austen, *E* 79). Though sixteen years Emma's senior, Knightley's experiential "advantage" also includes centuries of inherited patriarchal wisdom. "In the absence of any social superiors" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 127), Emma has no true model for her power. Deeply invested in highlighting Emma's fallibility and ignoring Knightley's, Mudrick extols Knightley in *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* as "a man of integrity, of force, wit, and high sense, and— we suspect—rather too good for Emma; but this is just a suspicion" (184). At the risk of sounding like Henry Tilney, I must note that Mudrick's suspicions are unfounded. If Knightley is "too good" for Emma, it is only because his job is easier: his societal position does not entail oxymoron. I argue that the uniqueness of Emma's position – she possesses power over others due to her class status, while remaining vulnerable to heightened scrutiny due to her gender – means the mistress of Hartfield must carefully navigate a world where she is criticized more (and more unfairly) than male counterparts for lesser offenses.

If not as a barometer by which to measure Knightley's greatness, why *does* Austen position Emma as she does? The short answer is freedom. Fergus suggests that "This unconventional, almost androgynous, choice of heroine permits Austen a much sharper look at women's options within society than she can take in any other novel. Because her heroine is so secure, nearly as secure as a rich man, Austen is free to explore issues of women's power and marginality more profoundly than she had in earlier novels without destroying a comic tone" (153). Butler sees it differently: "Austen's purpose in giving [Emma] an exceptionally unfettered social position is rather to leave her free to act out her wilful errors, for which she must take entire moral responsibility" (251). The freer Emma is, the more she can err, and the larger the eventual moral reckoning she must face. Butler highlights a popular theory that "Emma's mistakes themselves are what make her lovable; that they represent an inspired, intuitive grasping after a higher truth than Knightley's" (266), much like the truth that emerges through Catherine's "mistaken" gothic expectations. Rebutting this position, Butler claims this is not the case because Emma's mistakes arise from her initial refusal to submit to "the honest, searching criticism of a friend" (266), a moral flaw that she needs to resolve.

Alternatively, I will argue that Emma's mistakes do not illuminate profound truths purely because, ultimately, her mistakes are not unique or out of the ordinary. While Catherine has the moral high ground in her allegations, Emma is *wrong* to abuse her influence over Harriet, to mock Miss Bates, to spread rumors about Jane. How wrong, however, is another question entirely. Her errors are not a result of misguided female power, of "prejudices and cruelties" (Mudrick 184) that can only be reined in by the moral instruction of Knightley. She does nothing that a similarly powerful man would not do. While Emma's mistakes may not be enlightening, the *reactions* to her mistakes reveal deep-seated gender bias. To combat critical

misinterpretation, this chapter will examine how both *Emma*'s characters and critics too often hand down a shaming sentence that is disproportionate to the heroine's crimes.

Critics find many faults in Emma's character, some more justified than others, calling her meddling, controlling, egotistical, cold, snobbish, selfish. Emma has even been considered rude for refusing Mr. Elton's "inebriated proposal," a characterization which, Johnson suggests, "is scraping the bottom of the barrel indeed" (*Jane Austen* 128). Mudrick posits, "We sympathize with Emma because she *must* fall in love, and we are relaxed because we know that she will" (182). Before Emma can marry Knightley, Mooneyham argues, she must "ma[k]e his values her own, until she hears his voice of conscience from within" (107). For a heroine with an "unfettered social position," Emma is remarkably constrained by what readers expect of her, what she *must* do to ensure readers' comfort with her authority. In light of her supposedly endless faults, how can so "many readers [find] her attractive…as attractive, indeed, as any heroine in fiction" (Butler 266)? Though never "bothering to demur about" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 125) her power or her blessings, Emma *is* "more intelligent, lovely, and accomplished than most of her friends and neighbors" (Nardin 110). Emma's "sense of the privileges and duties attached to her station is legitimate" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 127). Readers must reconcile the good and the bad, yet also should interrogate if they are merely magnifying the bad because of Emma's gender. When Mudrick calls Emma "snobbish…wilful, possessive" (184), we are reminded of the feminine connotations of "bossy" as contrasted with the masculinity of "assertive." In 2014, Sheryl Sandberg called bossy "the other B-word," arguing that "bossy" has been imbued with harmful, gendered meaning (Peralta). In the same vein, rather than egotistical and controlling, we might reimagine Emma as (rightfully) self-confident and authoritative**.**

Emma's superior station means that the novel is not "anarchistic and egalitarian" as *Emma* "fundamentally accept[s] English class structure, and…discriminate[s] positive authority figures" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 126). Yet, unlike the conservative novel, *Emma* accepts "a hierarchical social structure not because it is a sacred dictate of patriarchy—*Mansfield Park* had spoiled this—but rather because within its parameters *class can actually supersede sex*" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 127; my emphasis). Within the confines of her society, Austen's only means of drawing a "natural" image of female power is through class superiority. Johnson writes:

> *Emma* recuperates a world Austen savages in novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, in order to explore what was precluded in those novels, the place such a world can afford to women with authority. Though it may favor male rule, the social system sustained in *Emma* recognizes the propriety of female rule as well, and it is to this system that Emma…owes her preeminence. (*Jane Austen* 127)

The same hierarchical system that affords Emma relative impunity harms other women, a fact that is hard to accept for those who admire the heroine. Class stratification has unfortunate consequences (as in the precarity of Jane Fairfax's situation), but it endows Emma with unmatched agency and a lofty perch from which she, and consequently Austen, can sit "musing on the difference of woman's destiny" (Austen, *E* 302).

While class allows Emma to circumvent certain machinations of patriarchy, she perversely cannot escape the scorn of critics who are convinced that she is "getting away with" something by evading shame. Firmly convinced that she dodges a necessary lesson, these critics attempt to exact it. Nardin argues that, by the end of the novel, "Emma has come a long way" (128), but this sentence's brevity belies its contentiousness. Without naming names, Johnson reports that "One recent critic has…complained that Emma's humiliation is too brief and too private, and that she is never vigorously 'punished' for her wrongdoing; and many readers have

been troubled that Emma shows no sign of 'reform' by the end of the novel" (*Jane Austen* 127). As "we tend to read Austen's novels…as dramas of moral correction— where Marianne is properly punished for impetuosity, Elizabeth for her prejudice (and so on)—Emma's power is generally presented as the problem she must overcome…" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 127). If Emma's moral fault is her own power, which never diminishes, she does show "no sign of reform." But, unlike Sir Thomas or Henry Tilney, she attempts to make amends for her most glaring abuses of power – not for show, but for an overwhelming desire to do and feel what is right. Through free indirect discourse, by the novel's close, we see "into [Emma's] heart… [and find nothing] …to reprove" (Austen, *E* 308).

Emma's androgyny – and the ire it inspires – raises a simple question: what if Emma were a man? Might her masculine-coded attributes be accepted or even praised in a man of the same station? Knightley tells Mrs. Weston, Emma's former governess, "you were preparing yourself to be an excellent wife all the time you were at Hartfield. You might not give Emma such a complete education as your powers would seem to promise; but you were receiving a very good education from *her*, on the very material matrimonial point of submitting your own will, and doing as you were bid" (*E* 30). In this account, Knightley positions Emma as an overbearing husband, only unacceptable because her gender does not align with the role. After expressing her disinterest in marriage, Emma later thinks to herself, "if she *were* to marry, [Frank Churchill] would be the very person to suit her in age, character and condition. He seemed by this connection between the families, quite to belong to her" (*E* 95), revealing a possessiveness and an entitlement we associate more with Henry Crawford than any Austen heroine. Nardin notes that, directly contrasting Fanny's beliefs, "The flaw in Emma's view of true propriety" is that the appearance of propriety is more important to her than true feelings of kindness or generosity

(115). As I have explained in the previous chapters, this very façade undergirds gentry values. Indeed, Henry Tilney does not declare that his father was too virtuous to commit murder, merely that General Tilney must always *appear* so virtuous. In Emma, all of these qualities are deemed inappropriate.

These supposed faults, grounded in deficient femininity, "… are supposed to make humiliation and reform necessary" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 128). Unlike the criticism of *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, *Emma* criticism takes a distressingly personal turn in several ways. Johnson identifies a clear "common denominator": **"**Emma offends the sexual sensibilities of many of her critics. Transparently misogynist, sometimes even homophobic, subtexts often bob to the surface of the criticism about her" (*Jane Austen* 122). The misogyny arises through a fixation on Emma's relationship to marriage, and this fixation transcends time. An unsigned review in *Literary Panorama* in June 1816 summarizes the novel as follows: "*Emma* presents the history of a young lady, who, after allowing her imagination to wander towards several gentlemen, almost to mislead her affections, fixes them, at last, on the proper object" (Southam 73). This writer says Emma takes too long to desire Knightley. Mudrick says Emma is not warm enough to her future husband. Wayne Booth says Emma needs to desire marriage to be cured (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 123).

Though an extension of this thinking, homophobic undertones in the criticism of a novel depicting only heterosexual romantic relationships are less predictable, and somehow even more disturbing. Mudrick and Edmund Wilson "treat Emma's 'coldness' as though it were a culpably perverse refusal of their own sexual advances" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 123). Mystified by Emma's appreciation of Harriet's appearance, Mudrick (again) raises his suspicions: "This is the clever and sophisticated Emma, transported by the presence of the most insipid girl imaginable.

Moreover, Emma's attention never falls so warmly upon a man; against this feeling for Harriet, her good words for Mr. Knightley's appearance seem pale indeed" (190). He concludes, "The fact is that Emma prefers the company of women, more particularly of women whom she can master and direct…this preference is intrinsic to her whole dominating and uncommitting personality. The same tendency has been recognized by Edmund Wilson; but Mr. Wilson adds that it is 'something outside the picture which is never made explicit'" (192). These critics declare that, in Emma's peculiar "tendency" (Mudrick 192) to form friendships with socially inferior women, something surely must be afoot.

Stopping *just* short of labeling Emma a domineering lesbian, Mudrick misrecognizes standard power dynamics as sinister sexuality. When Emma decides "*She* would notice [Harriet]; she would improve her; she would detach her from her bad acquaintance and introduce her into good society; she would form her opinions and her manners" (Austen, *E* 19), she perfectly parallels Edmund Bertram who "formed [Fanny's] mind and gained her affections" (*MP* 51). Both teachers see themselves doing a service to their grateful students, and both (wrongly) intervene in their pupils' marriage matches. Within Mudrick's formulation, however, the characters are not interchangeable: "The fact is that [Edmund] prefers the company of women, more particularly of women whom [he] can master and direct" does not carry the same weight. Couched in the comfort of heterosexuality here, it is clear that Edmund prefers to spend time with social inferiors whom he can mold – not necessarily a dangerous preference, just a fact. The same can (and should) be said for Emma.

If all of this is not evidence enough of critics' gendered backlash to *Emma*, Mudrick appallingly turns his misogyny on Mr. Woodhouse. Emma "feels affection only toward those immediately under her command, and all of them are women. Mr. Woodhouse is no

exception…for Mr. Woodhouse is really an old woman, of the vacuous, mild-natured, weakly selfish sort very common to novels and (possibly) to life. He has no single masculine trait…" (192). By this logic, Emma is not just androgynous, she *is* a man, and "we can hardly wonder that [Mr. Woodhouse's] daughter opts for the emotional detachment and the penchant for managing that could place her beyond such scorn" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 123). Within this "seemingly interminable scene of punitive/pedagogical reading" (Sedgwick 834), femininity is devalued, but the only way for Emma to be acceptable is to remain ensnared within those parameters. There is no way for her to exist – handsome, clever, rich, and a woman – without demanding punishment. The interminable scene continues: "Without [tenderness], [Emma] exhibits the strong need to dominate, the offhand cruelty…the malice of Jane Austen, the candid Jane Austen of the letters—in which miscarriage is a joke…and death equally amusing" (Mudrick 193). Where other critics see Austen's wit within Emma, Mudrick can only see malice, using Austen's personal letters as his evidence. Notably, this critic views Austen joking about death as as severe an offense as her "shrug[ging] off the fading interest of an eligible young man," both signifying that she is a cold woman crafting a cold heroine. In viewing Emma as a detestable extension of Austen herself, Mudrick proves Sedgwick's most provocative point: "That virginal figure 'Jane Austen,' in these [critical] narratives, is herself the punishable girl who 'has to learn,' 'has to be tutored'" (834).

After hearing of all of this critical frustration, one might be surprised to find out that Emma *does*, in fact, marry. But in having "a moral life as a man is expected to have a moral life" (Trilling 52), Emma and Knightley are on extremely equal footing. In an argument over Frank Churchill, before either had met him, Emma tells Knightley, "you… have always been your own master" (Austen, *E* 115), and consequently cannot understand the potential hindrance of Frank's

familial situation. However, in her ability to persuade her father, Emma has also long been her own master. More so than the central couples of *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*, Emma and Knightley are two autonomous individuals, neither indebted to nor idolizing the other. The difference is palpable in their interactions. For example, the flirtatious mocking that is decidedly one-sided in *Northanger Abbey* takes another form in *Emma*, banter that can be reciprocated and is thus far less uncomfortable. When Knightley arrives at the Coles' house in his carriage, Emma applauds his choice of transportation: "This is coming as you should do…like a gentleman…*Now* I shall really be very happy to walk into the same room with you" (*E* 167). He replies, "Nonsensical girl!' but "not at all in anger" (*E* 168). Rather than either party hurting the other's feelings, equality enables benign jest. Emma soon recounts to Mrs. Weston, "we arrived together; and I laughed at him about it" (*E* 176). Though the pleasure of the joke outweighs any shame Emma might be causing Knightley, this encounter still displays Emma's power; she thinks her approval is worth giving, and she does not fear repercussions from teasing or laughing at her friend.

On the more serious end of the shaming spectrum, unlike Catherine and Fanny whose social inferiority leads them to largely accept the wisdom of the men in their lives, Emma has no problem arguing with Knightley and standing her ground. In the case of discouraging Harriet from marrying Mr. Martin, Emma "did not repent what she had done; she still thought herself a better judge of such a point of female right and refinement than he could be; but yet she had a sort of habitual respect for his judgment in general" (*E* 52). Mutual respect is the foundation of their friendship, undercutting and complicating the idea that Knightley must admonish Emma until she learns. It is true, Knightley closely monitors Emma's behavior – "Alternately beaming with heartfelt approval when Emma acquits herself properly, and frowning with pain whenever

she misbehaves, he has been half paternal and half pedagogical in his watchfulness" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 140) – but his advice is distinctly *not* the advice of absolute power.

Following the same dispute, Emma believes "Making-up indeed would not do. *She* certainly had not been in the wrong, and *he* would never own that he had. Concession must be out of the question…" (Austen, *E* 78). Mooneyham argues, "Unlike Henry Tilney or Edmund Bertram, Mr. Knightley is a morally responsible Pygmalion figure. In other words, Mr. Knightley's efforts to educate Emma are not muddied by unacknowledged selfishness" (107). Understanding that "Concession [is typically] out of the question," Knightley's advice emanates from a place of care, rather than a vested interest in shaming Emma into a transformation, as certain critics would like. To him, "advice is not a function of power...Being who and what she is, Emma dishes out almost as much as she gets, and when she does not follow his advice—which is almost always—he does not turn away" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 141). If he were seeking a supplicant, Knightley would never propose to Emma, and readers hoping for a tidy pedagogical relationship should also look elsewhere. Emma often does not submit to his authority, and his character is not perfect; they both admit jealousies and biases and act out of their own humiliation when they should, ideally, be impartial observers to Harriet and Mr. Martin's courtship. In his proposal to Emma, Knightley says, "If I loved you less, I might be able to talk about it more…I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it" (Austen, *E* 338). Emma can bear it because, as Johnson scathingly notes, "even though he always does lecture and blame, nothing ever comes of it" (*E* 141).

As mentioned, Knightley's lecturing and blaming often addresses Emma's shamelessly paternalistic relationships with other women, particularly the "…threatened spinsters in the novel, Harriet Smith, Jane Fairfax [and] Miss Bates" (Fergus 154). Helena Kelly writes, "Critics

like to call Emma a snob – and she does spend a lot of time deciding precisely where in the social order people ought to belong. But if she is a snob then she's a very inclusive, persuadable one, willing to embrace a number of her social inferiors, and to change her mind about others" ("Gruel – *Emma*" 244). By examining instances of Emma's abuses of power, I will demonstrate how the heroine "work[s] within…[her] world" (Fergus 146), either mirroring or improving upon Austenian examples of male authority.

Bored and missing the presence of Mrs. Weston, her closest friend and confidante, Emma sees potential for a project in Harriet Smith, "a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect" (Austen, *E* 19). Within their pedagogical relationship, there is an undeniable element of subtle coercion. In dissuading Harriet from marrying Mr. Martin, a farmer, Emma says, "You must be the best judge of your own happiness" (*E* 42), astonishingly similar to Edmund's thoughts: "He could allow his sister to be the best judge of her own happiness, but he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income" (*MP* 31). Harriet is a "parlour-boarder" at Mrs. Goddard's boarding school with unknown parentage (*E* 19). Convinced that Harriet is a gentleman's daughter and should be treated like one, Emma not only discourages her from accepting Mr. Martin's proposal, but also pushes Harriet towards Mr. Elton and later Frank Churchill. Crucially, Emma is not the only meddler in Harriet's affairs; Knightley "felt the disappointment of [Mr. Martin], and was mortified to have been the means of promoting it, by the sanction he had given; and the part which he was persuaded Emma had taken in the affair, was provoking him exceedingly" (*E* 53). Unlike Tom Bertram's lack of concern for Edmund, Knightley is able to experience mortification, an indication of his empathy; his social persona is afflicted by Mr. Martin's pain. While Knightley's intervention in matchmaking normalizes Emma's "meddling," an activity that is clearly a product of class rather

than gender, it is this same benevolence that leads some critics to view Knightley as the ideal instructor for Emma.

As Johnson points out, "Emma is always taken to task for her scheme to improve Harriet…[but] the satisfaction Emma takes in this project is surely not unlike the self-approbation generally allowed to reflect well on Sir Thomas when he decides to take Fanny from the squalor of Portsmouth to the splendor of Mansfield" (*Jane Austen* 132). Never criticized for the act of adopting Fanny, Sir Thomas is still insistent that Fanny should know her (lower) place. Conversely, Emma attempts to elevate Harriet, even if she is selfishly motivated. Through her plotting, Emma inadvertently amplifies Harriet's confidence, arguing with Knightley because she believes Harriet can achieve a better match than Mr. Martin. When Harriet later declares her love for Knightley, she says, "now I seem to feel that I may deserve him; and that if he does choose me, it will not be any thing so very wonderful" (Austen, *E* 323). While Fanny is groomed to feel no sense of consequence, Harriet gains self-worth from Emma's tutelage. Harriet is deserving of more than the bare minimum, and she ultimately receives more: "as Emma became acquainted with Robert Martin…she fully acknowledged in him all the appearance of sense and worth which could bid fairest for her little friend…with him, and in the home he offered, there would be the hope of more [than just happiness], of security, stability, and improvement" (*E* 379). Harriet's match ultimately receives Emma's approval, partly because Emma wants Knightley for herself, but also out of an authentic concern for her friend's welfare.

Due to social insecurity, "almost any woman in *Emma* apart from the heroine" is accompanied by "a sense of threat" (Fergus 154) and none is more threatened than Jane Fairfax. If there is potential for Harriet's lineage to alter her life, Jane, as an orphan raised by the Campbell family, has no such miracle in store. She is destined to become a governess, a job she

likens to slavery in the "misery of the victims" (Austen, *E* 235). Although the novel's most endangered woman, Jane Fairfax is the most threatening to Emma. Jane is the niece of Miss Bates, frequent Hartfield visitor, and while "Miss Bates admires Emma greatly…it is always clear to Emma that Jane Fairfax, whom she regards as a…rival, holds the first place in Miss Bates's affection and esteem" (Nardin 113). At first, Emma cannot quite pinpoint her distaste for Jane other than hearing too much about her – "I wish Jane Fairfax very well; but she tires me to death" (Austen, *E* 70) – but readers come to understand that she is jealous and feels spurned by Jane's reserved nature. When Jane is not forthcoming with details about Frank Churchill despite their acquaintance, "Emma could not forgive her" (*E* 133). But Emma *does* forgive eventually and attempts to mitigate her own wrongdoing. In terms of her treatment and opinion of Jane, Emma's transformation is astounding, evidence of her adoption of a more benevolent form of power.

In the case of Jane, Emma's misuse of social power involves harmful gossip. Words alone can form a reputation and, importantly, Frank Churchill is an all-too-willing partner in substantiating these rumors. As previously shown, those who have certain privilege by virtue of class or gender seem to recover from shame more quickly. After Emma rejects his marriage proposal, Mr. Elton "had gone away…mortified…he came back gay and self-satisfied, eager and busy" (*E* 142). When Harriet shows several mementos of her love for Mr. Elton to Emma, Emma is reminded of her meddling and becomes embarrassed: "I deserve to be under a continual blush all the rest of my life" (*E* 266). No more than one moment later, "Emma…recover[s] from her state of shame…'" (*E* 266). Jane's shame is never as fleeting. Her fate as a governess is "to penance and mortification for ever" (*E* 129). Again, Austen employs multiple meanings of mortification. Jane will experience the social shame of "retir[ing] from all the pleasures of life,

of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope" (*E* 129), but also the religious connotation of self-denial and sacrifice. Unsurprisingly, in *Emma*, Jane Fairfax is the figure most linked to the physical shame response outlined by Tomkins. Hiding her own impropriety, a secret engagement to Frank, leads Jane to become literally sick from her own shame. Indeed, Jane's reserved personality is a defense mechanism against potential shame; when Frank taunts her by spelling out and displaying the word "Dixon" in a game of letters, Jane gets embarrassed and angry, with "her face averted from those who had made the attack" (*E* 274) and leaves promptly.

By consistently flirting with Emma, Frank attempts to conceal his secret but is also strangely intent on embarrassing and tormenting Jane. Emma speculates that Mr. Dixon, the husband of the Campbells' daughter, has an inappropriate affection for Jane, the reason Jane came to stay with Miss Bates rather than visit the Dixons in Ireland. When a piano arrives as a gift for musically talented Jane with no indication of who sent it, Emma makes her theory known to Frank: "after making his proposals to her friend, [Mr. Dixon] had the misfortune to fall in love with *her*, or that he became conscious of a little attachment on her side" (*E* 170). Both accusations involving an engaged man are damning, and she concludes that Mr. Dixon must have sent the piano anonymously. Frank is well aware that this is not the case because, under the guise of venturing to London for a haircut, *he* purchased the piano. And still, Frank's language extends beyond an attempt to remain inconspicuous. Agreeing with the popular verdict that Col. Campbell sent the present, he loudly declares that "True affection only could have prompted" (*E* 191) this act of kindness. Frank has three meanings: the literal suggestion that Col. Campbell sent it, the inside joke with Emma that Mr. Dixon sent it, and the awareness that his own affection prompted him to purchase the gift. Thinking he is being too frank, Emma says she is "half ashamed, and wish I had never taken up the idea" (*E* 191). Frank replies, "I am very glad

you did, and that you communicated it to me. I have now a key to all her odd looks and ways. Leave shame to her. If she does wrong, she ought to feel it" (*E* 191). Emma, "half ashamed," is really not ashamed at all, because she derives amusement from Frank's antics.

While Emma is improperly speculating, Frank is *intentionally* lying, hurting Jane on purpose, or, at the very least, refusing to put an end to Emma's ideas. If Frank has to flirt with Emma to hide his connection to Jane, he does not need to be so cruel. In one instance, Frank insults Jane's hair from afar and, as if turning it into a game with Emma, says he will ask Jane if "it is an Irish fashion" to see "whether she colours" (*E* 174). Because we are not privy to Jane's thoughts, only Frank's sneaky commentary, whenever Jane *does* blush, we are as clueless as Emma as to the reason, therefore also convinced of Frank's charade. "With Emma, as readers, we are swept along in the narrative that she has created" (Halsey 235), but Frank is equally complicit in this narrative. In fact, "Allusion to Mr. Dixon and Ireland becomes…his favorite method of simultaneously hurting Jane and amusing Emma while he laughs at both" (Mudrick 197), as in the game of letters. By essentially making a fool of Emma even as she believes she is on the "inside" of his jokes, Frank victimizes both women.

While I would suggest that Frank's treatment of Jane is far more grievous than Emma's speculation, it is still significant that Knightley marries Emma without being aware of the Dixon debacle. As such, "One wonders how Mr. Knightley would judge Emma's readiness not only to form scandalous thoughts about his favorite, but exultantly to impart them as well" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 141). Knightley is a staunch defender of Jane – he says "I am disappointed" (Austen, *E* 134) when Emma expresses dislike for her– but it is not his chastising alone that compels Emma to change her perception of Jane. Emma attempts to foster a better relationship because she sympathizes with her. Mr. Elton's wife, flouting proper conventions of address, calls

Jane by her first name rather than Miss Fairfax, and Emma thinks to herself, "Jane Fairfax 'ha[s] not deserved this. You may have done wrong…but this is a punishment beyond what you can have merited! —the kindness and protection of Mrs. Elton!" (*E* 222). As Emma cannot understand why Jane chooses to spend time with Mrs. Elton, Knightley explains, "But (with a reproachful smile at Emma) she receives attentions from Mrs. Elton, which nobody else pays her" (*E* 224). Emma then decides that Jane requires *her* kindness and protection; "it is very shameful. —Of the same age—and always knowing her—I ought to have been more her friend. —She will never like me now…But I will sh[o]w her greater attention than I have done" (*E* 228). Some may argue that, because Jane "will never like" Emma now, any show of affection is just for appearances or for Knightley's sake. This change of heart suggests, however, that Emma does not feel the need to be loved by everyone, but she needs to do the right thing by a woman so lonely she spends her time with the obnoxious Mrs. Elton. Emma is therefore capable of self-criticism and evolution.

Jane soon becomes severely ill, with headaches, a fever, no appetite, and possibly a "nervous disorder" (*E* 306). The cause is likely an amalgamation of her shame from hiding her engagement, her jealousy of Emma incited by Frank's flagrant behavior, and pure dread in anticipation of her governess role with a supposedly delightful family. Miss Bates says, "To look at her, nobody would think how delighted and happy she is to have secured such a situation" (*E* 298), betraying that Jane is not, in fact, delighted and happy. In this hour of need, Emma "wanted to be of use to [Jane]; wanted to show a value for her society, and testify respect and consideration" (*E* 306). She listens to the doctor's suggestions "with the warmest concern" (*E* 306) and tries to help in any way possible, from offering to enjoy fresh air with Jane to having her housekeeper send "arrow-root" to improve her appetite (*E* 307). When Jane refuses all of

Emma's kindness, Emma is "sorry, very sorry" (*E* 308). Though slighted, Emma's thoughts double as a repentant apology for years of unnecessary resentment.

In hiding Emma's whisperings from Knightley, Austen declines "to expose and to arraign a heroine reprehensible by conventional standards" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 141). Emma's embarrassment from partaking in such gossip does not dissipate – "Emma could not speak the name of Dixon without a little blush" (*E* 314) – but she is never scolded for this situation. Instead, Austen allows Emma's praise for Jane to display growth: Emma calls Jane "one of the most lovely and accomplished young women in England" (*E* 315) and, although she dislikes the deceitful way Frank and Jane have acted in Highbury, Emma again pities Jane's unfortunate circumstances. Emma insists, "If a woman can ever be excused for thinking only of herself, it is in a situation like Jane Fairfax's—Of such, one may almost say, that 'the world is not their's, nor the world's law'" (*E* 315). According to the novel's explanatory notes, here "Emma slightly misquotes Romeo's words to the impoverished apothecary…in order to generalize them into a sympathetic comment on the outcast lot of women constrained by circumstance" (402n). From unkind gossip to this sympathetic reflection, Emma's social power distinctly matures throughout the novel.

Emma's shamelessness is most apparent in relation to Jane's aunt, Miss Bates. A single woman living with and taking care of her widowed mother, "Miss Bates stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her, into outward respect" (*E* 17). In personality, the unclever Miss Bates cannot be more different from Emma, but "Single womanhood means Emma is not far off from being Miss Bates (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 138). Considering the loneliness she might face as an unmarried, childless woman, Emma

says she will always have a niece by her side (Austen, *E* 69), providing a clear opportunity for her to empathize with Miss Bates' deep affection for *her* niece, Jane, but Emma does no such thing. Nardin postulates, "probably it is doubly humiliating to Emma that anyone so dull as Miss Bates should possess the power to unsettle her" (Nardin 113) through her constant praise of Jane. Miss Bates is best defined by her speech patterns. Producing rambling paragraphs that take up entire pages of *Emma* and tempt readers to skim over them, she is extremely garrulous about issues for which her neighbors care little, not particularly witty, and often interrupts one sentence with another. Her presence and her speech annoy Emma, which she does not conceal from others: she informs Frank that Jane "has an aunt who never holds her tongue" (Austen, *E* 153).

When Mrs. Weston shares that she thinks Knightley might marry Jane, Emma's vexation turns into outright mocking: "How would he bear to have Miss Bates belonging to him? — To have her haunting the Abbey, and thanking him all day long for his great kindness in marrying Jane? — "So very kind and obliging!—But he always had been such a very kind neighbour!" And then fly off, through half a sentence, to her mother's old petticoat…" (*E* 177). Appalled, Mrs. Weston says, "For shame, Emma! Do not mimic her...And…I do not think Mr. Knightley would be *much* disturbed by Miss Bates…She might talk on; and if he wanted to say any thing himself, he would only talk louder, and drown her voice" (*E* 177; my emphasis). In the presence of Miss Bates, Emma acts properly, but her feelings do not match this show of decorum (Nardin 126). Unlike Fanny, whose education has penetrated her internal emotions, Emma is only expected to outwardly restrain herself, to refrain from mimicking and taunting, but she is certainly not expected, internally, to respect Miss Bates. It is not a question of whether Knightley would be disturbed by Miss Bates' constant presence, but *how much*, and if he could withstand the irritation. Even as he castigates Emma for her behavior, Knightley agrees with her when she

says “what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in [Miss Bates]” (Austen, *E* 295). Frank describes Miss Bates as “a woman that one may, that one *must* laugh at; but that one would not wish to slight” (*E* 204); for this lower-class, lower intellect woman, a pervasive lighthearted shaming is *necessary*, but a deeper shaming would be too cruel. In the midst of this atmosphere, Emma’s words at Box Hill, Emma “At her worst” (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 130), already seem less reprehensible.

Box Hill, as described by the explanatory notes, is “a hill in the Downs of Surrey, near Dorking; then as now an attractive natural area, popular as a destination for picnicking and sight-seeing excursions” (401n). A secondary definition might identify Box Hill as the location of the *Emma* scene most likely to make readers wince. It is also a scene set by Frank Churchill’s shenanigans. He announces to the picnicking group that Emma “only requires something very entertaining from each of you …she only demands from each of you either one thing very clever…—or two things moderately clever—or three things very dull indeed…” (Austen, *E* 291). Aware of her faults, Miss Bates responds, “then I need not be uneasy. ‘Three things very dull indeed.’ That will just do for me, you know, I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I?” (*E* 291). There is a critical consensus that what occurs next is a product of the moment: “Emma gets very caught up in this ostentatious display of wit…carried away by the novelty of the thing” (Nardin 124), “intoxicated with vanity, she rides the inspiration of the moment” (Butler 257). Austen writes, “Emma could not resist. ‘Ah! Ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me—but you will be limited as to number—only three at once’” (*E* 291). Miss Bates, “deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her” (*E* 291). Perhaps the remark could not anger her because she

adores Emma, or because she knows her own tendency to ramble. Either way, the reader cannot help but pity her.

Ironically given Emma's misstep, Mr. Weston immediately says two letters express perfection, "M. and A.—Em—ma," to which Knightley gravely says, "*Perfection* should not have come quite so soon" (*E* 292). The only person willing to admonish Emma, Knightley later says to her privately, "I wish you could have heard [Miss Bates] honouring your forbearance, in being able to pay her such attentions… when her society must be so irksome" (*E* 295). Miss Bates begins to painfully self-shame, as Fanny might after a comment comprised of half joke, half derision. Just as Emma cannot resist taking advantage of the "ideal…opportunity to put down Miss Bates" (Nardin 124), Knightley cannot resist reproving Emma: "I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance. How could you be so unfeeling to Miss Bates? How could you be so insolent in your wit to a woman of her character, age, and situation? — Emma, I had not thought it possible" (Austen, *E* 294). Emma "recollected, blushed, was sorry, but tried to laugh it off" (*E* 294). In her construction of this sentence, Austen implies that Emma moves through these phases quickly, attempting to recover from shame as privileged figures typically can. Having voiced his condemnation, Knightley might have noted Emma's visible embarrassment and ceased here, but he cannot let her recover so swiftly.

As Tomkins reminds us, "Shamelessness in a child or spouse or friend may evoke deeper shame than the circumstances themselves, since this is often interpreted as a character defect in the other" (407). When he perceives a deep character defect in Emma, Knightley, a close friend, experiences secondhand embarrassment. Thus, looking around to ensure that no one is nearby, Knightley delivers his famous reprimand:

> and were she prosperous…Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance…were she your equal in situation—but, Emma,

> consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!—you, whom she had known from an infant…to have you now, in thoughtless spirits, and the pride of the moment, laugh at her, humble her—and before her niece too—and before others, many of whom (certainly *some*,) would be entirely guided by *your* treatment of her.—This is not pleasant to you, Emma—and it is very far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will,—I will tell you truths while I can, satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel, and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now. (Austen, *E* 295)

Before analyzing Knightley's actual words, the length of his apparently "just rebuke" (Mooneyham 110) catches the eye, especially when compared to the few offending sentences. Emma's blip of shamelessness, which can be construed as the verbalization of the whole party's thoughts, is thus punished with a lengthy harangue, structurally similar to Henry Tilney's rebuke. If Emma's comments are "the release of accumulated annoyance" (Nardin 124) with Miss Bates, Knightley's lecture, filled with undue outrage, functions as the novel's release of fury toward female power.

Stunned, in "anger against herself, mortification, and deep concern," Emma "kept her face averted, and her tongue motionless" (Austen, *E* 295). Unable to speak, Emma cannot even attempt to defend herself or express her agreement; "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. How could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!" (*E* 296). The truth of his representation – highlighting the power differential between Emma and Miss Bates that worsened the effect of Emma's unkindness – is unquestionable. The method of its delivery, causing Emma to cry the entire ride home, is excessive, even an abuse of *his* power as a trusted male authority figure. According to Mudrick, Knightley's "acute and decisive mind…keeps [Emma] from the gravest consequences of her

mistakes, enlightens her when she commits a particularly flagrant snobbery or stupidity, as at Box Hill after her brutal insult to Miss Bates…We know that this will bring Emma up sharply, as it very satisfactorily does" (Mudrick 183). To take satisfaction in Emma's shaming is perverse, particularly because Knightley's scorn is incommensurate with Emma's wrongdoing.

Knightley finds it unbelievable that Emma "could have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates," but it is not nearly as perplexing as he believes. Knightley is shocked Emma can "laugh at" Miss Bates, but, as Frank tells her, "one *must* laugh at" Miss Bates. Emma, afforded power that few other women will experience and wit that can be used for good or bad, is bound to err at times. Should Emma's situation not "secure [Knightley's] compassion"? Read in the context of, for example, Sir Thomas' comment that Fanny "…sixteen [is] in some respects too much like [Fanny] at ten" (Austen, *MP* 26) which goes completely unaddressed like all of his cruel quips, Emma's "you will be limited as to number—only three at once" seems assuredly mild, a natural, if an unpleasant, effect of social superiority.

Critically, Austen allows Emma to rise above the brutality innate to Sir Thomas and General Tilney. As Johnson argues, "Emma is an authority figure responsible to the morally corrective influence of public opinion. This is what makes her feel the truth of Knightley's reproach at Box Hill, and this is what makes her resolute, swift, and feeling in her amends" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 130). While Fanny would be paralyzed in self-loathing, Emma's severe mortification at the hands of Knightley begets action; it emphasizes her true concerns, urging her to match her feelings with her words and actions. In a moving moment, Emma thinks, "As a daughter, she hoped she was not without a heart. She hoped no one could have said to her, 'How could you be so unfeeling to your father'" (Austen, *E* 296). She is truly struck by the allegations set before her.

Those who contend that Knightley's shaming was necessary for Emma to be straightened out, to deflate her ego, misunderstand a key detail of Knightley's (long-winded) argument. Knightley does not rebuke Emma's degrading opinion of Miss Bates, or her cruelty, for that matter. He takes issue with the *public nature* of her ill-mannered joke; Emma's fault is in carelessly insulting Miss Bates to her face, **"**before her niece too—and before others." When Emma compels him to acknowledge that "what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended in [Miss Bates]" (Austen, *E* 295), Knightley instantly and briefly agrees before transitioning to the shaming: "They *are* blended…I acknowledge; and were she prosperous…" (*E* 295; emphasis mine). There is a time and place, Knightley implies, to make fun of Miss Bates. He sees a distinction between public and private shaming, best exhibited in his own actions: "He looked around, as if to see that no one were near, and then" (*E* 294) begins to reprimand Emma. In Knightley's view, it would not be "badly done" to ridicule privately, to make mocking remarks to others if Miss Bates were absent. Emma expresses her annoyance in this "appropriate" way many times, as she does to Mrs. Weston who, better than Knightley, tells Emma to cease the private mimicry and mocking (*E* 177). Although Mrs. Weston believes Miss Bates' presence would not bother Knightley – "Little things do not irritate him" – he is not immune to irritation (*E* 177). Instead, he can resist expressing it when Emma cannot. In addition to Knightley's endorsement of two-facedness, he suggests that Emma's public comment would be perfectly tolerable if Miss Bates "were…prosperous." As he criticizes the setting rather than the sentiment of Emma's insult, Knightley's role as the unequivocally good hero—as the proverbial knight in shining armor—is qualified and complicated, if readers look closely, by the content of his "just rebuke."

If she fully adhered to Knightley's advice, Emma would continue sneering at Miss Bates behind her back and might redirect her public ridicule elsewhere, perhaps to Mrs. Elton. To atone for Box Hill, Emma would merely visit Miss Bates and make formal apologies; sincerity would be irrelevant. Instead, Emma reevaluates her relationship with both Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. She vows to start "a regular, equal, kindly intercourse" with Miss Bates and is "not ashamed of the appearance of the penitence" (*E* 297). And when Miss Bates tearfully describes Jane's illness and discusses her fate as a governess, "Emma was most sincerely interested. Her heart had been long growing kinder towards Jane; and this picture of her present sufferings acted as a cure of every former ungenerous suspicion, and left her nothing but pity" (*E* 298). In caring deeply about and attentively listening to what Miss Bates has to say about her favorite subject, her niece, Emma implicitly apologizes, retracting the offensive accusation that Miss Bates is boring and dull.

While Emma has moments of shamelessness and misrule, so do all people who are granted power – save, arguably, for Mr. Knightley who "is thus a fantastically wishful creation of benign authority, in whom the benefits and attractions of power are preserved and the abuses and encroachments are expelled" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 141). Unlike the authoritative male characters in Austen's body of work, Emma makes amends for her actions and, as Austen allows us ample access to the heroine's thoughts, we know they are heartfelt. Her maturation and redemption are not results of Knightley's gendered shaming – her decision to do what is right is made of her own accord, and she naturally grows to fill the contours of her own power. Perhaps Knightley is aware of this as, unlike Edmund forsaking Mary Crawford for her unacceptable shamelessness, he proposes and moves to Hartfield, highly untraditional for a man of his stature. Emma thus remains near her father and within her queendom, a signal that her power does not

conclude as the story does. In subverting the traditional gender dynamics of shaming – placing Emma in a position where she can humiliate others – Austen forces us to examine our implicit biases, disconcerting as this may be. Representing a failure to confront our prejudices, Emma has been misogynistically misinterpreted for far too long. In *Emma,* Austen presents us with a strong, intelligent, dynamic heroine demanding fair critical treatment. Are we up to the challenge?

## Conclusion

Although shame takes on different forms in *Northanger Abbey, Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, it also remains the same in several identifiable ways, particularly in Austen's most memorable moments of shaming. There are unsettling similarities between Henry Tilney's "Dear Miss Morland" speech and Knightley's Box Hill lecture. Both harangues are lengthy, suppressing an opportunity for mutual discussion through moralizing instruction. Both occur in private, heightening the sense of personal attack and highlighting the feeling of lecture rather than argument. And both, despite reasonable premises, include surprising justifications that prove these men are not the arbiters of unassailable morality. In both cases, readers are primed to support the male lecturer; it is understandable that Henry would not want Catherine to accuse his father of murdering his mother, and understandable for Knightley to believe that Emma should not mock Miss Bates. Yet neither man expresses his argument in a way that readers expect; Henry Tilney chooses to defend his country rather than his father, and Knightley excuses mockery, as long as it is conducted at the right place and time, in the presence of the right company. Unlike the singular tirades that Catherine and Emma are subjected to, Fanny faces an unrelenting cascade of shame when Sir Thomas, Edmund, and Mary Crawford encourage her to abandon her principles and accept Henry Crawford's proposal. Knowing what Fanny knows and understanding how her shaming has shaped her morals, readers cannot endorse the match or the coercion.

Even as criticism, undergirded by patriarchy, encourages us to relish these "just" reprimands, Austen's own writing, for close readers, permits no such satisfaction. In these three Austen novels, shame's gravity should not be mistaken for its rule. Austen depicts powerful characters humiliating others, not to legitimate this dynamic, but to reveal its many flaws. When

we celebrate or defend this shaming, we become complicit in its consequences: gendered abuse, manipulation, and scorn. To read Austen fairly, to end this spectacle, we need to unlearn our original understanding of these scenes of shame, repositioning them as incriminating reflections on the shamer rather than the shamed.

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