

5-20-2011

Navigating Heroines Between Scylla and Charybdis: Austen's Narrators

Katherine Johnson
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Johnson, Katherine, "Navigating Heroines Between Scylla and Charybdis: Austen's Narrators" (2011).
University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations. 1320.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1320>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Navigating Heroines Between Scylla and Charybdis: Austen's Narrators

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English

by

Katherine M. Johnson

B.A. University of New Orleans 2006

May, 2011

Dedication

To Dr. Dan Doll –

Thank you for your years of inspiration and guidance. May I always carry your enthusiasm for the written word with me, wherever my path may carry me.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Chapter I.....	1
Introduction	1
From What is the Narrator Trying to Save the Heroine?.....	3
Chapter II: Extant Marriages of <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> and <i>Northanger Abbey</i>	9
Chapter III: Who does the narrator want to save?	24
Chapter IV:	44
Who does the narrator allow the heroine to marry?.....	44
Compatibility and Self-Awareness	46
Chapter V: Conclusion.....	64
Bibliography	66
Vita	68

Abstract

Jane Austen champions practicality and compatibility versus purely romantic or mercenary sentiment in her novels, and through narrative techniques she preserves her heroines from imprudent marriages. Austen's heroines do not fall madly in love at first sight, but rather they acquiesce to marriage through reason and discernment. She endows her heroines with qualities that make them worthy of her interference in the marriage plot: intelligent although inexperienced, possessed of realistic expectations and sensibility and reason, and, importantly, financial instability. She carefully cultivates heroes worthy of her heroines through plot twists. However, to show her dissatisfaction with the limited roles available to the 19th century woman, she denies the reader the opportunity to witness the wedding that concludes her narratives. The narrator demonstrates her approval or disapprobation by choosing what scenes to narrate and what scenes to dramatize, the latter often representative of her disapproval, her silence signifying her acceptance.

British Literature, 18th and 19th century England, Jane Austen, marriage, narrative strategy, women

Chapter I: Introduction

With the many portraits of infelicitous unions prominent in Jane Austen's novels, the reader notices that instead of hastening her heroines to connubial felicity, Jane Austen tries to deter the marriage that traditionally concluded the comedy of manners. The institution of marriage is itself heavily –although implicitly -- criticized in Austen's novels. Ruth Bienstock Anolik sees the bride as “Bastilled” by her new role of “wife” and eventually “mother” (25), and Nancy Armstrong equates marriage with enslavement. Jane Austen never allows her heroines an unobstructed path down the aisle, to the altar, and into bliss; thwarted matches and false endings, which represent Austen's hesitation to marry off her heroines, punctuate her novels. Even though Austen does her best to unite her heroines with heroes who genuinely care for them and possess wealth and status enough to provide for them, these thwarted matches and false endings become her “narrative attempt to defer the figurative death of the heroine” (Anolik 27). The “deadening normality” (Anolik 28) that follows marriage does not leave much to narrate, so Austen does her best to stave off the marriage ending for as long as possible, not only to prolong the “life” of her heroine, but to delay the end of the narrative as well. Austen, through “circumlocutions and plot twists,” offers “a resistance to the ‘nonnarratable’ quiescence of marriage that marks closure, the death, of the narrative” (Anolik 27).

“Unhappily ever after” novel endings became a common trope in 18th and 19th century literature; even though readers still called for the wedding that traditionally ended comedic novels, more authors were acknowledging that neither life nor literature is always perfect, that endings are not always clean and satisfying, and that not all loose ends are neatly tied up. For example, Samuel Richardson's novel *Sir Charles Grandison* (1754) – which pointedly is cited as *Northanger Abbey*'s Mrs. Morland's favorite novel – grants its readers the traditional literary

“happy ending,” but the concluding marriage is tainted with sadness and loss, as each partner is denied his or her true desire¹. Sir Charles’s sister Charlotte’s assessment of marriage – while piercingly sardonic – is indicative of the plight married women often faced: “After all . . . , we women, dressed out in ribbands [sic], and gaudy trappings, and in Virgin-white, on our Wedding days, seem but like milk-white heifers led to sacrifice” (qtd. Stevenson 475). Richardson’s protagonists settle for second best, undermining the convention of the marriage ending and the happiness it allegedly brings. Austen destabilizes the conventional marriage ending through a different tactic: she concludes her novels with a wedding, but denies the reader the opportunity to witness it. This wedding is between a woman who has proven herself a true Austen heroine and a hero that – through “plot twists and circumlocutions” (Anolik 27) – has proven himself worthy of his heroine’s affection. Austen does not seek to weaken the established literary conventions just to rebel against tradition, but rather she tweaks the convention to show an alternative to the state of the contemptibly married woman. Her heroines hold out for love – Austen’s ultimate prudence – and are rewarded not only with reciprocal affection, but also with the financial stability that eluded many women of the 19th century. Whether trying to rescue her heroine or her novel from certain demise, Jane Austen is definitively making a statement regarding the undesirability of the limited roles offered to women, and she does this through her narrators’ interference in the plots of her novels. However, when her heroine has sufficiently developed and is ready to succumb to the marriage that must end the novel, Austen relinquishes her to the marriage plot with little or no dramatization, narration, or interference. Even though Austen’s narrators apparently surrender control of the narrative by allowing *Pride and Prejudice* and

¹ John Allen Stevenson’s essay “‘A Geometry of his Own’: Richardson and the Marriage-Ending” (1986) contains an excellent explanation regarding the way in which the marriage concluding *Sir Charles Grandison* is an unsatisfying ending. His essay will be cited later, but not in relation to Richardson’s novel.

Northanger Abbey to end with the marriage that they at first seem so intent on preventing, Austen's narrators carefully characterize heroines, heroes, and archetypes of unworthy behavior, who they can yield to the conventional marriage ending without concern for their future. Even though the heroine still submits to the "nonnarratable quiescence" that is marriage, the narrators have ascertained that the heroine is betrothed to the best match possible and preserved from the fate of the unworthy characters, illustrating that a balance can be struck between a prudent and a mercenary marriage.

From What is the Narrator Trying to Save the Heroine?

Historically, the limited options available for a woman's lifestyle were equally repugnant. Those who were not fortunate enough to fall "madly" in love regardless -- but hopeful -- of financial circumstances and marry the man of their choice were left with but two options. Samuel Johnson perhaps puts it best: "[Women] are placed . . . between Scylla and Charybdis, with no other choice than of dangers equally formidable; and whether they embrace marriage, or determine upon a single life, are exposed, in consequence of their choice, to sickness, misery, and death" (Johnson 197). Once of age, women had two alternatives -- Scylla or Charybdis: marriage, which was to choose a life of almost certain subjugation, or spinsterhood, which was to choose a life without financial security. Not all marriages were bad of course, but not all women were fortunate enough to find lives filled with connubial bliss. In the 18th and 19th centuries there were many restrictions that imperiled the legal life of a woman. One of the most dangerous was the statute of coverture, which denied a married woman the right to legal representation separate from that of her husband. Under this system, once married, a woman could not possess

property, money, or even her own children, separate from her husband. According to William Blackstone's 1758 *Commentaries* on the English Constitution:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and *cover* she performs everything; and is therefore called in our law-french, a *feme-covert* (qtd. Anolik 26)

In the rare instance in which a woman owned her own property, the marriage contract transferred ownership of that property – as well as any rent or other income -- to her husband. The only exception to the coverture statute was in the event that the bride had a separate estate set up by her family, which kept her property and money out of her control (but still in her name) unless she applied to a trustee for access to it. This prevented her husband from acquiring her personal wealth. This was a resource mainly for wealthy families, usually those without male relatives who could inherit. Trusts would be arranged to keep fortunes and estates in the family, to protect the family name, and to protect the heiress from financial ruin in the event that her husband could not provide for her and her children.

Primogeniture was another statute that limited a woman's ability to maintain wealth and property. Under this doctrine, all of a father's wealth and property would pass to the first-born son, and a daughter could only inherit in his absence; however, the transfer of property to a female was rare. Primogeniture was initially established to preserve the estates of the landed gentry by barring the owners of these estates from dividing up the land amongst multiple sons, but, along with the concept of entail, which restricted what could be done to the estate once it was inherited, it evolved into yet another means of patriarchal subjection. Primogeniture "effectively erased the female presence from the line of property transmission" (Anolik 32).

Entail also precluded women from inheritance via the statutes of primogeniture and coverture. It was initially instituted as a means of asset preservation (like primogeniture) as it temporarily prevented an heir from selling or mortgaging the family property, and controlled who inherited and when. The statute allowed a property owner to tie up his land for up to three generations, allowing ownership of only the land's income (not the land itself) to each succeeding generation until the estate passed to the generation predetermined in the entail on his 21st birthday. At this point, the heir could do what he pleased with the estate: sell it, mortgage it, give it away, or further entail it. This system only applied to the biological children of the landowner; it did not allow for the husbands of female children to become part of the entail. In the case of all female children, the entail allowed for a "lateral pass to another branch of the family" that did have male children (Pool 90-92). Hence *Pride and Prejudice*'s Mr. Collins's impending inheritance of the Longbourn estate: due to the entail, Mr. Bennet's children are precluded from inheriting their father's property because they are females, and since their husbands would not be the biological sons of Mr. Bennet, the estate will pass to Mr. Collins, an (albeit distant) male relative. Mrs. Bennet's preoccupation with the future of the unmarried Bennet girls and with her own future after the death of her husband is melodramatic, yet appropriate given the uncertainty they all face once Mr. Collins inherits the estate.

The importance of financial security cannot be overstated, which is why Austen's narrators and characters share an intense preoccupation with the finances of the heroines' suitors. For example, when the *Northanger Abbey* narrator surmises the attributes of Eleanor Tilney's husband, she informs the reader all that need be related of him: that he recently (and quite unexpectedly) acquired a title and a fortune. The narrator concludes, "[a]ny further definition of his merits must be unnecessary; the most charming young man in the world is instantly before the imagination of us all" (Austen 1090). This tongue-in-cheek assessment of Eleanor's husband

is Austen's irony at its best, but it is also a furtive reminder of the importance that finances play in courtship. Austen primarily deals with young women of uncertain financial future in her novels, such as *Pride and Prejudice*'s Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, and *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland. Marriage was more of a business transaction than a sentimental occasion: the bridegroom and his family had to be concerned with the wealth and reputation of the family of the woman with whom he was about to ally himself, while the bride's family had to be concerned with offering enough dowry to entice a man of substantial wealth and reputation into marrying their daughter.

The economic stability of the bride was a concern most successfully addressed by wealthy families that could set up trusts for their heiresses; however, there were options for the family of modest means as well. During the engagement, the bride's family could seek to secure a marriage settlement called a jointure (the 18th century equivalent of the modern prenuptial agreement), which would set aside some money for the bride and her children to be collected in the event of the husband's death. A woman with this contract could obtain the right of dower (the income from one-third of her husband's land) and portions (installments of money to be paid to her children) after her husband's demise, and also pin-money, which was a personal annual allowance to be paid to her during her husband's lifetime (Pool 181-82). Samuel Johnson writes in his essay collection *Rambler* about the "criminality" of marrying a woman who has not obtained a jointure. He thinks it an outrageous act of baseness that a man "*enslaves* [emphasis added] his wife by her own generosity; who by marrying without a jointure condemns her to all the dangers of accident and caprice" (Johnson 244). Hymenaeus – the pseudonym Johnson assumes – denounces the practice of marrying a woman without providing adequate protection for her in the event of her husband's death, since without this signed jointure, a wife had little hope of financial help upon his decease.

Divorce, although not an option in the society of Austen's fiction, was historically a social faux pas and a financial burden, and almost exclusively for the wealthy. Most divorces cost a fortune and left a stigma, most frequently on the bride. A parliamentary divorce, for example, would even allow a husband to sue his wife for adultery (whether or not she was guilty of it), and upon his likely victory he could take possession of any property or money of hers that the courts granted as recompense for his cuckoldry. Children were fair collateral in a divorce: they could be awarded to a husband as part of his divorce settlement. If the ex-couple remarried, any children begotten with their new spouses would be considered illegitimate. The system was obviously biased against women, as women obtained only four of the 90 parliamentary divorces granted before 1857 (Pool 185).

Widowhood also set up a precarious financial situation for a woman. While widowhood could grant a woman the emotional and even pecuniary freedom of a single woman while still allowing her the "all the claims to reputation" which marriage grants (Austen 421), it could also leave her destitute and dependent on her surviving male relatives, or on those of her husband's family. Properly managed, widowhood was the only way that a woman could engage in a "morally acceptable subversion of patriarchal possession" (Anolik 37). According to Anolik, a life spent in "mourning" for a dead husband is the only one which resists the principles of "patriarchal possession" such as primogeniture, coverture, and entail, and allows a woman to "[sustain] her visible existence by maintaining her wealth and outliving her husband" (37). Husbandless, a woman was allowed to be in control of her home, her children, and her finances. However, even if a woman had the protection of a jointure or a trust, if those sources of wealth were not properly managed, she could soon find her revenue exhausted. This is the case of the widowed Mrs. Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey* – she fails to take advantage of the freedom that her husband's death offers her by failing to maintain her finances. "Mrs. Thorpe was a widow, and

not a very rich one; she was a good-humoured, well-meaning woman, and a very indulgent mother,” the narrator describes Mrs. Thorpe, in lieu of a longer and more explicit account by Mrs. Thorpe herself, “which might otherwise be expected to occupy the three or four following chapters; in which the worthlessness of lords and attornies might be set forth, and conversations, which had passed twenty years before, be minutely repeated” (Austen 972). The implication is that Mrs. Thorpe has unsuccessfully clashed with lawyers and others of rank and economic prosperity, perhaps regarding the appropriation of money from her late husband’s estate. That she has little ready money is evident in her reaction to Mr. Morland’s offer of income to James and Isabella on their engagement. Mr. Morland offers a £400 per year living and an estate of equal value to his son and future daughter-in-law, on which Mrs. Thorpe comments, “I only wish I could do as much” (Austen 1027). Mrs. Thorpe ultimately fails to grasp the only real security available to her station and age as a married woman: widowhood. Austen uses Mrs. Thorpe to demonstrate how a woman can fail at properly managing widowhood, just as she illustrates each role available to the 19th century woman using specific characterizations and paradigms of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in each novel.

Chapter II: The Extant Marriages of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*

The narrators of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey* portray examples of happy and discordant marriages throughout both novels, but the similarities in each category indicate that the narrators believe there are certain conditions that promise a successful as well as a disastrous marriage. The absence or presence of these conditions also gives the reader a base upon which to establish expectations for the matches that have yet to be made in the novel. The portraits of the thriving marriages of the Gardiners of *Pride and Prejudice* and the Morlands of *Northanger Abbey* show the heroines – Elizabeth and Catherine respectively – the resultant happiness that similar temperaments bring to a marriage. While compatible personalities do not guarantee a successful marriage, the preeminence that Austen places on detailing the personalities of her heroes and heroines points to compatibility as a necessary condition. Just as in real 19th century marriages, the deficit or surplus of money and heirs correlates to the security and felicity of Austen’s fictional marriages. For example, the Gardiners and the Morlands both possess the pecuniary stability that *Pride and Prejudice*’s Bennet family lacks. Mr. Gardiner is a “man who live[s] by trade, and within view of his own warehouses” (Austen 287), while Mr. Morland has “a considerable independence, besides two good livings” (Austen 961), and although not of the highest echelon of wealth or society, is able to give Catherine a dowry of £3000 when she marries Henry Tilney. The Bennet family, however, has no such financial comfort: “Mr. Bennet’s property consisted almost entirely in an estate of two thousand a year, which, unfortunately for his daughters was entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation, and [Mrs. Bennet’s] fortune, though ample for her situation in life, could but ill supply the deficiency of his” (Austen 224-25). Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, though certainly not destitute, have no trade or properties to supplement their income.

Both the Morland and the Gardiner families include several male and female children, all of good health and constitution, which negates the need of any messy entail, or of a search for an heir to carry on the family name. The Bennets, however, can boast of no such security, due to the wastefulness of Mrs. Bennet, and the financial nearsightedness of Mr. Bennet, as well as the fact that they have no sons. The narrator explains the Bennets' lack of thrift:

When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come This event had at last been despaired of, but it was then too late to be saving. Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income. (Austen 376)

Mrs. Bennet's jointure provides herself and her five daughters £5000, and, as Longbourn is entailed to Mr. Collins, the women will have no other source of income after Mr. Bennet's death. Mrs. Bennet surely will find herself as financially unstable as *Northanger Abbey's* Mrs. Thorpe. Mrs. Bennet's £5000 can but poorly provide for the Bennet daughters, Mrs. Bennet, and Mrs. Bennet's spendthrift behaviors, for example, her endless doting on Lydia. Mr. Bennet reflects on the unexpectedly low dowry Wickham demands that, given Lydia's "board and pocket allowance, and the continual presents in money, which passed to her, through her mother's hands, Lydia's expenses had been very little within that sum," and that he would "scarcely be ten pounds a-year the loser, by the hundred that was to be paid [to Wickham]" (377). Lydia's marriage will actually be a financial blessing for the Bennets, liberating some money to be allotted among the remaining Bennet girls, but their monetary situation after Mr. Bennet's death

will still be precarious at best. The Bennet family name will die out with Mr. Bennet, and the remaining unmarried Bennet women will have to rely upon the generosity of Mrs. Bennet's brother and brother-in-law once their inheritance is spent. Lydia and Wickham certainly will not be in the position to offer any financial assistance or shelter to their family once they are turned out of Longbourn Estate, as they show no turn for proper financial management. The Bennets' fiscal mismanagement is only further complicated by their inability to have sons – a major function of the mostly unsentimental 19th century marriage. While male children are not a guarantee even of the happiest marriages, they certainly play a role in the pecuniary security that a married couple will enjoy, and Austen's narrators dramatize the threat that heirless marriages pose to that security in the Bennets, as well as in *Northanger Abbey's* Mr. and Mrs. Allen.

The Allens, although more financially sound than the Bennets, also find themselves lacking in matrimonial success. Mr. Allen owns the majority of the land surrounding Fullerton, and that he possesses ready money is indicated by the Allens' leisurely and lengthy sojourn in Bath, to which Mr. Allen has been ordered to repair for the benefit of a "gouty constitution" (Austen 963). That Mr. Allen is afflicted with gout is a marker of pecuniary affluence: gout was caused by the consumption of too many high protein foods, which were more costly and luxuriant foods like wine and red meat. This indicated that the sufferer possessed the "financial wherewithal to live high on the hog" (Pool 315). While the Allens do have a surplus of money, they have no one to whom to pass their wealth. The Allens have no children, and there is no mention of any other branch of their family on which their property and money will devolve. General Tilney takes great pains to discover "that the Fullerton estate, being entirely at the disposal of its present proprietor, was consequently open to every greedy speculation" (Austen 1090). Without an heir or even an entail, the future of the Fullerton estate, as well as the Allen family name, is insecure, and that is a strike against the successfulness of the Allens' marriage.

While the value of financial security cannot be overstated, Austen's narrators implicitly venerate compatibility as the most important factor in judging the success or failure of a marriage. The Morlands and Gardiners have complementary personalities: both couples exhibit intelligence and practicality, and they also shy away from the affectation of wit, humility, and social superiority. The narrator describes Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner as sharing an agreeableness of temperament: "Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister as well by nature as education . . . Mrs. Gardiner, who was several years younger than Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Philips, was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, and a great favourite with all her Longbourn nieces" (Austen 287). Reinforcing the connection between the Gardiners' happiness and the expectations of Darcy and Elizabeth's marriage is the narrator's description of the identical sensibilities of the Gardiners and their niece. On their departure from Longbourn to take in Derbyshire, the narrator says of the group: "one enjoyment was certain – that of suitableness as companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences – cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure – and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad" (Austen 340). Darcy's sincere regard for the Gardiners is indicative of his approval of these character traits, and surely Elizabeth will evince all the same qualities that she shares with her aunt and uncle with her future husband.

The Morlands are compatible as well; both are able to think practically about issues that would normally be clouded by sentiment, such as when their daughter Catherine is unceremoniously dismissed from Northanger Abbey.

Mr. and Mrs. Morland could not but feel that . . . General Tilney had acted neither honourably nor feelingly – neither as a gentleman nor as a parent. Why had he done it, what could have provoked him to such a breach of hospitality . . . was a

matter which they were at least as far from divining as Catherine herself; but it did not oppress them by any means so long; and, after a due course of useless conjecture, that, “it was a strange business, and that he must be a very strange man,” . . . her mother [said] at last; “depend upon it, it is something not at all worth understanding.” (Austen 1081)

The Morlands are also humble, sincere people, which accounts for Catherine’s naivety and her difficulty wading through the exaggerations of Isabella and John Thorpe. The narrator characterizes Mr. and Mrs. Morland as intelligent but modestly so: “[Catherine’s] own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind; . . . they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next” (Austen 990). Catherine likewise shares this earnestness of character: the narrator says of her confusion at John’s incessant blustering, “she knew not how to reconcile two such very different accounts of the same thing; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle, nor to know how many idle assertions and impudent falsehoods the excess of vanity will lead” (Austen 990). That she is “open, artless, guileless, with affections strong but simple, forming no pretensions, and knowing no disguise” is what draws Henry to her, and he praises this innocence in her as being “most to the credit of human nature” (Austen 1066). Henry also displays an aversion to affectation, and that he adores Catherine’s honesty indicates their compatibility. The Morlands’ earnestness is reflected in Catherine and Henry, intimating to the reader that their felicity is as certain as that of the Morlands (once the other prerequisites are gained).

Finding the narrators’ explicit approval of the Gardiners and the Morlands and their sameness of mind is less easy than finding explicit disapproval of the undesirable marriages in the novels. Much like the narrator allows the proposal scenes and marriages between couples

that she sanctions to proceed without dramatization or elaboration, she is sparing of the details of successful marriages. The disparity between the number of those passages that depict conjugal happiness and those detailing the marital disagreements between the husband and wife unworthy of narratorial endorsement distinguishes the thriving marriages from the floundering. The number of times the narrators frankly condemn the behaviors of the Bennets or the Allens is in stark contrast to the number of times the narrators openly applaud the Morlands and the Gardiners. The Allens are not of a similar turn of mind, and are so incompatible as to have the blatant disdain of the narrator, with particular derision reserved for Mrs. Allen:

Mrs. Allen was one of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough, to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man, like Mr. Allen. (Austen 964)

Mrs. Allen demonstrates a “vacancy of mind and incapacity for thinking” that merits her the narrator’s explicit distaste (Austen 987). She also proves herself to be a bad guardian for Catherine, approving of schemes that can only bring harm to Catherine’s reputation and person, and she shows the same indolence that Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do when the proper rearing of their children is concerned. She gives her consent and her censure with equal indifference, frequently retracting her former approval when met by a dissenting opinion, and she often acts with more regard for her gowns than for the safety of her young charge. Mr. Allen does show more discernment as Catherine’s guardian: at least he bothers to enquire into Henry Tilney’s character and family before allowing him to pay attentions to Catherine. In addition to different caretaking strategies, Mr. and Mrs. Allen perceive the world vastly differently. The most absurd example is

the way they each respond to Catherine's questioning about the weather on the day that she is supposed to go for a walk to Beechen Cliff with Eleanor and Henry Tilney:

[Catherine] applied to Mr. Allen for confirmation of her hopes [of a sunny day], but Mr. Allen not having his own skies and barometer about him, declined giving any absolute promise of sunshine. She applied to Mrs. Allen, and Mrs. Allen's opinion was more positive. "She had no doubt in the world of its being a very fine day, if the clouds would only go off, and the sun keep out." (Austen 999)

The disparity between Mr. Allen's profoundly logical response and Mrs. Allen's equally inane one is too pronounced to ignore: they demonstrate an irreconcilable incompatibility that leaves their marriage in the category of the undesirable, despite their financial advantage.

There is perhaps no husband and wife in Austen's canon so denigrated as Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. They clearly have the narrator's scorn from the opening pages of the novel, although for two different reasons: Mr. Bennet for his indolence, and Mrs. Bennet for her ignorance. That they are incompatible is indisputable from the narrator's introductory description of these two characters: "Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. *Her* mind was less difficult to develop. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (Austen 212). The narrator expresses her gratefulness that Elizabeth possesses the sensibility not to form her opinion of happiness in marriage based on her parents' marriage, given the deficit of any real enjoyment other than the amusement which Mr. Bennet garners from irritating his wife and laughing at her ignorance and folly. She explains the major fault of their union:

[Mr. Bennet,] captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose

weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. (Austen 338)

Mr. Bennet is unhappy in his choice, but is too laconic to do try to do anything to improve the quality of his wife's mind, and instead revels in her foolishness, often teasing her or belittling her in front of their children, for which he receives the disdain of the narrator and of Elizabeth herself, who realizes the impropriety of such defamation.

The narrator shows her disapproval of Mr. Bennet's behavior, but her serious disapprobation is aimed at Mrs. Bennet. She exhibits ineptitude even more severe than Mrs. Allen's. When the Gardiners come to visit the Longbourn family after Mr. Bingley's abandonment of Jane and Charlotte Lucas's marriage to Mr. Collins, Mrs. Bennet complains to her sister about her woes and her ill-usage. Even though she is wholly consumed by her own sorrow – not even those of the heartbroken Jane or the embarrassed Elizabeth – her absurdity overpowers even her egocentric “nervousness.” She grumbles to Mrs. Gardiner:

I do not blame Jane . . . for Jane would have got Mr. Bingley, if she could. But, Lizzy! Oh sister! it is very hard to think that she might have been Mr. Collins's wife by this time, had it not been for her own perverseness . . . It makes me very nervous and poorly, to be thwarted so in my own family, and to have neighbours [the Lucases] who think of themselves before anybody else. However, your coming just at this time is the greatest of comforts, and I am very glad to hear what you tell us, of long sleeves. (Austen 287)

Never mind that Elizabeth has no affection for Mr. Collins; never mind that Jane is forlorn over the removal of Mr. Bingley's regard; never mind that Charlotte Lucas's marrying Mr. Collins is her own doing, and not her family's, or that her inheritance of the Longbourn estate is

happenstance of her union with Collins. Mrs. Bennet has a very selfish view of the world, but even her egotism can be distracted by the novelty of a visitor and her love for news, no matter how inconsequential that news may be. The narrator carefully draws Mrs. Bennet as a flighty, self-interested character so that the reader easily understands why she is so deserving of derision, and why she is not a satisfactory role model for her heroine. Also, her description of the Bennets' infelicity clearly delineates that incompatibility is detrimental to marriage.

The Bennets, like the Allens, also prove to be poor guardians. Much like Mrs. Allen is more concerned with the state of her clothing than with the safety or propriety of Catherine's pursuits, Mrs. Bennet's time is mostly spent meddling in the affairs of her daughters. Mrs. Bennet orders Jane to travel on horseback rather than to take the carriage to visit the Netherfield ladies and Mr. Bingley, despite certainty that the weather will turn foul, and even shoos her out of the house "with many cheerful prognostics of a bad day" (Austen 226). When the rain-soaked Jane falls ill with fever, Mrs. Bennet is certainly to blame, but she is more proud of her scheming to leave Jane alone in Mr. Bingley's house than ashamed that her plan leaves her daughter sick. After Jane sends word home that she has fallen ill and will be staying at Netherfield until her health returns, Mr. Bennet treats this incident with his characteristic torpor: "'Well, my dear,' said Mr. Bennet, when Elizabeth had read the note aloud, 'if your daughter should have a dangerous fit of illness, if she should die, it would be a comfort to know that it was all in pursuit of Mr. Bingley, and under your orders'" (Austen 227).

Even more loathsome than Mrs. Bennet's intrusiveness is Mr. Bennet's indolence. The most woeful example of this behavior is when he allows Lydia to go to Brighton with the Forsters, even though Elizabeth tries to convince him of the dire consequences of such a plan. When she questions his reasoning, he blithely replies,

Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances We shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton [S]he is luckily too poor to be an object of prey to any body. (Austen 335-36)

Mr. Bennet is terribly wrong in his assessment of the potential dangers of sending foolish, imprudent Lydia to Brighton – which is more or less a repository for the officers that she and Kitty shamelessly chase – but even though he eventually admits his folly in judgment, he also admits that his self-blame will pass. Elizabeth tries to assuage his guilt after Lydia absconds from Brighton with Wickham, but he rebuffs her, saying, “No, Lizzy, let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough” (Austen 372). Mr. Bennet’s lethargy where Lydia is concerned rears its head again after she and Wickham are married: he swears that he will not receive the newlyweds into his home, but (probably due to Mrs. Bennet’s constant hen-pecking over the state of her “nerves”) the newlyweds descend upon Longbourn anyway. There is very little that truly perturbs Mr. Bennet about his family life; in fact, the only time in the novel in which his composure is truly rattled is when Mr. Darcy asks him for permission to marry Elizabeth, his favorite child. Mr. Bennet does at least acknowledge some responsibility for Lydia’s reckless behavior, while Mrs. Bennet passes the blame for Lydia’s thoughtlessness to “every body but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally owing” (Austen 365). She is only happy at having achieved her goal of marrying one of her daughters, regardless of the impropriety of the match and the social repercussions of having eloped with a man and lived with him for some time before nuptials actually took place. Even the Gardiners show concern for Lydia, and realize that she is not the only Bennet implicated in her

indiscretions. Neither Mr. Bennet nor Mrs. Bennet exercise adequate concern for the social or physical well being of their daughters, sacrificing parental control for the sake of their individual goals: Mrs. Bennet: the marriages of each of her girls, and Mr. Bennet: peace.

In addition to compatibility, another quality that Austen's narrators demand of her venerable characters is practical expectations of the conjugal state. While the married couples in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey* do not express much about what they expected from their own marriages, the reader understands what they expect of the marriages of the young people around them. Neither Mrs. Gardiner nor Mrs. Morland professes any overly sentimental or materialistic ideas about the nature of what makes a good marriage. In fact, Mrs. Gardiner shows a real distaste for maudlin turns of phrase that treat the subject of love in any immoderate way. She reproaches Elizabeth for using the idiom "violently in love" to describe Mr. Bingley's and Jane's feelings toward one another, telling her that the "expression of 'violently in love' is so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite, that it gives [her] very little idea. It is as often applied to feelings which arise from an half-hour's acquaintance, as to a real, strong attachment" (Austen 288). Both Mrs. Gardiner and Mrs. Morland have similar ideas about the monetary expectations of marriage, hoping for the best for Elizabeth and Catherine respectively, but always remaining realistic. For example, Mr. and Mrs. Morland love their daughter greatly, but both realize that Henry Tilney is of a very considerable fortune, and that the prospect of his marriage to Catherine, "under every pecuniary view, was a match beyond the claims of their daughter" (Austen 1089). Mrs. Morland also takes this "pecuniary view" into account when reflecting on the dissolved engagement between her son James and Isabella Thorpe. She tells Catherine that she feels compassion for her son's heartbreak, but that "it could not be a desirable thing to have him engaged to a girl whom [she] had not the smallest acquaintance with, and who was so entirely without fortune" (Austen 1082). The Morlands recognize both the social and the

financial imprudence of a match between two young people of small fortunes, as do the Gardiners. Mrs. Gardiner expresses a view of love to Elizabeth that retains notions of romance, but is also tempered with a healthy dose of realism, and she warns Elizabeth against letting emotion and sentimentality run away with her, not only for her own sake, but also for the sake of the young man to whom she would give her affection. She tells Elizabeth of her attentions to Wickham, “do not involve yourself, or endeavour to involve him in an affection which the want of fortune would make so very imprudent” (Austen 289). It is significant that she uses the word “affection”; she, like the narrator, emphasizes that it is an important element of a successful marriage. Mrs. Gardiner also advises Elizabeth on the different motives for courtship, although her counsel is rather tongue-in-cheek. Elizabeth, after losing Wickham’s affection to Miss King -- the new mistress of a £10,000 fortune – asks her aunt,

What is the difference in matrimonial affairs, between the mercenary and the prudent motive? Where does discretion end, and avarice begin? Last Christmas you were afraid of his marrying me, because it would be imprudent; and now, because he is trying to get a girl with only ten thousand pounds, you want to find out that he is mercenary. (Austen 294)

Mrs. Gardiner flippantly replies, “If you will only tell me what sort of girl Miss King is, I shall know what to think” (Austen 294). By enquiring into Miss King’s character, she sensibly acknowledges that personality and compatibility play an instrumental role in courtship. Both Mrs. Morland and Mrs. Gardiner have pragmatic expectations that they impart to Catherine and Elizabeth, and the narrators characterize the two younger women with the sensibility to heed this advice.

Mrs. Allen and Mrs. Bennet can boast of no such realistic ideas about marriage. When either of them relates her thoughts on marriage, their comments are limited to material objects,

such as gowns and jewelry. When Catherine enquires of Mrs. Allen about the Tilney family, all Mrs. Allen can relate is how much of a dowry Mrs. Tilney received, how much money her father gave her to buy wedding clothes, and what type of pearls she wore on her wedding day. Mrs. Bennet's understanding of what marriage entails is as inane as Mrs. Allen's. After it is announced that Lydia and Wickham will marry,

No sentiment of shame gave a damp to her triumph. The marriage of a daughter, which had been the first object of her wishes, since Jane was sixteen, was now on the point of accomplishment, and her thoughts and her words ran wholly on those attendants of elegant nuptials, fine muslins, new carriages, and servants. She was busily searching through the neighbourhood for a proper situation for her daughter, and, without knowing or considering what their income might be, rejected many as deficient in size and importance. (Austen 377)

Mrs. Bennet considers these things essential to the success of a marriage, and is beyond flabbergasted when Mr. Bennet refuses to admit the newlyweds into Longbourn, or to "advance a guinea" to buy wedding clothes, carriages, or the like for Lydia (377). She is not concerned in the least about the shame of Lydia's impetuosity and what effect it will have on her remaining unwed daughters to attract a husband, or about what the state of Lydia and Wickham's finances will be, or if they even possess any affection for one another. She, like Mrs. Allen, is only concerned with the tangibles of marriage.

Lastly, there is the marriage of the General and the late Mrs. Tilney, parents of Frederick, Henry, and Eleanor Tilney, who do possess all the wealth required for a luxurious and leisurely life, as well as male heirs to whom to pass their riches and family name. While there are no specific references to the General's fortune, it is clear that he is a prosperous man. Also, the fact that Henry, as a second son, will still be the beneficiary of a large inheritance and a parsonage is

indicative of the magnitude of General Tilney's prosperity. However, the General is guilty of a grating, harsh demeanor and of incivility to his children, and, implicitly, to his deceased wife. His unpleasant attitude and apparent incompatibility with his wife's temperament condemn his marriage to failure. Mrs. Tilney's children venerate her as a woman of "domestic, unpretending merits," and unparalleled character (Austen 1060), but Henry admits that his mother often had more than her share of the General's temper. He explains to Catherine, "he loved her, I am persuaded, as well as it was possible for him to – We have not all, you know, the same tenderness of disposition – and I will not pretend to say that while she lived, she might not often have had much to bear" (Austen 1061).

There are also indications of the incongruity between the parenting styles of General and Mrs. Tilney; Mrs. Tilney is characterized as having such a gentleness of character that it is unlikely that she exacted as much unquestioning obedience from her children as did the General. It is inconceivable that she would have turned Catherine out of her home with so little civility or concern for her safety, and it is easy to speculate that she would not have believed in the General's purely mercenary motives for marriage. The General espouses materialistic expectations of marriage, much like Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Allen do, and is only concerned with matches that may advance his children's pecuniary and social standings (and by proxy, his own).

The narrator spurns his behavior toward Catherine at Northanger:

The General had had nothing to accuse her of, nothing to lay to her charge, but her being the involuntary, unconscious object of a deception which his pride could not pardon, and which a better pride would have been ashamed to own. She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be. Under a mistaken persuasion of her possessions and claims, he had courted her acquaintance in Bath, solicited her company at Northanger, and designed her for

his daughter in law. On discovering his error, to turn her from the house seemed the best, though to his feelings an inadequate proof of his resentment towards herself, and his contempt of her family. (Austen 1086)

The hints at General Tilney's fiendishness coupled with the discourtesy he liberally showers on his children and on Catherine color him as a demonic husband and father-figure; this demonization might seem far-fetched, but it is put forth by the narrator herself. General Tilney's behavior is so nefarious that he has the distinct disdain of the narrator. She says that Catherine, upon learning why she was turned out of Northanger Abbey, "in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife . . . had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty" (Austen 1088). Mrs. Tilney doubtless met her husband's perpetual irritability with gracious equanimity, but even though Henry attempts to downplay the General's maltreatment of his wife, the reader cannot banish the feeling that the General's ill-usage of her drove Mrs. Tilney into an early grave. The Tilneys' marriage is ultimately just a dance of the General's aggressiveness and Mrs. Tilney's acceptance of her oppression – and ultimately a failure.

Chapter III: The Good, The Bad, and the Charlotte – Who Does the Narrator Want to Save?

The same points used to determine whether the extant marriages are successful or floundering apply to the novel's budding relationships: realistic expectations of marriage, a general agreeableness and sincerity of temperament, and, perhaps most importantly (though only demonstrated by Austen's more rounded characters) self-awareness. Of all the female characters presented in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, the women the narrator sets apart from their peers possess the traits that make them worth preserving from the fate of an unsuccessful marriage, like that of the Bennets or the Allens. The women that are not worthy of narratorial intervention are also underscored, often by their deficiency in the qualities that the heroines possess. That Elizabeth and Jane Bennet, Catherine Morland, and Eleanor Tilney need narratorial intervention has been demonstrated by an elucidation of their family's financial statuses, but financial necessity (or, in Eleanor's case, abundance) is not reason enough to merit the narrator's efforts at preservation. The Bennets' and the Morlands' pecuniary statuses are not exactly favorable; while the Morlands do possess some financial stability, the dowry that they can offer their daughters' suitors and the livings they can offer their sons are not remarkable enough to lure the more wealthy potential mates, and the Bennets, while comfortably protecting their own independence, will be hard put to secure that of their married daughters or to protect that of their unmarried girls after their deaths. Elizabeth, Jane, and Catherine's financial status make them vulnerable to narratorial extinction – that is, marriage to an unworthy suitor or a life of spinsterhood – the Scylla and Charybdis of Johnson's *Rambler* -- and therefore it is necessary for the narrators to intervene to save these women. Eleanor Tilney, while not in the same pecuniary danger in which the Bennet girls and Catherine find themselves, is likewise vulnerable to the aforementioned extinction, as her substantial inheritance and dower put her in danger of an

unsuitable match as might be constructed by the General and his mercenary motives. The marriages of these heroines should not be completely sentimental nor solely for financial gain; they should combine sentimentality and compatibility with financial stability, and that the narrators allow these women to marry the men they do assures the reader that such a balance exists. Austen's narrators present their readers with women who are not only in need of preservation for financial reasons, but are also worthy of preservation by the affability of their personalities.

The narrator initially describes Catherine Morland as an amiable yet unpromising young lady:

. . . her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind – her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and, when in good looks, pretty – and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is. (Austen 963)

Catherine's inauspicious nature is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the conventions of the Gothic novel that Austen was parodying in *Northanger Abbey*, but it is significant because it points to Catherine's modest upbringing. She is a young lady of strong convictions, but is also cognizant of her ignorance. Catherine struggles to see through the shady characters of Isabella and John Thorpe, but even though she is occasionally unsure of social constructs of behavior, she never behaves against her better instincts. When Catherine refuses to comply with Isabella's carriage ride scheme, Isabella does not restrain her irritation, accusing Catherine of obstinacy and petulance, but Catherine is firm in her adherence to her engagement with the Tilneys, telling Isabella, John, and even her brother, whose authority she had never before resisted, "If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe to be right If I could not be persuaded into doing what I

thought wrong, I never will be tricked into it” (Austen 1009-10). Catherine’s sincerity is unquestionable and laudable given the temptation she faces to renege on her former promise to attend the Tilneys on a country walk, and this earnestness clearly marks her as one of Austen’s heroines.

In Catherine’s sincerity, she is closely aligned with Eleanor Tilney; their conversation when they first meet at Bath is simple and common enough, in which “in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon” (Austen 994). Eleanor is clearly a minor character, but while her characterization is not as round or dynamic as Catherine’s, she is obviously the paradigm of elegant behavior in the novel. Eleanor receives the most gracious description of any female in *Northanger Abbey*: she is the exemplar of “resolute stillness,” “real elegance,” “good sense and good breeding,” and possesses the temperance of mind to be “young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of extatic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence” (Austen 985). The narrator’s description of Eleanor’s qualities is in direct contrast to the comportment of Isabella Thorpe, creating an obvious dichotomy of character: if Eleanor is the archetype, Isabella must be the antithesis of proper womanly conduct. Eleanor, unlike Catherine, can accurately discern the pretentiousness of others; she is well aware of Henry’s mock censure of Catherine’s diction in the Beechen Cliff scene, and her ability to see through Isabella’s caprice regarding her engagements to James Morland and Frederick Tilney will be illuminated. Catherine’s initial ignorance is part of her character development; she admits to it early in the novel, saying, “as to *most matters*, to say the truth, there are not many that I know my own mind about” (Austen

1023), but as the narrative progresses, she gains self-awareness. Catherine's and Eleanor's sincerity and pleasant temperament warrant the narrator's approval, assuring them of preservation from bad marriages.

Jane Bennet, like Catherine and Eleanor, is also a sincere and principled character, "firm where she [feels] herself to be right" (Austen 242). In Jane, the reader finds "great strength of feeling, a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner" united (Austen 221). Jane's only perceptible fault is a general tendency to like people, even when they have proved unworthy of her regard. Elizabeth Bennet perceives this flaw, and while expounding upon the injuriousness of this trait, she also elucidates the innate goodness that it exposes in Jane's personality. She tells Jane,

With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough; -- one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design – to take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad – belongs to you alone. (Austen 217)

Jane's guilelessness is not often met with, certainly not in the highly artificial societies presented in Austen's works. Elizabeth Bennet prides herself on being a superior judge of character, but while she may grasp Jane's character perfectly, she meets with less success with her most important acquaintance, Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy. Her almost willful misunderstanding of Darcy's true nature is the crux of Elizabeth's development, as it completes her journey to self-awareness (special attention will be paid to Darcy's role in Elizabeth's growth later). While Elizabeth is often smugly self-assured, and does not possess the same modesty of character as Jane, Eleanor, or Catherine, her "lively, playful disposition," intelligence, and sincerity redeem her, and make her worthy of narratorial intervention.

Austen's less laudable characters display no such sincerity; rather, they are defined by their insensibility and vapidness. The narrator provides a very ironic introduction to Isabella Thorpe, one that points out her superficial qualities while highlighting Catherine's naivety:

Their conversation turned upon those subjects, of which the free discussion has generally much to do in perfecting a sudden intimacy between two young ladies; such as dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes. Miss Thorpe, however, being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed, had a very decided advantage in discussing such points; she could compare the balls of Bath with those of Tunbridge; its fashions with the fashions of London; could rectify the opinions of her new friend in many articles of tasteful attire; could discover a flirtation between any gentleman and lady who only smiled at each other; and point out a quiz through the thickness of a crowd. These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new (Austen 972)

Isabella Thorpe is exactly the opposite of the admirable Miss Tilney. Isabella is given to affectation and to extremes of emotion, speaking in superlatives, often professing her violent love for something that she will abhor a few pages later. Her conversations are often one-sided, as she does not wait for a response from her auditors; her communications with Catherine are emblematic of her selfishness:

My sweetest Catherine, how have you been this long age? but I need not ask you, for you look delightfully. You really have done your hair in a more heavenly style than ever: you mischievous creature, do you want to attract every body? I assure you, my brother is quite in love with you already; and as for Mr. Tilney – but *that* is a settled thing – even *your* modesty cannot doubt his attachment now . . . Oh!

what would not I give to see him! I really am quite wild with impatience. (Austen 993)

Isabella's insincere raptures relegate her to unworthiness, but her inconstancy is her most vicious crime. She changes personalities as the situation suits her: while she is engaged to James, she is "immoderately sick of Bath" (Austen 993) because he prefers the country; when she fancies that she has captivated the attention of Captain Tilney, the Pump-room is once again her "favorite place" (Austen 1031). The narrator does not pass much explicit judgment on Isabella, leaving her instead to make a fool of herself. Catherine is often the lens through which the reader sees Isabella's fraudulence and selfishness, which is significant, given Catherine's naivety and hesitance to admit follies in those that she loves (much like Jane Bennet). Catherine recognizes the capriciousness of Isabella's behavior although she at first does not know to what to attribute it, and her uncertainty over the nature of Captain Tilney's attentions to Isabella gives her much uneasiness:

It seemed to her that Captain Tilney was falling in love with Isabella, and Isabella unconsciously encouraging him; unconsciously it must be, for Isabella's attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged as her engagement. To doubt her truth or good intentions was impossible; and yet, during the whole of their conversation her manner had been odd. She wished Isabella had talked more like her usual self, and not so much about money Isabella seemed an altered creature. (Austen 1034)

Isabella's chameleon-like tendency to change her personality to suit that of her current beau is ironic given her earlier declaration that, "[o]f all things in the world, inconstancy is my aversion" (Austen 1024), and it is this tendency which ultimately leaves her alone and husbandless at the end of the novel. The narrator does not need to attack Isabella or to censure her overtly; her

selfishness and vanity made evident by Catherine's observations make her unworthy of the narrator's preservative efforts.

Pride and Prejudice's Lydia Bennet is a capricious young lady devoted to her own selfish pursuits, and her only measure of self-awareness is a hyper-consciousness of her own importance, brought on by Mrs. Bennet's indulgence in her daughter's egocentric behavior.

Unlike Isabella and her penchant for affectation and hypocrisy, Lydia's greatest fault is that she is uncensored rather than insincere in her outbursts. The narrator introduces her reader to Lydia:

Lydia was a stout, well-grown girl of fifteen, with a fine complexion and good-humoured countenance; a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age. She had high animal spirits, and a sort of natural self-consequence, which the attentions of the officers, to whom her uncle's good dinners and her own easy manners recommended her, had increased into assurance. (Austen 234)

This description seems rather innocuous at first, but Lydia's actions soon merit her the narrator's scorn, which is delivered most adeptly through her sister Elizabeth. Much like *Northanger Abbey's* narrator does not directly censure Isabella often, *Pride and Prejudice's* narrator leaves the judgment of Lydia to the very perceptive and articulate Elizabeth. Lydia's attention-seeking behaviors go unnoticed by her mother, but Elizabeth sees Lydia for what she truly is: "self-willed and careless, . . . ignorant, idle, and vain" (Austen 326). Elizabeth is the lens through which the reader best views Lydia, judging her quite accurately, and even predicting that the trip to Brighton with the Forsters will be her downfall, as well as a strike against the reputations of her sisters. When begging Mr. Bennet to refuse Lydia permission to go, Elizabeth bemoans Lydia's character:

Our importance, respectability in the world, must be affected by the wild volatility, the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontroled! (Austen 336)

The narrator passes judgment on Lydia using Elizabeth as a filter, but Lydia's actions speak as vehemently against her as her sister's words, clearly marking her as a character of undesirable traits, worthy of the narrator's contempt, and unworthy of her intervention. Lydia, like Isabella Thorpe, is ultimately left to her fate.

Lydia marries George Wickham but remains wholly unchanged; much to the disgust of Elizabeth and the shock of Jane, "Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (Austen 380). Wickham's character is revealed to be no less disreputable than Lydia's in Mr. Darcy's letter, in which he discloses Wickham's "vicious propensities," "want of principle," and his "life of idleness and dissipation" (Austen 320). Even Elizabeth "detect[s], in the very gentleness which had first delighted her, an affectation and a sameness to disgust and weary" (Austen 337). Of course, Wickham's loathsomeness is not disclosed until after Elizabeth is out of danger of Wickham's attentions, which cease after he learns of Miss King's £10,000 inheritance. Miss King's sudden fortune is narratorial intervention at work: the narrator must prevent Elizabeth from marrying imprudently, and she does so by obstructing Wickham's and Elizabeth's courtship until such a time that Elizabeth can properly judge him. Elizabeth is saved from Lydia's wretched fate: a truly reprehensible version of Anolik's "nonnarratable quiescence" of marriage. Lydia's destiny – dependence, and insecurity -- is unacceptable to a character of Elizabeth's worthiness; the narrator intercedes on behalf of her deserving heroine, deferring her

marriage until a deserving suitor presents himself. Lydia, however, is left to Johnson's Scylla – a completely imprudent marriage.

A realistic expectation of matrimony is also an important component of a successful union, along with an affable temperament and sincerity. It has already been shown how Mrs. Bennet, Mrs. Allen, and the General possess completely frivolous and materialistic expectations of what validates a marriage; however, the younger heroines possess a much more sensible view that takes the focus off the selfish expectations of relationships and marriage and puts them into a more prosaic light, and warrants them the narrators' approval. Instead of looking at marriage as a means of gaining dresses, carriages, servants, and one's own household, these heroines consider what financial benefits and liabilities they and their partners bring to a marriage, as well as compatibility and affection. Elizabeth, Jane, Catherine, and Eleanor are able to approach relationships – their own as well as those around them – with common sense balanced by affection.

While the reader does not see Eleanor being courted by the unidentified young suitor that she eventually marries, her reactions to others' engagements reveal her pragmatism. When Catherine receives James's letter announcing the dissolution of his engagement to Isabella and intimating that she is soon to be engaged to Captain Frederick Tilney, Eleanor, expressing her "concern and surprize, [begins] to inquire into Miss Thorpe's connexions and fortune" (1065). That Eleanor is interested in what advantages Isabella can bring to the Tilney family shows her rational view of marriage: her immediate anxiety is the state of Isabella's finances, closely followed by concern over Frederick and Isabella's compatibility. She is also very aware of her brother's inconstancy in romantic attachments as well as of her father's illiberal demands on the pecuniary holdings of his children's potential mates, and as such remains unconvinced that any match between her brother and Miss Thorpe will proceed. She demonstrates a cognizance of the

way of the world: that both love and money must coexist in a relationship in order for that relationship to thrive. Eleanor is not a fortune-hunter like her father; rather, she is more closely aligned with Mrs. Gardiner of *Pride and Prejudice*, in that she realizes the line between “prudent” and “mercenary” motives for marriage, and in that she too weighs personalities when deciding on the propriety of a marriage. Eleanor is able to have both affection and financial security in her marriage because she demonstrates the ultimate prudence: holding out for love. The narrator intervenes on her behalf because of her worthiness, bestowing a title and a fortune on the man of her choice, making him truly worthy of her.

The less financially secure heroines are cognizant of their pecuniary appeal to their potential husbands. That Catherine questions Mrs. Allen about whether Henry Tilney is the only son of General Tilney after learning of his fortune proves that she too is concerned with money. Whether Henry has brothers will shape his own marriage goals: if he is at the end of a line of male heirs, he will be in need of marrying a wealthy woman to sustain his own fortunes, and if he is an only son his inheritance will be secure enough to allow him to court whoever he wishes. Unlike Isabella Thorpe and her unfounded expectations of Captain Tilney, Catherine is sensible about what her appeal to a man of such fortune as Henry could be. She is not given to idealization; when Catherine is listening to Isabella’s exclamations of the attractiveness of her brother James, she “secretly acknowledged the power of love; for, though exceedingly fond of her brother, and partial to all his endowments, she had never in her life thought him handsome” (Austen 1020). Catherine resists idealization in her relationship with Henry as well. Even after her faux pas with her Gothic imaginings about the true nature of Mrs. Tilney’s untimely demise, and after Henry has forgiven her and continues to show her affection, she still will not entertain the notion that Henry would choose her for his wife. Her realism makes her worthy of narratorial intervention.

Elizabeth Bennet is similarly aware of her and her sisters' financial appeal. She weighs in on the pecuniary attractiveness of men, not just of women, coming to the apparently startling realization that "handsome young men must have something to live on, as well as the plain" (Austen 293). Elizabeth realizes that some matches are lacking in affection, finances, and compatibility. She even apprehends the impropriety of her parents' marriage:

. . . she had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of [Mr. Bennet's] daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (Austen 339)

She similarly expounds on Lydia and Wickham's marriage: "How Wickham and Lydia were to be supported in tolerable independence, she could not imagine. But how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue, she could easily conjecture" (Austen 379). Her reluctance to believe in the success of Lydia's nuptials is echoed by Jane. Jane, who never wants to think ill of others, does not denigrate Wickham's character as Elizabeth does when she learns the truth of his life in Derbyshire, but she is sincerely concerned for Lydia: "I felt a little uneasy – a little fearful of my sister's happiness with him in marriage, because I knew that his conduct had not been always quite right" (Austen 367). Even the sentimental Jane is able to look realistically at Lydia and Wickham's relationship, and instead of seeing the connubial bliss that is supposed to attend marriage, she sees the disadvantages of uniting immorality with caprice. Jane's and Elizabeth's realistic approach to matrimony extends to the marriages of others, and assures them of the narrator's esteem and efforts at preservation.

Elizabeth turns her keen sensibility on herself, realizing the unlikelihood of Darcy's continuing fondness for her after Lydia disgraces herself and her family by eloping with Wickham. She realizes that her hold over Darcy has loosened, that "every thing *must* sink under such a proof of family weakness, such an assurance of the deepest disgrace. She could neither wonder nor condemn" (Austen 360). Her unwillingness to blame Darcy for the retraction of his affection shows her selflessness as well as her sensibility, as Jane's refusal to blame Bingley for withdrawing his attentions to her shows hers. Elizabeth is not always so sensible regarding matters of the heart; when infatuated with Mr. Wickham, she dresses herself quite carefully on the night of the Netherfield ball, preparing herself – as the narrator sarcastically informs the reader – "in the highest spirits for the conquest of all that remained unsubdued of his heart, trusting that was not more than might be won in the course of the evening" (Austen 259). However, in a few short weeks she grows from this unsophisticated assessment of love to a much more mature and realistic understanding. She explains to Mrs. Gardiner:

At present I am not in love with Mr. Wickham; no, I certainly am not. But . . . if he becomes really attached to me – I believe it will be better that he should not. I see the imprudence of it But since we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of fortune, from entering into engagements with each other, how can I promise to be wiser than so many of my fellow-creatures if I am tempted, or how am I even to know that it would be wisdom to resist? All that I can promise you, therefore, is not to be in a hurry. (Austen 290)

Elizabeth combines romance with logic, and shows her aversion to both the imprudent and the mercenary motives for marriage: the hallmark of a true Austen heroine. Jane Bennet likewise shows herself worthy of preservation by tempering romance with realism. While she does not

explicitly reveal her expectations of her relationship with Bingley, she is very pragmatic regarding the fickle nature of courtships. She imparts her wisdom to Elizabeth:

We must not be so ready to fancy ourselves intentionally injured. We must not expect a lively young man to be always so guarded and circumspect. It is very often nothing but our own vanity that deceives us. Women fancy admiration means more than it does. (Austen 285)

Jane's sensibility marks her as a character worthy of the narrator's preservative efforts.

The narrators characterize ladies that are not worthy of intervention with as much scrutiny as they do the heroines they wish to save. These women also demonstrate financial necessity: namely, Lydia Bennet and Isabella Thorpe, whose finances have already been detailed. As Austen's heroines possess a finely tuned sensibility regarding the nature of relationships and marriage, these other women are extremely unrealistic, looking only to the material trappings of weddings as the significance of marriage itself. As Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Allen believe that matrimony means fine carriages and gowns and the largest estate that money can buy, so do Lydia and Isabella have a trivial view of what marriage really means. For Lydia, her only motivation for marriage is that she might have the self-gratifying pleasure of being the first of her sisters to marry, so that she – the youngest – can chaperon her unmarried siblings at balls. Matrimony is no more serious for her than a new social status, and it is only due to Mrs. Gardiner that she realizes that she and Wickham should marry, for Mrs. Gardiner is unable to find that there was any plan for their nuptials, only that Lydia was “sure that they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify when” (Austen 384). After her elopement with Wickham, she writes a letter to Mrs. Forster explaining her glee at the surprise that signing her name “Lydia Wickham” will bring to her parents and sisters, saying of her eventual marriage, “What a good joke it will be! I can hardly write for laughing” (Austen 367).

The narrator's displeasure with Lydia is channeled once again through Elizabeth, who adeptly summarizes Lydia's attitude regarding relationships: ". . . Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body. Sometimes one officer, sometimes another had been her favourite, as their attentions raised them in her opinion. Her affections had been continually fluctuating, but never without an object" (Austen 361). Lydia's elopement was not a matter of chance, but only a matter of time and of opportunity. Lydia espouses a purely romantic view of love and matrimony – one not mitigated by realism or even the vaguest understanding of what it means to be contracted to someone in marriage – and it is this crude view along with her repugnant temperament that disqualifies her from narratorial preservation, leaving her to Anolik's "nonnarratable."

Isabella Thorpe grasps the idea that financial security should play a part in a successful union, but she strays from Mrs. Gardiner's prudent motives into the territory of the mercenary. She is enthralled to be marrying James Morland only as long as she is under a mistaken impression of the Morlands' finances (propagated by her brother John), but upon Mr. Morland's offer of £400 a year and an estate to the couple, her enthusiasm quickly deteriorates into disappointment. Before learning of this offer, she professes her intention to be satisfied with whatever Mr. Morland can provide:

. . . my fortune will be so small; [the Morlands] never can consent to [our marriage] . . . Oh! my sweet Catherine, in *your* generous heart I know it would signify nothing; but we must not expect such disinterestedness in many. As for myself, I am sure I only wish our situations were reversed. Had I the command of millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice . . . my wishes are so moderate, that the smallest income in nature would

be enough for me. Where people are really attached, poverty itself is wealth:
grandeur I detest (Austen 1020-21)

The reader can discern the falsity in Isabella's speech, and Isabella reveals it to be falsity when the next words she speaks are to "resolve on the quality of her wedding gown," as well as to fantasize how she will be "the gaze and admiration of every new acquaintance at Fullerton, the envy of every valued old friend in Putney, with a carriage at her command, a new name on her tickets, and a brilliant exhibition of hoop rings on her finger" (Austen 1022). She continues her musings, wondering "by what means their income was to be formed, whether landed property were to be resigned, or funded money made over," but the narrator caustically informs her reader that these were matters "in which [Isabella's] disinterested spirit took no concern" (Austen 1022). It is therefore no surprise that, when her dreams of financial plenty are destroyed by the reality of James's inheritance, Isabella's disappointment manifests itself so that even Catherine perceives the change: "'It is very charming indeed,' said Isabella, with a grave face . . . 'every body has a right to do what they like with their own money'" (Austen 1027-28). Far from retaining her romantic ideals about "poverty itself" being "wealth," she turns her attentions from James Morland to Captain Tilney, being assured of the money and social status that such a match can bring her. Isabella is not only mercenary where her own fortunes are concerned; she also exhibits mercenary tendencies in the affairs of her brother John. After John reveals to Isabella his intention to become engaged with Catherine (and what he misconstrues as encouragement from Catherine herself), Isabella tells Catherine,

I thought it a very foolish, imprudent business, and not likely to promote the good of either; for what were you to live upon, supposing you came together? You have both of you something to be sure, but it is not a trifle that will support a family now-a-days; and after all that romancers may say, there is no doing without

money. I only wonder John could think of it; he could not have received my last [letter]. (Austen 1032-33)

Isabella likely wrote to John detailing what she felt to be Mr. Morland's paltry offering, thus revealing the Morlands' finances to be less than desirable, and saw fit to sever his attachment to Catherine before it led to the same disappointment she has just experienced. Her selfishness ultimately leaves her isolated. James Morland realizes that her affection for him has subsided and now settled on the Captain, but when he ends their engagement and returns to Oxford, and Isabella's delusion about her hold over Frederick Tilney ends, Isabella takes no responsibility for her actions in driving away James. She writes to Catherine to beg her intervention, admitting only the suspicion that "he took something in [her] conduct amiss" (Austen 1071). Isabella rejects affection in favor of money, while repeatedly professing that love is everything. Some of her advice to Catherine is very rational: she, like Elizabeth Bennet, realizes the importance of taking one's time in romantic attachment; however, Isabella's idea of marriage revolves endlessly around profit. She is hypocritical in addition to being vain and selfish, and it is her search for the most financially advantageous match – regardless of compatibility or attachment -- that ultimately separates her from Catherine, Eleanor, Jane, and Elizabeth, and even Mrs. Gardiner. The narrator leaves Isabella to her own fate -- that of the "nonnarratable" -- ultimately deeming her unworthy of preservation, and refraining from intervening to save her engagement to James Morland at the close of the novel.

The female characters detailed to this point clearly belong to the category of the worthy or that of the unworthy; however, Charlotte Lucas is in a category of her own. She does not receive the direct censure of the narrator, nor does the narrator intervene on her behalf to save her from what appears to be an imprudent marriage. Where purely sentimental goals are one extreme of matrimonial expectations, Charlotte is firmly and admittedly on the other extreme:

absolute pragmatism, unmitigated by any notions of romance. The only explicit judgment of the narrator regarding Charlotte's character is when she and her family are introduced early in the novel: "[the Lucases] had several children. The eldest of them a sensible, intelligent young woman, about twenty-seven, was Elizabeth's intimate friend" (Austen 219). Despite her sensibility and intelligence – characteristics that merit Elizabeth, Jane, Catherine, and Eleanor the attention of the narrator – Charlotte is still left to her fate. The narrator does not intervene to present Charlotte with a "perfect mate" as she does the aforementioned heroines. This is because Charlotte does not hold out for love. Remaining unmarried is not an option for Charlotte, and courtship holds no promise for her either, as she avows to Elizabeth:

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

(Austen 222)

Charlotte's myopic notions of marriage are incongruous with the intelligence and sensibility that she possesses, but what sets Charlotte apart from Lydia and Isabella, and draws the line between her particular motives and the mercenary, is that Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins's proposal – and all that it entails – quite willingly. Charlotte has no delusions of marriage, even though her expectations are a far cry from the sentimentality tempered with realism that Elizabeth possesses, as well as from Lydia's visions of frivolity. Charlotte's view on matrimony is a touch mercenary, although clearly distinct from Isabella's fortune-hunting ways, but it reveals the truth about options available to 19th century women, echoing Samuel Johnson's Scylla and Charybdis. The narrator elucidates Charlotte's thoughts on her engagement to Collins:

She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. – Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. This preservative she had now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without ever having been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it. (Austen 278)

Charlotte gets exactly what she wants from her marriage with Collins, and as such does not need narratorial intervention: her expectations are fully realized, and the narrator does not need to provide the “perfect suitor” for her – he has already been presented. Charlotte tells Elizabeth: “I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins’s character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state” (Austen 280). While Elizabeth does not immediately accept this reckoning of Charlotte and Collins’s engagement, believing instead “the distressing conviction that it was impossible for [Charlotte] to be tolerably happy in the lot she had chosen” (Austen 280), the narrator informs her reader of Elizabeth’s myopia regarding marriage for financial security, noting the difference between her reaction to the news of Charlotte’s engagement and the news that Mr. Wickham was courting Miss King (and her fortune): “Elizabeth, less clear sighted perhaps in this case than in Charlotte’s, did not quarrel with him for his wish of independence” (Austen 292). A true Austen heroine would hold out for affection and compatibility combined with financial stability, but Charlotte does not, which dissociates her from the category of the utterly worthy heroine.

However, instead of putting Charlotte in the category of the disreputable, she is separated from characters like Lydia and Isabella by her determinism to do what is necessary to guarantee her own preservation from want. Johnson's Charybdis – a life of spinsterhood and financial peril – is not an option for Charlotte Lucas; Scylla – the imprudent marriage – is also not a reality for her, as there is no such thing as an imprudent marriage so long as the necessary securities and comforts are provided.

Austen and her narrator now do something unusual. Charlotte and Collins's actual nuptials are narrated, not dramatized, in a single, telling sentence which reveals the narrator's nonchalance regarding the marriage: "The wedding took place; the bride and bridegroom set off for Kent from the Church door, and every body had as much to say or to hear on the subject as usual" (Austen 290). However, the narrator does not immediately leave Charlotte to the "nonnarratable quiescence" of marriage. Her married state is dramatized when Elizabeth travels to Hunsford for a visit, and the reader witnesses the life that Charlotte has created for herself. Before her visit, Charlotte had already written Elizabeth of her satisfaction with all the material comforts of Hunsford, but Elizabeth still cannot resist studying the Collinses to detect their level of happiness. Collins is as smugly content and self-assured as ever, but to Elizabeth's – and perhaps the reader's – surprise, Charlotte shows no repentance or misery. "When Mr. Collins said anything of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, [Elizabeth] involuntarily turned her eye on Charlotte. Once or twice she could discern a faint blush; but in general Charlotte wisely did not hear" (Austen 296). Charlotte has arranged her life and her home as it best suits her, using for a parlor one of the less pleasing sitting rooms to ensure herself some comfort and isolation from her husband's ridiculousness, for, as Charlotte realizes, "Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had [she] sat in one equally lively" (Austen 302). Charlotte does achieve tolerable happiness in her

marriage with Collins, and Elizabeth acknowledges this: “Poor Charlotte! – it was melancholy to leave her to such society! – But she had chosen it with her eyes open; and though evidently regretting that her visitors were to go, she did not seem to ask for compassion” (Austen 328). It is only after Elizabeth’s visit that the narrator leaves Charlotte to the nonnarratable; Charlotte is hardly mentioned in the remaining pages of the novel until the letter that Mr. Bennet receives from Collins congratulating him on Jane and Bingley’s engagement, in which he announces Charlotte’s pregnancy. Now that it has been fully dramatized that Charlotte has achieved her expectations of marriage, the narrator can leave her to her fate.

Chapter IV: Who Does the Narrator Allow the Heroine to Marry?

The “perfect suitor” then is a seemingly elusive character: while he never arrives for Lydia or Isabella, and Charlotte accepts Collins because of his convenience, Austen does introduce Catherine’s and Elizabeth’s (as well as Eleanor’s and Jane’s) correct matches early in their respective novels, even though the narrators proceed to thwart their felicity until the heroes have proven worthy of their heroines. While a heroine must meet a number of criteria in order to merit the narrator’s distinction, the hero’s list of requisite qualities are decidedly fewer in number. The one thing that a hero absolutely must possess to be worthy of the narrators’ heroines is wealth, and Fitzwilliam Darcy and Henry Tilney (the beaux of the novels’ fully developed characters, Elizabeth Bennet and Catherine Morland, and as such the only two to be discussed in this section) certainly do not lack in that category. Darcy is by far the richest suitor of the two novels, as he receives £10,000 a year from his estate, and Henry Tilney, whose finances are never made explicit, is, as a second son, entitled to “a considerable fortune . . . by marriage settlements,” allowing him “an income of independence and comfort” (Austen 1089).

Unlike in the case of the Catherine and Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy’s and Henry’s expectations of matrimony are never explicitly revealed, and while their personalities are not as subtly nuanced as those of the heroines, the narrators’ characterizations of them reveal that their personalities revolve around a central trait. Ironically enough, that trait is often negatively perceived. Mr. Darcy initially draws the attention of everyone gathered at Sir William Lucas’s ball “by his fine, tall person, handsome features, [and] noble mien,” but during the second half of the evening, “his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased; and not all his large estate in Derbyshire could then save him from having a most forbidding, disagreeable

countenance” (Austen 215). Far from denying his pride, Mr. Darcy openly acknowledges it, saying, “where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation” (Austen 241). Despite the good he does among the poor, his initial characterization is that of a sour, arrogant man, and the narrator admits that Darcy “was at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting” (Austen 218).

Northanger Abbey’s narrator introduces her reader to Henry Tilney: “He . . . was rather tall, had a pleasing countenance, a very intelligent and lively eye, and, if not quite handsome, was very near it . . . and there was an archness and pleasantry in his manner which interested, though it was hardly understood by [Catherine]” (Austen 967). Catherine notices Henry’s “archness” of manner and the superiority that it insinuates in his silly conversation with Mrs. Allen about the quality of her muslins, and remarks to herself that, although it was kind of Tilney to engage Mrs. Allen in such inane talk, “he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others” (Austen 970). The narrator passes no explicit judgment on Henry; instead, much like the narrative strategy used to reveal the characterization and judgment of Isabella Thorpe, the narrator channels her opinion through the observances of Catherine. It is these extremes of characterization that the heroes need to correct in order become worthy of their heroines – Darcy’s pride must be tempered by humility, and Tilney’s displays of haughtiness must be checked by sympathizing with and attempting to reform genuine ignorance. Given such inauspicious initial characterizations, how do these characters deserve the distinction of hero? How is it that the narrators allow these men to marry their heroines, who they have already saved from the peril of other unsuitable matches? The redemption of the heroes happens at the hands of their heroines, and the heroines gain self-awareness through the narrators’ interference in their courtships.

Compatibility and Self-Awareness – Elizabeth and Darcy, Catherine and Henry

The narrator makes it apparent that Henry Tilney is fond of Catherine from the transcription of their first conversation. Henry praises her on her excellent temperament, although that praise is at first tempered by the same mocking air that Catherine notices in his discourse with Mrs. Allen. When Catherine remarks to Henry that under the instruction of Eleanor, she has finally learned to “love a hyacinth,” Henry teases her about her former indifference to flowers:

You have gained a new source of enjoyment, and it is well to have as many holds upon happiness as possible. Besides, a taste for flowers is always desirable in your sex, as a means of getting you out of doors, . . . [a]nd though the love of a hyacinth may be rather domestic, who can tell, the sentiment once raised, but you may in time come to love a rose? . . . The mere habit of learning to love is the thing; and a teachableness of disposition in a young lady is a great blessing.

(Austen 1048)

Henry pokes fun of Catherine’s “teachableness of disposition,” but it is this naivety and eagerness to learn that he esteems her for before her charming personality and society draw him closer to her. Henry truly adopts the role of the tutor-spouse, typical to the 18th and 19th century novel (Kelly 238²). During their walk to Beechen Cliff while in Bath, Henry imparts his ideas

² Gary Kelly writes in his article “Unbecoming a Heroine”: “An associated line [to the novel of manners, sentiment, and social emulation] was the novel of the young man’s first entrance into life, including choice of profession But in [such novels, the hero] is already perfected in his knowledge of the world, and so is ready assume the role of husband-mentor usual in such novels” (238). I have widened Kelly’s (and the conventional) “husband-mentor” into the term tutor-spouse, as I intend to apply this term not only to the male but also to the female (Elizabeth Bennet in particular), and also to remove the emphasis on the “perfection” that Kelly alleges attends the heroes (and my heroines) of the plot.

on novels, aesthetics, land enclosures, and politics, and finds Catherine a most willing student. She acknowledges her ignorance:

. . . she confessed and lamented her want of knowledge; declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw; and a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which [Henry's] instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste Delighted with her progress, and fearful of wearying her with too much wisdom at once, Henry suffered the subject to decline (Austen 1016)

Catherine is an enthusiastic pupil, as the narrator mockingly points out, but Henry's zeal for instruction is equally perceptible, as is the narrator's satire of Henry. Henry is flattered by the attention that the naïve Catherine pays to his every word, and fervently plays the role of tutor to Catherine's assiduous student. Henry enjoys Catherine's "teachableness," and the narrator has already informed the reader of Catherine's "attention to his words, and perfect reliance on their truth" (Austen 998). Catherine at first "seems more of a species than an individual; general, unimproved, female Nature," awaiting instruction in the ways of proper feminine behavior (Loveridge 6). Her love of Gothic terrors, helpless heroines, and brave rescuers is revealed early in the novel. She is obviously educated, but her instruction was limited to books from which "nothing like useful knowledge could be gained" – books that simply "supply [her memory] with those quotations which are so serviceable and so soothing in the vicissitudes of [life]" (Austen 962). Catherine, however, will eventually surmount the obstacle of her incomplete education when Henry disabuses her of her Gothic imaginings, and helps her understand the truth about personal character. Henry's teasing of Catherine borders on exploiting that confidence and trust that she places in him, and while Henry does genuinely care for Catherine, he must learn to

modulate his sarcasm, and to take a less directive role in Catherine's "education" than the one he assumes on Beechen Cliff. Catherine must learn to think for herself – which she will not learn until after the narrator intervenes in her budding relationship with Henry. The narrator will carefully orchestrate their development through "plot twists and circumlocutions" (Anolik 27), and they will each play the role of tutor-spouse. Before Henry comes to the realization that Catherine is his mate, the narrator will thwart their union twice: once at the hands of Catherine herself, and again, more egregiously, through John Thorpe and General Tilney.

Henry is truly surprised at "the dreadful nature of the suspicions [Catherine has] entertained" regarding the true nature of Mrs. Tilney's death (Austen 1061). His customary mocking tone fails him, and he beseeches Catherine to rethink her theory that the General was guilty of "some negligence . . . or . . . of something still less pardonable" in Mrs. Tilney's death: "What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live . . . Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you . . . Dearest Miss Morland, what ideas have you been admitting?" (Austen 1060-61). Catherine realizes the gravity of her mistake in letting her imagination be clouded by the Gothic novels she reads, and in allowing those imaginings to color reality. She achieves her most important measure of self-realization as a consequence of Henry's reproofs: she realizes that her "causeless terror" had been a "voluntary, self-created delusion . . . by a mind which . . . had been craving to be frightened," and she arrives at an important conclusion:

Charming as were all Mrs. Radcliffe's works . . . it was not in them perhaps that human nature, at least in the midland counties of England, was to be looked for . . . [A]mong the English, she believed, in their hearts and habits, there was a general though unequal mixture of good and bad. Upon this conviction, she would

not be surprized if even in Henry and Eleanor Tilney, some slight imperfection might hereafter appear (Austen 1062)

Although the narrator is subtly mocking Catherine's "revelatory" ideas on human nature, Catherine's recognition of the "general though unequal measure of good and bad" in people is instrumental in her ability to see through the affectation of Isabella Thorpe, and it shows her maturation from the "ignorant and uninformed female mind" that she is when she arrives at Bath (Austen 963). Catherine entertains her Gothic notions at other times during her stay at Northanger, and while she usually experiences a "shortly succeeding ray of common sense" (Austen 1059) that adds to her sense of shame over the ridiculousness of her fancies, it takes Henry's direct censure to really make her aware of her folly, and to make her resolve to change it. Henry too gains self-awareness from Catherine's Gothic faux-pas; he realizes the extent to which Catherine relies on his good opinion and wisdom when he rebukes her for her suspicions, "and the only difference in his behaviour to her, was that he paid her rather more attention than usual. Catherine had never wanted comfort more, and he looked as if he was aware of it" (Austen 1062). Henry softens his sardonic demeanor towards Catherine with his "astonishing generosity and nobleness of conduct, in never alluding in the slightest way to what had passed," leaving Catherine to "continual improvement by any thing he said" (Austen 1063). Catherine's Gothic imaginings – and the narratorial intervention that places Henry on the staircase in time to discover Catherine in her self-delusions – bring her and Henry closer together through their awareness that there are aspects of their personalities that need amendment.

Catherine's self-awareness is advanced by her interactions with Isabella Thorpe. When Catherine first meets Isabella, she is in awe of Isabella's experience and coquetry. As a 17-year-old girl from a retired village, with no models of female behavior besides those of her mother, Mrs. Allen, and her sisters (all of which are younger than she), Isabella's behavior is a novelty

and a marvel to her. However, though at first convinced of the intimacy and trust between herself and Isabella, Catherine soon finds herself doubting Isabella's sincerity. When the Thorpes deceive her into thinking that the Tilneys have broken their engagement with her, Catherine is truly wretched upon encountering Henry and Eleanor on their way to retrieve Catherine for their outing. Isabella is too much engaged in flirting with James Morland to be attentive to Catherine's woes, and Catherine experiences her first dawning of doubt regarding Isabella's true character: "Catherine could almost have accused Isabella of being wanting in tenderness towards herself and her sorrows; so very little did they appear to dwell on her mind, and so very inadequate was the comfort she offered" (Austen 1004). She feels a similar twinge of doubt about Isabella regarding Mr. Morland's proposed settlement; when Isabella demonstrates such gravity and disappointment at the figures mentioned in Mr. Morland's letter, Catherine is truly hurt by the insinuations of her father's parsimony (Austen 1028), but excuses Isabella's attitude by assuring herself that the cause of her unkindness is the delay of her nuptials until James comes of age. However, as Catherine observes the attentions that Isabella pays to Captain Tilney, as well as the attentions that he pays to her, she is thoroughly perturbed, and can find no justification for Isabella's actions. Here, Henry's role of tutor-spouse expands from aesthetics and politics to matters of the heart. Catherine expresses her discomfort, and Henry in his role as mentor entreats Catherine to consider more closely the nature of Isabella's attachment to James, as well as that of Isabella to Frederick. He poses a series of logical questions to her regarding the danger that Captain Tilney poses to James and Isabella's engagement:

My dear Miss Morland . . . in this amiable solicitude for your brother's comfort, may you not be a little mistaken? . . . Would he thank you, either on his own account or Miss Thorpe's, for supposing that her affection, or at least her good-behavior, is only to be secured by her seeing nothing of Captain Tilney? Is he safe

only in solitude – or, is her heart constant to him only when unsolicited by any one else? (Austen 1036)

Catherine cannot resist Henry's reason, and finds comfort in the idea that "Henry Tilney must know best," finally rationalizing Isabella's apparent fickleness as "judicious affection" (Austen 1037). Rather than tell Catherine explicitly what to think, Henry becomes adept at leading Catherine to draw her own conclusions; after his harshest criticism of Catherine over her Gothic suspicions and his advice to "consult her own understanding," Catherine no longer hesitates to make up her mind about Isabella's behavior to herself and to her brother James. After she receives Isabella's letter entreating her to intercede on her behalf with James regarding their broken engagement, she definitively judges Isabella's character. She says of Isabella once and for all: "She is a vain coquette, and her tricks have not answered. I do not believe she had ever any regard either for James or for me, and I wish I had never known her" (Austen 1072). Her final, accurate judgment is indicative of her self-awareness – she no longer needs Henry, or even James, whose authority had always taken precedence, to tell her what to believe. Henry praises her assessment, ironically stating that her mind is "warped by an innate principle of general integrity" (Austen 1072). Henry is pleased with Catherine's development and her continued display of "what is most to the credit of human nature" (Austen 1066) – sincerity – a trait valued not only by Henry, but by the narrator as well.

More malicious than the Gothic fantasies that (for a moment) threaten to thwart the perfect felicity of Catherine and Henry is the misleading information that John Thorpe propagates regarding the Morlands' financial status. While the reader catches glimpses of John at work – whispering to the General at the balls and at the theater, questioning Catherine about the Allens' children – it is not until the final pages of *Northanger Abbey* that his role in deceiving General Tilney is fully revealed. While misrepresenting the Morlands' and the Allens' wealth

may not appear to be such a heinous crime, to a man like General Tilney, being poorer than originally assumed is a crime that warrants immediate discharge from his home and severance of all ties with him and his family. John Thorpe, in order to gratify his own vanity on being applied to by the General for information on Catherine, “represent[s] the [Morland] family as yet more wealthy than his vanity and avarice had made him believe them . . . by doubling what he chose to think the amount of Mr. Morland’s preferment, trebling his private fortune, bestowing a rich aunt, and sinking half the children” (Austen 1086-87). He assures the General that the Allens are childless, and adds to the dower Catherine would receive from her parents (some £10,000 or £15,000 pounds according to his “knowledge”) the Allens’ Fullerton estate. The narrator purposefully delays the revelation of John Thorpe’s misleading information until Henry himself is apprised of the deception. This deferment creates dramatic irony, in that the General “knows” more than the reader (and Henry), so that the reader is truly shocked when his nefarious motives for Catherine’s dismissal are revealed. The reader is justified in vilifying the General; like Catherine, the reader has “scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (Austen 1088) by assuming that he either killed or imprisoned his wife. Henry decides to take Catherine as his wife against his father’s wishes, but the General’s deplorable behavior justifies Henry’s rebelliousness. This narrative strategy serves an important function in Henry and Catherine’s engagement. Not only the narrator postpones disclosing the truth of John’s meddling to the reader; Henry postpones disclosing the truth about the General’s disapprobation to Catherine until after he has secured her promise of affection and acceptance of his proposal. Although the reader applauds Henry’s disobedience, Catherine, had she known the truth before Henry’s profession of his love, would have rejected his proposal precisely because it predicated filial disobedience. The narrator explains:

The affrighted Catherine, amidst all the terrors of expectation, as she listened to this account, could not but rejoice in the kind caution with which Henry had saved her from the necessity of a conscientious rejection, by engaging her faith before he mentioned the subject [of the General's condemnation]; and as he proceeded to give the particulars, and explain the motives of his father's conduct, her feelings soon hardened into even a triumphant delight. (Austen 1086)

While the reader rejoices in Henry's defiance of the General, Catherine would not have approved had she understood the motives for his command beforehand. She would have *conscientiously* rejected Henry's proposal of marriage, and thwarted her own happy ending perhaps permanently.

When the truth of the Morlands' finances is revealed, the General believes that his expulsion of Catherine without notice from Northanger is not an adequate display of his resentment and contempt (Austen 1086), but the General's scorn does not stop there. On Henry's return from Woodston, the General informs him of Catherine's dismissal from Northanger and orders him not to think of her again; however, "[s]uch was the permission upon which [Henry] had now offered her his hand" (Austen 1086). After the refining process of thwarting Henry and Catherine's engagement twice, *Northanger Abbey's* narrator finally deems the hero and heroine worthy of each other. The General's decree that Henry cease all communication with Catherine makes Henry determined to declare his love: "He felt himself bound as much in honour as in affection to Miss Morland, and believing that heart to be his own which he had been directed to gain, no unworthy retraction of a tacit consent, no reversing decree of unjustifiable anger, could shake his fidelity, or influence the resolutions it prompted" (Austen 1088). Catherine achieves the ideal Austen marriage, composed of everything that the novel has proclaimed to its reader to be essential for a successful match: realistic expectations on the part of the heroine, sincerity, agreeableness of temperament (now perfected by the trials of the hero

and heroine's courtship), financial security, and affection. Added to Henry and Catherine's compatibility is the sentiment of gratitude, which Henry at first expresses to Catherine for her friendship with Eleanor, but which deepens into the very basis of his fondness for her. The narrator explains (tongue firmly in cheek regarding the "novelty" of gratitude in romantic attachments):

. . . for, though Henry was now sincerely attached to her, though he felt and delighted in all the excellencies of her character and truly loved her society, I must confess that his affection originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine's dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own. (Austen 1086)

The narrator draws attention to the artificiality of the ending as Henry and Catherine await the abatement of the General's fury at their engagement: "The anxiety, which in this state of their attachment must be the portion of Henry and Catherine, and of all who loved either, as to its final event, can hardly extend, I fear, to the bosom of my readers, who will see in the tell-tale compression of the pages before them, that we are hastening together to perfect felicity" (Austen 1089). Their actual marriage takes place in the last lines of the novel with as little pomp and circumstance as does Charlotte and Collins's wedding: "Henry and Catherine were married, the bells rang, and everybody smiled" (Austen 1090), demonstrating the narrator's unenthusiastic submission to the end – to the "death" – of her narrative. However, because the narrator has preserved the heroine from an importunate match, and guided her into the arms of the man best suited to care for her, even though it is the "death" of the narrative, the reader is left with the consolation that it is at least not the emotional or intellectual death of the heroine. The narrator's

preservative efforts have come to fruition: Catherine Morland is safe, even in her acquiescence to the “nonnarratable.”

That Fitzwilliam Darcy is fond of Elizabeth Bennet in their first few conversations in *Pride and Prejudice* is not immediately evident; however, the narrator often enters his mind – dodging his pride – to clarify. Darcy is mortified to admit to himself that Elizabeth’s face “was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes . . . and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness” (Austen 222). He is attracted to the “mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner,” and he realizes that, “were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger” (Austen 238). Elizabeth can profess no cordial feelings towards Darcy, but from the first spectacle of their banter it is clear that they have each met their match in intelligence. Elizabeth takes a special pleasure in being impertinent to Darcy, arguing with him to assert her own point or to deconstruct his, or outright rebuking his lack of tact in social matters. They spar verbally on the subjects of forgiveness and resentment, the latter of which Darcy admits he is guilty of in temperament, calling it a “natural defect, which not even the best education can overcome” (Austen 242). He declares that once lost, his favor cannot be redeemed, which Elizabeth proudly attributes to what she feels to be Darcy’s greatest “defect,” “a propensity to hate everybody” (Austen 242). Darcy returns fire, informing Elizabeth that her defect “is willfully to misunderstand [everyone]” (Austen 242). Darcy pinpoints Elizabeth’s fault exactly; she never questions her prejudice against Mr. Darcy from the moment that it is conceived, and it is not until the narrator intervenes that she even considers giving Darcy a second chance to make an impression. There are several other jousts of words between Darcy and Elizabeth, and while the narrator reveals Darcy’s “tolerable powerful feeling towards her” (Austen 262), Elizabeth’s only consideration of Darcy is how she can cause him the most discomfort. The narrator allows

the reader insight into each character's mind without allowing Elizabeth or Darcy to see into each other's minds, putting Elizabeth and Darcy at cross-purposes for the first half of the narrative. This narrative strategy heightens the dramatic irony produced by Darcy's mangled first proposal to Elizabeth, and highlights the aspects of the hero's and heroine's temperaments that need improvement before the narrator will allow the match to proceed.

In Kent, removed from the constant attendance of Bingley, Caroline, Mr. and Mrs. Hurst, and the rest of the Bennet family, Darcy's self-important façade dissolves as the self-restraint imposed by the watchful eyes of Miss Bingley and Mrs. Bennet is lifted. Darcy's demeanor softens, much to the consternation of Elizabeth. He often intercepts her on her favorite walk, and Elizabeth notices during one of their reconnoiters

. . . that he was asking some odd unconnected questions – about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins's happiness; and that in speaking of Rosings and her not perfectly understanding the house, he seemed to expect that whenever she came into Kent again she would be staying *there* too. (Austen 310)

She is sufficiently distressed by Darcy's attentions to her, but nothing could prepare her for the surprise of Darcy's proposal, especially after learning that he was instrumental in separating Bingley from Jane. He cites the same objections to his attachment to Elizabeth that he does to Bingley's attachment to her sister, while professing his affection for her despite her "inferiority – of its being a degradation – of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination" (Austen 314). He announces to Elizabeth: "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (Austen 314). His pride does not allow him to conceive of rejection, and when Elizabeth begins her rebuttal, Darcy "seemed to catch her words with no less resentment than surprise. His

complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature” (Austen 314). Elizabeth demolishes his cool self-righteousness, and it is some time before he regains his composure. Elizabeth is also disturbed by Darcy’s proposal, noting that “he was not more eloquent on the subject of tenderness than of pride,” but that “[i]n spite of her deeply-rooted dislike, she could not be insensible to the compliment of such a man’s affection,” finding it “gratifying to have inspired unconsciously so strong an affection” (Austen 314, 316). She finds Darcy’s pride “abominable” and “shameless” (Austen 316), and is incredulous that he should accuse her of the same pride in her refusal that she convicted him of long ago. Darcy tells her of his reservations about their relationship:

. . . these offences might have been overlooked, had not your *pride* [emphasis added] been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own? (Austen 315-16)

Elizabeth is as upset by Darcy’s denigration of her circumstances as she is by his regard. She forgoes all the previous politeness that she exhibited towards Mr. Collins when rejecting his proposal, and loses the resolve with which she accepts the dissipation of Wickham’s attentions to her. She, “from actual weakness,” cries for half an hour, and awakens the next morning “to the same thoughts and meditations which at length closed her eyes” (Austen 316-17).

As contemptible as Darcy’s language and manner are, his objections are all based on prudence, and, ironically enough, had the narrator had the same objections to her heroine’s suitor, the match would indeed have been permanently inhibited. Though painful, his misgivings are true, yet he pursues his desire to marry Elizabeth based on genuine affection for her. Darcy possesses Austen’s ultimate prudence – like Jane, he holds out for love. He could easily marry

Caroline Bingley, and Lady Catherine DeBourgh is convinced of her nephew and her daughter Anne's betrothal (which would certainly be the most financially and socially advantageous match of all); however, Darcy reserves his regard for Elizabeth alone. The pride that Elizabeth takes in being an accurate judge of character has been clouded by prejudice, and Darcy's pride dulls any sensitivity to Elizabeth's feelings as he proceeds to annihilate her dignity and that of her family. The narrator dramatizes this proposal scene because simple narration would not adequately convey the surprise of either character – Elizabeth's at being applied to for her hand in marriage by the "last man in the world whom [she] could ever be prevailed on to marry" (Austen 316), and Darcy's at being rejected. The narrator manipulates the reader as well as her characters: the reader is almost as shocked as Elizabeth and Darcy are when observing their behavior and language in this scene. Both Elizabeth's and Darcy's actions are abhorrent, even though the reader views Elizabeth's impudence with a milder repugnance than that felt for Darcy's abrasiveness. The narrator allows the reader to pass judgment not only on Darcy but on Elizabeth as well, and as they approach self-awareness, they are both able to criticize their behavior with the same acumen with which the reader judges them, and with which they once judged each other.

Both Darcy and Elizabeth are in need of self-awareness, and now that the narrator has dramatized the debacle of Darcy's first proposal, they can each begin to grow, refining themselves for their ultimate felicity. In his letter, Darcy clarifies for Elizabeth the matters of his interference in Jane and Bingley's romance and his supposed bankrupting of George Wickham. The narrator is once again at work, reproducing Darcy's letter in its entirety, and allowing the reader to absorb Darcy's explanations unpunctuated by Elizabeth's opinions. As soon as the narrative resumes, Elizabeth admits that she reads the letter "with a strong prejudice against everything he might say," interpreting his style as impenitent and full of "pride and insolence"

(Austen 321) – judgments that the reader might have adopted had the letter been reproduced with Elizabeth’s interruptions. Upon a second perusal though, she is overwhelmed by how differently she feels, and she realizes that although their acquaintance had not been of the most intimate kind, she had never “seen any thing that betrayed [Darcy] to be unprincipled or unjust – anything that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits,” and that in his most intimate circle he was “esteemed and valued” enough to prove him capable of “*some amiable feeling*” (Austen 323). When she realizes how gravely she has mistaken his character, her shame is absolute. She realizes that Darcy’s accusation of her being inhibited by pride was justified, and that not only was she formerly proud, but also “blind, partial, prejudiced, and absurd” (Austen 323). Elizabeth achieves a level of self-awareness from Darcy’s words that she could not have achieved on her own, and that could not have been brought about by a lesser man. Elizabeth realizes that she and Darcy are in fact guilty of the same irrepressible pride:

“How despicably I have acted!” she cried. “I, who have prided myself on my discernment! – I, who have valued myself on abilities! who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable [sic] distrust. – How humiliating is this discovery! – Yet, how just a humiliation! . . . But vanity . . . has been my folly. – Pleased with the preference of [Wickham], and offended by the neglect of [Darcy], on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and even driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.” (Austen 323)

Elizabeth experiences a change of heart: “when she considered how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided [Darcy], her anger was turned against herself; and his disappointed feelings became the object of compassion. His attachment excited *gratitude* [emphasis added], his general

character respect” (Austen 326). Elizabeth cannot think of her past behavior without either “vexation or regret” (Austen 326); the smugness that she exhibited at the opening of the novel has been neutralized.

Darcy’s character epiphany is not revealed until later, but its effects are felt as early as his and Elizabeth’s accidental meeting at Pemberley after the proposal. Clearly, Darcy has been shaken by Elizabeth’s refusal and the charges of incivility that she laid to his character; Elizabeth remarks, “never in her life had she seen his manners so little dignified, never had he spoken with such gentleness as on this unexpected meeting” (Austen 346). It takes very little time before Elizabeth thinks of “his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before” (Austen 345): “there was a motive within her of good will which could not be overlooked. It was gratitude. – Gratitude, not merely for having once loved her, but for loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him” (Austen 353). Elizabeth defines her initial attachment as one arising of gratitude, much like the gratitude the narrator of *Northanger Abbey* exposes as the source of Henry Tilney’s attachment to Catherine: a gratitude for having wholly given one’s regard without (or in Elizabeth’s case, despite) reservations. The narrator says – though not nearly as sardonically as she does in *Northanger Abbey* – that “gratitude and esteem are good foundations of affection” (Austen 360), and Elizabeth comes to a startling realization regarding the once loathsome Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy:

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgment, information, and

knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance.

(Austen 378)

The narrator acknowledges that a marriage between Darcy and Elizabeth will be mutually beneficial. Instead of the “husband-mentor” that Kelly writes of, the Darcys will be tutor-spouses to each other. Not only is Darcy to be a tutor-husband for Elizabeth, expanding her intelligence by his worldliness, but Elizabeth is to be a tutor-wife, teaching him by constant contact with the “easy playfulness” of her manners (that Darcy confesses to admire early in their acquaintance) the “liveliness” that she believes is his sole want. Darcy’s change of heart is not dramatized as Elizabeth’s is; Elizabeth’s maturation – while closely tied to Darcy’s – is still the focus of the narrative, and Darcy’s repentance is palpable from the moment of their chance meeting at Pemberly, and need not be elaborated.

Although Elizabeth’s self-awareness has come to fruition, the narrator has more trials in store for she and Darcy. Lydia’s elopement with Wickham is another reason for Darcy to avoid connection with a family such as the Bennets, but far from repulsing him, the potentially disastrous event propels him into action, without wishing to publicize his involvement in the matter, and forbidding the privy parties to mention it. On receiving Mrs. Gardiner’s disclosure that Darcy did in fact negotiate Lydia and Wickham’s marriage, Elizabeth is thrown “into a flutter of spirits”:

Her heart did whisper, that he had done it for her . . . [but] she soon felt that even her vanity was insufficient, when required to depend on his affection for her, for a woman who had already refused him, as able to overcome a sentiment so natural as abhorrence against a relationship with Wickham. Brother in law of Wickham!

(Austen 386)

Even though Darcy's affection overcomes the hurdle of Lydia's scandalous elopement and the promise of Wickham for a relation, a final obstruction to his union with Elizabeth remains: the dissenting voice of Lady Catherine DeBourgh, who will not stand for the "shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted" (Austen 404) by Darcy's marriage to a woman of such inferior birth.

However, rather than further thwart their union, Lady Catherine's trip to Longbourn to forbid Elizabeth's continued involvement with Darcy miscarries. Darcy sees, in Lady Catherine's inability to exact a promise from Elizabeth to refuse Darcy should another proposal of marriage be made to her, hope. Upon his return to Hertfordshire, he tells Elizabeth, "I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly" (Austen 409). Darcy continues, revealing his character epiphany regarding the folly of his pride, and Elizabeth's role in bringing it about:

Such I was [i.e. proud], from eight to eight and twenty; such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth! What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard indeed at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled. I came to you without a doubt of my reception. You shewed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased.

(Austen 411)

Elizabeth is a successful tutor-wife, and Darcy is a successful tutor-husband; the benefits of the match of her liveliness and his worldliness are virtually limitless.

The narrator sculpts this relationship throughout the "circumlocutions and plot twists" (Anolik 27) of the narrative, and through the purifying process of narratorial thwarting, Elizabeth and Darcy – like Henry and Catherine – have proven worthy of one another, and Darcy's second proposal and their subsequent marriage are allowed to proceed without interference or

dramatization. *Pride and Prejudice*'s narrator draws attention to the artificiality of the marriage ending by not giving the reader the marriage ending at all; while *Northanger Abbey*'s narrator surmises the Tilneys' marriage in a single, impassive line, *Pride and Prejudice*'s narrator skips over it entirely, giving instead of the one-line gloss, a chapter break. Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage – as well as Bingley and Jane's – is accepted as inevitable, and is allowed to proceed without interference, dramatization, or even succinct narration. This is the narrator's relinquishing of her heroines (and her narrative) to the marriage plot, and her acceptance that this is the end. The narrator speaks through Mr. Bennet (relaying the sentiment that is shared by the reader): “. . . he deserves you. I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to any one less worthy” (Austen 415). Elizabeth Bennet has been spared the reprehensible fate of a bad marriage: the narrator stops her potential marriage to Mr. Collins, to Mr. Wickham, and even to Darcy until such a time that he can prove himself worthy of the love of a heroine of Elizabeth's caliber. She – and the narrator -- can now acquiesce to the “nonnarratable” of marriage.

Chapter V: Conclusion

Despite the failed marriages that abound in her novels, Jane Austen's heroines are always married by the conclusion of the narrative. This is perhaps the irony of all ironies of Austen literature, but Austen concludes that marriage is a necessary "evil," as it ensures the survival of the sensible and intelligent women that she obviously esteems. Austen and her narrators present readers with a middle road between Johnson's Scylla and Charybdis: yes, the heroine must allow herself to be contracted to a man in marriage, but at least the man is one of good character, great fortune, and is deserving of his heroine. Austen and her narrators carefully contrive this irony throughout *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as throughout Austen's other novels, ending each novel with a wedding and seeming to forget the earlier narrative attempts to stop the marriage of her heroine and hero. Why does Jane Austen go to such lengths to paint for the reader an intricate portrait of the peril 19th century women faced only to marry off the heroine as if the pages between the first chapter and the last had never existed? The key is in Austen acknowledging that these were the conflicts that women faced; that Austen does not attempt to hide the loose ends of her narrative draws "direct attention to the artificial nature of literary closure" (Stevenson 470). It is tempting to discard Austen's implicit moralizing on the subjects of women and marriage, and to conclude that there is no purpose to her narrators' meddling since the heroines of her novels succumb to the institution of marriage anyway, but this would be an egregious misreading. Austen seemingly presents narratives without a clear ending – with a conclusion in which nothing is concluded; however, Austen's novels are profound statements on the condition of the female in the 19th century, and even though loose ends are not satisfactorily knotted and trimmed, the significance is to have broached this touchy subject at all. Austen's narratives perhaps provided comfort, solidarity, or even humor to women immured in the

“nonnarratable.” Her novels demonstrate that there can be a middle ground between the mercenary and the prudent marriage – one that combines financial security, compatibility, affection, and pragmatism, instead of leaning to one extreme or the other. By introducing her heroine’s perfect suitor at the opening of the narrative, and then using plot twists to thwart the match until the hero and heroine mature sufficiently, Austen’s narrators preserve the heroine from the horrible fates that Samuel Johnson so vehemently denounces in his essays. Although the narrator initially is reluctant to marry off her heroine, once she has ascertained that the hero is deserving (by subjecting them both to potential disasters that threaten to tear their relationship asunder), she allows her heroine to be swept away by the current of the conventional marriage plot. The narrator acknowledges that nuptials signify the end of the heroine, as well as the end of the narrative, by refusing to dramatize the wedding, often substituting a single line of narration in lieu of a longer account, or, in the case of Elizabeth and Darcy, conspicuously avoiding mentioning that a wedding took place at all. While the narrator and the heroine must acquiesce to the “nonnarratable,” generations of readers have accepted that, at the very least, the heroine and the narrative have been preserved from a reprehensible fate, and have both escaped “unhappily ever after.”

Bibliography

- Anolik, Ruth Bienstock. "The Missing Mother: The Meanings of Maternal Absence in the Gothic Mode." *Modern Language Studies* 33.1/2 (2003): 24-43. <www.jstor.org>.
- Armstrong, Nancy. "Captivity and Cultural Capital in the English Novel." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 31 (1998): 373-398. <www.jstor.org>.
- Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice. The Complete Novels*. New York: Penguin, 2006. 211-421.
- . *Northanger Abbey. The Complete Novels*. New York: Penguin, 2006. 959-1090.
- Johnson, Samuel. *The Rambler, No. 39 [Marriage (2)]*. *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*. Ed. Donald Green. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 197-200.
- . *The Rambler, No. 167 [Marriage (4)]*. *Samuel Johnson: The Major Works*. Ed. Donald Green. Oxford World's Classics. New York: Oxford UP, 2000. 243-46.
- Kelly, Gary. "Unbecoming a Heroine: Novel Reading, Romanticism, and Barrett's The Heroine." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 45.2 (1990): 220-41. <www.jstor.org>.
- Kinkead-Weekes, Mark. "This Old Maid: Jane Austen Replies to Charlotte Brontë and D.H. Lawrence." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. 30.3 (1975): 399-419. <www.jstor.org>.
- Loveridge, Mark. "Northanger Abbey; Or, Nature and Probability." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 46.1 (1991): 1-29. <www.jstor.org>.
- Newman, Karen. "Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending." *ELH*. 50.4 (1983): 693-710. <www.jstor.org>.
- O'Farrell, Mary Ann. "Austen's Blush." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. 27.2 (1994): 125-39.
- Perry, Ruth. "Sleeping With Mr. Collins. (Conference Papers)." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*. 22 (2000): 119ff. <go.galegroup.com>.
- Pool, Daniel. *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist – The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth Century England*. New York: Touchstone, 1993.

Porter, Roy. *English Society in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Penguin, 1982.

Stevenson, John Allen. “‘A Geometry of His Own’: Richardson and the Marriage-Ending.”

Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900. Restoration and Eighteenth Century. 26.3

(1986): 469-483. <www.jstor.org>.

Young, Kay. “Feeling Embodied: Consciousness, *Persuasion*, and Jane Austen.” *Narrative*. 11.1

(2003): 78-92.

Vita

Katherine M. Johnson is a life-long resident of New Orleans, Louisiana. She received her Bachelor's Degree from the University of New Orleans in 2006, majoring in Spanish while pursuing a minor in English. Upon graduating, she was awarded the Robert Cartmill Outstanding Achievement Award in Spanish by consensus of the Foreign Language faculty. After studying abroad in Madrid, Spain, she returned to the University of New Orleans to pursue her Masters Degree in English, choosing to concentrate on British Literature of the Restoration and of the 18th Century. She was awarded a Graduate Assistantship in the Fall of 2008, and was awarded the Marcus B. Christian Scholarship upon entering the Graduate Program at UNO in 2007. She passed the British Literature II Comprehensive Examination with Distinction in 2010, and successfully defended her Masters Thesis Examination in partial fulfillment of her graduate coursework.