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## Contrast and didacticism in the novels of Jane Austen

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# “Contrast and Didacticism in the Novels of Jane Austen”

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor of Arts with Honours (English).

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## **Abstract**

The first aim of this thesis is to explore Jane Austen's use of contrast in terms of characterisation. The second is to look at how contrast becomes a tool of didacticism, both for the characters within the novels and for readers of the novels. This study encompasses Austen's six completed novels and traces the development of the techniques she used to evoke contrast.

Austen used contrast in a variety of ways. Primarily it was used to construct and illuminate characters, but Austen also used it to introduce characters into the narrative, to compare two or more characters, and to structure the arcs of characters throughout the plot. Many of Austen's plots are structured around the sustained contrast of two characters. This thesis traces Austen's maturation in her handling of this technique by looking at instances of direct and implied contrast.

Austen also employed contrast as a tool of didacticism. Contrasting the actions and behaviours of various characters allowed Austen to portray some qualities as admirable and worth emulating, while others were shown to be negative and harmful. Realising these contrasts is a learning experience for both characters within the novels and for readers of the novels, if they choose. The chief qualities that Austen champions through her portrayal of her heroines are self-knowledge and personal integrity.

## Declaration

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## **Acknowledgement**

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## Introduction

The first aim of this thesis is to explore Jane Austen's use of contrast in terms of characterisation. The second is to look at how contrast becomes a tool of didacticism, both for the characters within the novels and for readers of the novels. This study encompasses Austen's six completed novels and traces the development of the techniques she used to evoke contrast.

Contrast is the 'state of being strikingly different from something else in juxtaposition or close association', and Jane Austen uses it to construct and illuminate her characters ("Concise Oxford English Dictionary," 2008, p. 310). She also used it to introduce characters into the narrative, to compare two or more characters, and to structure the arcs of characters throughout the plot. In doing so she gave the readers a detailed understanding of the characters, while creating highly structured and patterned narratives over which she had complete control.

Austen's use of contrast has been previously acknowledged by scholars, but not studied in depth. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar discuss the implications of the doubling of certain female characters from a feminist perspective in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000, pp. 157-160, 162). In *Religion, politics, and sex: Matters of decorum in Jane Austen*, Patricia Taylor comments that 'it is part of Austen's narrative technique to contrast major characters so that she can decorously handle sensitive issues' and looks at the contrast between various romantic relationships in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* (1988, pp. 15, 74-79). My own discussion of contrast and didacticism in *Sense and Sensibility* builds and diverges from Jan Fergus' *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* (1983, pp. 42-48). Where I hope to contribute to the scholarship in this field is by examining the methods of contrast that Austen used and by asserting that the contrast between characters can be a form of didacticism; where my research overlapped with existing scholarship, I have attempted to bring a fresh perspective or analysed previously overlooked examples.

Austen uses two different types of contrast, direct and implied. Direct contrasts are those that are explicitly stated by the narrator, as in the introduction of Elinor and Marianne of

*Sense and Sensibility*. They are established, through the description of their characters, in relation to each other, setting up the sustained contrast between them that provides the structure of the novel (Austen, 1996f, p. 11). Implied contrasts are those that are not explicitly stated by the narrator, such as the contrast between Mr and Mrs Bennet and Mr and Mrs Gardiner, which exists in the background of *Pride and Prejudice* and may not be apparent to some readers until the end of the novel. This is a contrast between two different sets of parents that is shown through the sum total of their actions.

Most characters who are placed in contrast with each other share some similarities of social standing, place in family hierarchy, or motivation: these are parallel characters such as Bingley and Darcy, whose behaviour is in contrast, but who occupy the same position as wealthy first born sons. Mary Lascelles writes that the pattern of *Pride and Prejudice* displays a 'delight' with 'exactness of symmetry' which perhaps explains Austen's motivation for placing her characters just so; shared similarities allow her to highlight contrasts, while giving the characters a complexity that avoids their being cast as binary oppositions (Lascelles, pp. 160, 163). Austen frequently employs parallel sibling dynamics in her early novels, such as the Dashwood sisters versus the Steeles, but she becomes less strict in the pattern of her contrasts as she matures as a writer, and her contrasts on the whole become more subtle while having greater impact.

Austen also uses the contrast of characters as a tool for the purpose of didacticism, employing the act of contrasting actions and behaviour as a possible learning experience for the reader. Most of the heroines and heroes of the novels learn from contrast, either by comparing themselves with another or by realising the disparity between what they thought they were and what they actually are; the reader may take up this model for learning as well, but, as Wendy Anne Mullen notes, Austen does not insist upon it (1987, p. 123). Primarily, Austen entertains.

As for her didactic intent, Patricia Taylor argues that the accomplished young woman described by Caroline Bingley and Mr Darcy is Austen's ideal woman 'again and again, novel after novel' but I disagree (pp. 38-39). None of the heroines exactly meets that bill of description, with Fanny and Catherine scoring very poorly; Emma and Anne come closest

but are still off the mark. Austen does not portray her heroines as “ideal women”. While Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet, and Emma Woodhouse are more flawed than Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot, even the latter three have occasional moments of bad judgement or unattractive traits.

Jan Fergus argues that Austen ‘manipulates her readers’ response to didactic and moral ends’ (1983, p. 6). I believe that Austen did try to educate readers’ responses, but I argue that she also had a more specific intent that the study of contrast reveals.

All of the novels use contrast to highlight qualities that are admirable and worth emulating or are negative and need to be overcome. If there are two qualities that all six novels are concerned with, they are self-knowledge and personal integrity. In *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion*, where the heroine possesses self-knowledge and personal integrity from the start, the plot deals with her struggle to maintain these qualities when under attack or facing temptation. In *Northanger Abbey*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*, the plot is concerned with their heroine’s journey towards acquiring these qualities. Ultimately, Austen shows the value of learning through the experience of contrast to both characters within the novel, and to readers of the novel.

I have chosen not to look at Austen’s six completed novels in the order of their publication because of the problem that *Northanger Abbey* presents. Originally written after *Elinor and Marianne* and *First Impressions*, it did not receive the extensive revisions of those two works – which became *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* (Lascelles, pp. 14-19). Thus, while it was published after Austen’s death, it does not have the maturity its publication order implies, and should be looked at as the earliest novel of her maturity.

Therefore, the first chapter examines the contrasts in *Northanger Abbey*, which are shown to be unsubtle and not overly didactic, but do foreshadow techniques and concerns featured in later novels. The second chapter, on *Sense and Sensibility*, is chiefly concerned with the contrast of those two ideologies as represented by two characters. The chapter on *Pride and Prejudice* discusses how contrast is a learning experience for Elizabeth Bennet and the reader, while that which deals with *Mansfield Park* shows how Austen made Fanny Price’s

steady principles less attractive by contrasting them with Mary Crawford's vivacious qualities. Chapter five looks at *Emma* as the height of Austen's use of contrast. The final chapter, on *Persuasion*, examines contrast in relation to the losses suffered by most of the characters.

## *Northanger Abbey*

*Northanger Abbey* stands as Austen's most obvious use of contrast with the least amount of effect in terms of characterisation. It is surprising that, in a novel concerned with the contrast of Catherine's expectations versus reality, the characters are always as they seem, at least to the reader. This is true even for General Tilney, who may not have murdered his wife but is still guilty of committing crimes. Thus there is very little contrast between how characters are at the beginning of the novel with how they are at the end, except for Catherine herself who, thanks to her time spent as a heroine, is a little wiser and more discerning.

Where Austen does use contrast is in establishing her characters. This is chiefly seen with Catherine and Isabella, where contrast gives the reader insight into their characters and essential dilemmas. Our introduction to Catherine details the ways in which she is not like a normal heroine:

- and not less unpropitious for heroism seemed her mind. She was fond of all boys' plays, and greatly preferred cricket not merely to dolls, but to the more heroic enjoyments of infancy, nursing a dormouse, feeding a canary-bird, or watering a rose-bush. (Austen, 1996c, p. 1005)

Catherine grows into her role, both physically and mentally. Her figure fills out, her complexion improves, and she completes a heroine's required reading, becoming familiar with the works of Pope and Shakespeare; however, now she is a heroine without a story, Fullerton failing to provide her with necessary adventures (pp. 1006-1007). When she finally ventures to Bath and beyond, this contrast continues: either Catherine is ill-equipped to handle situations as a heroine ought, or the situations she finds herself in fail to meet up to her expectations. Thus this neat use of contrast to describe the character of Catherine also introduces the essential conflict of the novel.

For Isabella, the contrast between what she says and what she does alerts the reader to her true nature, long before Catherine becomes aware of it. After an acquaintance of a mere

'eight or nine days', Isabella, having been waiting 'nearly five minutes' for Catherine, greets her friend by claiming to have been waiting for half an hour (p. 1020). What appears to be an attempt to make her new friend feel badly initiates the first conversation between the characters that is actually in direct speech, the first opportunity Isabella has to speak for herself: she does so, badly. She goes on to praise her friend Miss Andrews as both 'one of the sweetest creatures in the world' and 'as beautiful as an angel' before a compliment to Catherine becomes a criticism of Miss Andrews: 'you have so much animation, which is exactly what Miss Andrews wants, for I must confess there is something amazingly insipid about her' (pp. 1020, 1021). The contrast between the feigned great inconvenience and what was actually felt shows Isabella to be manipulative; her insincerity is indicated to the reader through the disparity of her comments regarding Miss Andrews. Her final key flaws, her desire for male attention and flirtatiousness, which come as a shock to Catherine when Captain Tilney arrives in Bath, are also quickly revealed to the reader (pp. 1082-1083). Isabella pretends to disdain the attention of two young men but when she loses sight of them she convinces Catherine, under pretence, to cross paths with them once again (p. 1022). Austen contrasts Isabella's claims of 'humbling' the young men with her 'fast...pursuit' of them (p. 1023). At this point in the narrative Catherine is too naïve to realize her friend's disingenuousness, that Isabella's actions do not align with her words. However, the contrast between her dialogue and the narrator's description gives the reader a perfect understanding of Isabella's character at this early stage of the novel. Consequently, the reader is not surprised by Isabella's later actions, and if she is the one character who appears to be drastically different by the end of the novel, it is a contrast finally recognized by only Catherine herself. Recognising the contrast inherent in Isabella, that her representation of herself is quite different from who she actually is, is an important lesson for both Catherine and the reader to learn from. It is emblematic of the larger theme of the novel, that of expectations, born of fantasy, versus reality, and Austen's didactic intent is for Catherine and the reader to realise the distinction between the two: this opens the way to self-knowledge.

Aside from using contrast to establish her characters, Austen also uses contrast to structure them. In *Northanger Abbey* Catherine encounters two sets of siblings, the Tilneys and the Thorpes. Each set, made up of an older brother and a younger sister, Henry and Eleanor

Tilney and John and Isabella Thorpe, share only a little in common: both Henry and John pursue Catherine romantically, while Eleanor and Isabella form friendships with her. In all else, the Tilney and Thorpe siblings are represented as binary oppositions. Austen uses direct contrast to construct the two young ladies: good-natured Eleanor is described as having ‘good sense’ and ‘more real elegance’ than the shameless flirt Isabella, whose air possesses ‘decided pretension’ and ‘resolute stilishness [*sic*]’ (p. 1030). The men are constructed with implied contrast, their introductions to Catherine leaving completely dissimilar impressions. Henry’s charm, wit, and intelligence is as apparent in his first meeting with Catherine as John’s boorishness, insensitivity, and presumption (pp. 1012-1013, 1024-1026). Catherine and Henry meet at a ball and, after a night of dancing and witty conversation, Catherine returns home with ‘a strong inclination for continuing the acquaintance’; John makes a much poorer first impression, more so on the reader than Catherine, whom he has wit enough to compliment (pp. 1015, 1027). However, his manners displease her from the start, particularly when he greets his mother by informing her that her ‘quiz of a hat’ makes her look ‘like an old witch’ (pp. 1027, 1026). Perhaps we can see this doubling of siblings as an allusion to the Gothic genre Austen was parodying, specifically the tradition of the doppelgänger, where a hero’s antagonist is identical to himself (Freud, 1919/2007, p. 169). Considering that one set of siblings exhibits all admirable qualities and the other all negative, we can, with a relative degree of safety, label the Tilneys as the “good” siblings and the Thorpes as the corresponding “bad” ones.

Austen highlights the difference between the Tilneys and the Thorpes through the ways in which they observe social codes, while competing for Catherine’s attention in Bath. In arranging a country walk with Catherine, the Tilneys agree to call for her at twelve o’clock unless rain should prevent them, and, unfortunately, inclement weather does occur at this time (pp. 1045, 1046). However, the rain clears half an hour later and Catherine once again hopes that the Tilneys will come for her (p. 1047). These hopes are dashed by the sudden appearance of John, Isabella, and Catherine’s brother James who come to persuade her to go driving with them. John’s voice can be heard calling up the stairs, “‘Make haste! make haste!’ as he threw open the door – ‘put on your hat this moment we are going to Bristol. – How d’ye do, Mrs Allen?’” (p. 1047). In this scene John is loud and rude, yelling orders to Catherine before he is even in the room, and acknowledges Mrs Allen, his hostess, lastly

and inattentively. When Catherine mentions her previous commitment to the Tilneys, it is 'vehemently talked down as no reason at all', showing John's disregard for both a recognised social custom (that of honouring prior engagements) and everyday politeness. When descriptions of their destination, Blaize Castle, do not bring about Catherine's consent, John lies and tells her that he just saw the Tilneys setting out on a drive to Wick Rocks (p. 1048). Thanks to this and, it must be acknowledged, Catherine's own desire to see Blaize Castle, she finally accepts their invitation.

These deceptions cause the same pain for both Catherine and the Tilneys, showing that their sensibilities are of the same disposition and that they all value considerate manners. Catherine, while still under the misapprehension that the Tilneys have gone driving instead of coming for her, feels 'that the Tilneys had [not] acted quite well by her, in so readily giving up their engagement, without sending her any message of excuse... To feel herself slighted by them was very painful' (pp. 1048-1049). When she discovers that she has been lied to she becomes 'angry and vexed' but, despite her protestations, cannot make John return her home (p. 1049). Ironically, her failed attempt to explain herself to the Tilneys leaves them all feeling the same mixed emotions, as Eleanor likewise commits an act of accidental incivility when she is prevented from speaking with Catherine (p. 1052). This leads Catherine to feel hurt and angry but she checks 'the resentful sensation' when she remembers that they must have felt the same when she was unintentionally uncivil to them (p. 1052). Indeed, when Henry and Catherine meet again he is still somewhat angry at her apparent abandonment of him and his sister in favour of driving with the Thorpes, but he comes to her (as is proper after acknowledging her across the theatre), is all politeness and civility, hears her apology, and gives the explanation Eleanor had been anxious she should hear (pp. 1052-1053). It is the Tilneys' practice of social codes in accordance with common courtesy, that sets them apart from the Thorpes.

These are "social codes in accordance with common courtesy" because there is evidence in *Northanger Abbey* that, for Austen's characters and, perhaps, for Austen herself, not all the codes of behaviour endorsed by society are all of the same degree of importance. This is an argument supported by Patricia Taylor, who writes that Austen's 'notion of decorum appears to operate on two different levels': in the first 'principle, duty, common sense, and



feeling determine one's manners and actions', while in the second 'merely socially (observable) correct behaviour is required--things that one does because one must' (1988, p. 90). The second, empty kind of decorum is disapproved of by Austen and is satirised in characters such as Lady Middleton of *Sense and Sensibility* (p. 90). In *Northanger Abbey* it is satirised by Henry, when talking to Catherine of the customary conversation patterns of a first meeting in Bath and he demonstrates how its inanity does very little to promote intimacy (Austen, p. 1012). He tells her that he has been "“very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath; whether you were ever here before; whether you have been at the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether”"; he then proceeds to ask her those questions with a 'simpering air' (p. 1012). It is not a dialogue of social niceties that promotes Catherine's relationship with Henry; rather, it is spirited discussion and teasing, as Henry himself notes: 'Thank you; for now we shall soon be acquainted, as I am authorized to tease you on this subject whenever we meet, and nothing in the world advances intimacy so much' (p. 1015). This contrast shows that the "good" characters are not adverse to dispensing with the dictates of society, nor think it wrong to do so, and can benefit from it.

But what of a more abrupt breach of propriety? John is criticised for his rude and uninvited entrance into the Allens' Bath residence; Catherine does very nearly the same thing. An agitated Catherine, determined to tell Eleanor she would not be breaking their engagement for a country walk the next day, bursts into the Tilneys' drawing-room without waiting for the servant, out of breath but determined to explain that it was a mistake and that she never agreed to go (p. 1058). The difference between Catherine and John is their intention: Catherine is motivated by her desire for honourable and courteous dealings with the Tilneys and so she violates the normative behavioural codes of society (by coming into their residence unannounced, uninvited, and unintroduced to General Tilney) in order that they may know the truth, that they have Catherine's respect, and that Catherine honours her commitments. In this we see that these are the social codes the characters truly value and that when dictates of society would otherwise prohibit true and proper intimacy between friends, they may be cast aside. This indicates that Austen's concern is not that her heroines conform to the expectations of society, but rather that they manoeuvre within society by

ascribing to only such codes that assist them in treating others with common courtesy, honour, and generosity. However, this concern is ultimately more a feature of her later works and shall be discussed further on.

*Northanger Abbey* is an early novel of Austen's maturity and this is indicated in the unsubtle way she uses contrast, the most obvious example of which is the comparison between the Tilney and Thorpe siblings, who by the end of the novel stand in stark contrast, appearing as binary oppositions. Fashioned in this manner, with all the good qualities on one side and all the bad on the other, there is no chance for the characters to change or surprise the reader: they always meet our expectations of them. This seems like a missed opportunity for the conflict of the novel – that of expectations not aligning with reality – to carry over into the characters; perhaps it would have been more in keeping with the rest of the novel to have John Thorpe revealed as the hero and flighty Isabella as the true friend. But maybe this characterisation was part of Austen's burlesque of the Gothic genre: Henry is suitably heroic but in his own inimitable fashion and not that of the traditional Gothic hero; likewise, John makes a foil for Henry, not through great acts of villainy but through rudeness and making a nuisance of himself. Once again, our expectations do not mesh with reality, but perhaps the lack of eventfulness is what really surprises us after all. Although Austen's contrast of the Tilneys and Thorpes must be acknowledged as unsophisticated, there are elements in *Northanger Abbey* such as her introductions to Catherine and Isabella, and her handling of differing societal behaviour of the Tilneys and Thorpes, that indicate her eventual mastery of contrast as a tool to develop characterisation. In terms of didacticism, Austen is not yet taking full advantage of the possibilities of contrast to explore it, but in her contrast of the Tilneys and Thorpes, she presents worthy and unworthy qualities and modes of behaviour for the reader to learn from. Catherine's interactions with the Tilneys and Thorpes also prove to be a learning experience for her, bringing about greater maturity and self-knowledge.

## *Sense and Sensibility*

Austen's use of contrast in *Sense and Sensibility* is, in most cases, quite as unsubtle as in *Northanger Abbey*. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are quite obviously constructed as subscribing to two different ideologies concerned with the governing of emotional response; the contrast of ideologies is, in itself, a new method of using contrast by Austen and will be present in her later works, although never as strongly as it is here. Where Austen's use of contrast significantly improves upon that displayed in *Northanger Abbey* is in the characters' knowledge and perception of themselves and each other and the readers' understanding of the characters. In *Sense and Sensibility*, unlike *Northanger Abbey*, characters develop significantly – such as Marianne – or are revealed to be not what they seem – like Willoughby – creating a clear contrast with their former self that is noticeable to the other characters and to the reader. Austen's contrasts between characters are also more complex. Characters constructed, apparently in opposition to each other, generally share some similarities; in turn, some similarities may vary in mode or expression so as to create new contrasts. Characters learn from these contrasts and the reader is encouraged to do so too: this is Austen's most overtly didactic novel, with a clear message resulting from the contrast between sense and sensibility that sense is a better quality to possess than sensibility.

In the first chapter Austen uses contrast to do two things: introduce Elinor and Marianne and their key character traits, and establish the thematic concern of the novel, the difference and conflict between sense and sensibility (Austen, 1996f, p. 11). She achieves this not only by directly contrasting the sisters with each other but also with their mother. Elinor, who possesses 'strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement', is called upon to advise her own mother, whose 'eagerness of mind' can lead to 'imprudence', against abruptly quitting Norland and causing a rift with their relations, John and Fanny Dashwood (p. 11). Elinor thus stands in contrast to both her mother and Marianne, between whom the resemblance is 'strikingly great' (p. 11). What we know of Mrs Dashwood helps complete our picture of Marianne who is 'eager in everything; her sorrows, her joys, could have no moderation', and who will likewise take extreme offence at the actions of others, in her case, the Middletons and Mrs Jennings (p. 11). However, Elinor and Marianne are not

binary oppositions and Austen highlights the disparity between them while portraying both in a positive light, writing that 'Marianne's abilities were, in many respects, quite equal to Elinor's' (p. 11). Marianne is characterised as being 'sensible and clever', while Elinor's feelings are 'strong', her heart 'excellent', and 'her disposition affectionate' (p. 11). Although Elinor may represent "sense", Austen firmly establishes in this introduction that possession of that quality does not preclude one from loving deeply and passionately.

Likewise, Marianne is not all heart and no head. As stated, Austen allows Marianne to be 'sensible and clever' and as Claudia L. Johnson notes, '[f]ar from basing her actions on impulsive, purely subjective feelings, Marianne employs a rational argument to justify her behaviour...' (1988, p. 60). We later learn that, for Marianne, concealment and propriety are akin to deception and dishonesty, 'a disgraceful subjection of reason to common-place and mistaken notions' (Austen, pp. 37-38). Johnson writes that 'though Marianne's openness is sometimes criticized, it is never really scorned, or even fully dismissed', showing that Austen's criticism of Marianne is in regards to specific qualities and not her character as a whole (p. 61). Those qualities are her indulgence in her feelings, her lack of prudence, and her want of common courtesy and regard for those who do not share her exact tastes and opinions, and they construct Austen's conception of the ideology of sensibility that she satirizes and criticizes in this novel. In the first chapter, Elinor watches with concern as Marianne and Mrs Dashwood 'voluntarily' renew the 'agony of grief', 'seeking increase of wretchedness in every reflection that could afford it' (Austen, p. 11). It is this selfish wallowing in emotion that Austen appears to find unhealthy and unhelpful, writes Jan Fergus, especially as it results in inconsiderate and rude behaviour towards others (1983, p. 49). While her mother is in this state, the onus falls to Elinor to maintain cordial relations with John and Fanny, despite her own grief. Our introduction to Marianne does not explicitly state that she lacks common courtesy and regard, but her possession of this trait is inferred by Mrs Dashwood having to be impelled to politeness by Elinor. Thanks to the direct contrast between the sisters and with their mother, the reader is given an understanding of Elinor and Marianne's characters and Austen's conception of sense and sensibility.

In all of her novels, Austen constructs characters by contrasting how they each respond to society and its codes. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the behaviour of Elinor and Marianne is shown to be directly linked to their belief in their respective ideologies, rather than just a general disposition, such as Sir John's towards gaiety, and consequently the reader can learn much about both the character and the ideology through how the character operates in society; as Austen writes of Marianne and Willoughby, 'their behaviour, at all times was an illustration of their opinions' (p. 38). When in the company of the Middletons and the Steeles, Marianne barely participates because of her lack of 'toleration for any thing [*sic*] like impertinence, vulgarity, inferiority of parts, or even difference of taste from herself' (p. 79). We can appreciate that Marianne does not want to engage in false flatteries as the Steele sisters do, but her unwillingness to promote a civil relationship with her nearest neighbours through the passing of harmless pleasantries reveals her self-absorption and self-righteousness and thus her adherence to sensibility. As Fergus notes, when Marianne limits her attention only to those whom she loves, such as her immediate family, and Willoughby, who meets her tastes and romantic expectations, she discounts the very real worth of Mrs Jennings and Sir John: they may be vulgar but they are essentially good hearted people who expend time and energy thinking of Marianne's enjoyment for both the present and future (p. 47). We are told in our introduction to Marianne that, because of her excess of sensibility she indulges too much in her own feelings; this interaction (or lack thereof) shows that the flipside of her preoccupation results in her having little time for anybody else's feelings. Marianne's behaviour gives us a better understanding of sensibility by showing its effect in society, but as that effect is a negative one, sensibility is censured.

Because for Marianne 'it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion', all the responsibility for conversation falls to Elinor (p. 76). Elinor is equally dissatisfied with the company in Devonshire, but I disagree with Mary Lascelles who writes that Elinor is 'Mrs Jennings's severest critic' (Austen, p. 38; 1966, p. 151). Elinor finds Mrs Jennings tiresome but acknowledges that she thinks 'very well of Mrs Jennings' heart'; this is quite unlike Marianne, who believes that Mrs Jennings 'cannot feel' and sees no value in Mrs Jennings' company unless it allows her to see Wickham (Austen, pp. 94, 120). Whatever Elinor's feelings, she understands that to live in society, which offers pleasures such as the friendship of Brandon as well as the attending pain of

associating with the likes of Lucy Steele, she needs to treat all who she meets with the same courtesy and regard. David Kaufmann writes that 'Elinor's "plan of civility" is, as Elinor points out to her sister, a way of preserving one's own opinions and feelings, while making sure that other's needs and deserts are accounted for...' (1992, p. 390). Some may not deserve such good manners or treat her in the same way, but if Elinor treats everyone with civility then poor relationships do not become hostile – always a possibility in her relationship with the John Dashwoods – and good can be found in those people who made bad first impressions – such as Mrs Jennings and Mr Palmer. Elinor's propriety in dealing with others is therefore not about submitting to societal codes but negotiating them in such a way as to allow personal integrity within society; for Austen, this is "sense" and this is in contrast with Marianne who is proven wrong for believing that those two concepts are mutually exclusive.

We also see the influence of ideology in the contrasting ways in which Marianne and Elinor approach romantic love. Where sensibility provoked reticence or hostility in dealing with society, when it comes to love it encourages complete and heedless devotion in Marianne. Willoughby consumes her attention: '...she had no eyes for anyone else. Every thing [*sic*] he did, was right...[they] were careful to stand together and scarcely spoke a word to any body [*sic*] else' (p. 38). In addition to what she feels, which is all consuming, she also puts her faith in Willoughby and never anticipates the possibility that she could be disappointed in him: 'I felt myself...to be as solemnly engaged to him, as if the strictest legal covenant had bound us to each other' (p. 112). Yet when he leaves Barton, despite this certainty, her misery at their parting is as if he were never to return.

She was awake the whole night, and she wept the greatest part of it...giving pain every moment to her mother and sisters, and forbidding all attempt at consolation from either. Her sensibility was potent enough! (pp. 54-55)

This is in sharp contrast to Elinor, who loves Edward deeply but conducts herself in an entirely different manner. When Edward departs from Barton, Austen makes a direct comparison of the two sisters' behaviour: 'Without shutting herself up from her family...or laying awake the whole night to indulge in meditation, Elinor found every day afforded her

leisure enough to think of Edward...' (p. 66). Unlike Marianne, Elinor keeps herself 'busily employed' and participates in family life, and while this does not 'lessen her own grief' it neither increases it nor causes pain to her mother and sisters (p. 66). Johnson observes that, for all of Elinor's sense, she cannot help hoping that somehow Edward's engagement to Lucy will end and that Elinor's behaviour, in comparison with Marianne, differs 'only in degree and not kind' (p. 63). However, it is one thing to live in hope and another in faith. When sensibility causes Marianne to do the latter it brings about her near destruction when she is disappointed, whereas, when Elinor discovers that Edward is engaged to Lucy and later when she believes him to be married, she is on both occasions able to keep command of herself, despite her hopes being quashed just like Marianne's (Johnson, p. 64). By showing Marianne's behaviour while in love to be over the top, ridiculous, and self-destructive in comparison with Elinor, the ideology of sensibility is once again criticised while the model of sense is held up as the right example to follow.

The differences between them do not escape the sisters' notice and there are some occasions in the novel where one sister contrasts herself or her situation with that of the other. This is the first instance of the characters employing contrast in this way and will be a feature of Austen's later novels. As Austen uses contrast to show Marianne's poor judgement in comparison to Elinor's, we might expect that Elinor also has this superior view of herself, but this is not the case. Elinor compares Marianne with Willoughby and Edward with Fanny Dashwood, but there are only two instances in the novel where she compares herself with Marianne, and neither involves her contrasting their respective behaviour and finding Marianne wanting, while wishing she was more like herself (Fergus, p. 47). The first instance is a conversation between the two sisters and Edward where they discuss the cost of living (Austen, p. 59). Marianne chastises Elinor for observing that wealth is tied to happiness, but when Elinor asks Marianne to reveal how much she thinks is necessary to live on, Elinor notes that '*Your* competence and *my* wealth are very much alike, I dare say...' and she is correct: Marianne, for all her high-minded and romantic ideas expects a higher standard of living (p. 59). In the second instance, Elinor compares her situation, having recently been disappointed in Edward, with Marianne's, who is all in hope for Willoughby, and wishes herself as fortunate as her sister (p. 96). Marianne, whose tastes are so exacting, is much less kind to Elinor, and there are four occasions in the novel

where she contrasts herself with her sister and determines herself to be superior. They occur when Marianne observes what she feels are deficiencies in the relationship between Elinor and Edward and thinks of how she would respond in that situation. In two cases, the issue is of taste: in the first of these she objects to Edward's lack of sensibility when reading and the fact that Elinor isn't bothered by it, and in the second she looks with 'amazement at Edward, with compassion at her sister' when Edward discusses his ideal landscape which is the antithesis of her own (pp. 17, 63). While these two instances feature Marianne pitying Elinor and her future with such a man, the others show Marianne wondering at Elinor's emotions (pp. 30, 66). She cannot understand how Elinor can be so composed and determines that her affection must not be strong (p. 66). What Marianne fails to grasp is that Elinor's propriety in dealing with Edward, and indeed with others, allows her to keep her affections private and safe from the attacks of others, as noted by Kaufmann (p. 391). Had Elinor abandoned the dictates of propriety and civility she would have been in the same position as Marianne: her sense lost to her sentiments and her sentiments known to the world. In her relationship with Willoughby, Marianne may cast herself as being independent of society but she gives up herself, so tied is her emotional, mental, and physical well-being to Willoughby. Only Elinor is able to maintain herself as an individual in love, and this is thanks to her observance of propriety and civility. It is this contrast that the reader perceives long before Marianne does.

When Marianne finally realises the extent of her own folly in comparison to Elinor, Austen's didactic purpose with this novel is at its most explicit. Now, understanding how, through her excessive sensibility she has done harm to herself, to her family, to her neighbours, and particularly to Elinor, Marianne severely rebukes herself for her conduct (pp. 202-203). However, it is by contrasting herself with Elinor that crystallises behaviour as a lesson in this moment. Talking together of Willoughby, Elinor asks Marianne; "Do you compare your conduct with his?" to which Marianne replies, "No. I compare it with what it ought to have been; I compare it with yours" (Austen, p. 202). This unequivocally positions Elinor as a model for Marianne, as the reader is informed that Elinor's ideology of sense, which encompasses not only self-knowledge, good judgement and the governance of feelings but also civility and propriety, is the correct way to conduct oneself. This is what Marianne and the readers are taught through contrasts of sense and sensibility.



*Sense and Sensibility* represents a maturation of Austen's handling of contrast. The sustained contrast between Elinor and Marianne provides the structure of the novel and is a technique that Austen will use again in later works. Although Elinor and Marianne are constructed to contrast with each other, the differences between them are not as great as the gulf between the Tilneys and the Thorpes, as Austen takes the opportunity to show that Marianne has good qualities as well as bad, and even some of her bad qualities have good but misguided motivations. However, where Austen lacks subtlety is in the contrast of the ideologies of sense and sensibility, as personified by Elinor and Marianne. Austen's almost exclusive use of direct contrast makes her didactic message quickly and clearly apparent.

## *Pride and Prejudice*

In *Pride and Prejudice*, the contrasts are numerous and various, but there is significant development from *Sense and Sensibility*, particularly in the increased use of implied contrast. Once again, Austen establishes characters in comparison with each other and shows characters undergoing significant growth so that they are in contrast with their former selves. This novel also sees maturation in Austen's use of parallel characters – that is characters who contrast but who occupy similar positions or roles within society or familial hierarchy – so that her structuring of them is less obvious but still strict. But where *Pride and Prejudice* makes its best use of contrast is as a learning tool for the characters, especially Elizabeth. Not only does Elizabeth learn about other characters by contrasting them, she learns about herself and what she values, particularly with regard to love and marriage. Elizabeth's learning from contrast also provides a model for how the reader can learn, in addition to showing us good and bad choices, and correct and incorrect behaviour and conduct.

The novel establishes Elizabeth learning from contrast in chapter three (Austen, 1996e, pp. 228-231). At the Meryton Assembly she witnesses the differences between Bingley and Darcy in the infamous scene where the former tries to convince the latter to dance with her. This informs her of their respective characters as their conversation shows Bingley to be amiable, good-humoured, and generous, while Darcy comes across as rude, snobbish, and uncivil (pp. 229-230). Prior to this, Austen makes the contrast between them explicit to the reader in her introduction to the characters, actually writing of Bingley, 'What a contrast between him and his friend!' (p. 229). The effect of this is that the reader is one step ahead of Elizabeth in understanding Darcy's character; this is also the case further on in the novel when the reader is told by Austen that Darcy has become attracted to Elizabeth, but that she is unaware of this change (p. 236). Additionally, this direct contrast helps enforce the negative impression of Darcy that Austen needs the reader to have in order for the reveal of his true worth to have its full effect later on. Thus we see how much Austen is now capable of achieving with both direct and implied contrasts as character-establishing devices. Not only does the reader learn from contrast as Elizabeth does, but we also learn the same thing

as she does – Bingley’s worth, and disdain for Darcy – which is critical for the successful narrative arc of *Pride and Prejudice*.

While all of Austen’s novels feature romances and marriages, *Pride and Prejudice* is the novel most concerned with exploring what makes a good relationship. Contrasting the numerous relationships in her life allows Elizabeth to discover what she values with regards to matrimony. Austen writes that, had Elizabeth looked only at her parents’ marriage, ‘she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort’ (p. 358). Mr and Mrs Bennet are in contrast to each other in almost every way, differing in wit, intelligence, and interests, and as a result there is frequent conflict and no affection between them. Mrs Bennet, with her ‘mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper’, has become a figure of fun to Mr Bennet and the only enjoyment he derives from their relationship is using his ‘sarcastic humour’ to tease and provoke her (pp. 226, 358). Elizabeth is very aware that their marriage is ‘unsuitable’ and further notes the negative impact of it on their children, as, although they are affectionate to their favourites, both are very poor parents (p. 359). Mrs Bennet throws herself into society in the hope of marrying off her daughters, but she behaves with great impropriety and encourages the foolish behaviour of her younger daughters while risking the health of Jane and the happiness of Elizabeth in her bid to secure them husbands. Mr Bennet is perhaps even worse because, while he recognises the faults of his daughters, he does nothing to correct them and exerts virtually no parental authority, choosing instead to distance himself from his family; Barbara K. Seeber writes that his ‘thoughtlessness’ verges on ‘callousness’ (2007). He also fails to adequately provide for them in the event of his death, thus making it necessary that they marry and marry men of means. For Elizabeth, the marriage of her parents is a cautionary tale that teaches her what she does not want in a relationship.

Fortunately, she is also witness to the marriage between her uncle and aunt, Mr and Mrs Gardiner, who offer a sharp contrast in their ‘implicit critique’ of the Bennets by providing Elizabeth with three things that her parents do not (Seeber). Firstly, their marriage is a much more positive example of matrimony for Elizabeth. There is no evidence of disharmony between them in the novel and the strength of their union is implied in the several instances where Austen describes them thinking and feeling as one: ‘it was not *their*

wish to force her...she was much better acquainted with Mr Darcy than *they* had before any idea of...*they saw* much to interest' (pp. 372-373, emphasis added). That they are so much in synchronisation with each other can be attributed to their both being sensible, intelligent people who treat others with kindness and generosity; unlike the Bennets, between them there is no disparity of the mind (p. 304). Secondly, they are much better parent models: they give good advice, such as when Mrs Gardiner counsels Elizabeth not to grow attached to Wickham; offer comfort and support when Lydia's elopement occurs; and they treat her feelings and opinions with respect, considering her thoughts but not prying into them (pp. 306-307). Finally, they give Elizabeth opportunities to promote her happiness and her relationship with Darcy. By inviting her on their summer tour, she is afforded the opportunity to see and experience more of England than her parents' limited funds and her father's lack of inclination allow. When the tour brings her into contact with Darcy again, it is under better circumstances than they have met before as the Gardiners do much to further their relationship. They prove that she has 'some relations for whom there was no need to blush' and their acceptance of his overtures of friendship allows her to observe and be affected by the changes in his behaviour and conduct (p. 367). Austen handicapped Elizabeth by giving her two parents whose deficiencies in those roles only detract from her own excellent qualities, but in the Gardiners Austen provides an alternative and better source of parental wisdom, parental support, and matrimonial felicity from which to learn. The implied contrast between the Bennets and the Gardiners also engages the reader's vanity when perceived because, as noted by Fergus, attending to such patterns allows our impressions of the characters to be guided by Austen and can thus be used as a tool for didacticism (p. 92). In *Pride and Prejudice* we are taught via demonstration the same lessons that Elizabeth learns.

Through witnessing these two contrasting marriages, Elizabeth learns to value mutual respect, love, and financial security as being the qualities essential to a happy and healthy marriage. I list mutual respect first because for Elizabeth, who has seen the disastrous effect of the lack of it in her parents' marriage, love cannot develop out of anything less.

According to Juliet McMaster, this is true for all of Austen's novels, writing that 'Jane Austen has greater faith than most writers in the love fully combined with knowledge of self and esteem for the partner...' (1996, p. 169). Elizabeth cannot think of either Collins or

Darcy as potential suitors as she does not respect the former because of his ridiculousness and has been hurt by the disrespect of the latter: ““your manners...were such as to form that ground-work of disapprobation, on which succeeding events have built so immovable a dislike...”” (pp. 261, 334). When she receives Darcy’s revelatory letter he rises in her esteem, but she does not consider returning his feelings until he treats herself and the Gardiners with true civility at Pemberly (pp. 373-374). Mr Bennet understands the need for respect and he cautions Elizabeth not to marry Darcy unless it is to be a marriage of equality; she assures him that it is and also one of deep affection. (p. 438). Elizabeth’s belief that love and mutual respect should go hand in hand is demonstrated in her reaction to the engagement of Charlotte and Collins:

‘...were I persuaded that Charlotte had any regard for him, I should only think worse of her understanding, than I now do of her heart...Mr Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man...you must feel...that the woman who marries him, cannot have a proper way of thinking.’ (p. 302)

To marry only for financial security and without affection and esteem for your spouse is antithetical to Elizabeth, but thanks to the difficulties that have been caused by her parents’ lack of economy, she does understand the importance of means in matrimony: she does not encourage the affections of Wickham because he would be unable to support a wife (pp. 307, 310). Elizabeth is fortunate that, in her relationship with Darcy, she finds her material needs met in addition to mental and emotional fulfilment. However, while presenting a compelling argument to both Elizabeth and the reader that a relationship comprising these three qualities is the most assured path to domestic bliss, Austen was very aware that not all women were so lucky and the married life of Charlotte reveals a great deal about the extent of Austen’s didacticism.

Elizabeth predicts that Charlotte’s marriage to Collins will result in her friend’s abject misery but in this she is proven wrong. On learning of the engagement, Elizabeth loses all respect for Charlotte and believes that it will be ‘impossible’ for her to be even ‘tolerably happy’ when bound in matrimony to a man whose tastes, abilities, and conduct are entirely unlike her friend’s (p. 297). When invited to visit them, Elizabeth looks at Charlotte and

expects to see her 'ashamed' of Collins but she detects nothing but a 'faint blush', 'once or twice' (p. 313). What she instead discovers is 'Charlotte's degree of contentment': Charlotte has divided the domestic space so that she is not often in her husband's company and she occupies her time with 'her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her poultry...[which] had not yet lost their charms' (pp. 314, 347). Charlotte's satisfaction with her life and that she does 'not seem to ask for compassion' subvert the expectations that both Elizabeth and the reader have for her: we do anticipate that, because she has not married for love, she will meet with poetic justice and come deeply to regret and be severely punished for her choice (p. 347). Instead, her fate is born from Austen's realism rather than her sense of morality, and because of this the reader is not positioned to cast a moral judgement on Charlotte's decision. That Austen does not take the opportunity to do so would seem to be further evidence to support Brien Wilkie's assertion that Austen was concerned with moral dilemmas but was not a moralist (1992a, p. 531). In agreeing with him, I believe that if Austen did have a didactic purpose it was a narrow one and not concerned with the blanket preaching of morality.

To return once more to Elizabeth, there is a contrast between how she perceives her powers of judgement and how discerning she actually is. Elizabeth believes herself to be a keen observer of life – "Compliments always take *you* by surprise, and *me* never" – and in many instances she is; we have already seen how aware she is of the faults of her parents (Austen, p. 231). However, her judgement of herself and others is often clouded. She is aware that she can be impertinent but she does not recognise her biggest breach of propriety in believing Wickham, until after her eyes are opened by Darcy's letter; then she is able to see how "very weak and vain and nonsensical" she had been (pp. 440, 351, 352). Thanks to her previously established prejudice against Darcy, she was already well disposed towards Wickham but she becomes even more so thanks to his charm, good looks, and marked attention towards herself (pp. 265, 268). The fact of Elizabeth's judgement being susceptible to flattery is foreshadowed when Elizabeth first meets the Bingley sisters, where a lack of attention to herself leads her to judge their characters more accurately (p. 232). In the case of Wickham and Darcy, their respective appeasing and offending of her vanity leads to her judgement being clouded by prejudice. Elizabeth's initial assessment of Darcy's character was correct: he was rude, snobbish, and uncivil. However, as Wendy

Anne Mullen notes, Elizabeth's clouded judgement means she does not consider the possibility that her knowledge of his character is complete or that he could change (p. 104). The reader is told that Darcy's feelings for Elizabeth have changed and is also given hints that Darcy has better manners and principles than he has so far displayed – his shame at 'his aunt's ill breeding' – but because of our affection for her and our trust in her otherwise good sense, we put more faith in her impression of him (Austen, p. 323). By positioning the reader in line with Elizabeth, Austen gets the opportunity to educate both on their prejudices.

Key to directing the reader's opinions of Darcy and Wickham is the way Austen uses contrast to construct their characters. In both men, their outward appearance in society belies their true worth. Darcy's social awkwardness, born of his own sense of superiority, does not reflect his essential goodness and noble generosity, while Wickham's immorality is hidden beneath his charm, pleasing manners, and ability to represent himself sympathetically. From outward appearance alone, which is all Elizabeth has to judge them from, there seem to be binary oppositions at work, with Wickham "good" and Darcy "bad"; the reader knows a little more of Darcy but this still holds true. It is only later that Elizabeth and the reader realise that Darcy 'has got all the goodness' and Wickham 'all the appearance of it' (p. 352). After this, Darcy's behaviour changes so significantly that Elizabeth wonders at the contrast, but thanks to his letter and his housekeeper's glowing recommendation, the reader knows that his civility and kindness towards her are now emblematic of his true character (p. 366). Interestingly, while Wickham's true nature has also been revealed, his manners are exactly what they were: 'pleasing' with an 'easy address' (p. 402). One wonders why Austen, considering her dedication to pattern in this novel, did not take the opportunity to reverse the situation of Wickham as she had with Darcy, but this would have been a violation of Wickham's character as he always seeks to promote himself and Austen is always consistent in her characterisation (Bloom, 1987, p. 1). It is enough that Elizabeth's and the reader's opinions of the gentlemen should change. They still stand in contrast with each other but at the end of the novel our perception of them is that they also stand in contrast with their former selves.

One of the great ironies of *Pride and Prejudice* is that the few obvious contrasts between Elizabeth and Darcy cloak their many similarities. While the differences in their manners and social standing draw the reader's attention, Austen constructs their respective character arcs in parallel to each other. Both form mistaken impressions of each other's feelings, but even when they are at odds at Netherfield, their respective intelligence results in their conversing as equals, as noted by John Hardy (1984, p. 37). After Darcy's first proposal they both engage in self-reflection and are startled at their own faults. Like Elizabeth, Darcy comes to realise the contrast between how he perceives himself and what the reality is: in his case his assured belief that he is a gentleman has resulted in him not acting like one because he has never thought to check his behaviour (Mullen, p. 98). He therefore learns from contrast as does Elizabeth. Having both Elizabeth and Darcy undergo the same journey towards self-knowledge reconstructs them as equals now destined for a happy and healthy marriage. In presenting this model of learning from contrast to the reader, Austen provides them with a method to learn these values from the novel.

*Pride and Prejudice* is the best demonstration of Austen's model for learning from contrast because it is a method of judging that Elizabeth uses from the very beginning; Emma Woodhouse learns this way too, but mostly at the end of her novel. Elizabeth does not always judge correctly, but when she does, like in the contrast between her parents and her aunt and uncle, the contrast teaches her values that ultimately result in a happy and healthy marriage for herself and her partner after he comes to learn the same lesson. By tying the didacticism to the romance plot in this way, the didactic message of this novel becomes very attractive to the reader because of its unobtrusiveness. This subtlety also results in the primary effect of the contrast between characters being entertainment.



## *Mansfield Park*

Contrast is used with great effect in *Mansfield Park* to illuminate three aspects of the novel: character, ideology, and setting. Like its spiritual antecedent, *Sense and Sensibility*, character and ideology are tied, and in engaging in sustained contrast of Fanny Price and Mary Crawford, Austen explores both their characters and their systems of value. Ultimately, the novel endorses Fanny's moral conduct over Mary's unprincipled self-interest but, in contrasting other facets of their characters, Austen reveals that both are complex individuals who do not conform to binary opposition. In her contrast of settings, Austen is concerned not just with the physical and material differences but also with what different locations represent to the characters. The prominent discussion of morality within this novel has previously overshadowed the subtleties that Austen has been able to render through contrast. This study of contrast will show that Fanny Price and Jane Austen have more to teach us than morality.

The first point of contrast between Fanny and Mary is their principles and how they are expressed through their actions. Kingsley Amis, one of Fanny's harshest critics, called her 'morally detestable' and found her lacking in 'self-knowledge, generosity, and humility', but I would argue that Fanny is in full possession of those three qualities and that they are the foundation of her principles, particularly the second (1992, pp. 244, 246). Other people's feelings matter to Fanny, as noted by Susan Morgan, and I contend that this is because she knows too well what it is like to have her own feelings ignored and disregarded (1987, p. 77). Finding no love or affection from anyone at Mansfield except for Edmund, Fanny realises the importance of treating others with kindness and consideration at a young age. Thus she is able to empathise with Julia Bertram and Mr Rushworth when she observes their jealousy over the flirtation between Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford; after all, Fanny's first objection to the play was not on the grounds of immorality but because she perceived the 'selfishness' of the participants and feared that the scheme would not end well (Austen, 1996b, pp. 541-543, 523-524). It is only after she reads the play that she objects to the content as being 'improper for home representation' (p. 527). It could be said that Fanny is too humble, but being raised as inferior to her cousins, neglected by Lady Bertram, and abused by Mrs Norris, how can she not feel intimidated by society and think

little of herself (p. 459)? In any case, Fanny's humility causes her to treat her family with respect – although she gets little in return – and conduct herself with propriety. As for self-knowledge, Fanny questions her decisions and reflects on whether she has made the right choices. She wonders if she is 'right' to refuse her cousins' entreaties to join the play (pp. 535-536). She also displays great insight into the mind when talking to Mary: ““There seems something more speakingly [*sic*] incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences”” (p. 566). To these three principles I add two more as being key for Fanny. The first is a belief that marriage without love is wrong: ‘how wretched, and how unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked it was to marry without affection’ (p. 632). The second is not allowing herself to be swayed by those who are not guided by these same principles; this is why she rejects Crawford's proposal and refuses to act, but does allow her education to be guided by Edmund. Many critics and readers have found it difficult to warm to a heroine so steadfast in her principles, as, although those endorsed in this novel are also featured in others, en masse they form a didactic lesson for the reader that might be easier to learn if Fanny's other qualities made the teacher more appealing. But Austen shows that Fanny ensures her own happiness without cause for reproach by living this way, and it is living by the principles of Fanny, not her manner, that she encourages.

As the antithesis to Fanny, Mary is motivated entirely by self-interest and places little importance on feelings. She desires to marry for wealth and consequence – ““A large income is the best recipe for happiness,”” she says – and not even the very real feelings she has for Edmund can persuade her to do otherwise (p. 569). Instead, she wants him to change his intended profession to suit her needs and interests. Austen depicts Mary's self-interest in a conversation with Fanny. When Fanny sees and appreciates the beauty of nature, Mary replies, ““To say the truth...[I] may declare I that I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it”” (p. 567). This contrast of Fanny looking outwards and Mary looking only at herself is indicative of their values. That Mary's judgement is faulty and that she does not know how to discern the worth of things is also shown through her lack of respect for certain people and subjects. She speaks publically with great impropriety of her uncle, talks disparagingly of the clergy on three occasions, and writes to Fanny of her hope that Tom Bertram will not recover from his illness so that Edmund may

inherit (pp. 482, 497-498, 501, 511, 697). Edmund and Fanny rightly discern that Mary's poor education is at fault for her lack of principles, her 'tainted' mind, and this is also given by Austen as the reason for the immoral behaviour of Maria and Julia (pp. 489, 601, 713-714). In contrast to Fanny, whose conscience was formed by experience and whose education had been directed by Edmund, these three young women suffer from a lack of guidance from their guardians which leads their worst qualities to be encouraged. Austen's didactic intent is therefore to show the importance of education in forming principles and the role that parents must take to achieve this. Thus contrast teaches the reader what principles are worthy and how to attain them.

As previously stated, Austen makes the contrast between Mary and Fanny more complex and complicated by contrasting other aspects of their characters; in doing so, she gives advantages to Mary that make her more appealing to modern readers who value Mary's style over Fanny's substance. The second point of contrast between them is their personalities, which could be broadly defined as "extrovert" for Mary and "introvert" for Fanny. Mary has considerable charm and wit that, on first impression, make her a more likeable character than Fanny. A skilled conversationalist with a great degree of beauty and musical proficiency, Edmund quickly falls under her spell (pp. 484-485). David Monaghan writes that, although Edmund is not completely blind to Mary's faults, 'her liveliness goes a long way towards compensating for her moral deficiencies' (1987, pp. 87-88). After being charmed by outward appearances, it is difficult to see that Mary, despite being clearly intelligent, as noted by Morgan, does not have 'a proper way of thinking' because she lacks principles to form her judgement. (pp. 68-69). It is only when Austen tells us of Mary's thought processes or motivations that we see the contrast between her charming personality and her tainted mind. Austen often accomplishes this by directly contrasting Mary with Fanny. On the trip to Sotherton, Mary is said to have 'none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling', and when both women learn of Edmund's intended home at Thornton Lacey, Fanny is saddened by the thought of not seeing him every day while Mary is angered that his living does not meet her standards for fashionable living (Austen, pp. 494, 589). Lionel Trilling observed that Mary's personality is quite like Elizabeth Bennet's and he calls the rejection of her in favour of Fanny 'strange...almost perverse'; I believe that this demonstrates that charm was a quality that Austen did not feel was essential for women

to possess, and only positive if it was accompanied by good judgement and good principles (1992, pp. 221-222).

In contrast to Mary, Fanny's personality is far less likeable; she is timid, socially awkward, and never displays a sense of humour. Both Henry and Mary Crawford observe that she does not like to be noticed in company and her docile personality often conceals the sternness of her purpose, giving other characters mistaken impressions about her (Austen, pp. 560, 591, 634). However, she is not Mary's exact antithesis, something that is overlooked because her other traits make a far stronger impression. Because she does not wish to participate in the play, Fanny has often been labelled a prig and thought to disapprove of such schemes in general; in actual fact, as Stuart Tave notes, Fanny is very eager to see the play – as she has never experienced 'even half a play' before – until she observes the tension among the players and discovers the play's immoral content (Austen, pp. 523-524; 1987, p. 40). Nor can she rightly be accused of saintliness; as Thomas Edwards writes, Fanny's character has 'human limitations' (1987, p. 18). Like Emma Woodhouse, Austen's most flawed heroine, she is capable of jealousy and pettiness, but where she differs from Emma is in self-knowledge and self-control. Fanny can recognise these feelings and thoughts as unworthy and does not allow herself to indulge in them:

Fanny could have said a great deal, but it was safer to say nothing, and leave untouched all Miss Crawford's resources, her accomplishments, her spirits, her importance, her friends, lest it should betray her into any observations seemingly unhandsome. Miss Crawford's kind opinion of herself deserved at least a grateful forbearance, and she began to talk of something else. (Austen, p. 561)

Fanny's flaws prove her to be a character of greater depth and complexity than her steadfast principles would suggest, but she still pales in comparison to Mary, whose personality is entertaining as well as interesting. However, why Austen gave one 'all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it' is because the charm of Mary (and her brother) only appeals if Fanny (and Edmund) are sufficiently without this quality themselves; according to Fergus, it makes them attractive in spite of their moral deficiency and thus more difficult to judge (1996e, p. 352; 128). Therefore the contrast between the personalities of Fanny

and Mary is necessary to the plot of *Mansfield Park* because it keeps Mary within Edmund's sphere when she would otherwise have been rejected sooner for her lack of principles.

The final point of contrast between Fanny and Mary is their physicality. Once again, Fanny has the less attractive quality, that of poor health, while Mary is shown to be physically strong and skilled. All activity except horse riding tires Fanny and it is implied that she is not an exceptionable horsewoman, even after six years of practice (Austen, 1996b, p. 486). Mary, on the other hand, proves to be a natural after two lessons, shocking Fanny with her ability to bring the horse to canter (pp. 486-487). But while Fanny is acknowledged not to be physically strong in comparison with Mary, and even Mrs Norris, there is evidence to suggest that her health might be better if she was not so neglected at Mansfield. Margaret Kirkham believes that Fanny was healthy as a child because she played with all her siblings and danced with William in the streets (1987, p. 124). But in her life at Mansfield, Fanny must answer to the whims of her aunts and is forced to overexert herself. While there are indicators that her strength is improving – at the ball she is able to dance until 3 o'clock in the morning – when she is deprived of the means of exercise or a healthy environment, her health begins to decline (Austen, pp. 607, 490, 682). Thus Fanny's strong principles are in contrast to her physical inferiority and likewise the weakness of Mary's character belies her active and healthy body. In this we see that Austen constructed the characters of Fanny and Mary in contrast with themselves in addition to each other.

To turn now to setting, Austen uses direct contrasts to emphasise the differences between Fanny's two homes: Portsmouth and Mansfield Park. On returning to Portsmouth after an absence of eight years, she is struck by the differences between the two: 'she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a consideration of times and seasons, a regulation of subject, a propriety, an attention towards every body [*sic*] which there was not here' (p. 667). Fanny had hoped to find in Portsmouth that which was missing in Mansfield – unconditional love – and would have gladly forsaken 'manner' for it (p. 664). Instead she discovers that, without the 'manner' or qualities of Mansfield, the conditions for love do not exist (Monaghan, p. 99). The only relationship that Fanny does develop in Portsmouth is with her sister Susan and she does

this by distancing them from the rest of the family in an upstairs room and in engaging Susan in the Mansfield activities of reading and discussion (Austen, p. 676). Fanny admits to herself that life at Mansfield may not have been perfect, but life in Portsmouth ‘could have no pleasures’ (p. 672). Portsmouth, with its rudeness, noise, clutter, and arguments, would stifle Fanny (p. 543). Thus for Fanny, Mansfield Park is a place for potential growth, what Wilkie calls ‘amplitude of being’, because it is a place of social codes that ensure that Fanny is treated with civility by her aunts and cousins, with consideration by her uncle, and with love by Edmund (1992b, pp. 542-543). However, the positive aspects of Mansfield, which had previously been the scene of the immoral behaviour of Fanny’s cousins, are only revealed through the direct contrasts with Portsmouth.

Austen engages in a broader contrast of setting in comparing the city and the country. For Mary, the country is tedious and frustrating because it lacks a variety of amusements to entertain her: her interest is ‘all for men and women’ and so London suits her needs better (Austen, pp. 611,494). Fanny enjoys the tranquillity of less society and, unlike Mary, she appreciates nature and the mechanics of country life (pp. 611, 494). As Fanny’s better judgement approves of the country, we can safely say that the novel endorses it over the city, but Austen provides further supporting arguments, too. In talking of his future life as a clergyman, Edmund creates a picture of the community he hopes to create at Thornton Lacey, one based on involvement, friendship, and teaching good principles (p. 589). This is in comparison to London, where bad character traits are encouraged because the sheer size of the city and the mass of people within it leads to insufficient moral guidance from either the clergy or parents:

...a good clergyman will be useful in his parish and his neighbourhood, where the parish and neighbourhood are of a size capable of knowing his private character, and observing his general conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. The clergy are lost there in the crowds of their parishioners. (p. 501)

Thus Austen uses a combination of direct and implied contrasts to represent country life – though not particularly Mansfield Park – as being morally superior to the city in that it offers better opportunities for good principles to flourish. The contrast of how certain

characters respond to the various settings of this novel reveals their interests, motivations, and value systems.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen creates a heroine whose merit and personal integrity is in contrast to her outward appearance, both in terms of personality and physical strength. Austen further lessens the appeal of Fanny by contrasting her with Mary, who is much more immediately attractive to the reader. But these contrasts also reveal Mary's selfishness and her poor judgement, demonstrating that charm, wit, and personal accomplishments are not nearly as admirable as Fanny's system of values. Through the additional contrasts of location, Fanny's values are shown to be worth emulating by the reader, and Austen illustrates the importance of moral education being guided by parental authority in order to acquire them.

## *Emma*

In *Emma*, Austen's use of contrast is at its sophisticated peak in presenting a character that is almost the antithesis of Fanny Price. Once again, Austen employs sustained contrast of characters – in this novel, Emma Woodhouse is contrasted with both Harriet Smith and Jane Fairfax – but unlike *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, where the heroine does not need to undergo significant change, Emma, like Elizabeth Bennet of *Pride and Prejudice*, must learn from contrast and to separate reality from fiction like Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*. In *Emma*, her most flawed heroine, Austen shows that mistakes and transgressions are not damning if we choose to learn from them. In watching Emma's struggle towards self-knowledge, the reader can learn from her mistakes as she does, in addition to gaining a sense of what qualities are admirable and beneficial in people and relationships.

We know that Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, and Jane Fairfax are meant to contrast with each other as parallel characters because they have a few key similarities. The first is that they undertake the same character arc, beginning the novel as unattached young women and becoming happily married by the end. Contrast results from how they, with different personalities, social statuses, and motivations, reach that destination. The second similarity is that all three are orphans, although they do come by this status in different ways: Emma is a maternal orphan and though her father still lives, he is not an authoritative voice in her life; Harriet is the illegitimate daughter of unknown parents; and Jane's parents both died when she was a young child (Austen, 1996a, pp. 723, 733, 813). The lack of proper parental presence and guidance is shown to have a varied but dramatic effect on all of their lives. With no mother to direct her, a father to indulge her, and a governess whose judgement she generally disregards, Emma grows up thinking 'a little too well of herself' and with the ability to direct matters just as she chooses (p. 723). This, in combination with the significant wealth and high social status of her family, gives her the very real power to cause harm to others and deceive herself of her own failings. In lacking parents, Harriet also lacks social standing and has been given an indifferent education, leaving her open to the attacks of the Eltons, the disregard of Mr Knightley, and the manipulations of Emma (pp. 733, 756-757). Without parents to provide a home or a dowry, Jane must suffer the



privations of living with her poor grandmother and aunt and look for employment as a governess; her lack of fortune and connections also necessitates a secret engagement with Frank Churchill, whose aunt would not approve of her (pp. 813-814, 945, 952). Through these differences, Austen is able to portray three contrasting young women as they grapple with love and courtship, but in sharing a few points of similarity to diverge from, the impact of the contrasts is heightened.

Ruth Perry asserts that women's friendships are 'often the most significant mirror for the self' and this is the function of Emma's relationships with Harriet and Jane: they serve as foils, not to reflect her brilliance, but her flaws (1986, p. 185). To develop Perry's assertion specifically in terms of contrast, the characters of Harriet and Jane are constructed in contrast to Emma and to contrast with Emma. In fact, a friendship forms between Emma and Harriet because of the considerable differences between their characters. Emma and Harriet are shown to be physically and mentally dissimilar. Harriet's blue eyes and 'short, plump and fair' features are contrasted with Emma's 'true hazel eye' and 'firm and upright figure' (pp. 733, 743). Emma is said not to be vain about her looks and so perhaps the reason why she admires Harriet's is because she does not see herself in her friend (pp. 733, 743). Mentally, Harriet is the inferior of Emma, a fact of which Emma is very aware: when they receive Elton's charade, she snorts at the idea of Harriet possessing 'ready wit' (p. 763). However, Emma views Harriet's mental shortcomings as an opportunity to educate her and hopes to gain employment and satisfaction from improving Harriet's mind and manners (p. 734). Harriet, ready and willing to be guided by a woman she acknowledges as her superior, is pleased and grateful for such attention. Only Mr Knightley sees potential evil in this scenario, believing that Harriet's ignorance will flatter Emma and that Emma will refine Harriet's opinions beyond what her circumstances allow; although he is largely correct in his predictions, Knightley later comes to recognise that Harriet has some 'first-rate qualities' (pp. 742, 911). While certain qualities of Emma's, such as her intelligence and wit, are held to be superior to Harriet's, her sense of her own superiority is not. In contrast, Harriet's humility and lack of affectation are shown to be admirable qualities; when she, like Emma, is finally without them, they both are drawn into calamity (p. 960). But initially, the contrasts between them inspire interest in each other, and a similarity confirms their friendship. Harriet, like Emma, is good natured and sociable, and although

she lacks Emma's wit and cleverness, conversation between them flows easily (p. 735). Mullen posits that one of the novel's didactic messages is to argue against covertness and affirm openness (p. 175). Through the relationship between Emma and Harriet, Austen shows that possessing an open temperament makes overcoming differences easier; without it, forming relationships is much more difficult and can lead to harmful misunderstandings.

This is the case for Emma and Jane. The contrasts between them are altogether of a different nature but chief of them is Jane's lack of openness. Emma gives Jane's 'coldness and reserve' as the reason for why they are not friends: 'There was no getting at her real opinion. Wrapt up in a cloak of politeness, she seemed determine to hazard nothing' (pp. 815, 817). Jane resists, or is unable, to participate in conversation beyond the requirements of civility and Emma, who enjoys both 'rational and playful' discussions, cannot like her reticence (p. 724). Mr Knightley tells Emma that she envies Jane's reputation as a 'really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself...' and a small part of Emma admits this charge (p. 815). Emma has never had the patience or work ethic to become as well-read as she would have liked, and, while she acquits herself well on the piano, she has never practised enough to become a remarkable performer; Jane is her superior in singing and playing (pp. 741, 851). Jane also differs from Emma in appearance, being tall with 'deep grey' eyes, dark hair, and a figure that is a 'becoming medium, between fat and thin' (p. 816). While Emma admires Jane's looks, she cannot overcome the difference in their manner, and dislikes being compared to her. Where the contrast of their characters brought about friendship with Harriet, it produces rivalry with Jane. Contrast thus constructs their relationships in addition to their characters. But it also produces some didacticism by showing, through Emma's need for self-knowledge, the importance of self-knowledge. Emma needs to recognise that she is self-centred, meddlesome, and inconsiderate of others so that she may stop causing harm.

If Harriet and Jane provide contrast to Emma with their differences, then Mrs Elton provides it with similarities. Mrs Elton possesses most of Emma's faults but to a heightened degree; as McMaster notes, she can even be considered a parody of Emma (p. 90). Both have a sense of superiority, for Mrs Elton comes to Highbury with the intention of leading its society, meaning to 'shine' (Austen, p. 876). Emma is offended by Mrs Elton's

presumption, failing to see that she herself has this attitude towards her neighbours; Wayne Booth claims that in discussing her reasons not to marry, Emma boasts ‘almost as blatantly of her “resources” as does Mrs Elton’ (2007, p. 104). But Emma has mostly earned her place as first in Highbury: her breaches of propriety and civility are so shocking because they are so few, she is a generous and hospitable hostess despite her father’s fussing over his guests’ health, and she spends time giving sympathy, compassion, and provisions to the poor (Austen, pp. 734, 773-774). The other significant contrast between the two women, as recognised by Johnson, is in their respective manner (p. 131). While Mrs Elton calls attention to her efforts to lead Highbury society, Emma does not, simply acting out of the ‘duty’ she believes is ‘attached to her social position’ (p. 131). In fact, Mrs Elton’s behaviour causes Emma to reconsider her own: after Mr Knightley observes that Jane must submit to the meddling friendship of Mrs Elton because Emma makes no overtures towards her, Emma begins to treat Jane with more kindness and more attention (Austen, pp. 888, 930-931). The contrast inherent in Mrs Elton therefore functions to highlight both Emma’s flaws and virtues and to propel Emma further down the path to self-knowledge via diegetic didacticism.

Johnson writes that Emma does not just boss other characters around, she attempts to “author” them by imagining alternate histories; unfortunately, the contrast between her fantasies and reality is great, and this has disastrous results for Harriet, Jane, and eventually herself (2007, p. 135). Harriet is the first to suffer: when Emma hears of the nature of Harriet’s birth, she becomes convinced that Harriet is the daughter of a gentleman and thus deserves to move among the first rank of Highbury society (pp. 733, 756). As a result, she casts about for a husband for Harriet, settles on Mr Elton, and misinterprets his courtship of herself as a courtship of Harriet. When the truth is revealed Emma is deeply ashamed of her actions for Harriet had been persuaded into genuine feelings for Elton. Emma realises her mistake and resolves to stop meddling in the lives of others, but she cannot stop herself from imagining and she creates two stories about Jane that hurt Jane deeply. The first story is that Jane is romantically involved with Mr Dixon, the husband of her best friend. When Emma tells her misguided suspicions to Frank Churchill – who is secretly engaged to Jane – Frank uses it to tease Jane in company and with Emma’s assistance (p. 922). The second imagining is that Emma is in love with Frank. Without having met him, Emma had always

been attracted to the name and idea of Frank and has thought ‘that if she *were* to marry, he was the very person to suit her in age, character and condition’ (p. 790). When they do meet she feels she ‘*should* like him’ which may be half the inducement to fancying herself in love; she does also find in him the open temperament and ease of conversation that she enjoys (pp. 829, emphasis added). But their flirtation must cause pain to Jane. When Emma realises that she ‘cannot be very much in love’ with Frank after all, she is still convinced that he is in love with her, until she creates an alternate story for him: that his rescuing Harriet from the gypsies must make them fall in love with each other (pp. 872, 914). Once again she is wrong about both of their feelings as it is Harriet’s gratitude for Mr Knightley that transforms into love, but this leads to her stories finally hurting her. Emma is distraught by the thought that she has inadvertently encouraged an attachment between Harriet and Knightley because it forces her to comprehend that she loves Knightley and the unlikelihood of his feeling the same (p. 957). Bernard Paris writes that Emma’s guilt over the harm that she causes Harriet is not enough to motivate Emma to change her ways; it is only when she causes herself to “suffer” that she can reform (1978, p. 71). I argue that it is the shocking, painful, and disappointing contrast between what she believed about herself and others and what the reality was that brings about the degree of suffering that causes her to mature and alter her behaviour. Thus contrast is a tool of didacticism within the novel as well.

Austen also uses contrast to structure the novel, using Harriet and Jane’s relationships with Emma as the driving forces of the plot. The formation of Emma’s friendship with Harriet in Chapter Three is effectively the start of the plot; the action of the novel, and Emma’s journey towards personal growth, begins with her meddling in Harriet’s life (Austen, p. 733). Although Jane does not arrive in Highbury until Chapter Twenty (Volume Two, Chapter Two, in original publication), Emma’s rivalry with her is also introduced early on. In Chapter Ten, Emma states her objections to Jane, foreshadowing Jane’s eventual importance to the plot (p. 771). Jane’s arrival brings about the next key plot development: Jane and Emma’s rivalry over Frank and for recognition as the most accomplished young woman in Highbury. But a turning point occurs when Jane and Frank’s engagement is revealed and brings about a change in Emma and Jane’s interactions as Jane is now able to talk openly with Emma and the two women converse in a manner that signals a future

intimacy that is unfortunately curtailed by the distance between their marital homes (p. 818). At the same point in the novel where Jane is divested of the role of rival, Harriet takes it on when she tells Emma of her feelings for Knightley. Ironically, Emma had dismissed the thought of Jane and Knightley with relative ease, but the thought of Harriet – whom she has always viewed to be her inferior and not a threat – and Knightley sends real fear into her heart. The exchange of roles by Harriet and Jane becomes the catalyst for Emma to finally know herself, and as the novel is primarily concerned with Emma's journey to personal growth, this marks the climax of the plot.

There are other contrasts in *Emma*, but these are the most significant because of the effect that they have on the structure and plot of the novel. Not since *Northanger Abbey* has Austen begun a novel with her heroine so clearly in sight, but the contrasts between Emma, Harriet, and Jane are her most subtly rendered yet. The reader may realise the stark contrast between these three young women, but the narrator favours implied contrast rather than direct to accomplish this. Certainly it is not immediately apparent how the contrasts between them shape the novel and perhaps this is the result of having two characters to contrast with the heroine: Austen can place the spotlight on one and use them to distract the reader from what she is doing with the other. Both Harriet and Jane are afforded opportunities to demonstrate via contrast how misguided Emma is about her view of herself and others, and they are also shown to possess admirable qualities in contrast with Emma. But the chief didactic purpose of their contrast is to provoke Emma's journey to self-knowledge and to show how important it is for her to acquire it.

## *Persuasion*

If *Emma* was concerned with a heroine's education, then Austen's last completed novel demonstrates how a heroine who has already learnt her lessons puts them into practice. In *Persuasion*, contrast is used to explore the theme of loss that runs through the novel. After parting eight years ago, Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth meet again and are faced with the contrast of what they were then with what they are now. Both have grieved for the loss of their relationship, and neither thinks of reconciliation until they come to realise that they use each other as the standard of contrast against which all other potential partners are judged and that nobody else ever measures up. Contrast is also used as a didactic tool for two different kinds of loss. The first allows Austen to return to a theme from *Sense and Sensibility*: how to cope with the grief that comes from losing a loved one. The second is Austen's championing of the new upper middle class, represented here by the Navy, over the foolish landed gentry, who, through contrast, are shown to be losing their power to the professionals.

Contrast creates the dynamic between Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth as they struggle with the differences in each other's character, situation, and feelings after being apart. When they met and fell in love eight years ago, Anne was a beautiful young woman of nineteen, but the end of their relationship caused her to lose her bloom early; now her critical father calls her appearance 'haggard' (Austen, 1996d, pp. 1158-1159, 1147). When Wentworth sees her again, he is reported to have said that she is 'so altered that he should not have known her again' and he believes that she no longer has any power over him (p. 1178). Indeed, she has no power over anyone: her father and elder sister, Elizabeth, do not consult her over their plans to remedy their finances, and younger sister Mary thinks Anne has no concerns and can only be of use to herself (pp. 1150, 1164-1165). Wiltshire notes that Anne's role as the main character is in contrast to her 'peripheral place in her social circle' but it is all in contrast to the social superiority to Wentworth that she possessed eight years ago (1997, p. 78). Then, Sir Walter Elliot found it a very degrading alliance for his daughter, as Wentworth's family were "nobodies" in comparison to the Elliots (Austen, pp. 1158, 1157). When Wentworth returns rich, successful, and admired, he quickly becomes the centre of Anne's social circle, a friend to Charles Musgrove, a romantic interest to

Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove. Their positions have been reversed: with her father's financial difficulties, it would now be to her advantage to marry him. Thus the dynamic of societal inequality between them is maintained through contrast.

Anne and Wentworth are also in contrast in the degree of their self-knowledge. As K. K. Collins notes, Anne knows herself from the beginning of the novel but Wentworth must achieve this before they can be reunited (1975, p. 387). The hurt Wentworth felt when Anne ended their engagement was considerable, but when they meet again he thinks he is indifferent to her; Anne's only fault of judgement in the novel is to believe him (Booth, p. 107). Later he realises that he 'had imagined himself indifferent, when he had only been angry' (Austen, p. 1284). Wentworth's accusation of 'weakness' in Anne has been echoed by many critics and readers and Joseph M. Duffy argues that Lady Russell persuaded Anne to reject Wentworth out of conservative fear of Wentworth's un-aristocratic characteristics: 'boldness, liberality, and candor [*sic*]' (Austen, p. 1178; Brown, 1997, p. 135; 1954, p. 282). I agree with Collins' assessment of Lady Russell's motivation that she recognised in his character the 'dangerous impetuosity' which leads him, without reflection, to think himself indifferent and, in his anger, fail to see Anne's excellent qualities (Austen, p. 1288; Collins, pp. 385-386). Thus Collins argues that Lady Russell 'could sense Wentworth's great flaw long before he himself perceives it' and her advice, while influenced by bias, was in Anne's best interest (p. 386). When Wentworth finally understands that he has been 'weak', he and Anne are finally equals in the most important sense: that of the mind and the heart (Austen, p. 1281). However, Anne also becomes increasingly important in her social circle by making new friends amongst Wentworth's acquaintance and coming to the attention of Mr Elliot, and her looks improve so much that Austen describes her as beautiful (pp. 1226, 1231; Wiltshire, p. 80). When they declare themselves to each other again they are 'more tender, more tried, more fixed in each other's character' (Austen, p. 1283). Once again they are in contrast to their former selves, only this time they are both better than what they were before.

Anne is also placed in contrast with two female characters, Mrs Smith and Louisa Musgrove, in order to shed light on the choice she made eight years ago. Mrs Smith's fate is what Anne's might have been had she married Wentworth and if he had not been so

fortunate (Collins, p. 393). An old school friend of Anne's, who shares her sense and discernment, Mrs Smith is a widow and so poor that she cannot afford a servant to attend her in her ill-health (Austen, p. 1231). Although Mrs Smith's spirits typically remain buoyed, Anne can 'scarcely imagine a more cheerless situation' (p. 1231). One of Lady Russell's fears of Anne's marrying Wentworth was that he would die in battle without making his fortune, leaving her in much the same situation as Mrs Smith (pp. 1159-1160). Wentworth mentions how his friend Captain Harville wanted money because he had a wife; Harville never did have the success of his friend and now lives in rather cramped conditions in Lyme (pp. 1181, 1200). Anne's concern in giving up the engagement was chiefly for Wentworth, 'self-denying principally for his advantage', but the word 'principally' indicates that she worried for herself, albeit to a lesser degree (pp. 1159-1160). Anne and Wentworth are very lucky to meet again under better circumstances, but the contrasting lives of their friends in the story show Austen's awareness that few are so fortunate.

Louisa, as Anne's rival for Wentworth's affections, is Anne's antithesis. Young, beautiful, and exuberant, she quickly edges out her sister Henrietta in the pursuit of Wentworth. Early on, Anne determines that Wentworth is not in love with Louisa by contrasting her 'memory and experience' of his behaviour with what it is now, but she thinks that the relationship will eventually end in love (p. 1190). She is very aware of the contrasts between herself and the Musgrove sisters, that they have more attractions, but she thinks her own mind 'more elegant and cultivated' (p. 1166). However, Louisa unintentionally impresses on Wentworth the difference between herself and Anne by declaring of herself, 'I have no idea of being so easily persuaded. When I have made up my mind, I have made it' (p. 1193). He feels her to be superior to Anne until Louisa foolishly jumps from the Cobb out of unflinching determination; then he finally learns to 'distinguish between the steadiness of principle and the obstinacy of self-will' (p. 1284; Mullen, pp. 184, 194). This is an important distinction to make because it goes to the heart of Anne's choice to end the engagement: her decision was founded on the former quality. What Wentworth does not realise is that he too possesses the latter quality in his anger cloaked as indifference towards Anne. Thus, the contrast between Anne and Louisa reveals not only insights into their characters but illuminates Wentworth's character as well.



Austen uses contrast as a didactic tool by contrasting two different methods of dealing with the grief resulting from the loss of a loved one. At Lyme, Anne encounters Wentworth's friend Captain Benwick, whose fiancée, Fanny, passed away from illness (Austen, p. 1199). Anne contrasts their respective situations and thinks that, despite his consuming grief at this point, his youth and sex give him the possibility of a second chance; unlike her, he can 'rally again, and be happy with another' (p. 1199). Laura G. Mooneyham also notes the contrast between Anne's private loss and Benwick's public one – he is allowed to grieve but she must internalise her feelings (1988, pp. 152-153). But his method of dealing with grief is one that Austen has criticised before: like Marianne Dashwood he renews his grief, using poetry as his trigger, and has withdrawn from society to Harville's home (Austen, pp. 1999, 1201). Anne admits to herself that she has sometimes indulged in verse, but by and large she copes with her loss by making herself useful (p. 1202). In this she is like Harville: Fanny was his sister and while he mourns her death too, but he engages himself in all manner of employment, creating things for his wife, making toys for his children, and fitting up his poor home in remarkable comfort (p. 1200). When they part, Anne advises Benwick to read less poetry and more prose so that his suffering can be put in context (p. 1202). He would do well to heed her. Anne's education has not been towards self-knowledge or personal integrity: she learns how to cope when confronted with loss and just as she teaches Benwick, she can also teach the reader.

The final contrast of this novel is the one between the landed gentry and the rising professional class represented by the navy. As Johnson notes, Austen has portrayed the landed gentry as ridiculous in other novels, but Lady Catherine de Bourgh and the John Dashwoods never lost their power or prestige as Sir Walter Elliot does (1997, p. 150). He is still the owner of Kellynch, but he has been supplanted in his home by a class of men he disdains because of his own impecuniosity (Austen, p. 1154). In addition to being selfish and foolish, he is also incredibly vain: when he hears of Admiral Croft's distinguished military record, he can only think to make a disparaging remark about Croft's appearance (p. 1156). He and his class are in contrast to the honourable, candid, energetic men of the navy. When Anne is in Lyme, she notices the different style of invitation that Harville offers: 'There was so much attachment to Captain Wentworth in all this, and such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so like the usual style of give-

and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display...’ (p. 1200). Brown observes that the navy ‘represents the only adequate community in the novel’, and it will welcome and cherish Anne when all of the others failed to do so (p. 125). Thus Anne cannot regret Kellynch going to the Crofts, but Sir Walter, Elizabeth, and Mary do (Austen, p. 1215). They hold on so tightly to the ‘Elliot pride’ and their ‘connections among the nobility of England and Ireland’ because they feel that they are losing their place in the world (pp. 1194, 1234; Mooneyham, p. 149). Anne is in contrast to this, as Wiltshire writes, and this contrast didactically affirms the life of hard work and honour of the navy, over the indolence and unfounded pride of the landed gentry.

In *Persuasion*, characters struggle to cope with the contrast between what they knew and what exists in its place and the emotional reaction that this provokes. But in most cases these contrasts prove not to be the road blocks to happiness that they appear to be. Anne and Wentworth observe the differences in each other and think that they have no future with each other, but they do. Benwick thinks that he will never overcome his grief over losing his fiancée, but he falls in love with another. Only the Elliots fail in this manner: they cannot help but be supplanted by the professional class and because they refuse to face this, they are doomed to lives that will never meet their standards. The Elliots could learn from Anne as Wentworth does and as Benwick and the reader are encouraged to do: she is a model for how to deal with loss. But Austen demonstrates through didactic contrast that the time of the idle landed gentry is coming to an end.

## Conclusion

Jane Austen's legacy is some of the most finely wrought characters ever to grace the page. This thesis has strived to look at how she used contrast as a tool in their construction, establishment, and structure by looking chiefly at the heroines around whom Austen's narrative revolves. Several points now become apparent.

Firstly, Austen did not contrast characters without purpose, or merely to highlight that they are different. Contrast always reveals new facets of their characters and gives the reader a better understanding of them and their motivations.

Secondly, she created characters to contrast with each other, and thus gave them antithetical qualities. Austen generally avoided creating binary oppositions by also creating points of similarity from which to diverge, thus rendering them as complex individuals. Characters typically differ in either manner of judgement, such as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, or social circumstances, like Emma Woodhouse and Harriet Smith, but in the case of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy, they differ in both.

Thirdly, sustained contrast between characters became a favoured method of structuring the novels. It allowed Austen to trace an individual journey in relation to another, comparing the effect of different behaviour and actions in attaining shared goals, typically those culminating in matrimony.

Due to the constraints of this thesis, I did not often get the opportunity to look at the minor characters of Austen's work, but I would contend that studying the contrast between their behaviour and that of the major characters, would also reveal insights into their characters while simultaneously showing how Austen used them to reflect the brilliance and the flaws of the heroines and heroes.

This thesis also looked at how Austen used contrast for the purpose of didacticism, both for characters within the novels and for the readers. Austen depicts characters learning from contrast in much the same way as the reader does, through the comparison of behaviour or

through the realisation of the contrast between perception and reality. Austen uses contrast to criticise certain qualities within characters, such as selfishness, indulgence in emotion, and unchecked imagination, by showing how harmful they can be to the characters themselves or to others. In comparison, sense, civility, and consideration of others are shown as admirable qualities.

Austen's didacticism is not insistent or generally overt. Rather, in her tales of self-improvement she provides a model for the reader on how to achieve it, and in her stories of principled, self-knowing heroines, she presents the values of those qualities. The contrast of characters is primarily for entertainment's sake; didacticism is a secondary concern. Thus, the reader is invited to acquire self-knowledge and personal integrity, the best ingredients for happiness, but they are not compelled to do so.

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