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IN FOUR NOVELS BY JANE AUSTEN

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CONSIDERING SPIRITUAL QUEST

IN

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By

Paula Ashley Harris

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ABSTRACT

CONSIDERING SPIRITUAL QUEST IN

FOUR NOVELS BY JANE AUSTEN

By

Paula Ashley Harris

This study investigates the place of spirituality and spiritual questing in the work of Jane Austen. The definition for spiritual quest employed in this study was found in Carol P. Christ's Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest (Third Edition, 1995). Christ outlines a paradigm for describing and discussing women's spiritual quest, particularly as this quest is apparent in works of literature. She asserts that social and spiritual quests are inseparable in a woman's life and identifies stages through which women on this dual-natured quest seem to move. They are: nothingness, awakening, insight and naming.

Using Christ's model as a guide, this work examines four Jane Austen novels: Sense and Sensibility (1811), Emma (1813), Mansfield Park (1814), and Persuasion (1818). These works were chosen because they span Austen's writing career but also because they represent the variety of heroines in her novels. Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility are poverty-stricken, genteel women. Emma Woodhouse is abundantly wealthy and of a higher social class. Fanny Price in Mansfield Park is of low birth and has no income or family support. Finally, Anne Elliot's family represents a high social class which has fallen on hard economic times due to poor management. Through textual analysis and historical research, this study explores the nature of each of these characters' quest in social and spiritual terms.

The foundation of this work lies in the historical context of eighteenth-century Christianity and in Austen's pursuit of new ways for women to experience their own

The foundation of this work lies in the historical context of eighteenth-century Christianity and in Austen's pursuit of new ways for women to experience their own spirituality. This writer finds that Austen offers new ways of being and new ways of experiencing spiritual success through the examples of her heroines. These new ways are measured against the prevalent conduct book literature of the eighteenth-century, which espouses a near-silent and unadventurous spirituality for women.

This work also explores the nature of the connection between a heroine's moral code, her own virtues and vices, and her ability to participate in a spiritual quest and concludes that the virtues of true amiability, constancy, and attention to duty are required. Only characters who possess these virtues are shown to experience a successful quest, achieving a stronger sense of self and personal spirituality than the conduct books allow. This successful quest contains elements of both social and spiritual exploration and growth, as Christ points out.

In addition to historical material and the novels themselves, this research relies on research supporting the feminist nature of Austen's writing. Austen's eighteenth-century brand of feminism, while moderate by today's standards, points out the nature of women's condition, criticizes the culture which upholds these conditions, and undermines through the use of irony and example the kinds of behaviors which do not afford women spiritual and social development.

Several conclusions are reached through examination of the novels. First, Austen creates a new spiritual potential for her readers. Second, Austen's brand of Christianity, infused with her personal moral code, is the basis for her feminist approach and her desire to offer her readers positive examples of how to live rightly and successfully. Austen's own character suffuses each novel and directs the readers on their own quests. As Austen's heroines find their lives enhanced through their spiritual and social questing, so might her readers.

For

Nonie Elizabeth Ross Nelson Ashley
Mary Mavis Johnson Caulder
Bonnie Louise Caulder Ashley
Cynthia Denise Ashley Gillis
Stephanie Denise Gillis
and
Ashley Jordan Harris

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Chapter One
Historical Foundations and Directions: Jane Austen, Criticism, Spirituality and the Telling of Stories

One of the great paradoxes of late twentieth-century life concerns our view of spiritual and religious issues. While social theorists and critics assert that we are morally and religiously bankrupt and are, consequently, watching the decline of Western culture, segments of the population continue to call for a return to "true" religion or seek new avenues for establishing spiritual wellness and oneness with mystic, Christian or Eastern greater powers.

The specific area of exploration for this dissertation is an analysis of spiritual and/or Christian elements in the writing of Jane Austen. I argue that Austen's Christianity is informed by her feminist impulses and that she creates in her novels patterns of living for young women which defy and rewrite the spiritual advice given to Christian young women of the eighteenth century. She offers in her narratives alternative means of achieving and methods for enacting a positive and forceful spirituality for women which was not otherwise visible in the traditional teachings or attitudes of the period, especially as presented in the conduct books. Austen rewrites the narratives of women's lives and through these alternate narratives shows young women participating in both spiritual and social quests.

Few critics, literary or otherwise, tackle this topic. Two particular critics offer theories for the lack of scholarly writing in this area. Margaret Olafson Thickstun, in writing about Margaret Fell and Mary Astell, two seventeenth-century radical, feminist, churchwomen, writers and rhetoricians, says in Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture

that "Astell's secular arguments appeal to contemporary scholars because she values what they value, education and the exercise of reason, while both her Scriptural criticism and Fell's impassioned claims of inspiration disconcert readers trained to equate religious enthusiasm with either irrationality or fundamentalism." Also in this passage, Thickstun says, "In their discussions of both writers [Astell and Fell], scholars reveal their assumption that religious faith and feminist convictions are necessarily antithetical . . ." (150). Similarly, Alistair Duckworth while writing about Jane Austen asks, "In pursuit of an autonomous and progressive author do we fail to see those aspects of a deeply pious woman for whom manners, ideally, were the living embodiment of religious principle? In our desire to restore a Nietzschean sense of the body to Austen's fiction do we fail to credit her belief—whatever our own might be—in the existence of a soul?" ("Review" 89).

These two comments foreground the concerns which contemporary literary critics generally eschew. Might writers, through fiction, address spiritual issues along with economic, political or philosophical ones? Specifically, I wish to examine the spiritual qualities apparent in Jane Austen's fiction, the ways in which her approach is feminist, and the messages to be drawn from the narratives themselves concerning a woman's spiritual questing.

A Brief History of Austen Criticism

In Writing a Woman's Life, Carolyn Heilbrun explains the importance of women's telling their own stories. Heilbrun identifies four methods which have served as vehicle for feminine story-telling: a woman may write biography, autobiography or fiction or a woman may write the story of her life by predetermining the direction in

which her life will move. She says, "A woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process" (11). While her book focuses on the development of biography as a primary method for narrating the events of a woman's life, she discusses fiction and the role of recent criticism. Recent criticism "has been so penetrating and persuasive that learning to read fictional representations of gender arrangements in our culture, whether of difference, oppression, or possibility, is an opportunity now available to anyone who will take the time to explore this vast and compelling body of criticism" (11). From this body of criticism, Heilbrun points out, one learns that "women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over – take control of – their own lives" (17). Heilbrun defines power as "the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (18). Heilbrun's argument establishes that fiction can "write" a life and serve as an example of a life for readers, that recent criticism creates new methods of reading, that without stories told, women have been powerless to enter some discourse arenas.

Particularly, through the advent of feminist scholarship, women's voices have taken preeminent positions of power in Austen criticism. Historically, and beginning so early in the nineteenth-century that Austen could have read it, criticism of Jane Austen's work was primarily male and focused on the domestic nature of her writing, lamenting that the sphere of her work was so narrow. Austen herself contributes to this notion when she describes her own writing as this "little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory" (Letters, 16 December 1816). Ironic or not, Austen's comment is meant to explain that she focused her attentions on a narrow piece of life but attempted to make that portrayal perfect. The

life which she explores most often is the one with which she was most familiar, the lives of young women born into rural gentility. While her characters and settings are diverse, they all include young gentlewomen born in small towns or rural settings throughout the countryside who struggle to find their places in their own worlds. Politics or the greater issues of state seldom find their way explicitly into Austen's writing. While twentieth-century critics beginning with R. W. Chapman and Mary Lascelles have understood that Austen's world is much larger than the world of her fiction, the early critics mistook this omission on Austen's part as a statement that she was uninformed about the workings of the world outside of her domestic life. During the last third of the twentieth-century, feminist critics like Heilbrun have uncovered layer after layer of complexity in Austen's fiction, revealing the struggles for power and autonomy of the women in her narratives. As I will demonstrate, one of these struggles is a struggle for spiritual adventure or the simple ability to determine the nature of one's own spiritual quest and to have a feminine voice heard in the discourse of spirituality.

Like all writers, Austen has had detractors and supporters in the two hundred years of criticism since her earliest publications, but the discourse arena to which Heilbrun alludes, particularly the discourse of spirituality, has been undeveloped. Nineteenth and early twentieth-century Austen criticism tended to categorize Austen as a writer of women's stories and to see her world view as limited to that ivoried domestic arena, while also acknowledging her contribution to the development of the novel as a genre. In the spectrum of Austen scholarship from its beginning, critics have investigated Austen as, for example, a novelist of manners, a woman's novelist, and a stern moralist. While this latter criticism moves closer to a discussion of spiritual qualities, there seems

to be no discussion of the discourse of women's spirituality or of women's ability to participate in such a discourse.

The earliest reviews of her work, written by critics of such stature as Richard Whateley, the Archbishop of Dublin; Sir Walter Scott; and Thomas B. Macaulay[1] appear in major journals: Quarterly Review, Edinburgh Review, Edinburgh Magazine and the British Critic. Each of these three early critics admires Austen's work but tends to bring to his criticism the concerns of his own writing. For example, Richard Whateley in an 1821 Quarterly Review sees a strong Christian foundation in her writing while Scott in an 1816 Quarterly Review response to Emma is especially impressed with her realistic portrayal of life. Some critics, however, continued to diminish her work. Even critics as recent as Henry James allude to Austen as somehow quaintly shallow, not measuring up to their ambitions for art. Ian Watt quotes from James' "The Lesson of Balzac" in his introduction to Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays: "[Austen] with all her light felicity, leaves us hardly more curious of her process, or the experience in her that fed it, than the brown thrush who tells his story from the garden bough" (8).

One of the first twentieth-century critics to look at Austen with a clearer lens, however, is D. W. Harding. In his 1940 essay, "Regulated Hatred: An Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen," Harding attacks the stereotypes prevalent in Austen criticism and points out the ironic nature of Austen's work and opens her novels to new and more serious criticism. When Harding comments that "the heroine of these early novels is herself the criterion of sound judgment and good feeling" (Harding 174), he stands on the edge of the criticism to come, especially the feminist criticism. He discusses Austen's use of irony, for instance in an inversion of the Cinderella story, arguing that Austen ". . .

so deliberately inverts it that we ought to regard Emma as a bold variant of the theme and a further exploration of its underlying significance" (177). He reads Austen's novels as subtle and ironic social criticism. Harding does not go so far as to call Austen a radical, but he does not ignore the undercurrents of protest in her work. Harding's essay added new perspectives in Austen criticism to the dichotomy of traditional Austen research which tended to define Austen in simplistic terms. It does not, however, take the greater step into a criticism showing the dynamics of women asserting their voices into a discourse from which they had been barred.

Some mid-twentieth-century critics continue to echo those earliest criticisms and to read Austen's novels through a narrow scope. Eugene Current-Garcia and Walton R. Patrick say as much in Realism and Romanticism in Fiction: An Approach to the Novel (1962). These critics argue that while Austen consistently combined realistic and romantic elements in her novels and devised "subtler ways to handle action, develop character, present their ideas, and control the focus of narration," her output was still narrow and small. "Her attitude toward the art of fiction was fastidious and her craftsmanship honest, incisive, and thorough. . . . Poise and self-control dominate nearly every page of narrative and dialogue as the novels unfold. . . in a style that marks a triumph of understatement" (12). These double-edged criticisms of Austen's novels which praise some aspects while demeaning others were common from the middle of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth centuries; her work is artful, but her subjects are small. Current-Garcia and Patrick read Austen as a moral writer, albeit morality on a small scale: "Morality, in short, could not be superimposed on the novel as an extraneous element; it had to be infused throughout the whole work as a reflection of the artist's

fundamental being" (32). Like many critics, Current-Garcia and Patrick identify the morality apparent in Austen's work but do not recognize the spiritual nature of this morality or the subversive quality of the feminist discourse which supports it.

With the advent of Marxist and Freudian criticisms, articles begin to deal with contemporary issues in contemporary terms. For example, David Daiches in "Jane Austen, Karl Marx, and the Aristocratic Dance" (1948) and Mark Schorer in "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy'" (1949) are two of the earliest writers to tackle serious issues of class and economics in Austen's novels, exploring Austen's awareness of and positions on existing social and economic structures. Austen's acute awareness of the cultural failings of her own time, particularly those which focus on the status of women, begins to come to the surface in the work of these critics.

John Bayley, in "The 'Irresponsibility' of Jane Austen," a 1967 talk given to the Jane Austen Society, considers New Criticism and its mark on Austen scholarship. He says that the problem with all new critics and new criticisms is that we find what we seek. "Our reaction to her seems intimately, even alarmingly, dependent on our own history. In meeting her again we reflect to ourselves in something of the way that Leopold Bloom does in Ulysses. 'Me. And me now'" (1). Bayley's statement points from historical criticism into historicism and brings to the forefront the fact that critics write as much out of their own times and concerns as they do about the periods in which works are created. "The big difference between self–characterization as we have it in Jane Austen. . . is that 'constraint for Jane Austen is the condition of life—accepted, uncomplained of. Her self–projections have thus a true grace of irresponsibility—they are at once a humorous indulgence and a spiritual exercise" (13). Such assertions undermine the accepted

objective stance of traditional criticism and make way not only for new readings of older works, made possible first by New Criticism, but for new insights into the important issues which have been, to date, unexplored, i.e. feminist and spiritual issues.

Mirroring the changes in direction in scholarship generally, more recent Austen criticism explores the multiple feminist impulses in the novels and opens further arenas in Austen research. Feminist criticism since 1965 points out the much broader scope of Austen's work and emphasizes her attack, sometimes subtle, sometimes blunt and direct, on the boundaries imposed on women by the established institutions of the eighteenth century. The first wave of feminist criticism launches the beginning of a new era in Austen criticism, and today few would argue against reading Austen as a feminist writer. Hundreds of articles and books published over the past twenty years establish her as such.[2] Some writers, like Marilyn Butler in Jane Austen and the War of Ideas, have been criticized by later writers for underestimating Austen's political acumen and relying too heavily on the received scholarship asserting Austen's fundamental political conservatism. Butler writes:

> The historical Jane Austen is serious-minded and didactic, but we should not, perhaps, be over-hasty to call her *moral*—or not, at least, without more careful and accurate consideration of her real moral position. That viewpoint is a strong-minded and intellectually consistent one, a strenuous, critical code which preaches self-understanding, self-mastery, and, ultimately, subordination. What therefore it does *not* do is to give special value to the individual. (Butler's emphasis, War, 296)

The careful and accurate consideration that Butler calls for has occurred and has given rise to criticism that Butler's work itself is too conservative. Regardless of this criticism, Butler's assertion that Austen's critical code preaches subordination adds to the critical heritage establishing Austen as a feminist and vocal social critic, while calling for more

scholarly consideration of moral, political and philosophical elements in Austen's novels. A consideration of the spiritual nature of Austen's heroines such as I undertake here will reveal a similar subversion of the prescribed feminine spirituality of her time.

By the mid-1980s, feminist criticism of Austen is prolific. Critics offer their views while assessing the place of these views within Austen criticism, analyzing the many critical approaches and presenting coherent theories drawing these together. For example, Alison G. Sulloway argues in Jane Austen and The Province of Womanhood (1989) that

> Austen's satirical purposes may have been so oblique that they have not been recognized for close to two centuries, but when she satirized male privileges and female disenfranchisements, her purposes were as insurrectionary as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft's feminist colleagues of the 1790s and later. . . . [Austen is] a provincial Christian gentlewoman whose contempt for the overt and hidden ethical disjunctions at the heart of all satire politely but obsessively pierces destructive myths and assumptions about her own sex. (xvi, xvii)

This recognition of Austen's hidden contempt and satire is also the heart of Harding's 1940 essay. Sulloway develops the argument in direct, feminist terms. Sulloway sees the radical nature of Austen's fiction and links her philosophically with the radical eighteenth-century feminists, Mary Wollstonecraft, for example. As she argues this position, Sulloway includes in her second chapter a helpful consideration of feminist scholarship on Austen and eighteenth-century England to that date and defines Austen's feminism as, ultimately, moderate in nature.

Margaret Kirkham's work, Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction (1983)[3] also links Austen's work specifically with feminist work as early as the mid-seventeenth century and gives a feminist reading of each of Austen's novels. She introduces her argument by noting, "How important or valid the ideas of eighteenth-century English feminists were

must remain a separate issue, but at least we can be rid of the assumption that Jane Austen's moral interest is of a purely personal nature, unconnected with any general changes in the awareness of her time" (xi). Kirkham examines the eighteenth-century feminists, placing Austen within the scheme. She says that "Austen's tendency to argue like 'the conservative moralists' about sexual conduct . . . suggests that she is in agreement with the rational feminist point of view, which was shared to some extent by women of widely different backgrounds, who disagreed on other matters" (xiii). Austen's link to both conservative moralists and radical feminists becomes important in the next chapter's discussion of eighteenth-century conduct books. Kirkham carries her argument beyond the issues of morality and gives a decidedly political slant to her analyses of Austen's novels by placing Austen in the context of eighteenth-century political debates.

While not specifically focused on feminist issues, Alasdair MacIntyre's 1981 work, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, addresses three important points in Austen criticism: the link between morality and spirituality in Austen's fiction, contemporary critics' hesitation to consider spiritual matters, and the general lack of understanding of the nature of virtue among twentieth-century readers. MacIntyre asserts that "we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality. . . . What we possess. . . are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived" (2). While Austen has been viewed as a moral writer from the beginning, MacIntyre argues that her morality is specifically Christian but that her value system unites "Christian and Aristotelian themes in a determinate social context that makes Jane Austen the last great effective imaginative

voice of the tradition of thought about, and practice of, the virtues which I have tried to identify" (240). Chapter Two explores the ways in which Austen's exploration of these expressed virtues, which MacIntyre identifies as amiability, constancy, and self-knowledge, differs from the prevailing religious voices of her day, whose tradition, also according to MacIntyre, she "does not ever merely reproduce . . . [but] continuously extends. . ." (241).

Mary Poovey's explicitly feminist work, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer (1984), explores Austen's extending of the tradition of virtues in an economic arena. Poovey, like Sulloway, connects Austen with the work and philosophy of two of her near contemporaries: Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley. Through both cultural and literary analysis, Poovey explores numerous feminist issues but focuses specifically on virtue, which came to be defined, for women, as sexual virginity. Poovey connects Austen to Wollstonecraft and Shelley in ways which show her as much more militant than many critics have suggested and argues that Austen deplores the economy of virtue in which she lives and which shrinks female virtue to the value of virginity. As she compares the three writers, Poovey concludes that Mary Wollstonecraft directly confronts the inequalities perpetuated in the name of propriety, Mary Shelley struggles to adapt to propriety, and Austen attempts to reform the ideas of propriety promulgated throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Poovey is another of the feminist critics who view Austen's narrative choice of marriage for her heroines as a caving in to bourgeois pressure and propriety.

Considering other narrative strategies which feminist writers might employ, Patricia Yaeger, in Honey-Mad Women: Emancipatory Strategies in Women's Writing,

develops another aspect of an argument begun by Rachel Blau DuPlessis in Writing Beyond the Ending. Both critics assert that women writers use particular strategies for coping with the restraints of their times. Yaeger discusses the fact that "women writers have incorporated men's texts in their own and entered into dialogues with these texts that these male writers have refused to initiate" and says that

> the novel is a form women choose because its multivoicedness allows the interruption and interrogation of the dominant culture. The novel's polyvocality gives the writer an opportunity to interrupt the speech practices, the ordinary patriarchal assumptions of everyday life. It is, first and foremost, a genre that asks from its writers a commitment to exploration and change. (30, 31)

The strategy which Yaeger describes, of talking to male texts through fiction, is apparent in Austen's work as she engages with eighteenth-century texts and asserts new territory for the exercise of women's spirituality. The textual strategies identified by DuPlessis in writing alternative endings and by Yaeger in the polyvocal discussion with other texts serve as examples of subtle and overt subversive narrative acts of women writers and are apparent in Austen's fiction.

Since 1990, numerous summaries explain the development of contemporary Austen feminist criticism. Feminist critics assert that Austen's concern for the welfare of women is apparent, as are her attacks on marriage as an economic arrangement rather than a loving, sacred commitment. They outline and attempt to categorize the variety of feminist approaches in Austen scholarship.

One of many articles summarizing feminist criticism is an unusual article by Julia Brown. In "Review Essay: The Feminist Depreciation of Austen," Brown attacks several major feminist literary critics, including Gilbert, Gubar, and Poovey, while reviewing Claudia L. Johnson's 1988, Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel.

Brown gives a quick critical history of twentieth-century (male) response to Austen, including that of Trilling, Watt, and MacIntyre, who set Austen's work beside that of Shakespeare and Flaubert. She then considers what feminist critics have done to Austen's reputation by diminishing her art and focusing on her politics. "Seen through their lenses, Austen is a traditional thinker who compares unfavorably to other, seemingly more ambitious, women authors—not unlike the Jane Austen of the old school in fact: that 'gentle chronicler of Regency order' who could not hold a candle to Walter Scott or Dickens" (303). She argues that Poovey and others use too narrow a gauge to assess Austen: "The feminist depreciation of Jane Austen hinges on the question of marriage" (305). Brown attacks the feminist critics who view marriage, in and of itself, as merely traditional and supportive of the political status quo. She applauds Claudia Johnson's argument that "shows how in every novel Austen was deeply engaged in the same political questions concerning the institution of marriage, family, primogeniture, patriarchy, female conduct—all subjects, Johnson shows, which in the period following the French Revolution were hotly debated and 'politicized'" (308). Brown argues, supporting Johnson, that Austen's work is not so shallow as some critics assume and that criticism must rise above such narrow focus. She concludes:

> A feminist literary criticism that is worthy of the name will not turn women into a field or subspecialty but will offer the deepest challenge to existing approaches. . . . It will see in Wollstonecraft, Austen, and George Eliot a feminist tradition that looks at society as an integral, rather than aggregate, whole, in which the interest of women does not compete against other groups or other men but is seen as part of a contiguous whole. (313)

Julie Shaffer takes up this argument in her 1992 essay, "Not Subordinate: Empowering Women in the Marriage-Plot—The Novels of Frances Burney, Maria

Edgeworth, and Jane Austen." She acknowledges the genre of marriage-plot novels from this period but argues:

> Each novel incorporates the lover-mentor convention and challenges it dialogically in ways that demonstrate the limitations of males' access to truth and morality; each novel thereby questions males' right to power and domination over women and begins both to argue that women should be granted power in some realms and to suggest what those realms might be. And by suggesting that any realm might rightfully be women's, these novels force an interrogation of the naturalness of that ideology which leaves men in positions of any kind of power over women. (53)

Shaffer includes Pride and Prejudice in this discussion and says that Austen shows that men are no more capable of understanding reality than are women and that women's power should likewise go beyond the domestic sphere and include social and political venues as well. I would like to add the spiritual venue to this discourse arena.

In a brief but important essay, Christine Marshall summarizes the major feminist critiques of Austen. Her 1992 "'Dull Elves' and Feminists: A Summary of Feminist Criticism of Jane Austen" argues that Claudia Johnson "finds that central to Austen's point is that women are capable of reason and thereby responsible for their choices. While unapologetic heroines such as Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet defy every 'dictum about female propriety and deference' (xxiii), their rationality and responsibility for their mistakes is the truly radical concept" (43). Whether readers agree with Johnson's position or not, or believe that Austen is "truly radical" or not, Marshall argues that feminist criticism has been the richest and most significant strand of Austen scholarship to date, opening new discourse arenas for the discussion of Austen's fiction.

Devoney Looser takes these debates in hand in "Jane Austen, Feminist Literary Criticism, and a Fourth "R": Reassessment." She acknowledges the first waves of feminist research on Austen but asserts that, from the 1990s on, critics must grapple with

the appropriateness of feminist theory which has been brought to bear on Austen's novels. Looser believes that critics must examine all of these areas of uneasiness with Austen as a feminist writer and continue to explore and reassess their work and Austen's. She says,

> Furthermore, whether or not Austen's feminism seems "proper"—seems worth celebrating or worth taking to task—depends very much on where one is standing when viewing Austen's world. As Said puts it, "interpreting Jane Austen depends on who does the interpreting, when it is done, and no less important, from where it is done" (161). From where I stand, it appears that there remains important work to be done on Austen and gay studies, on Austen and masculinities, on Austen and the performance of everyday life, and on Austen and colonialisms or Orientalisms. Finally, I think retrospective work on Austen's fluctuating authorial reputation during the last two centuries would be of value as we travel with her and her texts into the twenty-first century. I would consider each of the above endeavors to be potentially feminist ones. (133)

What Looser calls for in this article and in her next book on Austen is a reconsideration of feminist work on Austen with an eye toward the incongruities and discomforts which feminists find in Austen's novels or in our readings of them. By exploring the nature of Austen's spirituality, this dissertation takes up Looser's call.

Anne Crippen Ruderman addresses a bit of this new work in her 1995 The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen. She begins,

> The titles of Jane Austen's novels are one obvious sign of the moral context of her writing. Although some of the problems they raise (say, the relation between "sense" and "sensibility") have been much-analyzed, not enough attention has been paid to the way in which the novels generally display her thought (such a word seems justified) about the most fundamental moral issues, especially the connection between virtue and happiness. (1)

After this lead, Ruderman explores Austen's moral philosophy concerning human happiness and how virtue might be related to that. While recognizing the connections to Kantian philosophy, she generally rejects Kant's theory that virtue's rewards may not

include earthly happiness as a guiding principle in Austen's novels. Rather, like MacIntyre, Ruderman connects Austen to Aristotle. What Looser calls for and what Ruderman accomplishes is an attempt in Austen criticism to remove the dichotomy of self against society, liberal against conservative, to accommodate the complexity of Austen's novels in an argument for moderation.

Looser continues her work with an article which introduces a collection of essays, Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism (1995), and follows her own advice. She does not ignore the points in Austen's life and work which are less than comfortable for some feminist critics. She identifies and outlines the variety of Austen feminist criticism as it exists and as it might develop in future scholarship (beginning work on that history she called for) and includes an excellent, current bibliography of feminist criticism on Austen.

Looser, in attempting to draw the strands of scholarship together, identifies different approaches in feminist criticism, their chief proponents, and their flaws. Of five particular theoretical approaches, she generally refutes the first two, developed in the early 1970s. The first establishes Austen as a feminist simply because she is a woman and a writer. Few critics, especially not Looser, continue to argue that simple biology makes a writer a feminist. The second theory operates on a broader semantic level and asserts that referring to any writer before the mid-nineteenth century as "feminist" is anachronistic. The word as currently used and defined, of course, did not enter into standard usage in any modern sense until the late nineteenth century; proponents of this theory, then, believe that none of the writers working before the late nineteenth century can correctly be referred to as feminist. These two theories, according to Looser, are

valuable in so far as they go, but both are extremely limited and limiting. Little support is given to these two positions today.

The remaining theories which assert Austen's feminism, according to Looser, are more complex. The third stems from the work of Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Mary Poovey. Looser says, "In this version of Austen's gender politics, she is seen as enacting a 'sneaky feminism,' using traditional romance plots to soften her ironic and perhaps more radical feminist messages" (5). Looser argues that while these theories are compelling, they tend to ignore or limit the historical context from which Austen emerges. The fourth, slightly more radical theory, less fully developed by mainstream contemporary feminist critics, calls Austen "an unrealized feminist" because of her partiality to heterosexual marriage and her generally conservative, Tory nature. The fifth and most recent of the theories categorized by Looser includes the work of Kirkham, Sulloway and Johnson. These critics, according to Looser, seem more sensitive to Austen's historical base, and their studies focus on Austen's primary characters. They assert that any author who can create such exemplary women "must be promoting a feminist cause" (6). Looser concludes:

> Rather than continuing to struggle over whether Austen 'was' or 'was not' a feminist, our time might be better spent describing more intricately the workings of gender politics in her novels— without a primary troubling over what to label her. . . .
>
> From where I stand, it appears that future discussions of Austen's relation to feminist politics (or of the discourses of feminism emergent in her culture more generally) will allow us to consider her texts in tandem with discourses of other identities and practices at issue in her own time —as well as in our own. (9)

Looser's request and direction give impetus to my research. While Looser does not elaborate here on other possible approaches to Austen's work, she determines that Austen

feminist scholarship must branch into new areas, and the spiritual nature of Austen's work is one of these unexplored arenas.

Looser follows up this article with her 1996 "Jane Austen 'Responds' to the Men's Movement" in which she begins the task she has identified. Here she considers masculinist theories and looks at Austen's male characters. "Readers and critics have measured Austen's heroines for their negotiation of traditional female roles or for their degrees of 'feminism.' I would like to evaluate Austen's heroes in light of new theories of masculinity" (159). Obviously, Looser wants to develop these new directions in Austen criticism, addressing some of the contemporary inconsistencies in readings of Austen.

It is just such a branching out which I propose in this dissertation by considering the connections between Austen's feminism and spirituality. The discourse of Christianity, particularly eighteenth-century Christianity, cannot be ignored in any criticism of Austen's work. While some critics use Austen's Christianity as a sign of her conservative nature, I assert that her particular spirituality gives its impulse to her feminism. For Austen, it seems that one cannot exist without the other. In this dissertation, I posit that there is a spiritual quality to Austen's fiction which has been overlooked or ignored in the research to date. As the overview of Austen criticism has shown, while critics explore and explain complex attributes of Austen's fiction and her assumed politics, no one writes specifically of the spiritual nature of her work. I wish to explore the apparent working out of Austen's beliefs in her novels, which seems to place her between the more radical feminists, particularly Mary Wollstonecraft (as Sulloway and Poovey argue) and the overtly declared Christian women writers of her time (Hannah

More and Fanny Burney, for example). For more than walking a middle line, Austen establishes common territory with both groups and, in her fiction, quietly defines her own space — that of the Christian Feminist — and then places her characters squarely into this space and allows them to act.

The Value of Narrative in Women's Spiritual Development

Drawing upon the research of feminist theologians gives insight into issues of spirituality from which literary critics have generally kept their distance. Carol P. Christ, a literary critic and pioneer in feminist theology writes:

> Women's stories have not been told. And without stories there is no articulation of experience. Without stories a woman is lost when she comes to make the important decisions of her life. She does not learn to value her struggles, to celebrate her strengths, to comprehend her pain. Without stories she cannot understand herself. Without stories she is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. She is closed in silence. The expression of women's spiritual quest is integrally related to the telling of women's stories. If women's stories are not told, the depth of women's souls will not be known. (1)

This is the opening passage of Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, named for Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck," and Margaret Atwood's Surfacing. Christ explores the dimensions of contemporary women's spiritual and social quests for meaning and asserts that the two are inseparable. "Women's social quest concerns women's struggle to gain respect, equality, and freedom in society—in work, in politics, and in relationships with women, men, and children. . . . Women's spiritual quest concerns a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe" (8). Christ argues that the dualistic nature of western culture has enforced the separation of the social and spiritual elements of a woman's life in the same way that it has enforced the idea of the separation of body and mind. A woman's social quest involves these

struggles for position and equality to which Christ refers in this sentence but also generally includes political, legal or governmental issues. Contemporary social feminists, who support equal pay for equal work and have civil and social equality as their primary goals, immediately recognize the nature of the social quest.

Once Christ has established the parameters of a woman's social quest, she outlines more specific qualities of a spiritual quest. She states that there has been little acknowledgment in theological, philosophical or literary circles that women have indeed had spiritual quests. Before Christ's writing, very little scholarly work had examined the unique nature of women's spiritual quest; most theological ideologies, at least in terms of Western and Christian theology, were expressions of male experience. Indeed, most western philosophy has concerned itself with the nature of masculine thought and, in theology, with the masculine connection to the divine. As Christ states here, a woman's awakening to the depths of her own being is the hallmark of a spiritual quest. Women's spiritual quest involves recognizing the nothingness of one's place in the world, awakening to one's potential, gaining insight into the power of the individual, and arriving at a new naming of one's self and the world. While this process may be linear, notes Christ, more often it is recursive in women's lives. Each awakening may lead to a clearer understanding of the nothingness in which one has been living; one must recognize where one is or where one has been in order to move forward. In contemporary American culture, this nothingness may be apparent in young girls receiving less attention for their academic achievements or in families where daughters are not supported through college although their brothers are. Despite the low valuation of her place, a woman's spiritual quest culminates in self-actualization, just as Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs outlines, but, Christ argues, her actualization must include a new orientation to the world wherein a woman's place becomes her own and not one prescribed by tradition or personal constraint.

Christ says that because the social and spiritual quests are inseparable, the search for female fulfillment de facto includes the search for spiritual fulfillment. She explores woman's spiritual quest as seen in literary representation and uses the research of literary critics, rhetoricians and theologians to outline some of the early stages in the development of feminist theology, particularly the Judeo-Christian branch. She then draws these strands together in a rhetorical reading of five contemporary feminist texts by Kate Chopin, Margaret Atwood, Doris Lessing, Adrienne Rich and Ntozake Shange, exploring the spiritual dimensions of the struggles therein.

Christ's principal task in this book is the rhetorical analysis of literary texts using a spiritual yardstick. She turns a literary critic's eye upon texts as she re-evaluates spiritual qualities and goals as expressed in contemporary literary works: stories that women tell of their own lives. She says, "Women writers who name the gap between men's stories about women and women's own perceptions of self and world are engaged in creating a new literary tradition" (7). She carries this tradition beyond feminist literary critique into the spiritual realm. Through her readings of these works, Christ generates a vision of women's culture and in it a spiritual wholeness at the end of the quest. As her opening paragraph states, without the telling and interpreting of women's stories, individual women cannot make sense of their lives or weave their private experiences into the cultural fabric of telling and meaning-making.

In the manner that Christ has presented, Austen retells women's stories and asserts a feminism that relates directly to women's spirituality. This dissertation, a literary examination of four novels by Jane Austen, uses critical, historical and theological material to produce a close reading of four of Austen's novels. Historical research and feminist criticism are drawn upon to support this examination and lead to the following assertions: 1) Austen is a feminist writer; 2) her feminism leads to women's inclusion in the discourse of spirituality; 3) she creates new stories through her narratives which serve as models for women's spiritual development, and 4) the fields of feminist theology and feminist literary criticism contribute to such an understanding of her work.

The dimensions of contemporary feminist theology illuminate Austen's concern for the spiritual fulfillment of her women characters. As Christ claims, women's spiritual and social quests are inseparable, and literary works serve as valuable resources in developing understandings of both types of quests and their interconnections. Certainly Austen criticism explores the socio-economic questing of her heroines. If Christ is correct, then the spiritual questing of Austen's female characters is equally important and inextricably linked to these social quests. To explore these quests, I will examine established eighteenth-century standards of behavior for Christian women. Austen transforms these eighteenth-century 'plots,' particularly those establishing the boundaries of behavior for Christian women, and gives women new stories and new territories on which to build their own fulfillment. As Christ's statement about women's spiritual isolation argues: "Without stories [woman] is alienated from those deeper experiences of self and world that have been called spiritual or religious. She is closed in silence" (1). Austen breaks this silence and takes her characters into spiritual realms from which

women had been prohibited. While historical scholarship on Austen often asserts that she is a moral writer, few critics consider that spiritual elements are equally part of her characters' quests.[4]

Austen knows the work of the conduct books and similar religious documents, and she rewrites the myths of Christian womanhood, creating examples, outside of those discussed in the conduct books, of potential lives and new understandings of traditional virtues for Christian women. The old myths and narratives were informed and enforced by conduct books and clergy. It is my belief that Austen's feminism and her own ideas about spirituality are mutually supporting. Her stories, her reshaping and reinterpreting of traditional marriage plots, serve as new models for Christian women's lives. Few contemporary scholars argue against Austen's feminist tendencies, although the depth of her feminism is sometimes challenged. As mentioned earlier, some contemporary feminist critics object to Austen's use of marriage as the ultimate achievement for Austen's women and see this as a relinquishing to a patriarchal system, on the writer's part, of a more affirmed selfhood of her heroines. However, heterosexual marriage in itself is not the primary goal for Austen or her characters, and, I argue, Austen's feminism should not be defined by so narrow a measure as use of the comedic plot device, marriage. Austen's heroines do not seek marriage at any cost, to any one; they seek an equitable partnership in which both parties attain spiritual, social and economic fulfillment. Through this achievement, the partners are then able to turn their attentions outward to fulfill their roles in the larger community. Finally, historical and contemporary feminist literary criticism, along with research from feminist theology, serves to enhance an exploration of these elements at work in Austen's novels.

The Dual-Natured Quest —Story and Fiction

Story, in feminist theology as articulated by Carol Christ, serves as a means of transmitting information from woman to woman, generation to generation. Story becomes a method for acknowledging the potential of a woman's spiritual life and serves as a safe rehearsal for potential life patterns. As Christ notes, story refers "to all articulations of experience that have a narrative element, including fiction, poetry, song, autobiography, biography, and talking with friends" (1).

In Christ's definition, the use of story articulates for other women the nature and challenges of spiritual and social quest. Christ emphasizes that the movement toward wholeness in women's lives, made apparent through narrative, allows women to help each other.

> The drive to integrate the spiritual and the social quests also arises out of the impulse toward wholeness in women's quest. Dualistic thinking encourages a separation of the spiritual from the social, but whole thinking looks forward to the realization of spiritual insight in social reality. . . . Women's spiritual experience leads to a new sense of their own power of being. . . . In a supportive community, women will be eager to point out the false naming of power and value within patriarchy and to begin to name self, power, and value anew based on their experiences. They will be eager to create new ways of being in a new social world. (130-131)

In testing out their new lives, women come to know personal power as they redraw the boundaries of their lives. They recognize that their struggles for place in society mirror their struggles for spiritual understanding of self. Revealing the "false naming of power and value" is a first step in delineating the bases of real power and value. Austen's characters live out these struggles as they combat cultural limitation on action, on personal freedom and on the right to assert their own places. As Christ explains, the social quests for security, position and power carry these fictional women into spiritual

territory. To achieve true security and power, a woman must also recognize, name and criticize the elements of her life which have prevented her growth. This tripartite task becomes a lifelong adventure toward more wholeness of spirit. While the process itself is recursive and continuous, Austen's heroines move toward this wholeness of spirit and through it defeat the historic dualisms of patriarchal philosophy which have constrained women's lives.

What specific questions does a woman's spiritual quest address? While other theologians may use different definitions or terms to describe spiritual searching, Christ describes a woman's spiritual quest as

> a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe. A woman's spiritual quest includes moments of solitary contemplation, but it is strengthened by being shared. It involves asking basic questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my place in the universe? In answering these questions, a woman must listen to her own voice and come to terms with her own experience. She must break long-standing habits of seeking approval, of trying to please parents, lovers, husbands, friends, children, but never herself. In probing her experience and asking basic questions, a woman may begin to wonder whether she has ever chosen anything she has done. (8-9)

A woman's spiritual quest might take many forms, as Christ hints here. Generally, though, there are identifiable elements in a spiritual quest, according to Christ: seeking moments of solitude to contemplate one's position or one's choices, recognizing and drawing power from the natural world, learning to express one's thoughts and feelings at moments of deepest self-awareness, viewing one's emotionality or personal involvement as positive and life-affirming and refuting the philosophical elevation of personal detachment, and knowing that power comes from understanding one's rootedness in nature and history. Each of these actions or insights leads a woman to a deeper understanding of her place in the world, of her own spiritual value.

Christ's call to recognize woman's spiritual quest and to name it as such is one of the primary goals of feminist theology. Theologians delve into historical/biblical stories of women and reinterpret and re-present women's stories to reveal their sacred dimensions. This sacred dimension is not limited to biblical stories or religious and philosophical treatises, according to Christ. She argues that all narrative might function as a means of revealing this sacred element in women's lives. Alternative narratives allow women to tell and evaluate the stories of their own lives, to use story to measure a woman's spiritual fulfillment.

Like Christ, Austen, through her fiction, also steps forward, tells and names. Writing two hundred years ago and on the cusp of two centuries, Austen is an early example of a writer reaching for woman's spiritual fulfillment. She reacts against her own time and its shallow or missing stories of women and begins to tell her own. She writes stories of strong young women against the existing stories written about and for women by men. Austen writes against the theology of her day by presenting a new vision of womanhood; she is a feminist who, while obviously participating in the western cultural tradition of Christianity, rewrites the behavior book for young women. In the conduct books designed for women's edification, men explain the lives which good Christian women are supposed to live, and those lives are generally short on thought and empty of action. They quite literally instruct women to forego too much thinking about religion; women should rely on fathers or husbands to sort through the difficult ideas for them. Austen subverts this counsel by showing the spiritual awakenings of her characters and the active role they take in guiding their own lives, in living their own virtues. Austen's women characters refute the womanhood glorified in the conduct books and,

among other positive actions to be examined, they venture into this solitary contemplation. They struggle with the questions of personal meaning in life. Christ explains, "Women have lived in the interstices between their own vaguely understood experience and the shapings given to experience by the stories of men" (5). Austen steps into this interstitial space and fills it with stories of women's experience from a woman's perspective, giving them depth, giving them sacred dimension.

Revising Stories, Revising Theology

Feminist critics struggling with how to categorize Austen's work are sometimes creating a false dichotomy of feminist, non-feminist. Theologians[6] have a similar struggle between feminists wanting to revise Christian theology and feminists wanting to revolt and leave it behind. Austen, living in the thoroughly and overtly Christian West, never ventures outside of the confines of eighteenth-century Christianity; it would be foolish to call her a revolutionary. She is radical, however, in that she reinterprets texts and presents new views of Christian womanhood through her stories. She remains conservative in that she does not deny roots in Christian theology.

Austen's novels can be seen as her own articulation of Paul Tillich's definition of religion: "the expression of humanity's ultimate concern – the articulation of longings for a center of meaning and value, for connection with the power of being" (quoted in Womanspirit, 2). Austen explores various stories of women's experience and leaves the reader with models for achieving the spiritual and secular fulfillment of feminine adulthood. Austen's novels, as the following chapter explores, also suggest the inherent sexism in the spirituality of the conduct books; she gives voice to the fact that the expected passive nature of a woman's spirituality precludes true fulfillment.

Contemporary feminist theology can add fertile ground to feminist literary criticism concerning women's spiritual growth and awareness as these are expressed in literary works, even in work as early as Austen's.

Clearly Austen quietly criticizes the Christian traditions of her day just as she quietly criticizes the economic plight of eighteenth-century women. She self-consciously examines women's experiences and, most importantly, shapes those experiences to serve as models for women's spiritual growth. The conduct books of that period tend to represent masculine expressions of theology, and Austen reinterprets their texts to produce a feminine expression of her theology: a feminist view of women's spiritual quest through a redefinition of eighteenth-century Christian feminine virtues. I hope to show that Austen creates new models of women's spirituality by reinterpreting stories of women's spiritual achievement and offering her readers new paradigms for their own lives in which feminine power subverts the patriarchy of traditional Christianity.

This revisionist line of feminist theology – the reinterpreting and retelling of women's stories. biblical or not – is especially important in an examination of Austen's novels. While the patriarchal received stories against which Austen writes are not rightly horror stories, she does call into question the clear domination of women: women assigned to passive lives and with only passive virtues assigned to them. Austen attempts to do in 1800 what feminist theologians are attempting to do nearly two hundred years later.

The Dilemmas of Paradigm and Religious Expression

Another issue apparent in feminist theological studies concerns the concentric circles of sexism within ideologies, religions, and secular social structures which

reinforce each other. Feminist theologians and feminist literary critics often argue, as Christ expresses in her introduction, that the position of ethical neutrality and detachment so consistently adopted in academic and theological research, in the eighteenth or twentieth centuries, is a disguise for maintaining the status quo by supporting ruling class ideology.

Some of this detachment can be seen in interpretations of texts, scriptural and literary, which reinforce the political status quo. When religious metaphors become concrete prescriptions for women's behavior, as they did in the eighteenth century, the concrete prescriptions tend to be conservative in nature. The eighteenth century conduct books might be a working-out of biblical metaphors concerning Christian women's behavior. For example, because one Genesis story tells of Eve being created from Adam's rib, women, over time, have come to be seen as lesser creatures in spiritual terms and as helpers to men, not full human beings who might experience their own spiritual quests. In New Testament terms, husbands are declared heads of the home and thus become perceived as thinkers. Wives are seen as the heart of the home and therefore are oppositely perceived as emotional and irrational creatures. Over time, these metaphors came to be seen as concrete and became literal measures for women's spiritual behavior.

In a shifting spiritual paradigm, narrative can serve as a means for overcoming the spiritual dualities against which women have always strained. The goal of feminist theologians is to transform patriarchal culture, going into its roots in Judeo-Christian theology, and including in this paradigm shift a place for women's voices, women's experiences, and women's expression in theological affairs. This, too, is Jane Austen's goal: to give voice to women's untold stories, untold experiences, allowing for a re-

creation of woman's role in spiritual, and in Austen's case, particularly Christian, terms. Some readers flinch at what they view as the oxymoronic nature of the phrase "Christian Feminist." Austen's eighteenth-century audience would have found it an indecipherable label linking philosophies clearly seen as mutually exclusive, the first conservative and the second radical. The twentieth-century explosion of feminist theological research shows that it has taken two hundred years for feminist theology to achieve some measure of respectability and legitimacy, but conservative branches of theology still decry feminist research in Christian theology as inappropriate. While Austen never uttered such a phrase as "Christian Feminism," she connects these concepts in all of her novels. This dissertation argues that Austen's novels enact this connection.

Recognizing Austen as a feminist with a spiritual bent accommodates several of the complex impulses found in her work. As the literature review has shown, various strands of Austen scholarship over the decades have focused on one aspect or another of the writer or the work but have failed to reach a satisfactory peace with their existing contradictions. Any literary theory fails which does not consider each of Austen's primary roles: those of writer, woman, feminist and Christian. One of the goals of this work is to reconcile these four roles, to define Austen's feminism in terms of her spirituality. I hope to show how Austen's philosophies concerning the ideal woman differ from the standard and traditional Christian descriptions of the late eighteenth century and are more closely connected to the spiritual questing described in the feminist work of this and that century. Her heroines represent an active spirituality, opposing the passive Christianity which bound them.

In outlining Jane Austen's concern for women's spiritual lives, I offer a feminist reading of her texts with a focus on how her literary choices exemplify her spiritual ideals. Her spiritual ideals establish a pattern of behavior for young women that offers new and greater possibilities for expanding the range, the depth, and the value of their experience in both spiritual and secular terms. As Christ asserts in Diving Deep and Surfacing, these two dimensions are artificially distinct in western culture. Specifically, then, Austen transforms the religious prescriptions of her day, especially the prescriptions found in the conduct books and in the patterns of behavior expected in women. Austen rewrites these into stories of women's lives in feminist terms, in which her heroines step beyond the spiritual and secular boundaries established for them by male writers and patriarchal cultural constraints to find spiritual and social fulfillment.

Organization of this Work

The question arises: what does it mean to discuss women's experience? Is there a feminine experience which differs from the masculine? Women's lives are told in a variety of ways; they are told in narrative, spiritual, mythical, psychological, and physical terms. Woman's experience is told through matrimony, through maternity, through exploration of gender, sexuality, and through culturally-bound definitions of appropriate behavior.

Beginning this work with an overview of feminist literary criticism and twentieth-century feminist theology, I lay the groundwork for a discussion of Austen's fiction along with specifically religious writings of the eighteenth century. Contemporary feminist theology offers a language for describing Austen's task, in the same manner that discussion of contemporary feminist literary research offers a method for re-investigating

historical and contemporary texts in new light. Austen shares a reality with her readers, particularly a feminist spiritual reality, which male writers of her day did not share. She offers an alternate story for young women who are living their own *bildungsroman*, their own spiritual quests. The religious writings of the eighteenth century with their prescribed outlines of women's stories contrast with Austen's work, which shows the potential reality which young women might choose and live. These historical and critical materials serve as the framework for discussing four of Austen's novels and contribute to an understanding of the spiritual basis of the feminist reality she presents as she rewrites the possible stories of women's lives.

In an effort to understand the influences on Austen and other female readers, I examine three of the traditional conduct books written by men during this period. They are Rev. John Bennett's Strictures on Female Education (1795), Thomas Gisborne's An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797), and Dr. John Gregory's A Father's Legacy to His Daughters (1774). Although Gregory's work was originally published much earlier than the other two texts, its continuing popularity through the 1830's warrants its inclusion. Next, I compare and contrast their messages with the conduct books written by three women. The first two women to be considered, Hannah More and Elizabeth Hamilton, wrote conduct books of their own. Readers of eighteenth-century literature are familiar with More's Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education which appeared in 1799. Elizabeth Hamilton, slightly lesser known today, was a contemporary of Austen's and belongs rightfully with the other didactic women writers of her day. Her Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education, first published in 1802, went through seven editions by 1824. Both More and Hamilton had wide audiences,

including Austen who specifically acknowledges their work (Letters, 24 & 30 January 1809, 31 May 1811; 6-7 November 1813).

The third woman under consideration here is outside of these professed religious circles and is overtly political. Mary Wollstonecraft, once condemned by More and Walpole as a "hyena in petticoats," professes ideas similar in fundamental content to both More and Hamilton but with a very different motivation. Her ideas serve as counterpoint as I attempt to set the boundaries of the discussion before placing Austen and her work into this historical debate concerning moral behavior and the framework of women's spiritual experience. Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), connected to the feminist tradition established by Mary Astell and Catherine Macaulay, is, of course, a benchmark in the rhetoric of women's moral and educational history. Connections among Wollstonecraft and the other conduct book writers are overt. While outlining her own conduct guide for both sexes, Wollstonecraft critiques the work of Gregory, for example, and argues "affectionately" showing that their philosophies as they relate to women's education are not so dissimilar. "Such paternal solicitude pervades Dr. Gregory's Legacy to his Daughters, that I enter on the task of criticism with affectional respect. . ." (96). Vindication, however, makes a fundamental break with such didactic writers by asserting a sweeping feminist approach not only to women's education but to the very basis of gender differences in the moral arena. This concern places Vindication at the center of the any discussion concerning women's secular or spiritual achievements.

Even before the time of Wollstonecraft's work, the Cambridge Latitudinarians had proposed that the Calvinists were mistaken in defining morality as obedience to God and had asserted that to be considered "moral" one must consider rationally the alternatives of

a decision and behave accordingly. This Kantian definition holds particular significance for my discussion. While the conduct books written by men tend to enforce the older Church doctrine concerning women's behavior with its heavy emphasis on obedience, More and Hamilton tend to redirect attention from those assigned passive virtues, such as obedience and modesty, to a more active definition of virtuous behavior. These active virtues, however, are not public ones but are most often worked out in the highly private and highly traditional roles of wife and mother. Wollstonecraft and then Austen ask in what ways a woman can be considered a moral being if she has so narrow an environment of decision-making in which to operate. This questioning becomes apparent as both Wollstonecraft and Austen explore a character's limitation in physical space and move into the larger arena of metaphorical boundaries on morality and spiritual self-determination.

A series of questions arise from this dilemma and demand address. What virtues might a Christian woman exhibit? What do these writers outline as appropriate behavior for Christian women? In what arenas is it possible for a woman to be virtuous? What values are espoused, and what forms do they take? Do these values relate to social and economic class? How might education affect this virtuous state? How might Austen use her fiction to teach values, and are these values feminist ones? Can we legitimately place her in the company of either the didactic writers or the more radical feminists? For what do Austen's heroines quest?

In each of the novels under discussion here (Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion), Austen's heroines perform within the boundaries established by their worlds. But they do not all conform to the standard definition of a

Christian woman's behavior: they are more than obedient ciphers. They weigh information and consequences, make decisions, and take appropriate action. In moving her women to specific action, Austen makes her most important stand for the position of women in the eighteenth century. While she does not openly dispute that gendered virtues exist in the way that Wollstonecraft does, Austen establishes relationships within her fictional world where virtuous men and virtuous women support and respect each other and share a clearly established set of virtues. She removes woman from the static positions of obedient daughter and wife and gives her, sometimes, the power of self-determination, in secular and spiritual terms. A virtuous and religious woman, then, is not far removed in behavior or demeanor from a virtuous and religious man, and in this lies Austen's primary connection to Wollstonecraft and more radical feminists who attempt to eliminate the passive virtues ascribed to women. For both Wollstonecraft and Austen the idea of gendered virtue becomes moot.

The traditional forms of expressed Christian values, such as those presented in the conduct books, support patriarchy and gender-specific virtue with Pauline intensity, teaching young women to be meek, obedient, and easily and agreeably led by fathers and then husbands. Simply reading the table of contents of a variety of conduct books enforces this idea. Young women should be amiable, silent and demure, chaste, obedient and accepting of direction, modest, generous, self-sacrificing, busy, open and artless, with a strong sense of duty. Perhaps Austen would not argue with this list of virtues. She would, however, redefine these virtues, expand the list, and argue with the form these virtues might take in a young woman's life, just as contemporary feminist theologians argue for women's inclusion in all levels of spiritual life. Austen avoids the trappings of

established religion. Austen's portrayal of the complexity of women's lives clearly departs from the simplistic morality of obedience often preached by the men who wrote the conduct books. Her work places her in the highly charged and, at least for Austen, highly undesirable political arena of the women writers and aligns her with the Wollstonecraft of Vindication. Whatever the present century's hesitation for making moral judgments, a complete evaluation of Austen's work must recognize her premises of moral and spiritual rightness and identify her as a Christian and a feminist. Alistair Duckworth comments on the tenor of Austen feminist criticism by "wondering to what category of feminism Austen is being assigned" (Review, 85). I argue that her feminism is a spiritual feminism, focused on women's spiritual fulfillment, linked with the practiced Christianity of her day, but stepping beyond its boundaries to recreate spirituality in liberating terms.

After considering the primary historical documents showing these links, I will introduce Austen's work and show how her fiction differs in subtle yet fundamental ways from the conservative authors of the 1790s. The close readings of the four novels will show to what extent they exhibit the dimensions of a spiritual quest and how each narrative works as an alternate story given to women. My work considers the relationship between Austen and the more didactic women and supports the view of Poovey, Sulloway and others who align Austen more closely politically with the radical writers of the time. I would like to explore these connections in more directly spiritual terms, as Austen develops toward that ideal of spiritually-based feminism.

Austen's body of fiction might be viewed as a collective feminist theological 'bildungsroman' for the nineteenth-century female. In her stories, she recreates from the

Christian traditions a new behavior for women, a positive, moral and Christian adventure toward wholeness that moves beyond the gender boundaries established by the Church of her day. These boundaries are apparent in the conduct books written by both men and women of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as prescriptive guides on how to be Christian young women. "Although it can be distinguished from roles or attitudes prescribed for women by men and male culture, women's experience is always shaped to a greater or lesser extent by the male-centered cultures in which women live" (Womanspirit, 7-8). Austen shows how the male-centered culture affects women's lives and steps outside of the attitudes presented in the conduct books with their focus on outward and often trivial behaviors. Their focus is not on a deeper spiritual understanding or even on a more extensive understanding of Christian theology as practiced. Women were typically barred from participation in any real study of Christianity but were expected to meet the standards of behavior established by the patriarchal theology. In this theology, as is so often the case, readers see the stifling social and spiritual effects of a patriarchy.

An investigation of Austen's feminism and her spiritual basis for it begins to reconcile the disparate pieces of Austen's work. It moves beyond the standard assumption of critics that Austen is a writer of morals and aligns her morality specifically with the Christian faith she professed. It also shows that Austen's concern with morals and her allegiance to the faith was not merely a performance or matter of social norms, but a context for spiritual questing. While the debate about Austen's tendency for High Church or Low Church remains unresolved, this dissertation grounds her philosophies in the Christian rhetoric of her day, but questions arise. What is Austen's ideal woman?

How does she differ from the late eighteenth-century ideal Christian woman as defined by the conduct books of the day? The first step in my analysis is to say that a woman on a spiritual quest must be a moral woman. This morality goes beyond the common definition implying "good." Moral, again as defined by the philosophies of the time, connotes the ability to rationally consider options for behavior and then to act accordingly. While this statement seems self-evident, embedded in it is the discussion of whether or not women could be considered moral. Their abilities to consider, decide and then act were severely limited by the rules of propriety. Can a woman so limited be considered moral? Second, Austen shows that a spiritual woman would live by Christian ideals. The conduct books make the traditional ideals apparent; for women, they are the passive virtues growing out of New Testament traditions with an overlay of western patriarchy. In her fiction, however, Austen often refers to the positive traits of duty, self-control, sacrifice, affection, generosity, amiability, propriety, and constancy as all within the purview of male and female achievement. She often contrasts these with negative traits of reserve, artfulness, selfishness, deceit, inconstancy and greed. There are, however, major differences between Austen's characterization and those described in the conduct books, both in definition and resulting behavior; Austen rewrites their meaning. The third point in this examination of spiritual quest involves the extent of Austen's feminist leaning. As a writer, Austen is aware of the conditions controlling women's fates and is concerned about them. She looks for ways to move her characters beyond these controls to allow them a greater territory of operation, a larger moral playing field, and more personal independence for establishing their own priorities in life and in their behavior towards other people. Austen's Christianity, then, logically informs her

feminism. It gives a basis for defining her feminism which has not yet been settled despite the multitude of feminist criticism of Austen's work since 1970.

While Austen is clearly a product of the eighteenth century and far removed from the potential of any postmodern understandings of texts, meaning, reality or the slippery nature of language itself, she is equally clearly masterful at manipulating the language and meanings at her disposal for espousing new stories and new interpretations of Christian stories as she writes her own collection of new stories for Christian feminist women. For example, how neatly that opening paragraph from Carol Christ echoes Austen's statement by Anne Elliot in Persuasion. Captain Harville enters into a discussion with Anne concerning woman's constancy. They debate:

> '. . . as I was saying, we shall never agree I suppose upon this point. No man and woman would, probably. But let me observe that all histories are against you, all stories, prose and verse. . . . I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men.'
>
> 'Perhaps I shall.—Yes, yes, if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.' (234)

Using Christ's heuristic of a spiritual quest, I will examine Austen's novels, as she, pen in hand, writes a wider range of women's experiences and fits these experiences into a feminist and active spirituality.

Notes

[1]See both B. C. Southam's Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage, Vols I and II, Writers and Their Work: Jane Austen, and Claire Tomalin's Jane Austen: A Life for insights into historical Austen criticism.

[2]For example, see the work of Kirkham, Butler, Sulloway, Auerbach, Poovey and Looser for clear explanations of Austen's feminism. Several other works show the range of this discussion: Claire Tomalin, Jane Austen: A Life; Alistair Duckworth, "Jane Austen and the Conflict of Interpretations" and "Jane Austen and the Construction of a Progressive Author"; and Moira Ferguson, First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578 –1799.

[3]Kirkham includes a useful "Postscript: Jane Austen and the Critical Tradition" giving another brief overview of historical and contemporary criticism. See also Deirdre Le Faye, Jane Austen: A Family Record and her new edition of Jane Austen's Letters for recent considerations of Austen's biography.

[4]See specifically Alasdair MacIntyre. After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory explains the view that contemporary culture has lost a true understanding of virtue. In this explanation, MacIntyre considers Jane Austen one of the last, great writers to understand virtue and identifies the impulses in her work as a blending of Christian and Aristotelian conceits.

[5]For example, see the works of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Starhawk.

Chapter Two
The Stories in the Conduct Books

Spiritual questing, as contemporary feminist theologians portray it, is a new construct. As Chapter One outlines, a woman's spiritual quest centers around her exploration of the nature of self, the roles that self might play in the social world, and the connection between that self and the greater expansiveness of being — the nature of life. The quest to know this self is inextricably linked to the search for place in the social world and one's understanding of that place, hence Carol Christ's linking of the two. Two hundred years ago, this explanation would not have held true for women. Cultural and social constraints kept women's involvement in explicitly religious activity limited. A typical middle-class woman might be involved in charitable work on some level, might attend church regularly and might have private devotions in her home and with her family. The extent of her Christianity was measured in ordinary ways: basically through the external revelations of her private virtues, the acting out of a guiding value system.

In eighteenth-century England, there is no question that the guiding value system for the majority of people was Christian and Anglican. Oliver MacDonagh describes the Church of England in Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds: "By its very origin and nature, Anglicanism was a median religion. By upbringing, disposition and reflection alike, Jane Austen was (our shred of evidence suggests) a median member of the Church of England in her day" (14). With or without the historical support of the Latitudinarians of Cambridge, Anglican Christians were comfortable considering their Christianity as a moral system, i.e. morality and Christianity were nearly synonymous. In this case, the distinction between morality and Christianity emanates from the definition of a spiritual

quest. If the final question in a quest comes to the Divine, the search is spiritual in nature. If the Christian mythos is also in place, then the moral system established by the spiritual search is Christian.

Writings from the eighteenth century can illuminate current understandings of that Christianity. The conduct books that flourished during this time provide good material for investigation into practiced Christianity and some issues related to women's spiritual quests. While twentieth-century critics might debate their worth,[1] the enormous popularity of the conduct books, shown by their multiple editions and dozens of versions, speaks to the strength of the patriarchal structure in the culture of the eighteenth-century. The gilded edges, leather bindings, and artful end papers seem to show their value as perhaps today's high school graduates might view the inspirational and attractive books they receive as graduation gifts. Their audiences seem similar. While the conduct books exist as part of a larger, older tradition of religious meditations for men, their targeted audience became young women as the readership grew and as the eighteenth century progressed. Typically, men, the father figures and primary authors, wrote conduct books or life directions for young women. Many of the works were written as letters to daughters from loving fathers and then printed to extend the family limits to include all gentle readers. Others, while not written specifically by fathers, were written by friends to young women who needed advice. In the same way that husbands, due to age and experience, directed the lives and pursuits of their young wives, the conduct book writers asserted an equally paternal stance. These books, consisting of simple sermons, private devotions, or letters on important topics were considered serious reading for young

women. Multiple volumes were not uncommon, with advice or explanation often organized by character trait or in some cases chronologically by marital or sexual status.

A brief look at an early and popular conduct book writer makes these points clear. Richard Allestree's works, including The Government of the Tongue, Whole Duty of Man, and The Ladies Calling, all published anonymously, remained popular throughout the eighteenth century and can serve as an example of the tradition out of which the conduct books for women grew. While the first two claim to address general audiences, they are more appropriately and specifically for men. The Whole Duty of Man consists of an introduction and seventeen chapters to serve as separate devotions for seventeen Sundays throughout the year. Allestree asserts that readers must understand the parts of their souls so that the soul may receive adequate care. A small piece of the prevailing attitude toward women, as well as the nature of his audience, shows in his command that a man should, ". . . instruct the wife in the things that concern her Eternal Welfare. . . . This should make men careful to get knowledge themselves, that so they may be able to perform this Duty they owe to others" (304-305). The Government of the Tongue consists of twelve chapters in which Allestree discusses problems arising from unguarded speech. For example, some chapter titles are "Of the Use of Speech," "Of Atheistical Discourse," "Of Lying Defamation," and "Of Flattery." Concerning the last he says, "This is indeed the fatalist wound of the tongue. . ." (134). More importantly, however, Allestree sets out his task: ". . . especially in this Age, wherein the contrary liberty has got such a prepossession, that men look on it as a part of their birthright, nay, do not only let their Tongues loose, but studiously suggest inordinances to them, and use the spur where they should the bridle" (b). Again, typically, this book addresses the forms of

public discussion in which men would be most likely to participate. The tone of The Ladies Calling, however, is different and is established from the beginning with the editor's note:

> . . . whoever takes this Book in hand, would seriously consider it, and doing so, receive the infinite benefits of uniform virtue, and sincere piety, the documents whereof are here with all possible advantages proposed: and thereby give the Author that greatest of Blessings, the being an instrument to the eternal happiness of souls. (n.p.)

In this two-part work, Allestree outlines the natural virtues of the female sex (being Meekness, Compassion, Affability and Piety) and contrasts these to a number of masculine virtues. He says, "Such a degenerous age do we live in, that everything seems inverted, even sexes; whilst men fall to the Effeminancy and Niceness of women, ... women take up the Confidence, the Boldness of men . . ." (13). Allestree is comfortable defining virtues by gender. While he admonishes women against the masculine virtues of confidence and boldness, he also directs them to avoid the "spoilage of the mind" that accompanies an "indecent curiosity" (161), supporting thereby the idea that ignorance is its own protection against corruption. Allestree's stated purpose seems appropriately pious, but he is not free of cultural biases. He says that to talk to women one must talk to their understanding. Men are superior because they have been educated,

> [a]nd truly had women the same Advantage, I dare not say but they would make as good returns of it; some of those few that have been tried, have been eminent in several parts of Learning. . . . But not to oppose a received opinion, let it be admitted that in respect of their intellects they are below men; yet sure in the sublimest part of humanity, they are their equals. (b4-b5)

He admits that women have souls, but he does not fight the traditional idea that men are intellectually superior to women. Allestree's popular books served as models for the conduct books appearing over the next century and show the prevailing attitudes of the

century: that men are intellectually superior to women, that the province of women does not include serious intellectual work in secular or religious areas, and that virtues and specific spiritual behaviors are gender-specific.

The explicit goals of the conduct book writers of the eighteenth-century who follow Allestree are religious in nature and maintain the traditions established by Allestree. As a genre, the conduct books also reinforce the traditional patriarchal expression of Christianity, thus becoming one of the methods of maintaining the culture. The books outline character traits, acceptable behavior and expected virtues as gender-based and support the theological and political social order. The theological status quo, seen in the assumptions apparent from Allestree's work forward, says that women should be quiet receivers of ideas, should obey their fathers or husbands unquestioningly, and should not assert themselves into social or public settings but remain satisfied with their private and most often passive roles within the family. Like their secular roles, women's spiritual experiences were static and limited from the outside. Little sense of spiritual questing existed for women if conduct books serve as any indication of eighteenth-century guidelines.

If a person's place is appointed by God, as most educated people of the early eighteenth-century believed, then any theological or spiritual explanation of one's role in the world would support the religious status quo. What should be changed if God is the appointer of position? Religious writings which encouraged women to maintain and accept their established passive role also encouraged women to accept that this role should not be challenged and that those who might challenge their positions also challenged the laws of God.

This chapter examines six conduct books from the eighteenth century, considering several of these issues. Three of the books were written by men and three by women. The former are Strictures on Female Education (1795) by John Bennett, An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex (1797) by Thomas Gisborne and A Father's Legacy to His Daughters (1774) by John Gregory; I have chosen these three because of their immense popularity. All three books went through numerous editions over many years and contribute to an understanding of both patriarchal and Christian values of the period, but rather than showing a strong spirituality of religious action appropriate for women, these conduct books advocate, at best, a gender-based, patriarchally-approved private and passive female spirituality.

On the other hand, the three conduct books by women offer a bit more variability in their guidance and suggestions for young women's spiritual lives. The three works are Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education (1799) by Hannah More, Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education (1802) by Elizabeth Hamilton and Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft. These books show the diverse possibilities which women saw for the expression of their own spirituality and the overlapping nature of their social and spiritual quests.

The intertwining issues to be examined in this chapter, then, are expressed in these questions: 1) what is the nature of the content in the conduct books, 2) what is revealed about the views of women's spirituality in the conduct books by men and women, 3) how do specific and gendered virtues relate to women's spiritual expression and experience, 4) how does the level and nature of women's education affect their

spiritual and social quests, and 5) how does this gender-based spirituality connect to a patriarchal social order?

Written by Men for Women

Gregory, Gisborne, and Bennett typically chose a fatherly stance from which to lecture young women on behavior and morals. Wiser, older men could reasonably instruct a young woman on the ways of the world and her position in it.

Dr. John Gregory's work, A Father's Legacy to His Daughters, is the earliest of these works (published in 1774, a year after his death, with many subsequent editions as late as 1877) and is a personal address to his daughters from their aging father. According to the editor, the work's private nature and its coming at the end of a father's life indicates to the audience its public value. Motherless daughters need extra guidance to achieve the blessings which a mother would bestow. This catalyst of motherhood is used by many men writing conduct books.

While supporting traditional Christian values, Gregory reveals his own perspective on the issues by breaking the book into four sections: Religion; Conduct and Behavior; Amusements; and Friendship, Love, Marriage. While his advice is always conservative and enforces gender boundaries, he also says that he has his daughters' welfare at heart. In Vindication, Wollstonecraft criticizes Gregory's work and describes his ambivalence in this way:

> [H]aving two objects in view, he seldom adhered steadily to either; for wishing to make his daughters amiable, and fearing lest unhappiness should only be the consequence, of instilling sentiments that might draw them out of the track of common life without enabling them to act with consonant independence and dignity, he checks the natural flow of his thoughts, and neither advises one thing nor the other. (97)

Gregory tries to walk the line of moderation between acknowledging the culture's undue restrictions on the spiritual and secular lives of women and encouraging young women to fight against these patriarchal restraints. A few comments from the sections of his book indicate his ambivalence: he wants the best for his daughters, but he recognizes social and cultural limitations and does not openly attack them. He tells educated young women: "But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding" (15). Perhaps his intent is practical, but his message is damning; men will not abide women who think and speak.

Among these conduct books, Gregory's views of the character of women are, perhaps, the most conservative. His presentation offers a clear separation by gender in areas of virtue, education and religious experience and expression.

> I shall not repeat what I have said on this subject, and shall only observe, that from the view I have given of your natural character and place in society, there arises a certain propriety of conduct peculiar to your sex. It is this peculiar propriety of female manners of which I intend to give you my sentiments, without touching on those general rules of conduct by which men and women are equally bound. (3-4)

The feminine virtues which he espouses include truthfulness, delicacy, gentleness of spirit, modesty, charity and amiability — all virtues which will lend themselves to a character pleasing to others, and as he points out in his introduction, virtues not especially suited to men. Unlike other more serious-minded works, Gregory also includes a great deal of practical advice in his book, including the practical virtues which women as wives and mothers should have. "The domestic economy of a family is entirely a woman's province, and furnishes a variety of subjects for the exertion both of good sense and good taste (24).

In "Conduct and Behavior," Gregory distinguishes between wit and humor (the latter being desirable in women, the former not) and tends to undermine any self-assertion and moral independence when he encourages a modest reserve, delicacy, and silence in company. He cautions to have humor but warns that "Wit is the most dangerous talent you can possess [and while] wit is perfectly consistent with softness and delicacy; yet they are seldom found united" (15). In speaking of delicacy, Gregory dismisses prudery and affectation; he wants his daughters to have real delicacy. "Consider every species of indelicacy in conversation as shameful in itself, and as highly disgusting to us [men]" (16). Numerous times, Gregory shows that a guiding principle of his work is that his daughters should always strive to please men. Despite this guiding principle, he advocates true elegance for his daughters by suggesting that they avoid loose flirtation or affection. "I think you may possess dignity without pride, affability without meanness, and simple elegance without affectation" (48).

Education, as such, gets scant notice in Gregory's work. He says, "I am at the greatest loss what to advise you in regard to books. There is no impropriety in your reading history, or cultivating any art or science to which genius or accident leads you. The whole volume of Nature lies open to your eye, and furnishes an infinite variety of entertainment" (24). This seems like an opening to women to pursue their own abilities and tastes, but Gregory follows with the following statements:

> If I was sure that Nature had given you such strong principles of taste and sentiment as would remain with you, and influence your future conduct, with the utmost pleasure would I endeavour to direct your reading in such a way as might form that taste to the utmost perfection of truth and elegance. But when I reflect how easy it is to warm a girl's imagination, and how difficult deeply and permanently to affect her heart; how readily she enters into every refinement of sentiment, and how easily she can sacrifice them to vanity or convenience; I think I may very probably do you an injury by artificially

> creating a taste, which, if Nature never gave it you, would only serve to embarrass your future conduct. (24-25)

Gregory is exceedingly careful throughout his discussion to avoid any appearance of encouraging young women to move outside of the established boundaries of appropriate behavior in education, spirituality or daily obligation.

> I do not want to make you any thing; I want to know what Nature has made you, and to perfect you on her plan. I do not wish you to have sentiments that might perplex you: I wish you to have sentiments that may uniformly and steadily guide you, and such as your hearts so thoroughly approve, that you would not forego them for any consideration this world could offer. (25)

He wants to teach without making his daughters unwomanly and to guide without perplexing their understanding.

In his direct statements concerning religion, Gregory says that religion, for women, is sentiment not reason. He tells women to "Fix your attentions. . . , and do not meddle with controversy" (19) and avoid all that might shake faith. He supports the attitude that women should not concern themselves with matters of theology but should simply feel their religion and not question the authority of the Church, the teachings of ministers, or the living lessons of faith. In setting out women's natural propensity for "felt" spirituality, Gregory contrasts men and women.

> Though the duties of religion strictly speaking, are equally binding on both sexes, yet certain differences in their natural character and education, render some vices in your sex peculiarly odious. The natural hardness of our hearts and strength of our passions, inflamed by the uncontroled licence [sic] we are too often indulged with in our youth, are apt to render our manners more dissolute, and make us less susceptible of the finer feelings of the heart. Your superior delicacy, your modesty, and the usual severity of your education, preserve you, in a great measure, from any temptation to those vices to which we are most subjected. (5)

Women are not expected to act out their passions, even religious ones, but should maintain their delicate and modest control at all times. The gender separation of virtue is

apparent as Gregory outlines the vices into which men fall and the protection women need from these. His statement that "The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions particularly fits you for the practice of those duties where the heart is chiefly concerned. . . [i.e. religious devotion and family care]" (5) shows and supports this separation. In their soft sentimentality, women are also naturally silly and vain, according to Gregory, and need the reining force of religion to control them and to offer them comfort when they suffer under uncontrollable misfortune. Men have the additional outlets, unavailable to women, of plunging into business or dissipation of pleasure and riot (6). The restraints of modesty and spirituality and softness of sensibility hold women within the bounds of propriety.

Gregory talks about appropriate amusements which women might seek out, offering little new advice, but softening some of the cultural antagonism toward reading. "Such books as improve your understanding, enlarge your knowledge, and cultivate your taste, may be considered in a higher point of view than mere amusements" (49). This higher caliber of book certainly would not include the typical novel of his day but would more likely involve sermons, tracts or stories which edify, the typical conduct books. He teaches that standard accomplishments, what Gisborne will refer to as ornaments of education, have their place in a young lady's education: needlework teaches judgment and "fills the solitary hours you must necessarily pass at home" (52). He does not question his own assumption here. He goes on: dancing teaches ease and grace, but gaming is bad and may lead young women into inappropriate company and activity. He justifies the cultural admonition that young women need to entertain others by connecting these social skills with the loftier characteristics of caring for home and family.

Gregory moves into darker and more serious issues when he discusses jealousy and secrecy in the final section of this work. He says that jealousy prevents women from being good friends with each other. Such remarks on jealousy seem to be common in conduct books. Gregory discourages women from friendships with other women and particularly advises that single and married women should stay away from each other. He argues that single women should not tell secrets to married women because married women will simply repeat the stories to their husbands. Gregory does not explain the origins of these problems, but he believes that men make better friends for young women. His comments seem to show that suspicion of other women is the natural condition and should be considered by young women as they make friends.

Throughout his work, Gregory admonishes his daughters to maintain "perfect simplicity of heart and manners" (47). While he does not explain how to do this, he does offer very practical advice in other areas. Remembering that his daughters are motherless, he reminds them to keep secrets, to avoid gambling, to not marry a fool (although he does not tell his daughters how to recognize one), and to remember to ask about hereditary diseases when contemplating engagement. Gregory's noblest desires show a father's affection for his daughters and his sincere wishes for their success and happiness. These noble desires, however, include the integration of the gender-specific virtues of eighteenth-century Christian womanhood.

Rev. John Bennett's Strictures on Female Education Chiefly as it Relates to the Culture of the Heart is a collection of four essays and the basis for a longer work in two volumes entitled Letters to a Young Lady which went through nine editions from 1791 to its first American printing in 1796. Bennett originally intended to write a three-volume

set to address the problems of proper education for young women, the historical treatment of the education of women, the effect of women's education on society, the limitations of women's understanding, and the poor quality of public education with support for quality private education. Like Gregory, Bennett's "culture of the heart" refers to women's assumed sensitivity, to the emotional role which women play in life and to the "superior susceptibility of women, and that, exquisite sensibility, which so wonderfully disposes them to receive all impressions. . ." (Strictures 17). It is the duty of those who educate women, according to Bennett who echoes Allestree here, to preserve this delicacy and to teach true virtue to a feminine sensibility. The full title of Letters reflects Bennett's attitudes and wishes for his book: "Letters to a Young Lady, on a Variety of Useful and Interesting Subjects: Calculated to Improve the Heart, to Form the Manners, and Enlighten the Understanding 'That our Daughters may be as polished Corners of the Temple.'"

In Strictures on Female Education, Bennett defends the reputation of women by harshly criticizing prevailing attitudes toward women such as those made popular by Lord Chesterfield. Bennett attacks Chesterfield directly:

> He [Solomon] has been followed by a number of servile imitators, of all ages and nations, who indiscriminately, have applied the dark portrait to all. I will not add a Chesterfield to a group, (whose letters to his son, from beginning to end, are one continued libel upon women) because I wish the memory of his immortal graces, and his refined dissimulation, to sleep forever with him in his grave. (Strictures 15)

Specifically, Bennett attacks Chesterfield's denigration of women. Chesterfield says in The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield: "To men, I talked whatever I thought would give them the best opinion of my parts and learning, and to women, what I was sure would please them —flattery, gallantry, and love" (319). Bennett condemns

this attitude toward women and this undermining of women's credibility. He wants to protect women's natural innocence and sees Chesterfield's attack as ungentlemanly and ungracious. Bennett does not want the secular and satiric voices like Chesterfield's to dominate the cultural imagination. "From all quarters they [women] have been attacked, and whilst their form is confessed to be enchanting, they are treated, by the bulk of men, as fit for little else but some domestick drudgeries, or some indelicate enjoyments" (Strictures 17). Women's greatest attributes lie, he believes, in the sensitive and emotional areas of life. Bennett does not wish to see these destroyed or mocked.

Bennett's defense of women, while pointed, lacks real strength of assertion. His support for women caters to the idea that women are especially fragile and childlike and need protection from the world. His touch is gentle; he explores the gendered virtues, like sensitivity and modesty, and explains their development. In making this defense, Bennett criticizes the standards of education for women and advocates quality private education for women. He does not go so far as to advocate educating men and women equally, only in better educating women. To each her appropriate calling.

Bennett's work, Letters to a Young Lady, takes a more concerted approach to directing the education and subsequent conduct of young women. In two volumes of personal letters addressed to Lucy, a young woman whose mother has died, Bennett discusses issues of importance for young girls growing into womanhood. According to his editor, Bennett's

> . . . intention [in Letters] is really to serve the fairest and most amiable part of the creation; to rouse young ladies from a vacant or insipid life, into one of usefulness and laudable exertion—to recall them from visionary novels and romances, into solid reading and reflections—and from the criminal absurdities of fashion, to the simplicity of nature and the dignity of virtue. (Editor's Advertisement)

Bennett, more so than Gregory, expounds on appropriate reading material for young women, as he catalogues writer after writer as the proper choice for a woman's religious education, her spiritual growth and development into a useful, Christian woman. Specifically, he lists multiple sermon and devotion writers, including Tillotson, Ogden, Secker, Farringdon, St. Austin, and Taylor. Within his explanations are support for and critiques of these various writers, and he admonishes, "Sermons that aim to amuse or entertain are beneath the pulpit" (Letters 36). To Bennett, study of devotional material should be serious work.

While Bennett agrees with the prevailing attitude that women should not push themselves intellectually over philosophical or theological problems, he does not believe that women should be ignorant of religious history or practice. He writes many letters in Volume One briefly describing various world religions and some of the varieties of Christianity at work in England. Bennett believes that a young woman's education should include an understanding of how her religion differs from others in the world. He does not, however, present such information objectively. He directs young women to English, Anglican Christianity: "The public worship of the papists is overloaded with ceremony. It is performed in a learned language unknown to the vulgar, and intermixed with such a continual change of dress, attitude and ceremonies as are only calculated to excite the ridicule of a rational and enlightened mind" (Letters 52). Bennett's goal is for young women to know the superiority of the Church of England and to know their place in that Church. He says, "If I wished a woman to be universally charming, I would recommend this expedient. Compassion is the highest excellence of your sex, and charity is the sacred root from which it springs" (Letters 74). Both compassion and charity,

while acknowledged to be practiced by all, are virtues specifically assigned to the realm of female spirituality, especially at this time in the Church of England.

Despite Bennett's praise and support of women, his work also reinforces the gender restrictions in secular and religious education. "Though religion is indispensibly [sic] necessary to both sexes, and in every possible character and station, yet a woman seems, more peculiarly, to need its enlivening supports, whilst her frame must be confessed to be admirably calculated for the exercise of all the tender and devout affections" (Letters 9). This echoes Gregory's beliefs about the nature of women; they have physically tender bodies, natural timidity and emotional and spiritual sensitivity. Even Bennett's caring language and attitude cannot erase the power or the restrictive nature of these assumptions.

His assumptions include an understanding of the proper pursuits for women. He says, "Your reason and understanding were given you to be improved; a proper pursuit of knowledge, at the same time, will aid and inflame your piety, and render you much more valuable and interesting to all your acquaintance" (80-81). Doubtless this is true; knowledge aids piety and both make one interesting. The heart of the statement is that women become more interesting for men to have around. A second lingering notion from this statement, "the proper pursuit of knowledge," pushes Bennett into explaining which pursuits are proper for young women. He cautions in Letter XLIV that learned women are as much of a problem as ignorant women; moderation in everything is the answer, along with an understanding of which pursuits lend themselves to women's capacity:

> The prominent excellencies of your minds are taste and imagination, and your knowledge should be of a kind which assimilates with these faculties.

> Politics, philosophy, mathematics, or metaphysics are not your province. Machiavel, Newton, Euclid, Malebranche or Locke would lie with a very ill grace in your closets.

After outlining the subjects which women should not study, Bennett, in the same passage, explains why these subjects are inappropriate and into which areas women's studies should take them.

> They would render you unwomanly indeed. They would damp the vivacity and destroy that disengaged ease and softness, which are the very essence of your graces.
>
> The elegant studies are, more immediately, your department. They do not require so much time, abstraction or comprehensiveness of mind; they bring no wrinkles, and they will give a polish to your manners, and such a liberal expansion to your understanding as every rational creature should endeavour to attain. (Letters 81-82)

The underlying statements argue that women are only as womanly as they are soft; they are only as desirable as they are 'disengaged' from worry or deep thought. In this, Bennett agrees with Gregory. Bennett says, "The discipline of the imagination is the first thing to be attempted. . . . No consequence can justify one single act of caprice, sullenness or ill-humour. It is a direct violation of that universal law of charity, which requires us, in all our actions, to keep in view, the happiness of others, as well as our own" (Letters 78, 79). Grace, ease, softness, elegance, accomplishment, emotional sensitivity, compassion, devotion, piety, charity and self-government— according to Bennett, these are the virtues and natural talents for women to mine, always with an eye toward pleasing others.

Bennett differentiates women from men.

> Whilst men, with solid judgment and a superior vigour are to combine ideas, to discriminate, and examine a subject to the bottom, you are to give it all its brilliancy and all its charms. They provide the furniture; you dispose it with propriety. . . . Cultivate, then, such studies, as be within the region of sentiment and taste. Let your knowledge be feminine, as well as

> your person. And let it glow within you, rather than sparkle upon others about you. A diamond, so polished, will always be valued. You will charm all, but the ignorant and vulgar. You will be a rational, entertaining companion. . . . (Letters 82-83)

The masculine virtues or skills are intellectual in nature. Men think critically about and investigate important subjects. These subjects are outside the province of female exploration and would destroy the femininity of any woman found exploring them. A woman should be passive and attractive and sentimental. This strong delineation between femininity and masculinity, supported by his understanding of Christian behavior, runs through both volumes of Bennett's work.

After having said this, Bennett seems slightly more generous when he explains the appropriate categories of a woman's secular education. He approves for women the "elegant studies" of history, natural history, botany, astronomy, geography, biology and literature. He recommends Goldsmith, Robertson and Hume for their historical studies, but he cautions against the danger of reading their works which lie outside of the historical realm. He especially condemns Hume's metaphysical work as immoral. He continues, however, to differentiate the kind of work a young woman might do from the serious study appropriate for a man: "Stretch's Beauties of History will furnish you with many short, agreeable anecdotes, both ancient and modern, at a very small expence [sic] of time and trouble. Knowledge this epitomized, is what I should recommend. On such subjects, you want short and pithy sketches, rather than laboured and prolix dissertations" (Letters 86). This summarized material will enlighten a woman but not tax her, and in this lack of depth rests the primary difference between masculine and feminine education. The purpose of women's education, again, seems to be the entertainment of those around them.

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Even while proposing this limited exposure to substantial texts, Bennett defends women. "They, who talk degradingly of women, do not know the value of the treasure they despise. They have not sufficient taste to relish their excellencies, or purity enough to court their acquaintance. They have taken the portraits of abandoned women, and they think the features applicable to all" (9). He asserts that women have been harmed by their faulty education, but that they may rise to exceed expectation with proper guidance. "The education of women, is unfortunately directed rather to such accomplishments as will enable them to make a noise and sparkle in the world, than to those qualities, which might ensure their comfort here, and happiness hereafter" (9). Bennett believes that piety and virtue are the only sources of real enjoyment for women. Men, in the position of power, should know this and lead the women in their lives to these virtues.

Thomas Gisborne's tone is more serious, more systematic and more directly religious in nature than the work of Bennett or Gregory and is more like the earlier work of Richard Allestree. In his Preface to An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, (1797 with its 8th edition in 1810), Gisborne elaborates on the abundance of work in this genre and asserts that, in his efforts to be original, he did not read other conduct books until he had drafted his own. After completing his draft, he read others and revised his own to ensure "useful rules and just conclusions" and adds that he has been careful "not to load a practical work with controversy" (Duties iv, v).[2] So, with conscious care to avoid offense or controversy, Gisborne sets out his plan. He addresses the higher and middle classes and differentiates between single and married women, women of the city and of the country, and the variety of stations in life. Each, he states, has her own problems and her own duties, established by God and assigned by class. His work, he

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says, is deduced from scriptural authority, and he condemns writers who reject Christian guidelines but continue to write for young women, thus leading them away from righteousness.

In the sixteen sections of Duties, Gisborne includes many of the customary topics of the conduct books: Amusements, Dress, Education, Marriage Considerations, and Duties associated with life's stages. Chapter Two concerns the responsibilities of women to their duties. Early in the chapter, he says that women must not undervalue the duties given them by reason and revelation (10-11). Intelligent women, even learned women, should understand the value in distinguishing themselves in areas appropriate to their sex. He admits the limitations of such a life:

> The sphere of domestic life, the sphere in which female exertion is chiefly occupied, and female excellence is best displayed, admits far less diversity of action, and consequently of temptation, than is to be found in the widely differing professions and employments into which private advantage and public good require that men should be distributed. (Duties 2)

In making this statement, Gisborne acknowledges the cultural discussion of this issue and begins to define and support the boundaries imposed on women's lives. He criticizes young women who fail to find such a restricted life challenging or fulfilling.

> Young women endowed with good understandings, but desirous of justifying the mental indolence which they have permitted themselves to indulge; or disappointed at not perceiving a way open by which they, like their brothers, may distinguish themselves and rise to eminence; are occasionally heard to declare their opinion, that the sphere in which women are destined to move is so humble and so limited, as neither to require nor to reward assiduity; and under this impression, either do not discern, or will not be persuaded to consider, the real and deeply interesting effects which the conduct of their sex will always have on the happiness of society. (Duties 10-11)

Gisborne seeks to educate young women to their true and Christian calling by pointing out that many of the problems they experience lie in their own definitions and ambitions.

Women should not have ambitions beyond the domestic and private sphere. They should find contentment in their assigned roles, and Gisborne adds that not only are those roles designed by God and established by class, they are dictated by biology. Gisborne says that even women of outstanding ability should not consider a worldly demonstration, as this represents only pride and ambition. He leaves little room for women who might want to and might be capable of making a larger contribution to human society. A woman is called to care for husbands and parent, to moderate the vices of men through her manners and disposition, and to nurture children (Duties 8-9). Female influence "is like the dew of heaven which descends at all seasons, returns after short intervals, and permanently nourishes every herb of the field" (Duties 12). These assertions show the limits which Gisborne sets to the physical and psychic spaces in which women must function.

In seeking to alleviate what might be perceived as an injustice, Gisborne adds: "But, to protect weakness from the oppression of domineering superiority, those who He has not qualified to contend, He has enabled to fascinate; and has amply compensated the defect of muscular vigour by symmetry and expression, by elegance and grace" (Duties 20). A woman's superiority lies in her ability to charm and entertain the men who dominate her.

> It is accordingly manifest, that, in sprightliness and vivacity, in quickness of perception, in fertility of invention, in powers adapted to unbend the brow of the learned, to refresh the over-laboured faculties of the wise, and to diffuse, throughout the family circle, the enlivening and endearing smile of cheerfulness, the superiority of the female mind is unrivalled. (Duties 22)

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These virtues of pleasing fit a woman for her natural calling; Gisborne argues that the influence of the female character on the world and the characteristics required to accomplish this influence are found in this pleasing.

> Were we called upon to produce examples of the most amiable tendencies and affections implanted in human nature, of modesty, of delicacy, of sympathising [sic] sensibility, of prompt and active benevolence, of warmth and tenderness of attachment; whither should we at once turn our eyes? To the sister, to the daughter, to the wife. These endowments form the glory of the female sex" (Duties 16).

In contrast to these feminine endowments, Gisborne asserts that God has endowed men with stronger bodies, stronger passions and propensity for violence and with "the powers of close and comprehensive reasoning, and of intense and continued application, in a degree in which they are not requisite for the discharge of the customary offices of female duty" (Duties 15). Men, according to Gisborne, have been given these natural talents by God in order to perform the duties required of them in legislation, navigation, commercial enterprises, philosophy and research.

Gisborne also outlines the vices into which women might fall. He includes unsteadiness of mind, fondness of novelty, habit of frivolousness, dislike of sober application, unreasonable regard for wit, thirst for admiration, and vanity and affectation. While men also have vices, they are not on this list. Obviously the "vices" which Gisborne attributes to women are the vices of a person with few inner resources. Lack of education, lack of potential for action, lack of control of one's life, lack of development and lack of an understanding of one's spiritual potential would all lead to such flaws. Nowhere in his discussion does he venture to say that women must explore their own spiritual ideas or intimate that women might experience any kind of spiritual quest.

Gisborne defends his support of the gendered virtues and vices by asserting that some writers (although unnamed, perhaps Wollstonecraft) shame women by ignoring these "natural" boundaries.

> Genius, taste, and learning itself, have appeared in the number of female endowments and acquisitions. And we have heard, from time to time, some bold assertors of the rights of the weaker sex, stigmatizing, in terms of indignant complaint, the monopolising injustice of the other; laying claim, on behalf of their clients, to co-ordinate authority in every department of science and erudition; and upholding the perfect equality of injured woman and usurping man in language so little guarded, as scarcely to permit the latter to consider the labours of the camp and of the senate as exclusively pertaining to himself. (Duties 19)

Most certainly, writers like Wollstonecraft used forthright language, asserting that women have a place in any field in which they excel, but Gisborne bluntly seeks to uphold the gender boundaries which some women writers were trying to eliminate; for him, the boundaries represent God's plan. The separation between man and woman is intellectual, emotional, spiritual, physical, social, and biological. According to this scheme, male and female virtue and male and female spiritual behavior would be equally distinct. Gisborne supports this separation.

In his evaluation of the relationship between education and virtue, Gisborne does not discourage women from learning. He believes that mothers are, after all, the best teachers for children. "That instructor who is loved the best will commonly prove the most efficacious" (57). Therefore, the most natural subjects for women are those which provide a useful understanding of the physical world, making them better teachers of young children. Each potential mother needs a better education to fulfill this duty. To achieve this better education, Gisborne specifically lists Language, Geography, Natural History, History, Astronomy, Science, and French. Gisborne identifies the continued

attention to the ornaments of education, i.e. drawing, music, beauty, and dress, as one of the greatest faults in women's education. Unlike earlier writers, he questions the emphasis placed on these accomplishments because he believes that they feed pride, vanity and fashion. He adds, "Good sense and virtue are the only qualifications which endure or deserve lasting esteem" (86), a statement with which Austen might agree.[3] Gisborne, however, might have gone a great deal further in his condemnation of ornamental education. He understates the necessity of a grounded education for women; too strong a statement for change in women's education might push Gisborne into the dangerous territory of boundary redefinition.

In the specifically spiritual realm, Gisborne again takes a traditional position. He says that man has "the fixed preeminence over the other" (Duties 230) and uses scripture to support this. He mentions, briefly, men's duty in marriage and quotes specifically Colossians 3: 19: "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Gisborne uses Paul to support the spiritual status quo. This is the cultural base for Gisborne. From his scriptural edict for marriage where man is the head, Gisborne states that a young woman should rely on her parents to choose a good match for her. A woman obeys God by first obeying her parents and then obeying her husband. In so doing, she also contributes to the propagation of the secular and spiritual culture.

Typically, Gisborne's position takes on political as well as religious dimension. Like other writers from this period, including Bennett and Gregory, Gisborne assumes the superiority of English civilization and accepts its truths as universal and timeless. His argument about women's education is an offshoot of this stance. He takes a politically conservative approach, believing that education should transmit the accepted cultural and religious philosophies. In Duties, chapters three and four, Gisborne writes on

male/female differentiation and its connection to education. There are "treacherous underminers" who would destroy women and culture through an inappropriate education. Education should control that excess of vivacity and imagination that "can lead to an unsteadiness of mind" (Duties 33). Just as in moderation vivacity and imagination might be seen as women's gifts, in excess they become women's greatest vices. Gisborne argues that education should lead women to the specifically-feminine virtue to which they were born.

* * *

What stories do these conduct books tell about the nature of women and the expected course of their lives? In their answers to these questions, much common ground exists among Allestree, Gregory, Bennett, and Gisborne though their writings span one hundred fifty years.

Their fundamental conservatism underpins all of their positions and seems to approve of the cultural status quo. Each views education as the primary tool for transmitting and maintaining the culture. Each seems to believe that God smiles on some individuals but not on others and that human beings should not tamper with this. These writers espouse that God controls all and that God has designed all of the systems at work in the world, down to the specific placement of individuals in particular social classes. These conduct book writers wish to transmit and support the existing culture, particularly as it establishes gender-specific guidelines for behavior. Having a woman continue in her traditional role of wife and mother is vital for the continuation of the established power structure.

What does this mean for an individual woman's life? The story of a woman's life as told in these conduct books is simple. All women should:

-participate in established religion, feeling it deeply, espousing its tenets, but not investigating its mysteries or inconsistencies, avoiding difficult questions

-obey authority

-maintain feminine softness, both physically and temperamentally

-maintain an air of innocence and charm to please others

-possess the specific virtues assigned to their gender

-learn about the world but avoid intellectual rigor

-follow parents' advice in choosing a spouse

-marry and have children

-be an entertaining and lively partner

-raise children into the dominant culture

-participate in Christian, British culture

What do these rules mean for an individual woman's spiritual life? Discussing spirituality or attempting to define it is slippery. In spirituality lies the idea of a numen. It asks the question: Is there a divine spirit controlling or guiding or creating and operating behind the physical world which we inhabit? Spirituality involves the connectedness of all of life and one's search for the driving force or the driving purpose. Spirituality is apparent when individuals question the purpose of their lives and the reasons for their existence, as Christ describes in Diving Deep and Surfacing. Spirituality is evident in piety and to examine piety one must examine an individual's behavior. Piety is shown through an individual's belief system, sense of duty and attitude towards self and others.

A rich spiritual life entails the ability of an individual to question any of these precepts in any of these areas. Open investigation is encouraged whether the investigation is intellectual, metaphysical or if it works itself out through experimental living or experiential questing, trying out a variety of life plans or belief systems. A constrained spirituality is one in which some questions are not permitted or some answers are dictated. The constraining forces might be cultural, religious or political, but limits are placed on one's search for answers. Cultural approval is withheld and survival might be at stake if the cultural mandates for a spiritual quest are not followed.

The narrative strands in the story told in these conduct books are stunted. A woman who steps outside of or beyond these delimited boundaries is walking into dangerous and uncharted territory. She risks alienation, isolation and desertion, losing, among other things, her sexual identity. What would her story be then?

Written by Women for Women

Just as there is variation in the level of conservatism in the men writing conduct books, so also do the women vary. Hannah More and Elizabeth Hamilton, the more conservative of the three women under discussion here, found it necessary to avoid seeming too worldly and so developed an approach to writing their conduct books for women which differs from those approaches used by men. After all, Gregory and Bennett were physicians and Gisborne was a respected clergyman; they had position, status and power supporting them. Women, typically, did not have this social and cultural authority. More declares herself to be within the political and religious conservative element seeking to protect tradition and ritual; the Dictionary of National Biography reports that she and Thomas Gisborne were close friends. She behaves,

however, outside of the prescribed private arena in which women were typically confined. Hamilton, always aligned with the Scottish Church as Bennett was, was more practical in her approach and in her goals; she established homes for single young women and found them appropriate jobs aimed at their self-sufficiency. Her public behavior combined practical advice for 'modern' young women who found themselves outside of the traditional and protected 'gentlewoman' category, acknowledging and in a sense supporting the social hierarchy by offering different advice and guidelines to young women based on their social class.

Social class was not the only issue determining who could or who could not have a public voice. Marital status and a public persona were also aids. Women were regularly trained to be governesses and teachers; therefore, it would be acceptable to draw on this expertise for writing about the world. Neither More nor Hamilton married, and even had they, there seems to have been little market for conduct books filled with motherly advice. As experienced and educated women, however, More and Hamilton could address others who might share their concerns, particularly when these concerns affect the livelihoods of many women. The nature of the conduct books by these women is, therefore, fundamentally different from those written by men. They are more practical, speaking from and addressing arenas of social lives outside of the very limited, traditional images; they address particular issues of education often addressing an audience responsible for the education of children: both parents and teachers. They seriously discuss education, morality, and Christianity as the bases of women's existence, but they attack more liberal tendencies which they see as threatening to destroy the fiber of English culture and its backbone, Christian womanhood.

Writers like Hamilton and More, while deeply and devoutly Christian, are also deeply entangled in the politics of gender distinction, despite their assertions to the contrary. Stated directly in their works are references to maintaining one's position in life and society and respecting the authority of church and king and often husband, as well. What separates their work from other writers is their pretense that the work is not of a political nature. While also true for Hamilton, it is especially evident that More regularly denigrates herself and often uses an apologetic rhetoric in giving advice. In his 1998 work, Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders, Don Herzog explains this phenomena as a response to the rise of democratic action in a staunchly conservative patriarchy. On this subject, he says,

> So the women novelists tread lightly on the public stage. They offer their incisive observations about domestic life and so hesitantly vindicate their presence in public. [Harriet] Martineau and Wollstonecraft, writing on hotly contested political questions, have no such vindication to offer. They have strayed too far from the domestic sphere and are punished by forfeiting their sexual desirability. (428-429)

Neither More nor Hamilton were ever stigmatized in this way. Their conservatism, their denial of political motives and the meekness of their public stances prevented this criticism from taking hold. Gendered division in the spiritual realm was directly connected to the anti-democratic and patriarchal conservatism in England during this time.

Hannah More's Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education With a View of the Principles & Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune (1799) exemplifies this connection. For young women seeking to enact their spirituality, More defines the public forum as simply as giving to the poor, or forgoing purchasing new ribbons and 'sacrificing' in order to donate something of one's self to the greater good.

Interestingly, More writes about the importance of acting out one's convictions in a public forum, but she defines this forum very narrowly.

In part, public support of More's work rests on her continuous assertion of humility. In a letter from 21 November 1817 to Zachary Macaulay, long-time friend and father of Thomas B. Macaulay, she writes:

> I have lately been called upon for a correct copy for a new edition of 'Coelebs,' and of 'Practical Piety.' In spite of the dull task of reforming points and particles, I found the revisal, of the last especially, a salutary and mortifying employment. How easy it is to be good upon paper! I felt myself humbled even to a sense of hypocrisy, to observe (for I had forgotten the book) how very far short I had fallen myself of the habits and principles and interior sanctity which I found it so easy to recommend to others. I hardly read a page which I did not carry some reproach to my own heart. I frequently think of a line which Prior puts into the mouth of Solomon: -- 'They brought my proverbs to confute my life.' (Letters 101)

More's public persona is modest and humble despite the fact that the two works she mentions here had fifteen and eleven editions respectively. Obviously, this humility is part of the projected persona. She was astutely aware of the political nature of her literary acts, addressing the underclasses with her "Cheap Repository Tracts," for example, and admonishing the elite with works such as "An Estimate of the Religion of the Fashionable World" (1791) and "Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society (1788). As a devout and active Christian, she only slightly hesitates in addressing her readers, and the hesitation does not concern her message but concerns her ability as a woman to have a public voice, as Herzog notes. Maintaining her demure posture about her writings, More acknowledges her limitations in this arena but obviously continues to write. Claudia L. Johnson highlights this in her introduction to More's "Considerations on Religion and Public Education":

> Because the separation of spheres, which assigned women to the supposedly apolitical space within the home and men to the political world outside it, was still under construction -- in part by ideologues such as More herself! -- the intervention of 'proper' women into public affairs was not uncommon. In writing these pamphlets, More and Burney alike are crossing a gendered boundary they are in the process of delineating. (Intro to Publication 262 v)

This dual process separates More and the other women writers of conduct books from the men who wrote them. The women are proclaiming the privateness of their spirituality and their work while continuing to behave in a public forum. Men like Gisborne, Bennett and Gregory make no apologies.

More's persona, or at least the stereotypical characterization of it, shows her as a stern, serious, religious woman. While this picture is accurate, it is only partial. Hannah More also socialized with Dr. Johnson and David Garrick (who produced her plays), made annual visits to London, involved herself in the anti-slavery movement, and corresponded regularly with Horace Walpole. She wrote "Bas Bleu, or Conversation," in 1782 (published in 1786) elaborating on and defining the Bluestockings of London. This poem, as much as the story of Mrs. Vesey and Benjamin Stillingfleet, helped to move the Bluestockings into the public eye and into the history books.[4] It is sometimes difficult to reconcile her humble talk with these additional pieces of her life. Importantly, More and the other women writing conduct books continued, despite their personal influence and power, to speak meekly about their abilities to participate in the public arena.

In Strictures, More directly tips her hand and reveals her philosophies on woman's place in the world. This work addresses young women of the upper and middle classes, as Gisborne's work does. More begins with a disclaimer: as a woman she writes with only the best of intentions for improving the true lot of women in the world, and these good intentions serve "as a substitute for a powerful performance" (Strictures

Introduction). While she makes only the smallest claim to being an expert, she believes that she has valuable information to share with young women. She closes the work with a prayer and a similarly diminutive comment on "this lite work" (Strictures 287), much as other women writers do, prefiguring even Austen's description of her own work.

Scripture serves as the foundation of this work, and More asserts her position as a fundamentalist and evangelical. She believes in original sin and sees no good in natural man. She attacks Rousseau and other French philosophers saying that their philosophy "annihilates the value of chastity," and she argues that natural man is a "wayward, unfixed, unprincipled being" where Rousseau sees that "law and religion are unjust restraints on natural man" (Strictures 25). This attitude underlies her system of education as well when she asks, "Is it not a fundamental error to consider children as innocent beings, whose little weaknesses may perhaps want some correction, rather than as beings who bring into the world a corrupt nature and evil dispositions, which it should be the great end of education to rectify?" (Strictures 40). More believes in the literalness of original sin and supports the role of religion and culture in taming the wild beast, thus revealing the conservative nature of her politics and her religion.

> Let me not be supposed so to elevate politics, or so to depress religion, as to make any comparison of the value of the one with the other, when I observe, that between the true British patriot and the true Christian, there will be this common resemblance: the more deeply each of them inquires, the more will he be confirmed in his respective attachment, the one to his country, the other to his religion. (Strictures 115)

More reveals her conservative nature by looking to the past for answers to these problems, while linking the patriot and the Christian, as a good conservative would.

More addresses the connections among a woman's education, her spirituality and her social status in this political hierarchy. She criticizes the current system of women's

education and asserts that women are being educated into vanity and frivolity, not into useful Christianity and true patriotism. "To use their boasted power over mankind to no higher purpose than the gratification of vanity or the indulgence of pleasure, is the degrading triumph of those fair victims to luxury, caprice, and despotism. . . ." But she adds,

> I am not sounding an alarm to female warriors, nor exciting female politicians: I hardly know which of the two is the most disgusting and unnatural character. Propriety is . . . the first, the second, the third requisite. A woman may be knowing, active, witty, and amusing; but without propriety she cannot be amiable. Propriety is the centre in which all the lines of duty and of agreeableness meet. (Strictures 12, 13)

This seems a straightforward slap to Wollstonecraft's introduction to Vindication who calls for both warriors and politicians. Lest we doubt More's target, she discusses Wollstonecraft directly in several passages, while refraining from mentioning her name.[5]

> . . .a direct vindication of adultery was for the first time attempted by a woman, a professed admirer and imitator of the German suicide Werter. *The Female Werter*, as she is stiled by her biographers, asserts, in a work intitled, 'The Wrongs of Women [sic]' that adultery is justifiable, and that the restrictions placed on it by the laws of England constitute one of the Wrongs of Women. (Strictures 32, her emphasis)

More condemns Wollstonecraft, her compatriots and seemingly all of Romantic literature to hell: "Their's [sic] is an iniquity rather of phlegm than of spirit: and in the pestilent atmosphere they raise about them, as in the infernal climate described by Milton, 'The parching air/Burns frost, and frost performs the effect of fire" (Strictures 32). More continues, "This cool, calculating, intellectual wickedness eats out the very heart and core of virtue, and like a deadly mildew blights and shrivels the blooming promise of the human spring" (Strictures 33). She sees a direct line between democratization and the

fall of the social hierarchy which supports patriarchal life and the gendered separation of political, spiritual and social behavior.

More continues her attack on Wollstonecraft through Paine: "The rights of man have been discussed, til we are somewhat wearied with the discussion. To these have been opposed, with more presumption than prudence, the rights of woman" (Strictures 75). With her comment, so similar to Gisborne's, More ridicules Wollstonecraft and facetiously asks if the rights of children will be the next great issue. Two hundred years later, of course, the answer is yes. She directly links the political with the spiritual: "Too many consider Christianity rather as a political than a religious distinction; too many claim the appellation of Christians, in mere opposition to that Democracy with which they conceive infidelity to be associated. . ." (20). While More would not support the democratic impulses at work in the eighteenth century, she also would not assert that simple political conservatism equaled Christianity. She wants the explanation to be much deeper.

The heart of More's argument appears in Chapter XIII:

> The chief end to be proposed in cultivating the understandings of women, is to qualify them for the practical purposes of life. Their knowledge is not often like the learning of men, to be reproduced in some literary composition, nor ever in any learned profession; but it is to come out in conduct. . . .The great uses of study are to enable her to regulate her own mind, and to be useful to others. (Strictures 143)

She uses the example of literary activity as more appropriate for men than for women, but her point is broader. A woman's education should be designed to make her useful to others, in control of herself and capable of serving a practical purpose. Knowledge for its own sake is frivolous and vain for women, but a woman's education should show itself

through her conduct. Here More links education, moral behavior and spirituality in one stroke.

Importantly, she states that a woman's education, and concomitantly her spirituality, come out in the form of conduct. A woman's behavior, public and private, is the sum of her spirituality and education, not simply the acting out of a political philosophy. Improper reading leads to improper knowledge which leads women into decadence. The irony in the passage is that More exempts herself from her own discussion. She is the real woman of genius who must, through literary composition, seek to improve the conduct of both men and other women. While showing that she has read Rousseau and the German Romantics, More still separates the moral measure of the sexes through education to conduct. Men might create; women only behave.

To emphasize her point about the connection between conduct and education, More criticizes the excesses of women's education designed to help women "to allure and to shine" (33). If women are educated only for this physical life, then the current educational system is adequate, More argues, but if women are to be educated as Christians with immortal souls with a spiritual future, then a great gap exists. Learning the simple arts of pleasing through art, dancing or music is insufficient. The middle classes need to educate women to fulfill the duties of their class, not to waste time with trifles reserved for the wealthy and aristocratic. "Do we not educate them for a crown, forgetting that they are to live at home? for the world, and not for themselves? for show, and not for use? for time, and not for eternity?" (41). To begin to effect this change, More criticizes the current state of women's education and proceeds to offer a limited reading list for young women.

> The swarms of Abridgments, Beauties, and Compendiums, which form too considerable a part of a young lady's library, may be considered in many instances as an infallible receipt for making a superficial mind. The names of the renowned characters in history thus become familiar in the mouths of those who can neither attach to the ideas of the person, the series of his actions nor the peculiarities of is character. (89)

Here she directly disagrees with Bennett who has recommended Beauties as a valuable tool in developing a woman's ability to converse on historical topics. More goes on to specifically recommend that young women read Watt's or Duncan's Logic, Locke's "Essay on Human Understanding" and Bishop Butler's Analogy. She also argues that both history and geography might teach women about human fallibility and "may serve to give a clearer insight into the corruption of human nature (96). In this recommendation she refutes the position of some of the male conduct book writers who see no place for such study in a woman's education. More argues effectively that,

> Serious study serves to harden the mind for more trying conflicts; it lifts the reader from sensation to intellect; it abstracts her from the world and its vanities; it fixes a wandering spirit, and fortifies a weak one; it divorces her from matter; it corrects that spirit of trifling which she naturally contracts from the frivolous turn of female conversation, and the petty nature of female employments. . . . (92)

She carefully avoids criticism of this position with another disclaimer: "Far be it from me to desire to make scholastic ladies or female dialecticians. . . . Neither is there any fear that this sort of reading will convert ladies into authors" (93). Her reason for recommending a more solidly intellectual education for women is not to create more women authors or more women scholars. She wishes to upgrade women's understanding to make them better Christians. More continues her attack speaking specifically on Rousseau as one of these corruptors.

> [The] writings of the French infidels. . . are now sedulously laboring to destroy the religious principles of women, and in too many instances have

> fatally succeeded. For this purpose not only novels and romances have been made the vehicles of vice and infidelity, but the same allurement has been held out to the women of our country, which was employed by the first philosophist to the first sinner —knowledge. Listen to the precepts of the new German enlighteners and you need no longer remain in that situation in which Providence has placed you! Follow their examples, and you shall be permitted to indulge in all those gratifications which custom, not religion, has tolerated in the male sex! (29, 30)

Knowledge for its own sake or knowledge which challenges cultural authority is not in her plan. She attacks the novel as genre, eschewing its ability to teach morals, which is her primary goal: "Novels, which chiefly used to be dangerous in one respect, are now become mischievous in a thousand. They are continually shifting their ground, and enlarging their sphere, and are daily becoming vehicles of wider mischief" (Strictures 25). Most of the writers of conduct books condemn novel reading in young women because of the dangerous nature of its subjects, particularly the imaginative, potential, romantic life. But More ventures to add that "It is surely not necessary to state, that no disrespect can be here intended to those females of real genius and correct character, some of whose justly admired writings in this kind are accurate histories of life and manners, and striking delineations of character" (94). She asserts that there are novels which might be valuable additions to a young woman's education.

More operates under the assumption that the second primary goal for educating women at all is to make motherhood a powerful force for social and spiritual continuity. More discusses the importance of women's roles in educating children, and she outlines a plan for educating young women who will one day assume this role. "If you neglect this your bounden duty, you will have effectually contributed to expel Christianity from her last citadel [the English home]" (Strictures 38). Again, patriotic fervor and Christian ideals are collapsed into one goal. Motherhood within the English family is the source of

propagation for English Christianity. Once again readers find the words aligned here: Duty, Conduct, Virtue, Education, Amiability, Patriotism.

Perhaps the question arises about the inclusion of amiability in a broader discussion of Christian virtue and female spirituality. How can such an innocuous term or characteristic be referred to as specifically Christian? More answers this succinctly; women whose spirituality guides their behavior do not fall into the "impatience, levity, and fickleness" (193) of which they are accused but will show that "true good nature is the soul, of which politeness is only the garb" (184). Virtues are the outward manifestations of an inward spirituality, in this situation Christian, and these virtues are fostered by an education which teaches beyond the surface of memorized facts. More says that "The customs which fashion has established, when not in direct opposition to what is right, should unquestionably be pursued in the education of ladies! Piety maintains no natural war with elegance, and Christianity would be no gainer by making her disciples unamiable" (51). True Christian ladies will exhibit the virtues of patience, constancy, politeness, elegance and amiability and will have learned these through an education proper for their station in the social world.

While politically and religiously aligned with More, Elizabeth Hamilton stands somewhat apart from the other women in this study. Being a Scot and a member of the Reform Church separates Hamilton from More, but Hamilton's work, Letters Addressed to the Daughter of a Nobleman, on the Formation of Religious and Moral Principle (1806), is not unlike More's work in addressing the different social classes. Her philosophies of learning and education connect her with the Scottish Common Sense schools, and her education certainly allows for it. She read William Paley and quotes

him when she defines education: "Education . . . is the means employed to cultivate the moral and intellectual faculties of human beings, to the degree that is requisite to render the individual capable of fulfilling his religious and relative or social duties" (Series of Popular Essays I, 38). She asserts that knowledge of these principles

1) forms a just estimate of our own abilities,
2) makes us careful in measuring the merits of our own or other's characters,
3) confirms faith in divine revelation, and
4) helps us know our own hearts so that we may improve them.

She is much concerned with human capabilities, particularly female capabilities, and believes in continuing self-improvement. Her interest took practical shape in her work with the Female House of Industry in Edinburgh, where young women could work and earn a fair living, but she also wanted readers to remember intelligent and creative acts of women in history, so she recorded some of their stories for posterity in Memoirs of the Life of Agrippina, wife of Germanicus. She wanted to record a different kind of woman's story for future readers, to offer positive examples for how women might lead more fulfilling lives.

Like More and other women authors of the time, Hamilton maintains the public posture of female modesty. She says in Memoirs of the Late Mrs. Elizabeth Hamilton,

> —a life which appears as void of incident and adventure, that to have conceived the idea of leaving a sketch of it behind me, may seem ridiculous. I am, however, convinced, that to my own sex at least it might convey instruction. . . . (Memoirs 24)

She does not wish to seem too proud or too vain. Her goals are instructive and meek: her biography might serve as a model for other young women. It was written of her by a friend:

> Even though most Scotchwomen read, and were not inferior to their southern neighbors in general information and good taste, very few had ventured to

> incur the dangerous distinction of authorship. The vulgar term of 'blue stocking,' was more hackneyed even in polished circles of our literary metropolis, than you can easily imagine. It was, therefore, most fortunate for the interests of her sex, that when an authoress did appear amongst us, she should be one whose kind heart and unpretending manners, should set the sneers of prejudice at defiance. (Memoirs 176-77)

Despite her extensive education, despite her incredible publication record, the most important public statements made about Hamilton concern her Christian and feminine demeanor. She is admired for her natural cheerfulness, the activity of her mind, and her religion spiritual and practical (181). These are the qualities which all of the conduct books outline as the virtues of a Christian woman. Maria Edgeworth says of Hamilton:

> In recommending to her own sex the study of metaphysics, as far as it relates to education, Mrs. Hamilton has been judiciously careful to avoid all that can lead to that species of vain debate of which there is no end; she, knowing the limits of the human understanding, does not attempt to go beyond them, into that which can be at best but a dispute about terms. She does not aim at making women expert in the wordy war; nor does she teach them to astonish the unlearned by their acquaintance with the various vocabulary of metaphysical system-makers: such juggler's tricks she despised; but she has not, on the other hand, been deceived, or overawed, by those who would represent the study of the human mind as one that tends to no practical purpose, and that is unfit and unsafe for her sex. (Memoirs 210-211)

Edgeworth acknowledges the debate over appropriate study for women, calls it semantic, and then asserts that Hamilton would not be a part of the fight. She would not toss women into the "wordy war." Hamilton does, however, include metaphysics in her suggested education for women, a radical step in itself.

Hamilton bases her recommendations for women's education on her own experience and comments on the general attitudes toward women's education when she explains the responses of others when women read:

> Mrs. Marshall [her guardian], on discovering what had been her private occupation, expressed neither praise nor blame, but quietly advised her to avoid any display of superior knowledge, by which she might be subjected

> to the imputation of pedantry. . . . [Hamilton] once hid a volume of Lord Kame's Elements of Criticism under the cushion of a chair, lest she should be detected in a study which prejudice and ignorance might pronounce unfeminine. (Memoirs 50)

While not approving of or following the gender guidelines for study, Hamilton acknowledges their pervasiveness and the element of gender-prejudice inherent in them.

Logically, then, in Letters on the Elementary Principles of Education, Hamilton outlines a less restrictive plan for the education of women than More does. She does not, however, propose equal education for the sexes but supports personal and intellectual development for women "to the highest perfections of which they are capable" (Letters 1-2). This position is similar to More's in recognizing the natural abilities of ordinary and extraordinary women. Hamilton supports the teaching of the traditional activities to all women, but they are supported in terms of the ultimate calling of womanhood, i.e. motherhood. She defines the nature of a woman's most important task as spiritual.

> That the direction given to desire and aversion must conduct to virtue or to vice, is a consideration so serious, as to call our attention to every minute circumstance by which it can be influenced. And if it be by means of early and powerful associations that the desires and aversions of the heart are principally excited, it necessarily follows, that to watch over the associations that are formed in the infant mind, becomes the first and most momentous of the maternal duties. (Letters 16)

But guiding children into virtue is not the only demand which Hamilton places on young mothers. She adds,

> Were the prejudices which prevent the due consideration of its importance to be happily removed, it would become a primary object of solicitude to the Christian and the patriot, to raise the female mind to a sense of dignity of a situation, which enables it not only to effect the happiness or misery of individuals, but to influence the character of nations, and ameliorate the condition of the human race" (Letters 17).

Hamilton states that the education of women should be a priority for Christians and patriots. Her call for reform in women's education is not esoteric; she wishes to bring the practical effects of education to work in the raising of children into Christian behavior and in the preserving of British culture.

Just as More does, Hamilton links education with virtue and spirituality. She outlines the desirable virtues in Letters: benevolence, gentleness, truthfulness, politeness ("exquisite observance of the feelings of others" 99), filial duty, Divine obedience, and a sense of justice. As she discusses these virtues, Hamilton explains how a proper education can teach these. She also outlines vices and shows how a poor education can encourage non-Christian behavior. "We must take care that they are not taught to consider the duties of religion as separate and distinct from the common concerns of life. . . . We accordingly hear from infant lips, the cant of sensibility, the cant of taste, the cant of sentiment, the cant of religion" (Letters 280). Hamilton argues that true spirituality goes beyond form and influences all behavior; she is deeply concerned that religious show not make people "pretenders to God's favour" (281).

Religious admonition and direction are typical in didactic writing of the time, and Hamilton blends with these a clear understanding of educational principles. In this conduct book and in her other writings, she attacks the ordinary education which women received by asserting, "When you repeat what you have learnt by heart, without knowing or attending to the meaning, do you at that time make any use of the understanding in which are you superior to parrots and monkeys?" (Examples Part II "Divine Attributes to Impress the Heart" 50). Her answers teach readers to differentiate between instruction and education. Education teaches one "to analyze, draw out (educo) and cultivate as far

as can be done, the various powers of the understanding and the affections" (Examples iii). None of the other conduct books in this study make this distinction. With questions such as these and with goals so lofty, Hamilton guides the reader through a variety of practical and spiritual lessons teaching, among other things, the importance of performing one's duty in the world. In doing this, Hamilton refutes the statements in books written by men. Repeatedly, the men distinguish between the intellectual tasks and subjects appropriate for men and appropriate for women. Hamilton, here, says that women and men should pursue learning into as many areas and to as high a level as they are capable but always with the practical application of such learning in mind, to promote happiness through virtue.

> But as knowledge is only valuable in proportion as it has a tendency to promote social and individual happiness, by giving new motives to virtue, and thus extending the influence of the benevolent affections and counteracting or extirpating the malevolent, it follows, that whatever produces a tendency to the malevolent passions, defeats the noblest purposes for which knowledge has ever been acquired. (Letters 61-62)

These comments, interestingly enough, echo Wollstonecraft's similar statements in Vindication. Support for this connection is found in Hamilton's 1800 satire, Memoirs of the Modern Philosophers, where she refers to Wollstonecraft as "the very sensible authoress" and spares her the harsh critique so apparent in more conservative writers.[6] This comment, representing numerous of her expressed views, aligns Hamilton, despite their theological and political separation, with Wollstonecraft. Hamilton, closely connected to the Common Sense philosophies and pragmatic in her Christianity and her educational theories, is a step closer to Wollstonecraft's radicalism and a step removed from the more blatantly evangelical writing of Hannah More.

Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman is distinctly different from the works of More and Hamilton and generally more appealing to twentieth-century readers. As Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace demonstrates in Their Fathers' Daughters, late twentieth-century readers identify more easily with Wollstonecraft than with more didactic women of the late eighteenth century like More or Hamilton. Contemporary readers seem more comfortable discussing the political aspects of women's station than relying on Christian doctrine or religious phraseology to make their arguments. Contemporary readers feel an ambiguity toward righteousness, and, as Wayne Booth says in The Rhetoric of Fiction, "Many of us find it embarrassing to talk of emotions based on moral judgment at all, particularly when the emotions have any kind of affirmative cast" (260).

On the condition of women in the eighteenth century, Wollstonecraft does not hesitate to speak directly and openly and with strong moral judgment. She writes of her fellow Englishwomen as "mere dolls" (145), participants in legal prostitution (60, 148), slaves to their husbands to whom they offer "the fawning fondness of spaniel-like affection" (141), and "standing dishes to which every glutton may have access" (138). Her criticism of woman as a cultural product is scathing in moral, educational, and social terms. Women socialized into such a condition cannot be considered virtuous by Wollstonecraft's definition. Despite the hundreds of conduct books written about proper education, Wollstonecraft finds the condition of women in England pathetic and makes public her criticism of a system which produces such women.

She blames, among other institutions, the education offered to women. In practical areas, Wollstonecraft, like Hamilton, rejects education by memorization, the

primary educational method employed in women's education. She asserts that a girl's education has consisted of routine memorization of facts without the necessary development of reason to critique these. "The memory is loaded with unintelligible words, to make a shew of, without the understanding's acquiring any distinct ideas; but only that education deserves emphatically to be termed cultivation of mind, which teaches young people how to begin to think" (Vindication 163). Wollstonecraft does not believe that the prevalent education qualifies as true cultivation of mind, and without true cultivation, virtue cannot develop and criticism of women logically follows.

> Educated then in worse than Egyptian bondage, it is unreasonable, as well as cruel to upbraid them with faults that can scarcely be avoided, unless a degree of native vigour be supposed, that falls to the lot of very few amongst mankind.
>
> For instance, the severest sarcasms have been levelled [sic] against the sex, and they have been ridiculed for repeating 'a set of phrases learnt by rote,' when nothing could be more natural, considering the education they receive, and that their 'highest praise is to obey, unargued'—the will of man. If they be not allowed to have reason sufficient to govern their own conduct—why, all they learn—must be learned by rote! (Vindication 117)

Quoting Swift and Milton, respectively, in this passage, Wollstonecraft is on common ground with More and Hamilton advocating for a more rigorous reading regime. Wollstonecraft condemns ornamental education as insipid and consisting of the niceties of accomplishment, denying the support given to it by some male writers: "From the same source flows an opinion that young girls ought to dedicate great part of their time to needle-work; yet, this employment contracts their faculties more than any other that could have been chosen for them, by confining their thoughts to their persons" (Vindication 75). She wishes to expand the parameters of women's education to move women beyond themselves. Pursuits other than needlework would contribute to this growth.

> Gardening, experimental philosophy, and literature, would afford them subjects to think of and matter for conversation, that in some degree would exercise their understanding. The conversation of French women, who are not so rigidly nailed to their chairs to twist lappets, and knot ribands [sic], is frequently superficial; but, I contend, that it is not half so insipid as that of those English women whose time is spent in making caps, bonnets, and the whole mischief of trimmings, not to mention shopping, bargain-hunting, &c. &c. (Vindication 75-76)

Wollstonecraft insists that knowledge and understanding are vital for the development of virtue. Virtue cannot be cultivated in ignorance. In radical terms, she applies this concept to both sexes and for sex education as well, a step which opens her work to even greater ridicule and condemnation. She wishes to erase the gendered nature of virtue as it is understood by eighteenth-century Christians and the gender-specific education which produces it. The outcome of such a gender-less education seems obvious to her:

> In this plan of education the constitution of boys would not be ruined by the early debaucheries, which now make men so selfish, or girls rendered weak and vain, by indolence, and frivolous pursuits. But, I presuppose, that such a degree of equality should be established between the sexes as would shut out gallantry and coquetry, yet allow friendship and love to temper the heart for the discharge of higher duties. (Vindication 169)

A stronger, more egalitarian and co-ed education would lead to a stronger display of virtue by both men and women, argues Wollstonecraft. "Consequently, the most perfect education, in my opinion, is such an exercise of the understanding as is best calculated to strengthen the body and form the heart. Or, in other words, to enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent" (Vindication 21). In this she agrees with Hamilton: let each grow to her own potential. It is through this growth that virtue is nourished. Intellectual, physical and spiritual development are conjoined, coordinated efforts. True development would lead to "dignified beauty and true grace" (171). In her paraphrase of scripture which says that women should consider that their

bodies are temples of God, Wollstonecraft uses the popular icon—The Body as Temple of Virtue.

> A Christian has still nobler motives to incite her to preserve her chastity and acquire modesty, for her body has been called the Temple of the living God; of that God who requires more than modesty of mien. His eye searcheth the heart. . . . (Vindication 130)

Chastity becomes, then, not a means to worldly ends, but a higher virtue stemming from a genuine modesty and a desire to live up to the expectations of God.

She carries this discussion further as she attacks the cultural definition which equates virtue with chastity and says that for a young woman to maintain any semblance of virtue, she must be chaste.[7] Wollstonecraft blames most of the wrongs of woman on the greed, immodesty and sexual appetite of men. She explains:

> The leading principles which run through all of my disquisitions, would render it unnecessary to enlarge on this subject, if a constant attention to keep the varnish of the character fresh, and in good condition, were not often inculcated as the sum total of female duty; if rules to regulate the behaviour, and to preserve the reputation, did not too frequently supersede moral obligations. But with respect to reputation, the attention is confined to a single virtue—chastity. If the honour of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front—for truly she is an honourable woman! (Vindication 136-37)

Obviously, Wollstonecraft is infuriated by this sort of reasoning. She wants to move both men and women beyond a discussion of chastity and into a closer examination of what makes a man or woman truly virtuous. "For I will venture to assert, that all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand cause—want of chastity in men" (Vindication 138). She advocates teaching children of both sexes to be more modest, saying that the sexual freedom of men undermines the character of both sexes.

In arguing for a direct connection between a woman's education and the virtue she exhibits, Wollstonecraft says that any education which does not prepare a woman for real thought does not prepare her for real religious experience. Anything less subverts true religion. She repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of educating women to make them virtuous. She does not see true virtue in the traditional, passive roles assigned to women. "Women, commonly called Ladies, are not to be contradicted in company, are not allowed to exert any manual strength; and from them the negative virtues only are expected, when any virtues are expected, patience, docility, good-humour, and flexibility; virtues incompatible with any vigorous exercise of intellect" (Vindication 58). Wollstonecraft shows that the typical virtues assigned to women are negative or passive ones.

This passivity and the constraint of intellectual exploration also reach into women's spiritual lives. Wollstonecraft, again, contradicts the concept so common in conduct books by men that religious thought is not the province of women.

> If it [religion] be merely the refuge of weakness or wild fanaticism, and not a governing principle of conduct, drawn from self-knowledge, and a rational opinion respecting the attributes of God, what can it be expected to produce? The religion which consists in warming the affections, and exalting the imagination, is only the poetical part, and may afford the individual pleasure without rendering it a more moral being. (Vindication 114-15)

Wollstonecraft asserts that the works of Gregory, et al., undermine the very core of women's value as human beings by refuting their ability to evaluate and believe. Not only do these other works bar a woman from reaching her intellectual potential, but they separate her from the experience of any true spiritual life.

Wollstonecraft not only criticizes the education and religious lives made available to women, she goes so far as to say that even under the guise of religious instruction, women are taught behaviors contradictory to the expressed virtues. Wollstonecraft wants men and women alike to exhibit the virtues of affection, amiability, modesty, chastity, devotion and benevolence. She attacks what she terms dissimulation as it is taught in the standard conduct books and asserts that women must see beyond the decorum of behavior and into its heart. Wollstonecraft appreciates Bennett's arguments and his defense of ill-prepared women, particularly as it relates to dissimulation and takes up the argument against Chesterfield. She believes that Chesterfield focuses on women's vices and weaknesses and especially as they might be manipulated by men. Her attack is direct.

> Taking a view of the different works which have been written on education, Lord Chesterfield's Letters must not be silently passed over. Not that I mean to analyze his unmanly, immoral system, or even to cull any of the useful, shrewd remarks which occur in his epistles—No, I only mean to make a few reflections on the avowed tendency of them—the art of acquiring an early knowledge of the world. An art, I will venture to assert, that preys secretly, like the worm in the bud, on the expanding powers, and turns to poison the generous juices which should mount with vigour in the youthful frame, inspiring warm affections and great resolves (Vindication 106).

Sounding significantly like William Blake's "The Sick Rose," Wollstonecraft worries about the worldliness that comes too soon to many young people, and she interestingly "unsexes" Chesterfield and those like him by calling his code of behavior not only immoral but unmanly.

But, like More and Hamilton and most of the writers of the conduct books, Wollstonecraft makes her more radical position palatable to Christian readers when she calls on God to guide her, her readers and the nation.

> Gracious Creator of the whole human race! hast thou created such a being as woman, who can trace thy wisdom in thy works, and feel that thou alone art

> by thy nature exalted above her,—for no better purpose?—Can she believe that she was only made to submit to man, her equal, a being, who, like her, was sent into the world to acquire virtue?—Can she consent to be occupied merely to please him; merely to adorn the earth, when her soul is capable of rising to thee?—And can she rest supinely dependent on man for reason, when she ought to mount with him the arduous steeps of knowledge?—(Vindication 67)

Wollstonecraft's obvious answer to the questions in this prayer is no.

Wollstonecraft outlines the problems which grow out of woman's inadequate education and her dependency on the support of a husband or brother. She uses Christian terminology to support her theories just as More and Hamilton do. Wollstonecraft wants to improve the lot of woman by erasing that invisible and impenetrable gender boundary which More and others work so hard to maintain: "for I here throw down my gauntlet, and deny the existence of sexual virtues. . ." (Vindication 51) and

> I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behaviour. For this distinction is, I am firmly persuaded, the foundation of the weakness of character ascribed to woman; is the cause why the understanding is neglected, whilst accomplishments are acquired with sedulous care: and the same cause accounts for their preferring the graceful before the heroic virtues. (Vindication 57)

To achieve her ends, Wollstonecraft outlines a most specific directive on female education. Her entire chapter "On National Education" erases many of the distinctions between male and female education. She does not erase class distinctions or assert that boys and girls need the same education, but she does call for co-education with children studying common subjects until they are divided at a later age (usually by class). "In order to open their faculties they should be excited to think for themselves; and this can only be done by mixing a number of children together, and making them jointly pursue the same objects" (Vindication 157). She argues that attending day schools while living at home promotes the development of virtue in young girls. "The only way to avoid two

extremes equally injurious to morality, would be to contrive some way of combining a public and private education" (Vindication 158). She argues that, out of this hybrid process of education, public affections and public virtues would grow and "must ever grow out of the private character" (Vindication 162).

* * *

What stories do the conduct books by women tell about the nature of women and the expected nature of their lives? While there are principles common to all of the works examined here, the women writers differ from the men in several fundamental ways. These differences begin to tell a new story for women's spiritual and social lives.

More is clearly the most conservative of these women, yet her criticism of the standard education of the day is clear. She supports the idea of gendered virtues, but she does not believe that women should be necessarily limited in what they read and what they learn. While wanting to protect basic femininity as it was defined in the culture, she understands that women are rational as well as emotional creatures. Their intellectual and spiritual lives should reflect this.

Hamilton walks a middle ground between More and Wollstonecraft. Her considerations for improvement in women's lives focus on education but also on the practical working-out of responsibilities and life's daily duties. Like More, her basic tenet is Christian and traditional, although as an intellectual woman she supports more strenuous academic work for women who are capable.

Wollstonecraft wishes to eliminate the idea of gendered virtue and in doing so, to open all fields to women as they are capable. Her position would support the theological

development of women generally by educating women in religion beyond the exercise of the emotion involved in regular worship.

How do these positions vary from the tenets established by the male writers?

—obey all authority: While More and Hamilton would support the directive to obey God and State, they would not necessarily include every man as a woman's authority figure.

—maintain feminine softness, both physically and temperamentally: More and Hamilton would support behavior protecting women's temperament, but neither they nor Wollstonecraft recommend maintaining physical softness. They recognize the importance of physical health and strength.

—maintain an air of innocence and charm to please others: All three women might support this principle, believing that innocence and charm might be signs of a true Christian spirit. None of the women would support this idea if innocence is defined as ignorance of the world.

—possess the specific virtues assigned to one's gender: These women tend to be less supportive of specific feminine virtues and move toward creating one list of virtues for all human beings. Wollstonecraft is the only one to state this directly. More and Hamilton, as Claudia Johnson says, are maintaining these boundaries while they simultaneously move beyond them.

—learn about the world but avoid intellectual rigor. As intellectuals themselves, these writers struggle with the persona of public figure. They recommend more education and stronger education for women, generally, but More and Hamilton avoid making their statements too strongly.

—follow parents' advice in choosing a spouse: Wollstonecraft would be the least likely to support this idea. She believes in Christian guidelines for respecting parents, but she also believes that parents must respect and help their children. The primary difference, then, in the view of the women writers, is that all women must evaluate the advice they are given, regardless of its source.

—marry and have children: Ironically, Wollstonecraft is the only one of the three women here to marry or have children. Clearly, these women found a way to narrate their own lives outside of this particular cultural norm.

—be an entertaining and lively partner: Again, Wollstonecraft is the only one to marry. Hamilton and More would perhaps support the idea that every person should seek to be an interesting companion to others.

—raise children into the dominant culture: More and Hamilton support this claim insofar as the dominant culture is Christian and British. All of these women state that the greatest duty of womanhood is motherhood.

—participate in Christian, British culture: All three participate in both private and public arenas. Hamilton and Wollstonecraft are more apt to participate through criticism of the culture, but even More asserts that the education given to women does not prepare them to become actively involved in the world in which they live, whether spiritual or social.

Generally, these three women blur the boundaries defined and supported by the male conduct book writers. They work to achieve more freedom in women's ordinary lives through education and practice of an active Christianity.

How might an active spirituality for women be defined?

The Revised Story of Women's Spirituality

Feminist theologians of the latter twentieth century have been carving new spiritual territories for women. In these new territories, the feminist theologians describe, categorize and outline the spiritual lives that have been available to women historically and then write new narratives for future spirituality for women. Their goals are to explore their own spirituality through their own lenses to achieve more, to act more, in public and private spaces, or in other words, to find appropriate and personally acceptable ways to act out their own faith. These actions transform the traditional avenues of spirituality, offering women an understanding of the depth of their own experience, a depth of self-consciousness about their own lives, permitting them to move beyond the strictures of private living and private Christianity and taking them into more public spheres of action. They are building, of course, on hundreds of years of alienation from decision-making on spiritual issues. They are creating a spirituality for women which moves women out of passive roles and into active roles of creating and naming their own religious experiences.

In the eighteenth century, however, social structure, the Church of England, common practice and thought, and the status quo of conservative patriarchy all strictly defined women's roles, spiritual or otherwise. Women, confined by the strength of these bonds, could make few overt moves to stretch beyond the established boundaries into new arenas of action. The conduct books by men tended to support the status quo of women's spiritual and secular experience. Gisborne's position is the most traditional and religiously conservative of those presented here. While both Bennett and Gregory were physicians by profession and wrote their conduct books out of personal and cultural

concern, Gisborne was a member of the clergy with official standing and power. They all, however, supported three issues important in the traditional expressions of women's spirituality.

The first of these three issues is the emphasis on the gender-specific nature of human virtues. The received story of women's spirituality indicates the passive nature of virtues assigned to women: modesty, obedience, chastity, and amiability, for example. These virtues tend to reflect a virtue by omission of sin, not a proactive virtue of doing. A woman's spiritual life consisted of obeying God by obeying the men in her life. While certain acts of charity might be considered active, boundaries of sensibility and delicacy keep potential acts of charity from ranging too far afield to be proper for a woman.

The second major point of agreement on women's spirituality is the limitation placed on a woman's formal education. Just as there are gendered virtues, there are gendered intellectual fields appropriate to each sex. This intellectual boundary by default limits the extent of a woman's true understanding of any ideas deeply religious or philosophical. Exploration in the arenas designated appropriate for men could damage a woman's value by diminishing her femininity. According to the conservative writers of conduct books, true women accept the emotional experience of practiced religion, such as listening to moving sermons, without concerning themselves with the depths of spiritual study or the conflicts apparent in multiple theologies. A woman's concern should center on being a caring neighbor or serving as a good example to her family.

The third point in women's traditional religious expression concerns another omission. Where men might grow spiritually through experience and study, women have no similar paths for spiritual questing. A woman's focus should be on her family and her

conduct on earth. Her spiritual reward comes to her through her obedience and good behavior; she does not quest for spiritual answers; she does not expose herself to the possibility of doubt or to the possibility of being "unsexed" by too much masculine study.

The conduct books written by women begin to subvert this standard of woman as passive receiver of spirituality. Even a conservative evangelical writer like Hannah More takes women's potential for action farther than the men who write conduct books. Despite her arguments to the contrary, More's ideal women take a measure of control of their own spiritual destinies, even when their economic destinies might suffer. Their actions may be public or private; they may include solitary moments of reflection and decision-making; they may be composed of action which no one else sees. The active spirituality she describes is one step away from the passive lives described by the male conduct book writers. Elizabeth Hamilton, with her pragmatic, common-sense approach, moves beyond More's defined spirituality. She asserts that the lives being lived belong to women and that women should expect a decent education and a decent living, depending on their class, and that spirituality is theirs to investigate, to understand, and to act upon. She approaches the idea that a woman's quest in life to find her own person is as much of a spiritual searching as a secular one. Of course Wollstonecraft is the most radical of the women writers. The fundamental difference between the philosophies of Wollstonecraft and More is their view of human nature. Even though their advice is similar, often offering the same solutions to problems in women's education, Wollstonecraft aligns herself with French philosophes who view natural man as good and perfectible while society is the corrupting influence. To more conservative writers like More, society and education are the guiding influences on the naturally corrupt human being; she believes in

original sin. Wollstonecraft wants to use education, not to create greater limits on women, but to open new possibilities for women's lives by educating them to change the world, to allow women the freedoms of education, religious involvement, secular success and public expressions of self.

This active spirituality is contrary to the eighteenth-century idea of woman's spirituality. Christian womanhood, with its ordained and approved behaviors, accessible to twentieth-century readers in a variety of forms including the conduct books, shows a spiritual life devoid of excitement and discovery. Spiritual quests did not exist for women and would have been a laughable idea to conservative conduct book writers. But the women who also wrote these books pushed gently or forcibly against the cultural restraints and presented a potential variation in the boundaries of a woman's spiritual life. Turning then to Austen, readers might see how she manipulates the spirituality of the conduct books through her characters' lives and continues to rewrite the story of women's spiritual and social quests which More, Hamilton and Wollstonecraft have begun.

Notes

[1]See Duckworth and Sulloway particularly.

[2] Perhaps he refers to the debate heated by Wollstonecraft's Vindication in 1792, or to the scandal surrounding her name during the political trials of William Stone, or to her attempted suicides. Wollstonecraft died in 1797, the year of Duties' publication.

[3]This seems borne out by Austen's response in a letter to Cassandra, dated 30 August 1805, in which she says that she is pleased with Gisborne's work despite the fact that she had "quite determined not to read it." Jane Austen's Letters, collected and edited by R. W. Chapman. I, 47.

[4]Mrs. Vesey , apocryphally perhaps, invited Benjamin Stillingfleet to one of her 'Sundays.' He declined saying that he lacked appropriate dress. She responded that he could come in his blue stockings, i. e. his ordinary worsted stockings.

[5] Emphasis within the quotation is More's. Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria was published posthumously in 1798.

[6] See Claire Tomalin's The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft for other contemporary responses to Wollstonecraft's work.

[7]Mary Poovey's The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer examines the historical development of this attitude.

Chapter Three
Sense and Sensibility:
The Prototype of a Quest

Assumptions

Beginning this discussion of Austen's novels requires a drawing together of some of the critical and historical materials presented in Chapters One and Two. These materials are the groundwork for discussing the spiritual and social quests in which Austen's heroines participate. Several key assumptions guide this work.

First, Austen's work is fundamentally feminist. Review of the past thirty years of Austen criticism supports this, although no one definition of her feminism has been reached. Feminist critics continue to examine the complexity of Austen's novels and characters, and while some, like Julia Brown, doubt the validity of some feminist criticism, most critics agree that Austen's novels are feminist examinations of women's lives in early nineteenth-century English culture and the constraints of the culture on their lives.

Second, Carol Christ, as a feminist theologian, has designed a heuristic for examining women's spiritual and social quests. This heuristic provides a framework for talking about spirituality, especially as that spirituality is feminist and is exhibited in literary works. The structure of the quest, as Christ defines it, is more often recursive than linear. This recursive nature reflects a woman's struggle to reach self-actualization. The spiritual and social aspects of the quest are inseparable, and a woman on such a quest reaches no conclusion, no final pinnacle of spiritual or social success. She spends her life forever reaching, moving and re-moving through the stages Christ has outlined: nothingness, awakening, insight and naming.

The third assumption guiding this dissertation concerns methods for determining the level and identifying the nature of one's spirituality. In addition to a belief in or experience of the Divine in human existence, spirituality, generally, involves a working-out of itself in external behaviors and value system. One method for examining spirituality, then, considers a character's value and belief systems. Outward behavior or exhibition of virtue can show one's spirituality. Readers can begin to judge a character's spirituality by external behaviors and direct statements which reveal beliefs and value systems. These statements, behaviors and beliefs simultaneously guide characters through life quests and reveal the nature of those quests as the characters seek answers to life's greatest questions.

These assumptions underlie the following examinations of four representative Austen novels: Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, Emma and Persuasion. I will consider each heroine's belief system as it is apparent in her behavior and in her espoused values, how her individual virtues contribute to her ability to participate in a genuine spiritual quest, and what stages of Christ's spiritual and social quest are evident in each novel. Through this research, I would like to examine to what extent Austen's novels portray a new narrative for spiritual and social questing, particularly for her nineteenth-century readers.

Before considering the details of Sense and Sensibility, two questions stemming from these three basic assumptions must be addressed. First, what are the external behaviors which reflect internal spirituality? Second, how is internal spirituality translated into external moral behavior? Answers to these questions can be found in the work of Immanuel Kant, the reigning eighteenth-century voice in philosophical analyses

of morality. Kant defines moral behavior in Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals (1798) when he explains "good will" and its relationship to duty and virtue. In essence, he asserts that morality is based not on the outcomes of behaviors but on the initial impulse which guides the behavior.

> A good will is good not because of what it performs or effects, not by its aptness for the attainment of some proposed end, but simply by virtue of the volition, that is, it is good in itself, and considered by itself is to be esteemed much higher than all that can be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, nay, even of the sum total of all inclinations. (18)

He goes on to say that "[Reason's] true destination must be to produce a *will*, not merely good as a *means* to something else, but *good in itself*, for which reason was absolutely necessary" (21, his emphasis).

Alisdair MacIntyre's work, After Virtue begins with the thesis that an understanding of morality and moral behavior, especially as Kant defined it, has been lost between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries, stating that the language of moral behavior has been retained but a true understanding of it has not. As MacIntyre asserts, Kantian philosophy of the eighteenth century says that using other people as a means to one's personal ends is immoral behavior. Kant distinguishes moral behavior from immoral behavior on this basis of motive. Any manipulative actions taken against other people, to serve selfish purposes, are immoral, according to Kant and according to eighteenth-century standards of accepted social behavior. MacIntyre says, "It [the will to be moral] is to be unwilling to influence another except by reasons which that other he or she judges to be good" (23). With or without direct influence from Kant, Austen[1], according to MacIntyre, seems to support this premise as one of the signs of moral behavior.

MacIntyre defines a virtue as "an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods" (178). This definition is key to understanding the connection between moral behavior and women's spiritual and social questing. For Austen, these acquired human qualities (specifically constancy, amiability, self-knowledge, and attention to duty) define moral behavior and are the fundamental values apparent in each of her novels, evidenced by both the authorial voice and the characters' actions. MacIntyre defines constancy in Austen's work as "a virtue the possession of which is a prerequisite for the possession of other virtues" and amiability as a virtue wherein it was possible for "the possessor . . . to have a certain real affection for people as such. (It matters here that Jane Austen is a Christian.)" (183). He later elaborates on the nature of self-knowledge in Austen's work, calling it "a Christian rather than a Socratic self-knowledge which can only be achieved through a kind of repentance " (241). MacIntyre says, "The intent of Jane Austen's theory of the virtues . . . [emphasizes] how profoundly Christian her moral vision is" (185). As a writer of her time, Austen's moral vision is Christian; in her work, readers may discern a blending of Kantian philosophy and Anglican spirituality. In a spiritual quest, the attendant virtues so important to Austen and their acquisition might serve as outward symbols of an inner success; however, nothing guarantees that such virtuous behavior might lead to worldly success. Indeed, virtuous behavior may be highly unfashionable and unsuccessful in the world that Austen reflects. A successful spiritual quest, in Christ's terms, may or may not be aligned with a successful social quest.

As MacIntyre explains, the Christian call to moral behavior offers no guarantee of ultimate physical happiness:

> . . . Kant rejects the view that the test of a proposed maxim is whether obedience to it would in the end lead to the happiness of a rational being. . . . all men do indeed desire happiness; and he has no doubt that the highest good conceivable is that of the individual's moral perfection crowned by the happiness which it merits. But . . . our conception of happiness is too vague and shifting to provide a reliable moral guide. Moreover any precept designed to secure our happiness would be an expression of a rule holding only conditionally; it would instruct to do such-and-such, if [it] would in fact lead to happiness as a result. Whereas Kant takes it to be the case that all genuine expressions of the moral law have an unconditional categorical character. They do not enjoin us hypothetically; they simply enjoin us. (After Virtue 44)

Austen's heroines are enjoined by their writer to exhibit this fundamentally Christian and outwardly moral character, exhibiting the virtues of constancy, self-knowledge, amiability and sense of duty; they are enjoined to exhibit this character regardless of its immediate benefit. Her heroines search for fulfillment in a world which does not acknowledge a woman's potential for such spiritual searching. Kant's eighteenth-century definitions of morality and happiness pervade Austen's works, where her heroines sometimes suffer material and emotional losses while keeping their senses of duty and obedience intact.

Inversely and importantly, a lack of the virtues of constancy, amiability, attention to duty and self-knowledge prevents a woman from undertaking a spiritual quest. She must have the moral character, or in Kant's terms, the will to good, to enter into the spiritual debate, to participate on any level in a spiritual quest. This idea, that one's spirituality is apparent in one's possession of particular virtues, serves as the nexus for a comparison of Austen's heroines to the heroines who might be created from conduct book definitions of a virtuous woman. In the gaps between these two types of heroines,

readers may discern how Austen sketches out new territory for women's spiritual lives and shows that women might participate in spiritual quests.

According to MacIntyre, Austen, therefore, holds a special place in modern letters. He sees her as a writer who blends seemingly discordant moral philosophies into a cohesive pattern of virtue and behavior.

> We thus have at least three very different conceptions of a virtue to confront: a virtue is a quality which enables an individual to discharge his or social role (Homer); a virtue is a quality which enables an individual to move towards the achievement of the specifically human *telos*, whether natural or supernatural (Aristotle, the New Testament and Aquinas); a virtue is a quality which has utility in achieving earthly and heavenly success (Franklin). (After Virtue 185)

These three philosophies are at work in Austen's fictional worlds illuminating the nature of spiritual and social quests, particularly as the two quests undergird each other or merge. Austen's concern with duty serves both the Homeric and Christian ideals of obligation to others or to one's community. While in Kantian terms they need not do so, for Austen, the outcomes of virtuous behavior ultimately lead her heroines to their earthly success, reaching their classical and Christian, spiritual and social goals simultaneously.

As he elaborates more specifically on eighteenth-century views on morality, MacIntyre interprets Kant's moral philosophy in this way:

> . . .if the rules of morality are rational, they must be the same for all rational beings, in just the way that the rules of arithmetic are; and if the rules of morality are binding on all rational beings, then the contingent ability of such beings to carry them out must be unimportant — what is important is their will to carry them out. (After Virtue 43-44)

In determining moral behavior, motive and intent are all. When seeking the good of others guides a character's behavior, then that character is exhibiting true amiability, fundamental to Christian ideals. On the other hand, when self-interest guides a

character's behavior, then that character is exhibiting a philosophy grounded in greed, not in sacrifice or caring. For example, in Sense and Sensibility, readers see the success of a young woman who operates solely from a sense of self-interest:

> The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of time and conscience.[2]

Characters like Lucy, who lack amiability, are questing only for social and material success. They show no concern for or awareness of deeper spiritual principles which might guide their behavior. Readers see no evidence of a spiritual quest.

Austen blends these perspectives on spiritual and social achievement, and, as she does so, she approximates Christ's definition of spiritual and social questing, moving through the stages of nothingness, awakening, insight and naming. Austen expresses a woman's potential for spiritual searching beyond that defined by the conduct books while maintaining a realistic perspective on providing for her heroines' physical and social selves. Elinor Dashwood serves as the writer's first, full-scale attempt to explore such a quest.

None of Austen's successes in life, whether social, spiritual or financial, seem to have come easily. Sense and Sensibility, part of her earliest work, must have seemed like a great triumph. Although it was sixteen years in coming to publication, Sense and Sensibility began as an epistolary novel, Elinor and Marianne, in 1795. Austen says of Sense and Sensibility, ". . . I am never too busy to think of Sense and Sensibility. I can no more forget it, than a mother can forget her sucking child . . . . I think she [a potential reader] will like my Elinor. . ." (Letters 25 April 1811). Austen expresses a writer's

tender attachment to the novel and to her heroine, Elinor Dashwood, and she still speaks of the novel's success two years later: "You will be glad to hear that every Copy of S. & S. is sold & that it has brought me £140—besides the Copyright, if that sh^{d} ever be of any value.—I have now therefore written myself into £259.—which only makes me long for more (Letters 3 - 6 July 1813). The novel and its heroine thus brought a measure of financial, artistic and critical success to the writer.

Already in this her first novel, Austen explores many of the strands of thought which reappear in all of her works. She examines the economics of marriage in the eighteenth-century, relationships within families and among community members, the importance of personal virtue, and the makings of good marriages. It seems reasonable to think of Elinor, this first heroine, as that "sucking child" and as the prototype of each of Austen's future heroines, bound on their individual social and spiritual quests.

As outlined in Chapter One, Carol Christ defines four stages in a woman's spiritual quest: Nothingness, Awakening, Insight, and Naming. A woman moves through these stages as she begins to recognize her place in the world, to know it for what it is, and to articulate this experience and this knowledge. Each woman's spiritual quest, however, is guided by her own telos: the reality or philosophy which is her final destination and which gives her life meaning. The telos for Austen's heroines is both corporal and numinal. The economic and social aspects of their searchings are easy to identify: her heroines seek happiness in life, particularly through the achievement of economic stability, community respect, and marriage with the right partner. Simply, marriage is not the goal for her heroines. Austen shows through numerous fictional examples of bad marriages[3] that her heroines quest for a virtuous and appropriate partner.

The numinal aspects of her heroines' strivings are less easily identified. As I have argued, Austen's world is a Christian world where moral behavior, evidenced by a character's possession of the virtues of constancy, self-knowledge, amiability and sense of duty, is equated with Christian ideals. In Sense and Sensibility, Marianne utters these words: "Had I died,—it would have been self-destruction. I did not know my danger till the danger was removed; but with such feelings as these reflections gave me, I wonder at my recovery,—wonder that the very eagerness of my desire to live, to have time for atonement to my God, and to you all, did not kill me at once" (346). This rare reference to God might be lost in the reader's consideration of Marianne's penance to Elinor; but, Austen has Marianne add: "His [Willoughby's] remembrance can be overcome by no change of circumstances or opinions. But it shall be regulated; it shall be checked by religion, by reason, by constant employment" (347). These references remind readers that Austen's world is Christian and that her heroines are defined by the internal and external expressions of their virtuous selves. Only through a process of searching and growing do these characters achieve happiness, and that happiness is found only in a life of virtue. Their searchings are spiritual insofar as they seek answers to life's greatest questions: who am I? what is my place in the world? what is my duty to perform? While heaven itself is seldom overtly mentioned in Austen's novels, achievement of a good life in this world is one key leading to entry into the successful life to come.

These social and numinal aspects of a woman's life quest become entwined naturally, according to Christ. "Women's spiritual quest provides orientation for women's social quest and grounds it in something larger than individual or even collective achievement" (Diving 11). This spiritual grounding supports Austen's heroines as they

choose, for example, not to engage in marriages with the wrong partners and seems missing in characters like Lucy Steele who seek to marry anyone with money. Austen's characters reflect this seeking for wholeness in life, and through this seeking "the oppositions between body and soul, nature and spirit or freedom, rationality and emotion are overcome" (Diving 26).

As Austen explores a woman's potential through Elinor, readers see what a woman might be and how she might act as she moves through a spiritual quest. While Austen considers a number of subjects and characters in Sense and Sensibility, her focus seems to remain on Elinor.[4] Elinor's character, her virtues and her quest for social and spiritual actualization are the writer's primary concerns, but marriage and the economics of marriage serve as the backdrop for Austen's examination of her character.

Drawing on the language of the conduct books, it is easy to assemble a list of virtues for Austen's first heroine: self-control, sacrifice, affection, a sense of duty, strong familial ties, modesty, decorum and restraint, propriety, self-knowledge and, most importantly, amiability and constancy. These qualities, as already mentioned, are typical of the tables of contents of the conduct books of Austen's time, and all of these traits are present in Elinor. In many ways, Elinor represents a woman who lives up to the conduct book standards and who is rewarded for her self-sacrifice and self-control. Her strength of character and intelligence, essential in Austen's heroines, enhance these quiet virtues and create an almost ideal woman.

Elinor's best qualities might be read as passive ones: keeping quiet when she might speak, sacrificing a potential mate who is, in actuality, already promised to another, and caring for her family before herself. Her actions are limited to this domestic

realm. Elinor's spiritual and social questing, then, may seem small in scale. She is not perfect; but she is also not a flat character representing feminine perfection. Along with her strengths, Austen writes weaknesses into her character, a sense of self-doubt, of uncertainty with her own motives, and a touch of priggishness which irritates her family. How Elinor comes to recognize these traits in herself, to acknowledge her own and her culture's failings and to recognize them for what they are represent the heart of her spiritual quest. As she quests, these seemingly passive qualities become translated into action.

The virtues of having strong family ties, sharing true affection, and feeling a sense of duty to others dominate Austen's fiction and certainly dominate in the character of Elinor. To represent their author's Christian and feminist impulses, Austen's characters must openly show all of these virtues, and in this novel, where family members regularly forsake each other in moments of crisis, these traits are of especial importance. These traits are easily apparent in the Dashwood women as they support each other, under Elinor's guidance, through the crisis of Mr. Dashwood's death, through Marianne's near-fatal illness and into their new lives. Elinor "possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgment, which qualified her, . . . to be the counsellor [sic] of her mother" (6). She uses this judgment throughout the novel to guide her family members into what she sees as 'right' behavior. For example, Elinor guides her mother in choosing a new home. "But she [Mrs. Dashwood] could hear of no situation that at once answered her notions of comfort and ease, and suited the prudence of her eldest daughter, whose steadier judgment rejected several houses as too large for their income, which her mother would have approved" (14). Elinor always speaks to her mother with respect while

attempting to guide what she sees as mistaken ideas, stemming from Mrs. Dashwood's lack of "acquaintance with the world" (56) and the excess of sensibility which she shares with Marianne (7). A conversation between Mrs. Dashwood and Elinor about Marianne's possible engagement to Willoughby shows their conflicting inclinations and Elinor's reasonable hand:

> But there was one method so direct, so simple, and in her opinion so eligible of knowing the real state of the affair. . .that she could not help suggesting it to her mother.
>
> "Why do you not ask Marianne at once," said she, "whether she is or is not engaged to Willoughby? From you, her mother, and so kind, so indulgent a mother, the question could not give offence. It would be the natural result of your affection for her. She used to be all unreserve, and to you more especially."
>
> . . . Elinor . . .urged the matter farther, but in vain; common sense, common care, common prudence, were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood's romantic delicacy. (84-85)

Already Elinor seeks, however gently, to guide her mother and Marianne into making appropriate choices and behaving with propriety. She has no ulterior motives, and she does not attempt to manipulate her mother, only to convince her of the value of questioning Marianne.

Austen imbues Elinor with the raw material of a heroine by establishing her strong belief system and her strong sense of virtue, thus giving her the potential for a spiritual quest. While imperfect, Elinor is at heart good and giving and not driven by self-interest. In these traits, she matches Kant's definition of moral behavior. Elinor quietly follows the murmurings of her own heart and seeks fulfillment beyond the social arenas of her life.

The Stages of Elinor's Spiritual and Social Quests

Elinor possesses Austen's favored virtues of constancy and amiability as the novel begins; however, these traits do not continue undisturbed throughout the novel. As Elinor faces disappointment and grief, she sometimes falters in her judgment, but she seldom fails, despite these falterings, to uphold outward signs of propriety, always using her manners to carry her through difficult and public situations. She is already experiencing what Carol Christ defines as the first stage of a woman's spiritual quest, nothingness. A spiritual quest "begins in an *experience of nothingness*. Women experience emptiness in their own lives —in self-hatred, in self-negation, and in being a victim; in relationships with men; and in the values that have shaped their lives" (13, her emphasis). Moving backwards in time two hundred years does not seem to affect these issues. Christ's contemporary definition of a woman's place in the world seems to hold for the eighteenth century as well as for the twentieth century.

This stage of nothingness in a woman's spiritual and social quest is obvious and important in all of Austen's novels. All of her heroines, to some extent, experience this place of unimportance in society. Even the witty and vivacious Elizabeth Bennet experiences the struggles of silence, low social status and lack of independent direction in her life. Somewhat less obvious are the stages of awakening and insight in the spiritual and social quests of these heroines. Most of the characters seem to understand their place in the world and suffer in them. The process of a quest, spiritual or social, seems to be recursive in a woman's life, and the stages reappear as her life experiences change and develop. Christ says that "A woman's awakening to great powers grounds her in a new sense of self and a new orientation to the world. Through awakening to new powers,

women overcome self-negation and self-hatred and refuse to be victims" (Diving 13). Few of Austen's heroines show signs of self-hatred but most struggle with self-negation and with developing an ability to assert themselves against victimization. Austen's novel begins with an explanation of Elinor's 'lost-ness.'

The stage of nothingness in Elinor Dashwood's life is clear. She is nineteen years old, displaced, unmarried, and has just lost her father. "He survived his uncle no longer [only one year]; and ten thousand pounds, including the late legacies, was all that remained for his widow and daughters" (4). Not only are the Dashwood women bereft of their husband and father, but they face an uncertain future with too little money and the loss of their home. "Mrs. John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her mother and sisters-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors" (8). As Lore Segal writes in "The Uses of Story" in Antioch Review, "Mrs. John Dashwood promptly, perfectly legally, perfectly heartlessly, installs herself as mistress of Norland, turning Henry's grieving widow and daughters into visitors in their own home" (135). Despite her good judgment and keen sense of right, Elinor is helpless to change the condition of life in which she, her mother and sisters find themselves. As Segal emphasizes, the actions taken against them, while inexcusable, are legal and accepted. Theirs is an invisibility and nothingness peculiar to impoverished and displaced women and not limited to fictional texts.

The economic victimization of the Dashwood women fills the novel. Austen always delves into the financial and social realities of the worlds in which her heroines live. Characters' reactions to these realities show their virtue and wisdom or their ignorance and greed. In Jane Austen: Real and Imagined Worlds, Oliver MacDonagh in

seeking to illuminate English history through a study of Austen's novels, gives a close accounting of the financial realism of the novel in his chapter, "Receiving and Spending: Sense and Sensibility." While he does not call Sense and Sensibility a Marxist work, he asserts its primary concern with economic issues. "The sudden impoverishment of Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her daughters is central to the action; it is this which brings all else into play. It is Marianne's lack of money which 'preserves' her from Willoughby, and it is Edward's lack of income which saves him initially from Lucy" (64). While Mrs. Dashwood never has a clear understanding of her situation, Elinor does. She awakens to her position and experiences the loss of financial security, social status and prospects for future, married happiness. Her insight is keen. Her ability to change the world is limited.

According to MacDonagh,

> For all their strength of character, Elinor and Marianne are cast in essentially passive roles. Their fates depend on others' gains and losses; they wait on the roulette wheel which determines others' fortunes. No more than Cassandra and Jane Austen do they contemplate becoming governesses or schoolmistresses, the only conceivable occupations for girls of their class unless, by some extraordinary chance, they had both the talent to earn their living by their pen and the luck to find an outlet for their writings. (64)

Obviously, he is correct in asserting that the fates of Marianne and Elinor depend on the actions of others, but MacDonagh does not concern himself with the spiritual nature of their awareness. The actions which MacDonagh ignores are the very actions which Austen would consider most important. In following the dictates of her own conscience, Elinor exhibits Christian behavior with a strong sense of personal integrity. Elinor is not fashionable by eighteenth-century standards. She is not a young woman of the world. Elinor relies on honesty, self-control, sacrifice, and attention to duty to provide her with,

while perhaps not an easy life, an honorable one. All of these virtues are apparent in her dealings with other people, despite the nothingness of her position.

While she cannot control the prevailing forces in her life or the state of nothingness in which she finds herself, Elinor can control her own responses to those forces and circumstances. Elinor's silent pain figures prominently throughout the novel. First, exhibiting those Christian behaviors, she sacrifices by controlling her own sense of loss, keeping her suffering private to protect her family, particularly as Edward abruptly ends his visit with the Dashwood women.

> This desponding turn of mind, though it could not be communicated to Mrs. Dashwood, gave additional pain to them all in the parting. . . and left an uncomfortable impression on Elinor's feelings especially, which required some trouble and time to subdue. But as it was her determination to subdue it, and to prevent herself from appearing to suffer more than what all her family suffered on his going away, she did not adopt the method so judiciously employed by Marianne, on a similar occasion, to augment and fix her sorrow, by seeking silence, solitude, and idleness. Their means were as different as their objects, and equally suited to the advancement of each. (104)

Her behavior contrasts sharply with that of Marianne who naively and romantically believes that those who suffer gracefully do not suffer genuinely and assumes that true suffering is visible suffering. She will not, cannot, temper the display of her feelings. Elinor, on the other hand, is equally determined to keep her suffering private and to avoid inflicting her despair over the loss of Edward on her family. Again, Austen shows this hiding of feeling and the altruism which prompts it:

> Elinor sat down to her drawing-table as soon as he was out of the house, busily employed herself the whole day, neither sought or avoided the mention of his name, appeared to interest herself almost as much as ever in the general concerns of the family, and if, by this conduct, she did not lessen her own grief, it was at least prevented from unnecessary increase, and her mother and sisters were spared much solicitude on her account. (104)

Repeatedly, Austen shows Elinor determining to protect her family from the hurt she suffers. While her attempts are always admirable, Elinor's family does not always interpret them as such. On learning of Edward's engagement to Lucy Steele, Elinor considers their respective losses:

> As these considerations occurred to her in painful succession she wept for him, more than for herself. Supported by the conviction of having done nothing to merit her present unhappiness, and consoled by the belief that Edward had done nothing to forfeit her esteem, she thought she could even now, under the first smart of the heavy blow, command herself enough to guard every suspicion of the truth from her mother and sisters. And so well was she able to answer her own expectations, that when she joined them at dinner only two hours after she had first suffered the extinction of all her dearest hopes, no one would have supposed . . . that Elinor was mourning in secret over obstacles which must divide her for ever from the object of her love. . . . (140-141)

She is comforted by the knowledge of having done no wrong. She is also comforted by the knowledge that she protects her family at the expense of their potential consolation. Elinor carries this behavior so far that even Marianne suspects her of having only calm feelings (104). Marianne does not acknowledge the value of discretion, and Elinor continually sacrifices her own inner peace to fulfill her promise of discretion to Lucy, to protect herself from public humiliation and to protect others from hurt. She suffers at Lucy's hand, over Lucy's secret engagement to Edward. "She was silent.—Elinor's security sunk; but her self-command did not sink with it" (131). Elinor's experience of nothingness is tempered by her virtue; she cannot affect the situation, but she faces it with control. She speaks "with a composure of voice, under which was concealed an emotion and distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before. She was mortified, shocked, confounded" (135). She carries this mortification and shock through most of the events of the novel.

Each of these examples reflects on the stage of nothingness in Elinor's life. The combined losses of her father, her home, her social status, and her chances of marrying Edward show this nothingness. Elinor's responses to these losses, relying on the strength of her virtues, carry her into the next stages of her spiritual and social quest: awakening and insight.

Readers see repeated scenes of Elinor's awakening and insight throughout the novel. Scenes of quiet admission are plentiful:

> Mrs. Jennings, though regretting that she had not been five minutes earlier, was satisfied with the compromise; and Elinor, as she swallowed the chief of it [a glass of wine], reflected that, though its good effects on a cholicky gout were, at present, of little importance to her, its healing powers on a disappointed heart might be as reasonably tried on herself as on her sister. (198)

Elinor recognizes and knows the state of her own life. Her disappointed heart remains a quiet fact while she seeks to make her way through life, to make the lives of her family members more comfortable. All of Elinor's insights are not so charitable. She admits, at least to herself, that she does not like Lucy Steele, and, while the author does not intend for either Elinor or the readers to approve of Lucy, she is careful to protect Elinor's sensibilities and not make her too crass or direct in her emotional response to others. "Elinor only was sorry to see them. Their presence always gave her pain, and she hardly knew how to make a very gracious return to the overpowering delight of Lucy in finding her still in town" (217). Elinor is equally able to admit feelings of anger and bitterness, especially those stemming from loyalty to Marianne. Upon reading Willoughby's rejection letter to Marianne, Elinor responds with strong emotion. "She paused over it [Willoughby's letter] for some time with indignant astonishment; then read it again and again; but every perusal only served to increase her abhorrence of the man, and so bitter

were her feelings against him, that she dared not trust herself to speak, else she might wound Marianne still deeper" (184). Abhorrent and bitter feelings are not missing from a woman's spiritual quest but are part of a necessary awakening and insight into her own being, into who she is and what her place is in the world. Knowing these feelings for what they are is part of the process of both spiritual and social growth.

According to Christ, in a bildungsroman, a character "defines himself through tests and trails, and returns with a clear understanding of himself and his place in the world. . . . Because female social roles are different from men's, the content of the female quest differences from that of the male" (Diving 9). Elinor's life, as readers see it in Sense and Sensibility, meets this definition of bildungsroman, and readers glimpse her quest in the outward choices which she makes in response to these trials. She faces the trials of losing her father and her place in society, losing Edward to a less worthy woman, and nearly losing her sister. Through these trials, she awakens to a clearer understanding of herself and the nothingness of her place in the world.

Elinor's insights into the realities of that world often come out in her advice to Marianne. "Elinor could not be surprised at their [Marianne and Willoughby] attachment. She only wished that it were less openly shewn; and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne" (53). Elinor understands the dangers to Marianne of revealing herself too fully in public situations. Propriety, self-respect and discretion might all combine to help a character control her behaviors. Public sanctions could arise easily. Again, Elinor tries to guide Marianne's outbursts: "'Pray, pray be composed,' cried Elinor, 'and do not betray what you feel to every body present'" (176).

Elinor cannot change the value system of the world in which she lives, but she can try to guide her sister through its minefield.

Elinor's insight into her own self is not always so clear. Early in the novel, her mother accuses her of judging Willoughby somewhat harshly. On the occasion of Willoughby's abrupt departure from the neighborhood of the Dashwood family, Mrs. Dashwood says to Elinor: ". . . you, Elinor, who love to doubt where you can. . . . You had rather take evil upon credit than good. You had rather look out for misery for Marianne and guilt for poor Willoughby, than an apology for the latter" (78). Elinor responds avowing her wish to be fair in her own judgment. "There is great truth, however, in what you have now urged of the allowances which ought to be made for him [Willoughby], and it is my wish to be candid in my judgment of every body" (79). Within their family, the contrast of Elinor's calm temper to Marianne's vivacity often fails to flatter either character. Both her mother and Marianne consider Elinor a bit too serious and a bit too prudish. On planning a trip to London, Mrs. Dashwood says, ". . . if Elinor would ever condescend to anticipate enjoyment, she would foresee it there from a variety of sources" (157). Elinor's quest for insight sometimes causes pain. As Elinor gains insight into herself, she is not always comforted by what she finds. There is room for growth in Elinor's heart. The pain Elinor suffers on introspection is often shared with the reader. Elinor quests and suffers; Austen holds up the mirror, and the reader quests and suffers as well. As Segal says, "Jane Austen is holding the mirror up to my nature. Story has the power to prevent my natural tendency to cover myself from my own observation" (139). As Austen writes her heroines through their spiritual and social quests, she also writes a new path for the spiritual and social quests of her readers

The self-awareness which Elinor gains does not always please her. As she and Marianne ride to London for a possible reunion with Willoughby, Elinor envies Marianne's prospective happiness. She is jealous of ". . . the rapture of delightful expectation which filled the whole soul and beamed in the eyes of Marianne" and cannot avoid realizing ". . . how blank was her own prospect, how cheerless her own state of mind in the comparison" (159). She attempts to correct her own feelings: ". . . she must then learn to avoid every selfish comparison, and banish every regret which might lessen her satisfaction in the happiness of Marianne" (159). For her sister's sake, Elinor succeeds in controlling this jealousy. However, once in London and faced with Lucy, her sister, Mrs. Ferrars and Mrs. John Dashwood at a dinner party, Elinor responds emotionally: "But while she smiled at the graciousness so misapplied, she could not reflect on the mean-spirited folly from which it sprung, nor observe the studied attentions with which the Miss Steeles courted its continuance, without thoroughly despising them all four" (233).

Christ says that "Women often describe their awakening as a coming to self, rather than a giving up of self, as a grounding of selfhood in the powers of being rather than a surrender of self to the powers of being. . . [a grounding that] leads to newfound *self*-awareness and *self*-confidence (Diving 19, 21, her emphasis). Elinor grows throughout the novel and learns to trust her perceptions and her knowledge of people. As her response to the four women indicates, she is not naïve to the faults of the people around her or to her own. She becomes grounded in the knowledge that she has acted rightly, despite temptation to ignore her own value system and act more designedly in her own interests. Elinor might respond to the situation following the example of Lucy

Steele; she might flatter and cajole her way into the Ferrars' good graces. She chooses to act otherwise. Elinor speaks her awakening to nothingness and her insight into her condition in the world but determines to live her life according to that value system. Thus, in responding to Marianne's question of how she bore her suffering, Elinor replies, " By feeling that I was doing my duty. . . and I owed it to my family and friends, not to create in them a solicitude about me, which it could not be in my power to satisfy" (262).

Christ's statement explaining the value of women's voicing their predicaments and realizations applies not only to the author, in this case, but also to her heroine. Elinor shares her understandings with Marianne, narrating her experience of suffering and realization and the subsequent self-control she developed. Elinor adds that along with her sense of duty to protect her family from hurt, she found strength in knowing that she loved them. "But I did not love only him;—and while the comfort of others was dear to me, I was glad to spare them from knowing how much I felt. Now I can think and speak of it with little emotion. . . I have many things to support me" (263). While readers might be skeptical of Elinor's denial of feeling, her conscious choice to protect others from her pain shows her strong sense of self and strong allegiance to her value system. She takes comfort in the fact that she acted rightly throughout her encounter with Lucy and Edward. She knows that she cannot control the outcome of the situation; Edward is to marry Lucy, and Elinor will be left, unmarried, with her mother and sister. Elinor's spiritual base and sense of self are strong enough to carry her through this turmoil. Her ability to voice this experience makes it possible for other women to consider Elinor's behavior and adapt its guiding principles to their own lives.

This knowing on the part of her characters becomes part of Austen's task as well. If she is rewriting the possibilities of spiritual growth for her characters, she is also rewriting the spiritual possibilities for her readers. According to Christ, naming is the final step in a woman's spiritual quest. Naming is important for several reasons. It reinforces a woman's own understanding of her quest. It makes her quest more real. "After a woman experiences the grounding of her quest in the powers of being, it is important for her to name her experience in words. When one woman puts her experiences into words, another woman who has kept silent, afraid of what others will think, can find validation" (23). The author's task is to share new experiences, new insights and new namings with her readers, to offer new options to her readers for living their own spirituality.

> For just as women are excluded from autonomous significance and value in men's stories, so women must even read themselves sidewise into analyses of the experience of nothingness. Women need a literature that names their pain and allows them to use the emptiness in their lives as an occasion for insight rather than as one more indication of their worthlessness. Women need stories that will tell them that their ability to face the darkness in their lives is an indication of strength, not weakness. (17)

Through this telling of stories, naming becomes apparent. Elinor faces the darkness of her life with strength. She seeks to give her own life meaning through caring for her immediate family. Without the possibility of marriage to Edward, Elinor sees the boundaries of her future. Austen shows that Elinor's insight and her willingness to face this darkness are strengths to be desired. Austen knows the emptiness and nothingness for what it is, and her heroine, Elinor, lives it, names it, survives it, offering readers new ways to view their own lives and new experiences of their own spirituality.

One part of this naming experience concerns the heroine's understanding of her social and financial status. In this novel, Austen gives particular attention to her knowing the appropriate value of wealth. A Christian and a feminist, she understands the role of economics in a woman's life, and she neither values money too highly nor ignores the financial realities of her own or others' lives. She understands true value and knows that value has everything to do with heart and action and very little to do with wealth.

While Austen does not often use the words 'greed' or 'avarice,' she often measures moral character against one's need for, desire for, and efforts to obtain money, critiquing economic behavior. In his essay, "Jane Austen and The Moralists," Gilbert Ryle says that Austen "pin-points the exact quality of character in which she is interested, and the exact degree of that quality, by matching it against the same quality in different degrees, against simulation of that quality, against deficiencies of it. . ." (108). In the case of Sense and Sensibility, Austen considers financial greed and how it affects characters and families. She contrasts Elinor's reasoned concern for her own and her family's economic welfare with the avarice shown, for example, by Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood who refuse help to his sisters. Simulation of generosity, or simulation of any kind, has no place in Austen's world. Her characters possess virtues in varying degrees, and some simply do not possess them at all. Through the contrast among these characters' acting out of virtue, Austen explores the paths which women might take and the outcomes of their choices. Her heroines' outward choices, even those concerning finances, sometimes reveal stages of their spiritual and social growth.

Elinor criticizes the culture in which she lives in a number of ways, and these criticisms also represent part of the naming phase of her spiritual growth. In quiet ways,

she faults the systems of primogeniture and entailment. To this end, Elinor becomes the observer of situations and people and responds as wisely as possible to each. The readers first knowledge of Elinor comes amid her family's devastation resulting from her father's death. While the author shows the results of primogeniture and entailment on the Dashwood women, Austen allows Elinor to respond with prudence. Elinor convinces Mrs. Dashwood to stay at Norland for a respectable amount of time after John and Fanny take possession. "Her eldest daughter induced her first to reflect on the propriety of going [leaving Norland too soon]. . . and for their sakes avoid a breach with their brother" (6). Elinor understands the consequences of fostering such a break so soon after her father's death. The women would be homeless and virtually without funds. Again, concerning the economics of inheritance, Elinor specifically criticizes Mrs. Ferrars' financial hold over her children and the way she is allowed to manipulate them with promises of reward or threats of withdrawal. Had the culture a stronger law concerning the distribution of wealth through inheritance to all family members, this manipulation could not occur. "What Mrs. Ferrars would say and do, though there could not be a doubt of its nature, she was anxious to hear; and still more anxious to know how Edward would conduct himself" (260). Elinor anticipates Mrs. Ferrars' behavior, and she is correct. Mrs. Ferrars disinherits one son, rewarding the other.

Christ considers the differences between the quests of men and women.

> Men have often found it difficult to give up conventional power and ego gratification to open themselves to union with the powers of being. Women, in contrast, live in a male-defined world in which culture has, for the most part, denied them access to power. The ordinary experience of women in patriarchy is akin to the experience of nothingness. (17-18)

This male-defined power which often excluded women is apparent in the world Austen creates. Elinor is trapped by a culture which denies her access to external displays of power, whether social or political. Elinor asserts control over the situations which she can control and finds a personal power in maintaining her value system. She knows the rightness of her own behavior and seeks to alleviate the pain of others, even when she cannot alleviate her own.

> But Elinor had more to do; and so anxious was she, for his [Edward's] sake and her own, to do it well, that she forced herself, after a moment's recollection, to welcome him, with a look and manner that were almost easy, and almost open; and another struggle, another effort still improved them. (241)

At this juncture, Elinor believes that Edward will marry Lucy and that she will manage alone. Despite her feelings of despair, she acts kindly and affectionately to Edward, as his station and family connections might require. At this point in the novel, she acknowledges to herself that marriage to Edward is no longer a possibility.

Elinor's spirituality does not exist in a vacuum. She has a strong realistic nature and a clear understanding of the social realities of her life. Late in the novel, after she and Edward decide to marry, Elinor continues to grapple with the social aspect of her life quest. How will they live? From where will the money come? "One question after this only remained undecided, between them, one difficulty only was to be overcome. They were brought together by mutual affection, with the warmest approbation of their real friends, their intimate knowledge of each other seemed to make their happiness certain — and they only wanted something to live upon" (369). Their mutual struggle for economic security is named and eventually overcome. Elinor's social quest attaches to that of her husband, and together they find security, comfort and community. "[I]f Edward might be

judged from the ready discharge of his duties in every particular, from an increasing attachment to his wife and his home, and from the regular cheerfulness of his spirits, he might be supposed no less contented with his lot, no less free from every wish of an exchange" (377). Elinor's quest merges with that of Edward. With him, Elinor achieves the position she has sought, Christ's new way "of living in human community" (Diving 31). Her spiritual and social quests have merged, and she has come to recognition and delight.

As Christ describes it, "The moments of women's quest are part of a process in which experiences of nothingness, awakenings, insights, and namings form a spiral of ever-deepening but never final understanding" (14). Austen's heroines never arrive; they are forever questing. Perhaps the continuous nature of a spiritual quest, then, is best shown by ending her novels with weddings. This social movement carries her heroines into a larger world and into a greater social context where their awareness of self becomes a tool for participating in the greater good of the community. Each woman takes her appropriate place and looks forward to the delights and the duties inherent in that place.

Conclusions

Despite its concern with the weighty topics of inheritance, economics, greed, and marital happiness, Sense and Sensibility is no heavy tragedy. Austen brings the reader to a comedy's conclusion, a spiritually and financially rewarding marriage for each of her primary women. In a seeming twist, Austen allows Elinor, in all of her sensibleness, to marry for love, providing her with sufficient income for her comfort, that predicted £1000 mentioned in an early discussion with Marianne (91). The writer tames Marianne

through disappointment, heartbreak and two years' growth and concludes with a mature young woman who marries an older man out of esteem and friendship. "She was born to overcome an affection formed so late in life as at seventeen, and with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship, voluntarily to give her hand to another!" (378). The writer's touch is light here with her smile apparent in the irony of the passage. Ultimately, Marianne comes to wealth and happiness through a spiritual though not at first spirited, union with Col. Brandon. Austen defines married love in these comments, and, by example, Elinor and Edward also have a love founded on this mutual esteem and friendship.

How does this working out of Austen's plot reflect on the narratives of women's lives? First, unlike the conduct book writers, Austen is more apt to reveal the flaws in the culture for which women cannot be blamed but which make women victims. Second, pointing out these flaws shows women that their plight is not entirely personal but extends into the socio-economic realm. Women might recognize their connectedness to other women suffering similarly. Third, Austen rewards the personal virtues exhibited by her heroines despite the conditions in which they might find themselves. She shows that virtue brings its own reward and that reward should be first internal and spiritual. Women might find strength in their self-command and in their ability to perform morally when others around them might fail. Finally, although Austen's *telos*, as MacIntyre explains, rests heavily on marriage, it rests on a kind of marriage which takes the heroine into a new community. In this new community, she will function with power, prestige and amiability—the final mingling of the spiritual and social.

Austen's heroine differs from the conduct book 'heroines' in several important ways. Elinor, as a young woman on a spiritual quest, strives to act morally. The eighteenth-century definition of moral behavior, as the earlier discussion of Kant and MacIntyre has shown, includes the ability to make choices concerning one's behavior. A conduct book heroine would find her choices severely limited. She would not be allowed to make decisions on her own, to learn to make rational, moral choices. Austen's heroines and the conduct book heroines possess virtues similar in name, but in nature these virtues seem to take a new form in Austen's work. Austen's continual focus on constancy and amiability gives a specific Christian dimension to her heroine's quest. Conduct books teach young women to obey directions, and, as Austen's fiction will show, sometimes in obeying directions from others, personal integrity and constancy are lost.

The assessment of this novel's conclusion lies not only in a recognition of Austen's particular definition of these virtues but also in her definition of a good marriage. Austen draws on her definition of a good marriage and blends the social and spiritual searchings of her heroines to include their search for fulfilling partnerships. To eighteenth-century rational Christians, to be good, to serve others, to render one's duty willingly and thoughtfully, is at once an unselfish and a selfish act. By making moral choices, by growing through a spiritual quest, Austen's heroine wins. Had all of her characters behaved in such a way, their stories might have ended differently. Had Willoughby been unselfish, had Lucy Steele been less artful, had Marianne shown a greater self-command, all would have been served. Elinor, however, stands out as a character faithful to her values, who maintains her dignity while seeming to lose all else

of value in her life. Elinor quests and finds. Austen does not allow the reader to miss these realizations in the happiness of the novel's conclusion.

Notes

[1] Concerning Austen's access to Immanuel Kant's Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals, biographers have been unable to determine the exact nature of the library at Steventon parish. Evidence, however, supports Rev. Austen's willingness to give his daughters open access to his library. Claire Tomalin writes in Jane Austen: A Life that "It is clear too that he gave her uncensored access to his books; for if she was allowed to read Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison as a child, which gives detailed accounts of maternal drunkenness and paternal adultery, and lays out the correct attitude to adopt towards a father's mistress and illegitimate half-brothers, Mr. Austen cannot have kept much from her. In this as in his unruffled response to her bold stories, he was an exceptional father to his exceptional daughter" (67).

[2] Jane Austen, The Novels of Jane Austen, Vol. 1, Ed. R. W. Chapman, 376. All references to the novels are identified in context and refer to this edition of Chapman's work.

[3] Consider these examples of couples: Mr. and Mrs. Bennet in Pride and Prejudice, the John Dashwoods in Sense and Sensibility or the near marriage of Edmund and Mary in Mansfield Park.

[4] Elinor is typically viewed as the heroine and main character, although in Irony as Defense and Discovery, Marvin Mudrick argues that Marianne is the central figure in the novel.

Chapter Four
Mansfield Park:
Fanny Price's Real Quest

When Austen began writing Mansfield Park in 1811, she had just published Sense and Sensibility. As Chapter Three suggests, Sense and Sensibility lays the groundwork for all of Austen's future novels and her heroine, Elinor Dashwood, establishes an early pattern of spiritual and social development. More than sixteen years after it was begun, Pride and Prejudice was readied for publication during this same period. Elizabeth Bennet in Pride and Prejudice is one of Austen's most beautiful, good and charming characters. Readers love her. After writing Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice, Austen wrote Mansfield Park whose heroine is so self-effacing and uncharming that readers stop and ask themselves why Austen would want to create such a character. One of Austen's first references to Mansfield Park says, "Now I will try to write of something else;—it shall be a complete change of subject—Ordination" (Letters 29 January 1813). She adds six months later, "I have something in hand—which I hope on the credit of P. & P. will sell well, tho' not half so entertaining" (Letters 6 July 1813). While the subject of Mansfield Park is not ordination, the novel does address issues important to the church of Austen's day, including ordination, the role of the minister in leading the community, and the buying and selling of the benefice. While these topics creep into most of Austen's novels to some extent, a consideration of the spiritual concerns apparent in Mansfield Park might lead readers to a better understanding of the author's desire to explore this territory more thoroughly.

To say that Mansfield Park shows the heroine's social and spiritual quest is self-evident. The pervasiveness of Austen's concern with spirituality in her novels hints at the complexity of the issue. In her earlier novel, Austen has Elinor Dashwood struggling to make her way in a hostile world while maintaining her own sense of virtue. In the novel following Mansfield Park, Emma Woodhouse must develop self-awareness and emotional maturity—her social position is established from the beginning. In Austen's last complete novel, Persuasion, Anne Elliot blossoms under the influence of love and respect and grows to trust her own decisions while recognizing her duty to others. What does Fanny Price, referred to by Claudia Johnson as "the nerdiest of heroines" ("What Became" 62), learn and gain? In considering these questions, readers find that each of Austen's novels contains elements of the heroine's internal and external searching, the struggles of spiritual and social questing.

Among the novels, Mansfield Park, indeed, proves somewhat problematic. In her essay "What Became of Jane Austen? Mansfield Park," where Johnson names Fanny as nerdiest, she examines several examples of critical comment, including the views of Alistair Duckworth and Marilyn Butler who read Mansfield Park as evidence of Austen's political conservatism. They argue, in Johnson's account, that Mansfield Park "posits stability, authority, custom, sobriety, and staunch morality as values cultivated in the country-houses of the Tory gentry" (59). Johnson also discusses two historical camps of Austen criticism, the first of which holds that Austen is a repressive Christian "bringing about the correction of her heroines" (60). In the second camp, which begins with Margaret Oliphant's 1870 critique of Austen's "feminine cynicism" and extends through D. W. Harding's naming of her as an ironist, critics have perceived Austen as "not in the

least committed to the values of her neighborhood or to any values qua values at all. . . ." (60). They argue "that she is fundamentally disengaged from dominant moral and political norms, particularly as these are underwritten by the institutions of heterosexual love and marriage"(60). Johnson adds that "clearly, on the score of sexuality, some have feared that Austen had too much, too little, or none at all" (61). These extreme differences of opinion seem irreconcilable.

Part of the difficulty in categorizing Mansfield Park and Fanny Price stems from modern interpretation and reaction to the eighteenth-century conduct books. It appears logical to readers and critics that a fictional heroine who seems to adhere to the virtues expounded by the conservative and religious conduct books would be de facto religiously and politically conservative. While this assumption may or may not be correct, it remains possible that some readers misread Fanny Price. In her re-reading of Mansfield Park, Susan Greenfield argues that contemporary interpretation of conduct book philosophy is ambiguous. She offers a more liberal interpretation of them both in "Fanny's Misreading and the Misreading of Fanny: Women, Literature, and Interiority in Mansfield Park." Although in Greenfield's reading, the novel upholds the standards of ideal womanhood commonly promoted in conduct books of the period, I would argue that Fanny goes beyond the conduct books. Greenfield comes close to supporting this idea when she asserts that the novel subverts the social order on which the standards of womanhood stand. She argues that

> . . .conduct books implicitly challenged the assumption that people should be valued according to external assets such as property and title. Because conduct books also stressed the importance of woman's role inside the home, the ideal female came to stand for interiority in a dual sense: as a model of moral behavior, woman contained and represented the proper space inside the mind; as domestic governor, she controlled and epitomized the sanctity of the

> middle-class home, that inside space, removed from the supposedly corrupting influences of the external world, where good minds could be developed. (315)

The intent of this dissertation is not to resolve definitively this critical tension on how to read Fanny Price but to draw on the richness of the critical debate, to examine the novel for the ways in which it moves beyond the conduct book descriptions of women's spirituality and for the ways in which it serves as a vehicle for discussion of a character's spiritual quest.

Fanny's quest is apparent throughout the novel, particularly in her conscious choice to recognize virtue and to behave accordingly. In contrast, Mary Crawford's failure lies in her inability to sustain choosing rightly, not fashionably. Without the ability to judge a situation, to make a reasoned decision based on observation, and to stand behind that decision with constancy, a person could not be considered moral. Adam Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments, first published in 1759, illuminates Austen's text by detailing the components of moral behavior. These components are based on the ability to choose and then to act with prudence and propriety.

> Virtue and the propriety of conduct consisted in choosing and rejecting all different objects and circumstances according as they were by nature rendered more or less the objects of choice or rejection; in selecting always from among the several objects of choice presented to us, that which was most to be chosen, when we could not have them all; and in selecting, too, out of the several objects of rejection offered to us, that which was least to be avoided, when it was not in our power to avoid them all. (Theory 403)

As this quote expresses, morality requires the ability to accept or reject. Thus it is that women, in stereotypical, straitened eighteenth-century circumstances, could not be evaluated as moral creatures. The discernment needed to make moral decisions was not seen as theirs. Morality involves choice and standing behind a principle. In the late

eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, women made few choices, had few choices, and were considered inconstant. They were, therefore, outside the sphere of conscious morality. Smith's work does not address directly the morality or amorality of women. His is a description of a man's morals and a man's actions in a man's world.

Smith's eighteenth-century work reflects an approach to spirituality similar to Kant's, advocating the virtues of a Christian life. These virtues are a love of God and a love of man as directed in the biblical commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). Smith rephrases this commandment. He says,

> . . .that to feel much for others, and little for ourselves, that to restrain our selfish, and to indulge our benevolent, affections, constitutes the perfection of human nature; and can alone produce among mankind that harmony of sentiments and passions in which consists their whole grace and propriety. As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or, what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us. (Theory 27)

While Smith's focus is a rational definition of moral behavior, he does not ignore the role of Christian teachings in supporting and defending his theories. Austen addresses these inversely; the Christian teachings come first and lead to an outwardly substantiated moral behavior, and, in Mansfield Park, this outward expression of spirituality is rewarded in concrete, earthly ways.

Alisdair MacIntyre elaborates on eighteenth-century virtue and moral behavior in Platonic terms of beliefs and knowledge and in Aristotelian terms of the resulting actions. He argues that Smith and other eighteenth-century writers would agree that "Morality . . . is never the mere inhibition of passions. . . . Morality is rather meant to educate the

passions; but the outward appearance of morality may always disguise uneducated passions" (MacIntyre 224). Eighteenth-century philosophers would agree that the passions must be controlled, subdued, and subverted for a person to live a virtuous life. Austen shows this struggle for self-command in Mansfield Park. Controlling, subduing, and subverting are part of the challenge of a spiritual quest. As Christ explains, "The drive for wholeness and for the integration of spiritual and social quests is part of the new naming" (Diving 120). Recognizing all parts of the self and understanding the relationship between that self and the world are fundamental parts of the spiritual quest. Subsequent to mastering both positive and negative emotions and traits is the challenge to redirect passion with a sense of positive action outward from the self. How is outward behavior related to spirituality? Austen has Edmund Bertram say to Mary Crawford that the church and, specifically the clergy, "has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally—which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence" (92). When Mary insults country clergymen, Edmund defends them:

> They are known to the largest part only as preachers. And with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of, might rather be called *conduct*, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend. . . . (93, Austen's emphasis)

Speaking through Edmund, the hero in this novel, Austen shows her understanding of the co-mingling of virtue, manners and spirituality. In Kant, in Smith and in all of Austen's novels, manners, morality and spirituality are linked, and eighteenth-century culture is

shown to be inadequate as it leaves women without the resources for entering upon spiritual quests in which varying degrees of visible spirituality might be explored.

In Mansfield Park, Austen examines the nature of virtues and vices, assuming this Christian orientation in a world moving quickly away from traditional Christian values. Her attention to duty in all of its forms, as well as manners, serves as evidence of this orientation. Austen measures, praises and condemns her characters by how faithfully and with what attitude each performs her duty to others. Fanny's strong sense of duty comes from a conscious obedience of Christian law, but more deeply from a living of its practice and from true amiability. Amiability and constancy prohibit one's tossing aside of values for expediency's sake. The intellectual choice to follow Christian teaching and to make moral decisions must, however, go hand in hand with emotional and spiritual constancy. As Chapter Six will note, Anne Elliot in Persuasion says that women are more constant in their feelings than are men. This statement contradicts the typical eighteenth-century portrait which held women to be inconstant, making them incapable of moral behavior. According to the common view of the time, women's emotions were inconstant and could not be counted on when decisions of morality had to be made. Part of the new story which Austen tells in Mansfield Park concerns this prevalent attitude. Austen shows through Fanny's quest that women have the ability to discern right from wrong, that they are capable of thinking deeply about moral behavior, that they can take a moral stand against external pressure from family or friends and that they can learn to have peace and fulfillment by performing their duties to others, with or without husbands.

Self-knowledge through self-examination makes these virtues of amiability and constancy possible and conscious, and without them, other virtues cannot develop and

one's duty remains unrecognized and unaccomplished. Fanny Price, Mansfield Park's heroine, moves through life on a dual quest—a spiritual one to achieve goodness by developing and living by these virtues and a social one to know and to achieve her place in the world.

Fanny Price exemplifies the cultural struggle between enforcement of gendered virtues and a recognition of women's spiritual and moral potential. In Mansfield Park, readers see negative examples of what the culture can produce: women without the necessary insight to make choices for virtue and morality. The boundaries of their spiritual awareness and potential are severely limited. Lady's Bertram's example serves as an indicator of what Fanny might become: a silly, thoughtless woman who is incapable of attending to any serious tasks, even the elevated feminine task of raising children:

> To the education of her daughters, Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience. . . . (19-20)

Under the roof and under the tutelage of the Bertrams, why should Fanny not develop into this kind of woman, into the kind of woman that her cousins will become? The answers lie in Fanny's own spiritual journey, in the steps she makes moving from inarticulate child to giving, thoughtful partner. Fanny learns constancy; her amiability strengthens as she learns to have confidence in herself and her own judgment. She is truthful, honest, meek and kind— almost always.

From early in the novel, Fanny shows herself to be steadfast, her constancy is clear. When Edmund decides to participate in the production of the play, Fanny thinks:

> After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable. The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, and which had all slept while she listened to him, were become of little consequence now. The deeper anxiety swallowed them up. (156-157)

While Fanny wants to blame Mary for Edmund's lapse, she knows that he has faltered in his constancy toward proper behavior. After Sir Thomas returns and shuts down the play, Edmund speaks highly of Fanny: "Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout, who has been consistent. Her feelings have been steadily against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you. You will find Fanny every thing you could wish" (187). Fanny later says of Henry Crawford, "I cannot think well of a man who sports with any woman's feelings; and there may often be a great deal more suffered than a stander-by can judge of" (363). In these two instances, both of Fanny's potential partners falter in their constancy to right behavior and to others. Fanny sees their lapses and reaffirms the importance of constancy in her own conduct and in the conduct of others in all relationships.

While Fanny's constancy is seldom in doubt, she is not without childish tendencies. Upon entering the chapel on the Sotherton estate, Fanny's reacts:

> Fanny's imagination had prepared her for something grander than a mere, spacious, oblong room, fitted up for the purpose of devotion—with nothing more striking or more solemn than the profusion of mahogany, and the crimson velvet cushions appearing over the ledge of the family gallery above. 'I am disappointed,' said she, in a low voice to Edmund. 'This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. . . . No signs that a 'Scottish monarch sleeps below.' (85-86)

Austen does not paint Fanny so stiffly that readers forget how young, imaginative and untutored she is; Austen smiles at the sense of the gothic.

Charm does not rank highly with Austen. Charm, in itself, might hide deceitfulness and is valued inasmuch as it reveals a true caring for other people. While decidedly uncharming as a girl, Fanny becomes more charming as she grows, but she understands enough about posturing to distinguish between charm and true amiability. Both Mary and Henry Crawford in Mansfield Park are exceedingly charming.

> . . .Mrs. Grant received in those whom she hoped to love better than ever, a young man and woman of very prepossessing appearance. Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty; Henry, though not handsome, had air and countenance; the manners of both were lively and pleasant, and Mrs. Grant immediately gave them credit for every thing else. (41-42)

Ultimately, however, Mrs. Grant's faith is misplaced and both young people reveal their lack of moral strength as the novel unfolds. So compelling is Henry's charm that he almost wins Fanny as his great prize. During his visit to Portsmouth, he says:

> "I know Mansfield, I know its way, I know its faults towards you. I know the danger of your being so far forgotten, as to have your comforts give way to the imaginary convenience of any single being in the family. . . . If, therefore, (turning again to Fanny) you find yourself growing unwell, and any difficulties arise about your returning to Mansfield . . . if you feel yourself at all less strong, or comfortable than usual, and will only let my sister know it . . . she and I will immediately come down, and take you back to Mansfield. You know the ease, and the pleasure with which this would be done. You know all that would be felt on the occasion." (410-411)

After this speech, both Fanny and the reader begin to soften towards Henry. His potential is not unlike that of Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility; with Fanny's influence as his wife, Henry could become a good man. His temperament of open charm and his lack of steadfastness, however, win out and lead him into a clandestine relationship with Maria Bertram. After all, Mary describes him early in the novel as "the most horrible flirt than can be imagined" (43). He is lost both socially and morally.

Fanny's amiability, although not her greatest strength, stands in contrast to Mary and Henry's charm. Even Mary says to Fanny, "I hate to leave you. I shall see no one half so amiable" (359). From her first appearance at Mansfield Park, Fanny is too timid a child to immediately provoke the accolade of amiability. Fanny shows her true amiability in small measures: in the strength of her attachment to her brother and sister, William and Susan, and in her willingness to offer her life to giving comfort to her Aunt Bertram. In this,

> Fanny [was] devoted to her aunt Bertram, returning to every former office, with more than former zeal, and thinking she could never do enough for one who seemed so much to want her.
>
> To talk over the dreadful business with Fanny, talk and lament, was all Lady Bertram's consolation. To be listened to and borne with, and hear the voice of kindness and sympathy in return, was everything that could be done for her (449).

Fanny performs her duties to others, learns amiability, possesses self-knowledge and is constant in her affections and her quest for virtue and purpose in life. As Fanny learns self-confidence and learns to value herself, she also learns to share her true amiability with others.

The Stages of Fanny's Spiritual and Social Quests

Fanny Price's social, spiritual and emotional growth reflect the stages of Carol Christ's social and spiritual quest: growing from nothingness, to awakening, to insight, and finally into naming. The nothingness of her childhood is apparent. Her awakening becomes evident when she begins to distrust the motives and understandings of people around her, including Edmund, and begins to make moral decisions for herself. Fanny has "moments of lucidity. . . when the meaning of our lives seems clear," as Carol Christ

says (Diving xxi). She awakens and sees the world in a new way, and in this new world, Fanny, ultimately, shapes her life out of nothing, guided by no one.

Mansfield Park is the only Austen novel showing a character's development from childhood into adulthood. While the pages devoted to childhood are brief (Fanny is eighteen years old in chapter five when Mary questions her eligibility status as "in or out"), these pages shed light on the starting point of Fanny's life and the nothingness from which she rises. The narrator describes the ten-year-old girl as unhappy, afraid, ashamed, homesick, small, sickly, timid, uneducated, unpolished, and despondent with acute feelings which others cannot appreciate (12-14). Readers suffer with Fanny as she struggles through early adolescence under the burden of such a personality. She is further constrained by the constant reminders from Aunt Norris that she is socially and natively inferior to the Bertram daughters, can never be their equal and should be grateful for having a home at Mansfield Park at all.

Despite her youth and innocence, Fanny is Mansfield Park's example of a true spiritual nature. She achieves goodness almost single-handedly, not having had the benefit of virtuous parents to train her. At age ten, she is removed from her home and taken in by the Bertrams with none of the women guiding her as a mother might. Like Elinor Dashwood and Elizabeth Bennet, Fanny is virtually motherless. Fanny's own mother, while not uncaring, was too much distracted by "her ninth lying in" (5) and by a husband "disabled for active service, but not the less equal to company and good liquor" (4) to be of much use to her daughter.

Fanny comes to Mansfield Park from such a home with little formal education, making her a target for the Bertram girls' ridicule. "Fanny could read, work, and write,

but she had been taught nothing more; and as her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid. . . ." The girls report to their mother as this passage continues: "Dear Mamma, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia—or she does not know the difference between water-colours and crayons!—How strange!" (18). Her cousins also criticize Fanny for never having learned French or "the chronological order of the kings of England . . ." (18). The Bertram girls have been given the standard education of the day.

The women conduct book writers deplored this system of education for girls which Austen examines here. Elizabeth Hamilton ridicules it when she says that "those little nursery catalogues of Kings and Queens. . . can never be mistaken for a knowledge of history" (Letters 230-31). Hamilton critiques this method and explains that, for women, knowing a few good writers well is better than having a smattering of useless information. Austen draws upon this attitude as she fictionalizes these incompetent women and as she shows Fanny's more appropriate quest for a genuine education.

Fanny's life of nothingness is clear. She has no money, no real home, no education of value, and a complete lack of self-regard projected by painful timidity. Fanny's awakening to her condition in the world and her perceptions on how this position might change represent the stirrings of her spirituality. She is the product of poor, uneducated, and ill-equipped parents, yet, as she quests for spiritual and social place, her faculties of perception, attention, conception, judgment, imagination, taste, memory, and reflection grow. In Fanny, Austen gives an example of a woman's potential for spiritual growth despite the child's lack of preparation for it. Where the conservative conduct

books would see no room for a woman to experience spiritual exploration, Austen reveals the nature of a woman's quest through Fanny's seeking. When Carol Christ writes about a woman's spiritual awakening, she gives examples of women finding access to their own power through the power of the natural world. In Mansfield Park, Austen shows Fanny seeking answers and self-assurance and coming to moments of awakening in solitude.

Fanny has grown up in Mansfield Park with a lack of self-regard, particularly stemming from her recognition of her inferior social class. Vanity could never be one of her faults. Austen shows, however, that Fanny takes comfort in and gains insight from the time she spends alone in her room, searching for understanding. There, Fanny surrounds herself with works of art, with nature in her plant collection, and with books and in doing so develops her own sense of taste and discrimination.

> The comfort of it in her hours of leisure was extreme. She could go there after any thing unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand.—Her plants, her books—of which she had been a collector, from the first hour of her commanding a shilling—her writing desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity, were all within her reach; —or if indisposed for employment, if nothing but musing would do, she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it.— Every thing was a friend. . . . (151-52)

Her collection of private possessions reflects her self and the purpose she seeks: intellectual work in reading and writing, connection to nature with her plants, charity work and creative expression. All of these activities nourish Fanny's spirituality.

Other solitary moments are spent outdoors. Some of the first moments that Edmund spends alone with Fanny are spent walking outdoors. "Let us walk out in the park and you shall tell me all about your brothers and sisters" (15). In this setting, Fanny is able to calm herself and reveal her feelings, and from this experience, Edmund is

"convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right; and he could perceive her to be farther entitled to attention, by great sensibility of her situation and great timidity" (17). At this early point in the novel, Fanny is revealed to Edmund as she is revealed to herself.

In a discussion of land improvement among Mr. Rushworth, Mary, Maria, Edmund and Fanny, Fanny takes a romantic posture concerning the tearing out of trees and modernizing of property, just as she did in responding to the character of the chapel. She says, "Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited'" (56). Her position, while similar to Edmund's, is the lone voice of disapproval of the improvement plan. Fanny sees more in the natural world than property value and updating make apparent. Her link is spiritual.

During this same visit to Sotherton, the young people are all out walking the grounds, when Fanny stops to rest in the wood and is subsequently left alone. Edmund and Mary walk away. "Edmund urged her remaining where she was with an earnestness which she could not resist, and she was left on the bench to think with pleasure of her cousin's care, but with great regret that she was not stronger. She watched them till they had turned the corner, and listened till all sound of them had ceased" (96). Fanny is left alone for more than twenty minutes, after which time other members of the party join her, at intervals. Fanny spends more than an hour alone in this situation. This hour is important to Fanny's awakening understanding of the complex nature of human relationships. She reaches conclusions concerning the behavior of all of the other party members. All of them fall short of behaving with propriety and with regard for each

other's feelings. Edmund and Mary have forsaken her; Maria and Julia fight over Henry, and Henry leads them all in disregarding Mr. Rushworth. Fanny, alone, recognizes and censures their inappropriate and thoughtless behavior. During these moments of solitude in the woods, she understands her own position among these people; socially she is excluded while morally she struggles to maintain her own virtue.

Fanny's greatest trial and her most important insights come late in the novel. First, she must challenge Edmund's behavior and, second, reject Henry's marriage proposal. Readers have watched her build the necessary skills for coping with this crisis in less important arenas. First, Fanny's deep concern over the propriety of producing a play sets her apart from her cousins and friends. Edmund's acquiescing to participate with Mary Crawford represents a challenge to Fanny's constancy and judgment. If Edmund finds it acceptable to participate, why should she hesitate? But she does. Fanny stands firm on her principles, knowing that Sir Thomas would not approve of this behavior and that participation compromises the virtue of each of the young people. She sees the world differently and articulates what she sees, beginning the naming stage of her spiritual quest. In taking this stand against Edmund, Fanny goes beyond his teaching and launches into a moral adulthood which is of her own construction. This experience, for which Fanny is ostracized, serves as a test run for the second, more difficult stand she must take against Henry Crawford and the wishes of her family.

Fanny's rejection of Crawford's proposal shows her greatest strength. Readers watch this moral character in action; Fanny self-consciously debates. She reasons. She chooses. Sir Thomas admonishes Fanny:

> . . . he shortly afterwards, and in a voice of authority, said, 'Have you any reason, child, to think ill of Mr. Crawford's temper?'

> 'No, sir.' She longed to add, 'but of his principles I have;' but her heart sunk under the appalling prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably non-conviction. (317)

With Sir Thomas, Fanny is hesitant to name what most concerns her about Henry or to implicate Edmund's behavior in any way. She withstands Sir Thomas' continued berating. He says,

> I will, therefore, only add, as thinking it my duty to mark my opinion of your conduct—that you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed. For I had, Fanny, as I think my behaviour must have shewn, formed a very favourable opinion of you from the period of my return to England. I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulnness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you. . . . (318)

Despite this attack from Sir Thomas, Fanny maintains her position. She knows that she is not acting in a "self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful" way (319), but she is rejecting the conduct model of behavior which Sir Thomas is expecting from her. In an effort to help her clear her mind of obstacles to this marriage, Sir Thomas advises Fanny "to go out, the air will do you good; go out for an hour on the gravel, you will have the shrubbery to yourself, and will be the better for air and exercise" (322). This finding of solace in physical action and the out-of-doors is important. Fanny regains her composure and returns determined in her action but softened towards her uncle. She remains firm and is later proven right and vindicated.

When Edmund seeks to persuade Fanny to marry Henry, he finds her "walking alone in the shrubbery" at Mansfield Park and says, "'I am come to walk with you, Fanny.' . . . She assented to it all rather by look than word. Her spirits were low" (346).

For a moment, Fanny has escaped from the turmoil of the house and the pressure being brought to bear upon her to accept Henry's proposal. She seeks comfort in nature. Fanny's attachment to the natural world is made more explicit late in the novel when she returns to Mansfield Park from Portsmouth:

> Visions of good and ill breeding, of old vulgarisms and new gentilities were before her. . . . Fanny had been every where awake to the difference of the country since February; but, when they entered the Park, her perceptions and her pleasures were of the keenest sort. It was three months, full three months, since her quitting it; and the change was from winter to summer. Her eye fell every where on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees, though not fully clothed, were in that delightful state, when farther beauty is known to be at hand, and when, while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination. Her enjoyment, however, was for herself alone. . . . [Edmund's distress] made her melancholy again. (446-447)

Fanny finds emotional and spiritual comfort, now, in returning to Mansfield Park, realizing its beauty and knowing it as home. Fanny has awakened to the scandals in which her relatives and friends are involved, knows her place as niece and comforter of her aunt and equally knows that she will not be Edmund's wife. While these awakenings are not mystical, they are vital to Fanny's spiritual and social quests. She would be unable to move into a new naming of her world and her place without this knowledge.

Christ says that as a woman moves through her spiritual and social quest she ". . . begins a new naming of self and world. Each rejects negative body images and names her body's power anew" (Diving 120). As Fanny has come to recognize the nothingness of her world and to awaken to its realities, she has also asserted and confirmed her own virtue and worth. The new naming which she experiences includes a rejection of her old body and her old self-image just as a caterpillar rejects its old form when it metamorphoses into a butterfly. As she has aged, she has become more attractive. Edmund says to her,

> Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny. . . . Anybody but myself would have made something more of it, and any body but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before. . . .
>
> Your complexion is so improved!—and you have gained so much countenance!—and your figure—Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it–it is but an uncle. If you cannot bear an uncle's admiration what is to become of you? You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at.—You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman. (197-198)

Fanny has grown from a sickly, inarticulate child to an attractive young woman. While she hears these compliments with some distress, Fanny explains her hesitation to continue a conversation with her uncle: "I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their [her cousins'] expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel" (198). While she might be fully aware of her distinction, Fanny does not wish for attention whether it concerns her body or her temperament. Her physical attractiveness does not seem to last, however. In Portsmouth, she fades, "beginning to feel the effect of being debarred from her usual, regular exercise; she had lost ground as to health since her being in Portsmouth. . ." (409). After returning to Mansfield Park, Fanny's physical attractiveness gets no mention. Her moral character takes precedence. Fanny is comfortable in herself, in her body but, more importantly, she is comfortable with her spiritual self and with her place in the world.

When it is time to return to Mansfield Park, Fanny names her own place:

> Her eagerness, her impatience, her longings to be with them [the Bertrams], were such as to bring a line or two of Cowper's Tirocinium for ever before her. 'With what intense desire she wants her home,' was continually on her tongue. . . .
>
> When she had been coming to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home, had been fond of saying that she was going home; the word had been very dear to her; and so it still was, but it must be applied to Mansfield. *That*

was now the home. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home. (431, Austen's emphasis)

Fanny has a duty to perform at Mansfield Park, and this duty lends purpose to her life. She can comfort her family, and she can help her sister Susan. This multiple purpose guides her, while her recognition of Mansfield Park as home reassures her. Fanny is prepared to live with unrequited love. Her goal is not marriage at any cost but a life of value in giving to others. She will live and be useful to her aunt and uncle and comfort them through the distress of the scandal.

Despite her seeming penultimate happiness, before her marriage and independently of Edmund, Fanny's life flowers. She returns to Mansfield Park, realizing that it is now her home, understanding that she has value to others and purpose in life. Her attachment to Sir Thomas grows mutually; her affection for Lady Bertram takes on a consciousness of the woman's faults but acceptance of her. Is Fanny a perfect, conservative religious woman? No. Too many shades and shadows are thrown over her to encourage such a reading. Fanny hopes to win Edmund, delights in her triumphs, and fights to overcome jealousy and pettiness. She hates feeling envy (413) but does feel and acknowledge it. She explodes with resentment over Edmund's desire to marry Mary: "Such sensations, however, were too near a kin to resentment to be long guiding Fanny's soliloquies. She was soon more softened and sorrowful" (424-425). Fanny is not perfect. She suffers through her dark night of the soul in Portsmouth and then enters into a new life at Mansfield Park, before Edmund turns to her.

In her social and spiritual quests, Fanny has moved through the stages of nothingness, awakening and insight into naming. She has come to understand the flaws

of her family and the injustices of the social order and has integrated this knowledge into her own search for fulfillment and place.

Conclusions

Out of this past of poverty, neglect and ridicule grows a young woman constant to her values regardless of pressure from the people around her. Fanny will not succumb to overt pressures to conform even when they come from Edmund. She relies on her own developed judgment of situations and character and stands quietly but firmly against what she believes to be wrong.

Fanny, ultimately, is rewarded for her virtue. Sir Thomas recognizes her first for her beauty and more slowly for her virtue. Later the other characters come to the same realizations. She achieves Austen's great and final reward, a good marriage to a good man, Edmund.

> With so much true merit and true love, and no want of fortune or friends, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be. —Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort. . . . (473)

Another heroine receives her just reward. As Christ writes, "The drive for wholeness and for the integration of spiritual and social quests is part of the new naming. . . [a woman] seeks to integrate her newfound spirituality and sensuality; she wants the whole life of a free woman, including sexuality and creativity" (Diving 120). Thus, Fanny's journey, so far, has been both social and spiritual; spiritual in the fact that it grounds experience "in something larger than individual or even collective achievements" (Diving 11). For Fanny, this grounding is in moral behavior and in the prevailing value of love. The quest

is evident when larger experience gives life meaning and takes women beyond themselves. Her spiritual quest will continue after her marriage.

Fanny is taken beyond herself as she focuses on caring for her younger sister Susan. In Susan lies a second young woman who will stand stronger and firmer and who will perhaps accomplish more in her life quest than Fanny. Austen ends the novel with this description of Susan:

> Her more fearless disposition and happier nerves made every thing easy to her there.—With quickness in understanding the tempers of those she had to deal with, and no natural timidity to restrain any consequent wishes, she was soon welcome, and useful to all; and after Fanny's removal, succeeded so naturally to her influence over the hourly comfort of her aunt, as gradually to become, perhaps, the most beloved of the two. (472-473)

Susan's quest may take her farther because she has strengths to Fanny's weaknesses. Fanny's growth has been phenomenal but takes her only so far in life. Susan might accomplish much more because she begins with fewer barriers and fewer personal weaknesses.

In Mansfield Park, Austen does not agonize over these great weaknesses or Fanny's lack of formal education as writers of the conduct books might. She shows through a series of events how much Fanny's quest brings to her life. She has grown through a series of realizations about the condition of her life, from her removal from her birth family, through her primary education with the governess and her education under Edmund's tutelage, and finally through her own efforts to develop her intellectual and moral tastes and a personal sense of right and wrong.

By the novel's conclusion, Fanny has outgrown the patronizing direction of Edmund and has become a true companion and moral example to him, a mature woman with a sense of herself as a social and spiritual being. Austen has shown Fanny's comfort with solitude and with her own morality when she isolates Fanny in the forest and allows her to judge the other characters. Fanny comes to be content with and to trust her own

judgment. She knows her own constancy and recognizes, through her life quest, that the education and virtue she is still acquiring make it possible.

> Common to all stories with this 'sacred' dimension is the importance given to the story by teller or hearer. It might seem that all sacred stories would have to be realistic and serious, but this is not so. The story might be of adventure if the teller thinks adventure is what life is all about, a love story if love makes life meaningful, a fantasy if fantasy is the only way to achieve transcendence. (Diving 4)

Austen tells this story of love and virtue offering to her readers a new sacred dimension for which to quest.

Chapter Five
Emma:
Acquainted with the Heart

Saving Emma Woodhouse from herself is Austen's primary goal in Emma. Contemporary feminist debate focuses, however, on who is responsible for Emma's salvation and from what she is rescued. In her article, "Identifying with Emma: Some Problems for the Feminist Reader," Wendy Moffat explains that feminist critics have identified several problems in this novel. The novel's "inherent tensions" (45) center on Austen's seeming approval of upper class values, her leanings toward patriarchal salvation rendered upon her heroines, the role of men in educating the heroines and the writer's efforts to reform her characters before they are ready for marriage. Moffat discusses contemporary readings of Emma, focusing her attention on the demands of the genre itself:

> To be sure, Emma tests the literary conventions of the novel of instruction by discouraging the reader's wholehearted identification with its protagonist—whom Austen designed to be at times irritating and unlikable (Austen-Leigh 157). By placing a protagonist whom readers must resist at the center of a novel of moral instruction, Austen points up the tension inherent in the relation between such novels and their audience. (47)

According to Moffat, the tension felt by feminist readers concerning how to read Emma exists for all but the most inexperienced readers.

Austen's novel of instruction might be better read not for its possible patriarchal overtones but for its potential as a model for the spiritual growth of the original readers. A careful reading of Emma shows that Austen focuses on the weaknesses of a character with unlimited potential, takes an undeveloped, immature girl (albeit one of a much higher social class than Elinor Dashwood or Fanny Price), follows her through a series of

mistakes and delivers her into womanhood. The end product—a spiritually and socially mature woman ready for marriage—is possible only because the character possesses specific virtues and experiences specific growth. Emma's quest, unrecognized and unrealized by the character through most of the novel, is to come to this full womanhood and to find meaning in her life beyond the silliness of her childish melodramas. Emma's dormant virtues are activated when she confronts her fallible nature, "making her acquainted with her own heart" (Emma 407).

Feminist critics sometimes balk at Knightley's role in Emma's development.[1] Is it necessary for a man to lead Emma into maturity? Is this simply another case of a mentor-husband leading an inexperienced young girl to a marriageable state, just as the conduct books teach? These critics misread Emma. Knightley does not cause Emma to examine her head and heart, although he continuously tries to persuade her to do so. Harriet does. After her confrontation with Harriet when the young woman states her claim for Mr. Knightley, Emma deliberates:

> She saw that there never had been a time when she did not consider Mr. Knightley as infinitely the superior, or when his regard for her had not been infinitely the most dear. . . . This was the conclusion of the first series of reflections. This was the knowledge of herself, on the first question of inquiry, which she reached; and without being long in reaching it.—She was most sorrowfully indignant; ashamed of every sensation but the one revealed to her—her affection for Mr. Knightley.—Every other part of her mind was disgusting. (412)

Her struggle is internal. Emma must come to know her own heart before she can reach full womanhood. She does this before she steps to the threshold of a deeper spirituality and before she marries George Knightley. While Knightley, her elder by sixteen years, often serves as Emma's conscience when she seems not to hear her own, it is not through her marriage to him that she grows. Both partners prepare themselves for the union,

bringing strengths which will guide and mold the other throughout the marriage. Early in the novel, neither Knightley nor Emma is ready for marriage.[2] Where Knightley is sometimes sullen and jealous, Emma is open and charming. Where she is capricious, he is careful. The reader does not see events after the marriage. Emma's change of perspective and her more mature understanding develop before she enters into marriage. Emma's growth and consciousness of that growth are the more important issues.

The heart of the novel is not found in the dilemmas of who might marry whom, although Emma's interference in Harriet's life nearly leads to disaster. Its importance lies in Emma's growth, in her recognition of her errors, and her acceptance that she must continue to develop her own sense of judgment. Were this tragedy, a different outcome would result from Emma's flaws. Austen writes comedy, however, so the flaws are recognized but overcome, allowing for the true marriage of kindred minds, or as the novel concludes, in acknowledgment of "the perfect happiness of the union" (484).

Denise Kohn argues in "Reading Emma as a Lesson on 'Ladyhood': A Study in the Domestic *Bildungsroman*" that this novel of instruction analyzes ladyhood and creates a new understanding of women's quests. "One of Austen's greatest achievements in Emma is that she writes a novel of education —a *bildungsroman*— that instructs her readers to deconstruct the pervasive images of 'ladyhood' created by her period's conduct-book writers" (45). Kohn investigates three important points in this essay: what a *bildungsroman* for young women would look like, what the conduct-book writers indicated as appropriate behavioral goals for women, and, specifically, how Austen deconstructs the assumptions behind both issues.

> Austen resists the view of a "lady" as passive and selfless and redefines the highest ideals of "ladyhood" as self-assurance, strength, and compassion

> through the depiction of her heroine, Emma. Such a reading of the novel, however, not only shows how Emma redefines female ideals but also how the novel redefines the *bildungsroman* within the context of early nineteenth-century domestic values. (45-46)

Indeed, Emma does all this; the discussion, however, need not be limited to achieving "ladyhood," although ladyhood is Emma's defined role in her community. Austen refutes the kind of flat spirituality depicted for women which involves no active quest and no struggle. The conduct books teach young women how to achieve a gendered spirituality in which a woman's spiritual success is measured in passive terms and exemplified by silence, obedience and demurral to the guidance of man-as-mentor.

Austen makes numerous references to Emma in her letters, often comparing her heroines to one another. In a letter to James Stanier Clarke, she writes:

> My greatest anxiety at present is that this 4th work shd not disgrace what was good in the others. But on this point I will do myself the justice to declare that whatever may be my wishes for its' [sic] success, I am very strongly haunted by the idea that to those Readers who have preferred P&P. it will appear inferior in Wit, & to those who have preferred MP. very inferior in good Sense. (Letters 11 December 1815)

While Austen's concern for Emma's success might have been needless, she continues to feel these anxieties partly, perhaps, because she continues to think of her heroines as her children. She writes to Anna Lefroy shortly after the birth of Anna's daughter, Jemima: "As I wish very much to see your *Jemima*, I am sure you will like to see my *Emma*, & have therefore great pleasure in sending it for your perusal. Keep it as long as you chuse; it has been read by all here—" (Letters ? December 1815-January 1816, her emphasis). These comments emphasize Austen's

attachment to her heroines while showing her concern for the response of her readers. Her fictional children have a task to perform.

As the novel begins, Austen's Emma stands on the brink of womanhood. She already possesses the "self-assurance, strength, and compassion" which Kohn identifies as the heroine's uncharacteristically androgynous strengths. Emma's spiritual quest must go beyond these traits, however. Emma finds herself in a precarious spiritual position; she might continue to behave as she always has, stubbornly refusing direction and advice from those who might guide her, or she might develop self-awareness, heed her own conscience, come to understand her own limitations, and learn to accept the guidance of others. Austen has already outlined a variety of possible character models. If Emma chooses the former option, she could be like Mansfield Park's Mary Crawford, frivolous, self-indulged and shallow, or, worse, like Sense and Sensibility's Mrs. John Dashwood, greedy, unfeeling, and narrow. But Emma comes to distrust her own judgment and to understand that her perceptions might be faulty. By making this transition, Emma becomes a truly moral woman, assessing people and situations and making careful judgments. She grows into womanhood and into a fuller spiritual personhood when she learns to read herself and to understand and recognize her own motives and flaws. She achieves the state defined by both Adam Smith and Immanuel Kant, as moral: she can choose and she can will "good." Because Emma has these qualities innately and because she is capable of making moral choices, she is eligible to participate in a spiritual quest. Her coming to terms with yourself, learning who she is and who she wants to be in her community are some of the aspects of Emma's spiritual and social quest.

As the discussion of Sense and Sensibility shows, Austen connects a heroine's moral code with her ability to participate in a spiritual quest. Are Emma's virtues strong enough and of the appropriate nature to support her through a quest, and how does her value system represent her spirituality? To uncover answers to these questions, readers must analyze Emma's moral code, her possession or lack of virtues and the *telos* which guides her life.

The conduct-book writers would not approve of Emma, as Kohn has pointed out. While they assert the value of constancy and the observance of duty, they offer little advice on knowing one's own head and heart. Obedience to fathers or husbands and an overriding attention to propriety are much more highly touted as the appropriate virtues for young women. Young women need not ponder the great mysteries of psychological truth; a pleasing young woman is more concerned with the appearance of virtue than with her philosophical understanding of virtue's definition. Austen refutes this attitude. Emma is outspoken, self-assured and self-directed.

Several passages in Emma clarify Austen's perceptions of the virtues of amiability, constancy, sense of duty and self-knowledge and their role in a heroine's spiritual quest. These moments reveal a compelling sense of duty, distinguish amiability from mere agreeableness and acknowledge a character's constancy or inconstancy. These virtues are also vital in both partners who wish to enter a socially and spiritually fulfilling marriage. How do these virtues complement the joining of personalities in marriage? Emma's realizations and subsequent behavior emphasize the importance of self-command and self-knowledge and make clear Austen's concept of the virtues and of the spiritual growth which occurs when they are practiced. A heroine in whom these virtues are not

developed is not only excluded from any spiritual questing but also shows no sign of having an active spiritual life. Importantly, quite unlike the heavy emphasis on gender-specific virtues discussed in the conduct books, Austen expects these virtues in both men and women. She consequently judges men and women with equal strictness, cataloguing their failures and achievements throughout this novel. This chapter will explore some of the passages which emphasize the importance of these virtues before considering the specific stages of Emma's spiritual quest.

Compared to the earlier characters of Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price, Emma's flaws are more apparent. Readers will not mistake Emma as too good to be real. Besides being under-educated, self-satisfied and self-deceived, Emma manipulates and is too quick to judge others. In short, she is an immature, self-important child spoiled by a doting and insensible father. Much like Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice, however, Emma is also pretty, lively, and generally likable. But unlike Elizabeth, Emma is from a wealthy and titled family and has experienced so little restraint and correction in her life that she stubbornly does as she pleases and always believes that she is right.

While Emma's self-assurance and self-direction are sometimes misplaced, she has developed them without supportive role models to help her find her way in life. In Emma, Austen presents fathers in unflattering terms: Mr. Woodhouse is a doddering old man concerned with gruel, and Mr. Weston is a moderately concerned but uninvolved father. Woodhouse's response to Miss Taylor's marriage to Mr. Weston shows the depth of his silliness:

> His spirits required support. He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of every body that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable; and he was by no means yet reconciled to his own daughter's

> marrying, nor could ever speak of her but with compassion, though it had been entirely a match of affection, when he was now obliged to part with Miss Taylor too; and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel differently from himself, he was very much disposed to think Miss Taylor had done as sad a thing for herself as for them, and would have been a great deal happier if she had spent all the rest of her life at Hartfield. (7-8)

Had his heart been less good, Mr. Woodhouse might have become a parent like Mrs. Ferrars in Sense and Sensibility, or a model for Dickensian villains, always manipulating family members to achieve his own desires. Emma says of him, "It is tenderness of heart which makes my dear father so generally beloved" (269). These are not the guiding father-figures assumed by the conduct book writers.

Emma's devotion and kindness toward her father, however, reveal her strong sense of filial duty. Surely a reasonable young woman could do better than obediently follow such a father's advice. Emma, though, is a perfect balance in this regard. She honors her father by genuinely caring for him, by exhibiting the true amiability of her nature, but not by following his explicit direction. Emma is an intelligent young woman who happens to need guidance and a chance to mature. Austen provides both for her.

In Emma as in the earlier novels, amiability plays a central role. As MacIntyre defined it, amiability with its Christian bent is the fundamental and sincere caring for people and is the foundation for the other virtues important to Austen. Without this, agreeableness is little more than manipulation of others for one's own gain and, as Chapter Three explains in the case of Willoughby, immoral behavior. In Emma, Knightley criticizes Frank Churchill's failure to visit his father. "No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very 'aimable,' have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the

feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him" (149). Knightley refuses to recognize Churchill as sincere in his behavior towards others. Charm and good manners, as demonstrated by Willoughby in Sense and Sensibility, often disguise self-aggrandizement.

Other characters in this novel are also measured on this scale of agreeableness-amiability. Austen offers a strong negative example in Mr. Elton who is also found to be agreeable without possessing true amiability. John Knightley says, "I never in my life saw a man more intent on being agreeable than Mr. Elton. It is downright labour to him where ladies are concerned. With men he can be rational and unaffected, but when he has ladies to please every feature works" (111). He implies that Elton's behavior toward women is somehow false and, therefore, lacking in amiability. Also in this passage, John tells Emma that Mr. Elton might be in love with her, but she rejects this idea. "Mr. Elton in love with me!—What an idea!' 'I do not say it is so; but you will do well to consider whether it is so or not, and to regulate your behavior accordingly. I think your manners to him encouraging. I speak as a friend, Emma. You had better look about you, and ascertain what you do, and what you mean to do" (112). In this passage, John comes close to accusing Emma herself of a lack of true amiability. As Emma comments later, both Knightley brothers are extraordinarily insightful.

The impulse to please is good, even in Mr. Elton, but must spring from a deeper affection for people, not simply from a desire to be liked or to win a wife. John Knightley himself is not a model of amiability and is not the most pleasing of characters: he often complains and seems to detract from otherwise pleasant situations. The narrator says of him,

> Mr. John Knightley was a tall, gentleman-like, and very clever man; rising in his profession, domestic, and respectable in his private character; but with reserved manners which prevented his being generally pleasing; and capable of being sometimes out of humour. He was not an ill-tempered man, not so often unreasonably cross as to deserve such a reproach; but his temper was not his great perfection; and, indeed, with such a worshipping wife, it was hardly possible that any natural defects in it should not be increased. (92-93)

Despite these flaws, he is presented as a generally good character. He is a good father and a caring husband and brother, qualities showing that he possesses amiability while sometimes falling short of being agreeable. Men who possess true amiability know its value and condemn its absence in other men. For example, George Knightley acts out of a platonic desire to be helpful when he sends his carriage for Jane when she is not feeling well. He has nothing to gain from assisting her. It is important that Austen has men criticizing other men in both of these examples, as it reveals the writer's impulse to remove the gendered basis of virtue and to assert that amiability should be a human virtue, not a 'woman's' virtue.

In women, the contrast of agreeableness and amiability is most evident between Emma and Jane Fairfax. Both women are 'good.' Jane is better educated and is a truly gifted musician. Emma has been lazy with her education and is only competent with her music; both inadequacies she later regrets. Emma repeatedly criticizes Jane's reserve, not unlike John Knightley's, and perceives it as a major character flaw and representative of Jane's less than amiable nature. Again it is Knightley who remarks, "Jane Fairfax is a very charming young woman—but not even Jane Fairfax is perfect. She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife" (288). Obviously Knightley has always hoped to marry Emma which partly explains his preference for an open temper. But, while the cause of Jane's restraint is later revealed as her concern over

the secret engagement, her temper remains quiet, unlike Emma's which is truly open. Jane's apology to Emma acknowledges this fault: "You are very kind, but I know what my manners were to you—So cold and artificial!—I had always a part to act.—It was a life of deceit!—I know that I must have disgusted you"(459). This mirrors the discussion between Elinor and Marianne in Sense and Sensibility where the former is too reserved and the latter has no restraint.

The secret engagement of Jane and Frank is important to the plot of the novel and valuable in establishing the virtues at work in it. An amiable person is open, artless and honest in dealing with others. On reading Churchill's letter to the Westons, Knightley responds to Emma:

> Fancying you to have fathomed his secret. Natural enough!—his own mind full of intrigue, that he should suspect it in others—Mystery; Finesse—how they pervert the understanding! My Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other? (445-6)

Emma admits the truth. She knows that he is right and knows equally that she has fallen short. Not only has she been unfair in her dealings with Jane and Frank, but she has entered into secret intrigues with Churchill against Jane Fairfax and, by extension, against Knightley.

In Emma's code, one who is amiable must also be constant. Honesty and directness require constancy to give them substance. After all, capricious honesty is hardly a virtue. Austen asserts the constancy or inconstancy of her characters in all of her novels, and Persuasion, of course, is an entire novel devoted to the subject. Emma considers the presence of this virtue in Frank Churchill: "To complete every other recommendation, he had almost told her that he loved her. What strength, or what

constancy of affection he might be subject to, was another point. . . (262). Emma's immaturity shows in her own definition of constancy. She believes that she is being constant in her friendship to Harriet, by continuing to teach her and by trying to find her a husband. Emma learns later in the novel that constancy might take a different form. "How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! (408). It is a moment of extreme self-recognition and regret.

To overcome these flaws and grow, Emma must first confront her own moments of inconstancy. While she is constant in her friendship and respect for Knightley, she is inconstant in her behavior to others. She does not yet know romantic or sexual love and therefore has yet to learn of the constancy required between husband and wife. She dabbles in match-making for others and for herself. Emma's concern with constancy moves to the foreground when she discovers that Elton intends to propose to her. While her misjudgment indicates the extent of her naiveté, her respect for the virtue of constancy remains apparent. "[T]here was no putting an end to his extreme solicitude about her. She was vexed. It did appear—there was no concealing it—exactly like the pretence of being in love with her, instead of Harriet; an inconstancy, if real, the most contemptible and abominable! and she had difficulty in behaving with temper" (125). Of course, Elton is not inconstant in this instance; Emma has misread his intentions. Later, she convinces herself that marriage with Churchill would be ideal and proceeds to fall in love with him. As she later states, she escapes disaster by falling out of love with him before he can damage her pride or her reputation. "[M]y manners gave such an impression, I have as much reason to be ashamed of confessing that I never have been at

all attached to the person we are speaking of, as it might be natural for a woman to feel in confessing in exactly the reverse.— But I never have" (426-27). Despite her capacity to misjudge the conduct of others, Emma's outbursts establish the importance of constancy.

Harriet's complete lack of constancy can be viewed as a comic foil to Emma's more serious approach. As Knightley says to Emma, Harriet is an open, artless, beautiful young woman who is profiting from her relationship with Emma. Unfortunately, Harriet's growing sense of judgment does not seem to aid her constancy in her relationships with men. As Emma considers, "Mr. Knightley, always so kind, so feeling, so truly considerate for every body, would never deserve to be less worshipped than now; and it really was too much to hope even of Harriet, that she could be in love with more than three men in one year " (450).

Only through these moments of self-recognition can Emma learn constancy and self-awareness. When she does not know her own mind or her own heart, she cannot offer constancy in her relationships with anyone else. Austen shows Emma developing through the novel, through numerous episodes of epiphany. In an early disagreement with Knightley, she reflects:

> Emma made no answer, and tried to look cheerfully unconcerned, but was really feeling uncomfortable and wanting him very much to be gone. She did not repent what she had done; she still thought herself a better judge of such a point of female right and refinement than he could be; but yet she had a sort of habitual respect for his judgment in general, which made her dislike having it so loudly against her. (65)

At this point, Emma has not come to understand her own behavior. Later, readers see this response: "Emma remained in a state of vexation too; but there was more indistinctness in the causes of her's, than in his. She did not always feel so absolutely satisfied with herself, so entirely convinced that her opinions were right and her

adversary's wrong. . . (67). Emma's unease and vexation with her own behavior continue throughout the novel until they culminate in her final recognition of how she has wronged Harriet, how she has not done her duty by her friends, and how she realizes that she loves Knightley.

Emma's strengths, even from the beginning of the novel, are apparent. She is attractive but not vain, generous, dutiful and concerned with the well-being of the poor. Emma's sense of duty, so strong in these areas, is not often misplaced or mistaken. As the inheritor of £30,000 and the woman of a large estate, Emma knows her duty to the people of Highbury. While she is sometimes mistaken in her feeble attempts to seem democratic (as with Harriet), she maintains a good relationship with poor families in the vicinity. There is no hint of irony in Austen's presentation of Emma visiting the poor. The narrator says,

> Emma was very compassionate and the distresses of the poor were as sure of relief from her personal attention and kindness, her counsel and her patience, as from her purse. She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those, for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will. (86)

Her general good sense allows her to help the poor without condescending to them or making a show of her compassion. Emma, as the lady of the village must do a lady's duty. Austen would not have Emma shirk her duty in this sphere.

Emma's compassion also extends to more genteel underprivileged neighbors like Miss Bates. In a discussion over supplying food to the Bates household, Emma replies to her father, "'My dear papa, I sent the whole hind-quarter. I knew you would wish it'" (172). She unselfishly shares the riches of her estate with her less fortunate neighbors.

Despite her seemingly insurmountable faults, Emma is salvaged by her growth in self-knowledge. The author's affectionate touch is apparent; Austen has written into Emma the set of virtues she most esteemed as appropriate and desirable for young women to strive towards achieving. These primary virtues — amiability, constancy, a sense of duty, and self-knowledge — must come to fruition for Emma to become socially and spiritually actualized. Without these, a character cannot grow into full personhood. As the novel begins, Emma contains the roots of these virtues, but they are undeveloped. She must grow out of her childish self-importance and recognize the value of each of these virtues. Then she must, with maturity and assurance, adopt them as guides for her own behavior. Thus, Emma may become a heroine because she is made of suitable raw material, i.e. she possesses the virtues of constancy, amiability, the ability to gain self-knowledge and a sense of duty. Emma learns from her own mistakes and, ultimately, quests for greater spiritual fulfillment.

The Stages of Emma's Spiritual and Social Quests

Emma is an unusual character in Austen's repertoire. No other wealthy, free-spirited character possesses the requisite virtues for serving as an Austen heroine. Wealthy, spoiled and meddling might describe Emma. How does Austen write a spiritual quest into such a novel with such a heroine?

Again relying on Christ's heuristic, readers begin by identifying any stages of nothingness or recognition of nothingness in Emma's life. On first glance, there may seem to be none. This view, however, might be too shallow. What is Emma's nothingness? First, readers learn early in the novel that Emma is motherless. Knightley says to Mrs. Weston, "Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest of her family. . . . And ever

since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her. She inherits her mother's talents, and must have been under subjection to her" (37). With no mother to guide her, Emma grows up with indulgence and pampering. She has no one to contain her excesses; no one to direct her development. A great gap exists where Emma's mother should be.

Emma's greatest duty and the second most prominent factor in Emma's nothingness is her lack of freedom from her father. She has no real freedom from her filial duty, and her sense of duty to her father is so great that she will sacrifice any personal happiness for him. "Emma spared no exertions to maintain this happier flow of ideas, and hoped . . . to get her father tolerably through the evening" (9), and her "soothing attentions" (107) are always directed first toward her father. Emma refuses Knightley's first proposal of marriage by answering "While her dear father lived, any change of condition must be impossible for her. She could never quit him" (448). Her future belongs to Mr. Woodhouse, as long as he lives.

A third example of the nothingness in Emma's life concerns her education. Emma lives most of her girlhood ignoring the directions of her doting governess, Miss Taylor. After Miss Taylor becomes Mrs. Weston, Emma is entirely on her own. From the first page of the novel, the narrator asserts that Emma has had "rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (5). This fault and its resulting emptiness follow her to the final moments of the novel. Emma has been guilty of toying with other people's lives but sees her matchmaking as "the greatest amusement in the world" (12). Other people seem to exist solely for her entertainment. In the same way that she dabbles in the lives of her neighbors, she dabbles in art and study. Emma

talks more about reading and steadiness of pursuits than she actually practices. Knightley says that "Emma has been meaning to read more ever since she was twelve years old. . . . But I have done with expecting any course of steady reading from Emma. She will never submit to any thing requiring industry and patience, and a subjection of the fancy to the understanding" (37). Emma has only moderate accomplishments in art, intellect, and music. With her advantages, her talents should be superior. They are not, and this lack creates a center of nothingness in Emma's life.

Emma describes herself as an "imaginist" (335), which Knightley interprets as all "fancy and whim" (98). Emma's imagination, her romantic naivete, her "fancy" and her lack of education, combine to form part of the negative experience of her life. Like Catherine Morland in Northanger Abbey, she lives in a romantic world of her own creation, little related to the reality in which other adults live. This fancy and this arrogance, gentle as readers might want to make them, could be exceedingly damaging to a young woman. Emma is a gossip. She is jealous of Jane Fairfax (166), childish at times (336), and most importantly self-deceived. Emma does not know herself; she does not know her own heart. Until she confronts her own motives and actions in greater depth, she will not achieve a true spirituality. As an immature young woman, Emma does not see the existence of the cage which holds her. She must awaken to the depths of the nothingness in her life to begin her spiritual quest.

Seldom does Austen use traditional mystical conversion as the means of awakening for her characters. More often, she uses an awakening such as Christ describes wherein "the ability to see or to know is within the self. . . [and whose] grounding in the powers of being often leads to newfound self-awareness and self-

confidence" (Diving 18, 21). Emma, having her quest thrust upon her, awakens to see her life situation. She recognizes the depths to which she has fallen or might fall; she has gossiped about Jane Fairfax when she should have been her friend; she has humiliated Miss Bates, an older woman living in poverty, and she has nearly ruined Harriet's chances of a decent marriage. Emma seeks to redress these situations, but she must, on one hand, understand the social milieu in which she finds herself and, on the other hand, she must repent in Austen's Christian terms for her own lack of virtue or insight.

As Emma awakens in her spiritual quest to the reality of the social order in which she lives, she changes her own attitude about that social order. Her early comments concerning social status and separation of classes show a support for boundaries which exist. She says to Harriet while discussing the Martin family,

> The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is therefore in one sense as much above my notice as in every other he is below it. (29)

While Emma cannot remove the social structure which exists around her, she need not support the snobbery which keeps it in operation. She awakens to her own failure when she awakens to the inhumanity of her position. Through Mr. Knightley's suggestion and through her experience with Harriet, Emma comes to view this yeomanry in a different light.

> She had no doubt of Harriet's happiness with any good tempered man; but with him [Martin], and in the home he offered, there would be the hope of more, of security, stability, and improvement. She would be placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself; retired enough for safety, and occupied enough for cheerfulness.

> She would be never led into temptation nor left for it to find her out. She would be respectable and happy. (482)

Emma's experience with people in social classes lower than her own will continue to improve, as will her attitude towards them, as she becomes mistress of the estates. She learns to understand that all people are to be judged by the quality of their person.

Significantly, Emma asserts that she has fallen short in another area of her social duty: her "woman by woman" duty to Jane Fairfax. Her self-criticism shows Emma's capacity for self-knowledge. She is unable to acquit herself of this unfortunate behavior.

> Perfect happiness, even in memory, is not common; and there were two points on which she was not quite easy. She doubted whether she had not transgressed the duty of woman by woman, in betraying her suspicions of Jane Fairfax's feelings to Frank Churchill. It was hardly right; but it had been so strong an idea, that it would escape her, and his submission to all that she told, was a compliment to her penetration which made it difficult for her to be quite certain that she ought to have held her tongue. (231)

This moment of self-doubt, while still clouded with misconception, reveals Emma's deeper sense of right. She has failed to keep her duty to Jane as a woman.

Similarly, as Knightley later points out to her, Emma's ill-treatment of Miss Bates is made fundamentally worse because of the woman's fallen social and economic position, both of which will worsen as Miss Bates ages and her resources dwindle. According to Austen, the wealthy must dutifully care for such women, and, perhaps not ironically, obviously after her own father's death, Austen, her mother and her sister are women like these who must be helped by wealthier relatives. Emma knows enough and cares enough to minister, as a lady would, to the poor in her community and to women less fortunate than herself. She acts out of kindness and necessity without being asked or directed.

Because she does not know her own heart, Emma continually makes poor decisions or behaves in unseemly ways, as the picnic incident reveals. Emma insults Miss Bates in banter: "Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her [Emma's] manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her" (371). Knightley rebukes Emma for her behavior. "Were she your equal in situation—but, Emma, consider how far this is from being the case. She is poor; she has sunk from the comforts she was born to; and, if she live to old age, must probably sink more. Her situation should secure your compassion. It was badly done, indeed!" (375). Emma, of course, immediately recognizes her mistakes in propriety and with shame attempts to correct her errors. She visits Miss Bates to apologize for her harsh, biting words and begins the process of creating a relationship with Jane Fairfax, which jealousy has prevented for years. She wants to heal the wounds she inflicted in ignorance and restore her position of good grace with her friends.

Another of Emma's awakenings concerns the quests of people around her. Most people quest for earthly, physical rewards — money, position, power, and prestige. As much as any woman of her day, Emma already has these. Through the example of Mr. and Mrs. Elton, Austen shows how this earthly quest takes practical shape. Emma responds to the patronizing attitude taken by Mrs. Elton. Mrs. Elton elevates herself in conversation by offering to introduce Emma socially to other friends: "It was as much as Emma could bear, without being impolite. . . . She restrained herself, however, from any of the reproofs she could have given, and only thanked Mrs. Elton coolly. . . (275-276). Emma separates herself from the crassness of such people and through the development

of her own self-awareness, she awakens to the fruitful potential of her own life. For what, then, does Emma quest, and how are her gains made apparent?

Only through brief moments of self-awareness and self-examination in which her awakenings mingle with the final stage of spiritual questing, naming, do readers see that Emma learns to critique her own behavior and to understand her failure to grow spiritually. Without these moments of questioning, self-doubt and self-reflection, Emma could not achieve greater meaning in her life. While her outward behaviors seem to suggest that she does not listen to or heed advice, Emma often questions herself after being prompted. Her brother-in-law suggests to Emma that Mr. Elton's attentions are being directed at her and not at Harriet. "Instead of forgetting him [Mr. Elton], his behaviour was such that she could not avoid the internal suggestions of 'Can it really be as my brother [in-law] imagined? can it be possible for this man to be beginning to transfer his affections from Harriet to me?—Absurd and insufferable!'" (118). Her questioning is apparent, but at this point in the novel, her discomfort is rejected. Emma believes that she cannot possibly misjudge the emotions or the motives of others. Only a very young woman could feel so certain of her own insight.

In each of the instances of her mistakes, Emma serves as an example for the young women reading Austen's novel. The mistake does not define Emma; her response to the mistake, her willingness to accept responsibility and her awakening to its true meaning do. She cannot grow if she does not make mistakes and learn from them. Throughout the novel, readers find descriptions of Emma's regret. After "quiet reflection" her "perturbation" is lessened (133). She feels shame, she desires to be humble and discreet (142). She is uncomfortable with herself (179) and recognizes the

sting of her own conscience: "something in it which her own heart could not approve" (185). Fortunately and significantly, Emma criticizes herself, showing that she has right intention in her heart even when she does not manage to achieve it in her conduct.

Significantly, many of Emma's moments of insight or awakening occur in nature. Christ discusses the role of nature in women's spiritual awakening and identifies ". . . women's exclusions from culture as one reason for their mystical experiences with nature . . . . Whether or not women really are closer to nature than men, cultural attitudes and cultural roles have encouraged women to develop a sense of their own affinity with nature" (22). In brief comments, Austen shows Emma's movements and reflections. "Every moment had brought a fresh surprise; and every surprise must be matter of humiliation to her. . . she sat still, she walked about, she tried her own room, she tried the shrubbery—in every place, every posture, she perceived that she had acted most weakly . . ." (411-412). She awakens slowly and torturously to the errors of her own behavior. "To understand, thoroughly understand her own heart, was the first endeavour. To that point went every leisure moment which her father's claims on her allowed, and every moment of involuntary absence of mind" (412). In natural settings, Emma's mind opens to her own mistakes.

She also finds tranquility in nature.

> The weather continued much the same all the following morning; and the same loneliness, and the same melancholy, seemed to reign at Hartfield—but in the afternoon it cleared; the wind changed into a softer quarter; the clouds were carried off; the sun appeared; it was summer again. With all the eagerness which such a transition gives, Emma resolved to be out of doors as soon as possible. Never had the exquisite sight, smell, sensation of nature, tranquil, warm, and brilliant after a storm, been more attractive to her. She longed for the serenity they might gradually introduce. . . . (424)

Emma has awakened to her heart's inner workings. She knows that she is in love with Knightley. She finds comfort in the natural world, where Austen matches the scene to her heroine's emotions. Emma seeks to name her recognitions to all involved: Knightley, Harriet, the Bates women and Jane Fairfax.

Coming to terms with her practiced misjudgment, Emma finds what she should have known all along: she will marry Knightley. But, it is not the discovery that is most important here. It is Emma's struggle, the outcome of which helps her understand that one cannot see into another's heart and that finding the truth of one's own heart is a livelong task. To achieve a life consisting of meaning beyond physical behavior, one must know oneself. Until this point, Emma has not known herself. Emma's spiritual quest has taken her from arrogance and misjudgment to insight and identification. She comes to know who she is, what her world is like, and what the guiding principle of her life should be. Emma's *telos* becomes recognizable; she quests to deserve the blessings of her life, to join a peer in a loving, respectful marriage and to grow to fulfill her social responsibilities to the larger community.

Conclusions

The process of becoming rational is the process of becoming adult and the process of becoming moral. Knightley outlines Churchill's faults in failing to reach this maturity. It is this same, ordinarily gender-driven process which Emma undertakes in this novel. Her growing awareness is compared to similar processes in several of the other characters and is not defined or limited by gender. Knightley is already a man, but he is not always right. Churchill has much growing to do which he will do under the guidance of Jane

Fairfax. Emma is launched on this road to rational adulthood, and readers observe her progress.

Emma's social growth is expected and usual. She ultimately marries a man of greater wealth and higher position than herself who improves the circumstances of a young woman who already has a high standard of living. Had Austen hoped to launch a frontal attack on the class structure of her time, she indeed might have had Knightley marry the unpolished, illegitimate Harriet. This does not seem to be the writer's goal. Austen shows Emma's personal and spiritual growth through a number of painful and embarrassing experiences, so that the young woman comes to deserve (or nearly deserve) the fate which is ultimately hers.

Self-knowledge cannot be over-valued. Without it, one cannot act wisely or virtuously, as the scene with Miss Bates shows. Without understanding, the virtues of amiability and constancy are useless, hence Austen's concern with the psychology of her characters. Emma believes that she has a well-developed understanding and a clear knowledge of herself. She faces the truth through a painful process of self-recognition and gains self-command in the process.

Throughout the novel, there is a balance between Emma's blundering and her sense of regret at her actions. Repeatedly, Knightley chastises Emma, sometimes gently and sometimes harshly, and she responds confidently that she is right while secretly doubting her own judgment. As children will do, Emma makes herself more comfortable by casting doubt on to others, but like Anne Elliot, Emma seeks a time and place for quiet reflection and contemplates her errors. "But her mind had never been in such perturbation, and it needed a very strong effort to appear attentive and cheerful till the

usual hour of separating allowed her the relief of quiet reflection" (133). In these moments, Emma finds herself. She discovers the deep principles instilled by Anne Weston and confronts her mistakes:

> Every part of it brought pain and humiliation, of some sort or other; but, compared with the evil to Harriet, all was light; and she would gladly have submitted to feel yet more mistaken—more in error—more disgraced by mis-judgment, than she actually was, could the effects of her blunders have been confined to herself. (134)

And again,

> The first error and the worst lay at her door. It was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together. It was adventuring too far, assuming too much, making light of what ought to be serious, a trick of what ought to be simple. She was quite concerned and ashamed, and resolved to do such things no more. (136-137)

Such self-reproach prevents the reader from condemning Emma too harshly. As she continually blunders, she continually seeks redress and, through these trials and errors, grows into that rational adult described by Knightley.

When it comes to love, Emma's naiveté is most apparent, and her errors most numerous. She has no experience with romance or marriage but believes that she can see into the hearts of others. She imagines what she believes love to be and then fancies herself, and everyone else, in it.

> Emma's eyes were instantly withdrawn; and she sat silently meditating, in a fixed attitude, for a few minutes. A few minutes were sufficient for making her acquainted with her own heart. A mind like her's, once opening to suspicion, made rapid progress. She touched—she admitted—she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself! (407-8)

Emma has had little occasion to suspect her own heart, but her intelligence and understanding are acute; once she begins to doubt, she sees the full range of her mistake. She awakens, has insight into her life and names her errors and her hopes to others. What remains is to seek to correct her mistakes and to change her conduct to avoid these errors in the future.

> Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness, had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world. (408)

Only a strong measure of self-doubt and self-examination will ensure this.

With this novel, Austen shows that amiability, constancy, duty and self-awareness are necessary for spiritual growth. She establishes a scale to measure her characters' goodness, while stepping away from the gendered virtues proclaimed by the conduct books. She launches into her own explanation, not unlike Wollstonecraft's, on why and how men and women must go beyond the constraints of traditional definitions of virtue. They must stand as partners under one set of regulations and behaviors, rooted in spirituality, requiring women as well as men to develop these virtues and to educate themselves to their fullest potential. Emma's quest has taken her from arrogance to humility, from childishness to maturity, and from self-deceit to understanding. Only after achieving these might she join Knightley as an equal partner, with social as well as spiritual support, in marriage.

Notes

[1]See Laura Mooneyham White, "Jane Austen and the Marriage Plot: Questions of Persistence," 71-86.

[2]See Margaret Kirkham's discussion "Emma" in Jane Austen: Feminism and Fiction in which she says, "This has led to the belief that Emma is a novel of education in which all the learning is done by the heroine, all the instruction provided by the hero. . .," [but she goes on to argue that] "Mr. Knightly is as ignorant as Emma about the state of his own feelings. . ." (133). Also see James Boyd White, "Conversation, Rational and Playful: The Language of Friendship in Jane Austen's Emma."

Chapter Six
Persuasion:
The Story and the Quest

Austen's novels show that a woman's struggle for place in society is a struggle for recognition of her spirituality, that as a spiritual as well as a physical entity, she has value. Each heroine's story establishes new patterns of behavior for women and, in the process, offers new means to achieve a more fulfilling social and spiritual life. In the articulation of experience that is Anne Elliot's story, Persuasion reveals Anne's quest for social and spiritual actualization. Considered as an example of Carol Christ's definition of social and spiritual questing, Anne Elliot exemplifies the nature of a woman's life quest where "whole thinking looks forward to the realization of spiritual insight in social reality" and where,

> [i]n a supportive community, women will be eager to point out the false naming of power and value within patriarchy and to begin to name self, power, and value anew based on their experiences. They will be eager to create new ways of being in a new social world. (Diving 130-131)

Anne Elliot has no supportive community. Persuasion is the story of her life, eight years after rejecting a marriage proposal. Her rejection, based on the well-meant advice of her surrogate mother, Lady Russell, has colored her life and shaped her values over the time since its occurrence. Anne suffers from a lack of place in her family and a lack of value as an unmarried woman in her society, until her lost fiancé, Capt. Wentworth, returns as a wealthy, successful man. The novel's conclusion leaves readers with a glimpse into Anne's new naming of self and power and value and into her future, where she finds this supportive community among Capt. Wentworth's family and friends.

The tension in this story lies in Anne's silent suffering of her fate and in her inability to speak frankly with Capt. Wentworth to reveal her feelings and to know his. Austen uses this story of found love, lost love, and love recovered to examine the efficacy of a woman's living by the virtues and spiritual and social rules outlined in the conduct books of the time, and in the general societal acceptance of a woman's role as a passive one. Anne struggles with what she believes to be appropriate and right behavior, then suffers terrible consequences because of her decisions. Her conscience, however, remains her greatest ally and support. Although she is deeply unhappy with the circumstances of her life, she comes to terms with her own decision-making processes and blames the cultural rules for shackling women.

Persuasion is Austen's last finished novel, and Anne Elliot is her last heroine. Unlike Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price but much like Emma Woodhouse, Anne has a family whose title and position give her an element of personal freedom which the earlier heroines do not possess. Anne's family, however, has lost financial security because of her father's inept financial management and insistence on living beyond the family means. The Elliots can no longer afford a lifestyle of casual wealth. Unlike Emma, Anne has a soberness grown from disappointment and loss and a self-awareness which the girl, Emma, does not yet possess. Austen writes about Anne in a letter to her niece, Fanny Knight: " . . . of Novels and Heroines;—pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked. . . . You may perhaps like the heroine, as she is almost too good for me" (Letters 23 –25 March 1817). Anne Elliot is not unlike Fanny Price in Mansfield Park. While both characters seek to be good, Fanny's path follows a more explicitly

Christian philosophy than Anne's does, but in her moments of reflection Anne's spiritual quest becomes apparent.

Anne harbors a system of beliefs and values based on a rational consideration of virtue. Like most members of the eighteenth-century Church of England (and perhaps even the contemporary one), the evidence of Anne's spirituality is found in the decidedly social nature of her concern for other human beings.[1] An active spirituality is apparent in an individual's life choices: behaviors, values, choice of partner, parenting style, or in Austen's value system – amiability, constancy, duty and self-knowledge. Austen's character tries to live her life guided by these virtues. The working-out of her behavior, however, shows how too strict an adherence to the conduct book definitions of these virtues nearly destroys her. Anne Elliot must find a new way to live by these values.

In "Rhetoric and Gender in Jane Austen's Persuasion," Arthur E. Walzer argues that our understanding of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory might be enhanced by a close reading of Austen's novel (688). Walzer explores the rhetorical matter of Austen's novel while examining the works of Francis Bacon, George Campbell and Hugh Blair. "Austen's treatment of persuasion in the novel contributes to our understanding of eighteenth-century rhetorical theory. The result is a reading that sees Persuasion as endorsing Anne's conventionally feminine values, her receptivity and sociality, over Wentworth's stereotypical masculine firmness and autonomy" (689). In this discussion, Walzer's description of conventionality, receptivity and sociality might be subsumed under Austen's heading of amiability — a genuine openness to and caring for others.

Walzer says that Blair, Campbell and other rhetoricians "distinguish persuasion as intended to lead to action, therefore as directed toward the will and requiring emotional

appeal" (690). Because the rhetorician can potentially control this, "Susceptibility to persuasion is associated with a weak will, a character flaw. The only weapon the listener has to resist. . . is critical reason" (693). Thus the gender stereotypes are again upheld in rhetorical theory. Women are assumed to have weaker wills and are less capable of resisting persuasion than men because their abilities to reason are weaker. Walzer asserts that Austen rejects this stereotyping and argues that "the morality of a choice is at least as much a question of feeling, of being open to the concerns of others, of recognizing others' needs, as it is of reason and self-control. . . " (696) and "a persuadable temper might indicate an affectionate heart, rather than a weak will, and a mind characterized by a discriminating moral sensibility rather than by a timid suasibility" (697). Although Walzer's discussion of a "discriminating moral sensibility" makes up a small portion of his essay, it is the heart of this dissertation. The conduct books teach a dichotomy of good and evil, apparent in gender-based virtues. Women were stereotyped as having weak wills and requiring guidance. Obedience to more knowing individuals, then, was taught as one of the preeminent feminine virtues. Austen shows that Anne's new consideration of these virtues actually represents a feminist approach to spiritual behavior.

According to a computer search of this novel, Austen uses various forms of the word persuade thirty-two times. Her usage includes noun and verb forms and shows examples of nearly every character being persuaded by someone into doing or believing something. There are characters whose internal persuasions set their value systems, characters who are persuaded by others to behave well or badly, persuasions made on the side of safety, and characters remaining unpersuadable. Austen does not use one

definition for this term or even one viewpoint. She explores the variety of rhetorical uses of the word and, in Anne Elliot's case, examines how persuadability may represent good or ill in a character's makeup. In Austen's new story for young women's lives, persuadability cannot be assumed as a positive quality in a young woman's character.

In Persuasion Austen considers virtue and its consequences as she addresses the conduct book virtues of duty, obedience, and propriety. Austen imbues her heroine with the feminine virtues important in eighteenth-century culture and allows her heroine to follow the rules of obedience and passivity and then shows the consequences. In Persuasion, Austen shows that strict obedience to the conduct book guidelines does not lead to success in life, to happiness, or to any kind of spiritual or social fulfillment. Anne realizes, in repeated moments in the novel, that her following of the traditional guidelines has prevented her growth and fulfillment, and only when she steps beyond these boundaries does she really begin to grow.

As noted earlier, for Austen, appropriate behavior goes beyond obedience, beyond manners and beyond propriety to encompass a moral code founded on amiability, constancy, duty and self-knowledge. Not only does the strict acting-out of the conduct book virtues not lead to happiness, it also does not make a woman virtuous; it does not make a woman's life a spiritual journey. Strict adherence represses choice, represses reason, and cannot, even in eighteenth-century terms, lead to behavior which might be considered moral. Austen shows that a woman must find the quest in her own life, make rational decisions about her own behavior and work to achieve her own growth. In a delicate balancing of all of these virtues and by tempering each with reasonable consideration of situations, Austen carries Anne into a life of self-respect and humility,

with a strong sense of feminist justice. The author refutes the theories of eighteenth-century rhetoricians, undermines the narrow definition of virtue espoused by the conduct books and gives Anne Elliot's life that element missing in the standard conduct book definitions: the adventure of a spiritual quest.

Like all of Austen's heroines, Anne is proper, good and, in many ways, isolated from the people closest to her. She is neither foolhardy and highly visible like Emma Woodhouse nor overly timid and retiring like Fanny Price. Anne Elliot is a complex and intelligent woman with a strong sense of morality. Her strong reliance on reason is a testament to her will to good. She is "in her temper, manners, mind, a model of female excellence" (159) as Mr. Elliot and Lady Russell agree. Although by this point in the novel readers know to question these characters' honesty and judgment, respectively, this description holds true for Anne from the beginning. While Anne's actions might be misinterpreted, her will to do her duty and to will good for others is always apparent. An early example shows her concern. In breaking her engagement with Wentworth at Lady Russell's behest, Anne makes her decision on the basis of both obedience to Lady Russell and of benefiting Wentworth in the long run:

> Had she not imagined herself consulting his good, even more than her own, she could hardly have given him up.—The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for his advantage, was her chief consolation . . . . (28)

By establishing Anne's intentions for Wentworth's good above her own happiness, Austen approaches the Kantian value system in which virtue is its own end and acts are good only as they reflect one's will to do good. Anne's real happiness exists in making others happy, not in achieving her own happiness.

Austen gives the reader ample opportunity for observing the development of Anne's strong moral code. A few examples point up the relationship between the choices Anne makes and the guidelines established by the conduct books. More often than not, Austen uses Anne to undermine the conduct books' oversimplification of morality and often shallow depiction of women's moral and intellectual abilities. In Persuasion, Austen focuses on the actions and inactions of her characters, which in turn often reflect on the conduct books' insistence on the separation of women's private sphere from men's public one. The primary virtues extolled in Persuasion are lifted straight from the Christian language of the conduct books. Austen focuses on obedience, duty, propriety, self-knowledge, amiability, and constancy but redefines how these virtues work in a woman's life, often upholding them in ways not outlined in the conduct books. In the first of these, for example, strict obedience to parents is emphasized in most conduct books. The writers fail to address the problems which might arise if a young woman has an unscrupulous or shallow father, like Sir Walter. Thomas Gisborne, in Enquiry, states that education should seem useful to the child or the child should demure to the wisdom of the parent or teacher giving it (73). Richard Allestree says in The Ladies Calling that a "daughter is neither to anticipate, nor contradict the will of her Parent" (177). Unquestioning obedience, which these writers support, does not develop a woman's critical reasoning ability or allow her to make choices of moral consequence. She must learn this on her own, as Austen shows through Anne Elliot's behavior, as she first obeys and as she later asserts her own positions. Anne's initial obedience comes close to ruining her life, but through the experience, she comes to understand that while

obedience may not always be the best choice, in this case, Anne's sense of duty to Lady Russell outweighs the value of her own choice.

Her caring, amiable nature is strengthened by her sense of duty, but Austen tests the limits of a woman's duty when she has Anne adhere to a strict obedience. For example, Anne's sense of duty to her guardian, Lady Russell, is clear and understandable but is nevertheless drawn into question over Lady Russell's misguided advice. Despite Austen's own disclaimer, Anne's amiable nature does not make her inhumanly good. She considers her own perceptions and motives before taking action, but she makes mistakes. Had her initial obedience to Lady Russell been a mistake? When Anne's mistakes are made obvious, they embarrass her and cause her to withdraw and consider how her motives might complicate and obscure her perceptions, as they do when she and Lady Russell spot Wentworth on the street. Anne attributes deliberate snubbing to Lady Russell and is later embarrassed by her own assumptions (179). Regardless of these perceptions and motives, Anne maintains an appropriate sense of duty to others to the extent that her own morality supports it. Lady Russell's advice was mistaken; Anne would not give such advice to someone in a similar situation. Anne's obedience and sense of duty to Lady Russell was not a mistake. Hence, Anne says that, given the situation again, she would respond in the same way. She would obey.

Anne's sense of duty is more tempered toward her father. He is a man of no moral consequence. As a father he deserves no such respectful attention, but Anne gives to him what is proper to give, while recognizing that he is deficient and feeling sorry that this is the case. None of Austen's fictional parents give sound advice to their children; Anne's father frequently shows poor judgment, but Anne refrains from admonishing him:

> Mrs. Clay, who had been present while all this passed, now thought it advisable to leave the room, and Anne could have said much and did long to say a little, in defence [sic] of her friend's not very dissimilar claims to theirs, but her sense of personal respect to her father prevented her. She made no reply. (158)

Anne's personal integrity is more important to her than a moment's pleasure in setting straight a family in which she is unloved, disrespected, and ignored. Anne's duty to her father is to respect his authority and refrain from admonishing him; her obedience is to the good in which he should, but does not, instruct her.

Anne's example contrasts strongly with Sir Walter's definition of propriety. On this same issue of Anne's visits to Mrs. Smith, Sir Walter says:

> "Westgate-buildings!" said he; "and who is Miss Anne Elliot to be visiting in Westgate-buildings?—A Mrs. Smith. A widow Mrs. Smith,—and who was her husband? One of the five thousand Mr. Smiths whose names are to be met with every where. And what is her attraction? That she is old and sickly. —Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Every thing that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms, foul air, disgusting associations are inviting to you." (157)

As this scene shows, Sir Walter measures a person's worth by name, connection and wealth. Mrs. Smith has none of these, and Sir Walter is appalled by Anne's continued friendship with her. He does not understand that Mrs. Smith may be more than the sum of these three parts. The only issues of propriety important to Sir Walter concern appearances. How does it look to others that a woman of Anne's social stature descends to the level of poorer friends and visits unfashionable, unsavory neighborhoods? Sir Walter has no charitable feelings for the poor; they offer no entertainment and no social status to draw his attention. Not only does he show his own lack of charity in this passage, he gives no value to Anne's caring nature. Anne judges her father rightly when she tries to warn Elizabeth of the possible detrimental effects of a relationship between

Mrs. Clay and Sir Walter: "With a great deal of quiet observation, and knowledge, which she often wished less, of her father's character, she was sensible that results the most serious to his family from the intimacy, were more than possible" (34). In this particular instance, Anne ascertains the possibility of marriage in this relationship and the negative effects of such a marriage on her family. Austen establishes Anne's pattern of behavior, the combination of observation, thought, and subsequent action, early in the novel. Encouragement of such logical behavior seldom appears in the conduct books, where evaluation or decision-making is often eschewed in the tautology of obedience. With such a family lacking in moral consequence, Anne must redefine obedience and redefine duty and satisfy her own moral sense. She must decide what is reasonably owed to them and to herself.

The most important virtues of Austen's characters, however, do not arise from duty or obedience or even propriety. Persuasion focuses primarily on constancy, and, in all of Austen's novels, constancy and amiability are the cornerstones of virtuous women; Anne Elliot possesses both virtues abundantly. In this novel, Austen directly considers the strengths and weaknesses attributed to women: their weakness of mind requiring obedience to others; the expectation of attention to Christian duty, especially the caring for husband, children and home; and the expectation of amiability, seen as a particularly feminine attribute. Constancy, however, has a different history. The debate is outlined by Captain Harville and Anne late in the novel:

> We [women] certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions. (232)

Anne argues that by cultural design women have fewer distractions to move their attentions from their own feelings. Once in love, she says, it is harder for women to forget. Capt. Harville responds: "I believe the reverse. I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that as our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather" (233).

Anne refutes his position by pointing out that women are more long-lived than men, showing the feminine strength of body. Their discussion continues, each debating the given theories on which sex is more constant and why, until Harville says, "I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say upon woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness. But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men" (234). Anne affirms his statement: "Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing" (234).

As a plot device, Anne's debate with Harville verges on *dea ex machina*; it serves the purpose, however, of showing Anne's continued feeling to Wentworth who overhears them. As a discussion of Austen's position on constancy and her belief in women's ability to sustain this virtue, it is a fine piece. Too often the male writer gives an inaccurate account of woman's constancy, in much the same way that Wentworth has misinterpreted Anne's sense of duty. So, while speaking for her author, Anne asserts that the stories which have been told to women and about women have shortchanged them. Women's lives, virtues, weaknesses and life directions have had no fair representation. Austen

seeks to change that by offering her novels as the new stories of women's lives, offering truer pictures of women's spiritual and social struggles.

Austen uses Anne to subvert traditional female behavior through a variety of narrative devices, in just the way that Walzer argues. Austen inverts standard gender roles and allows Anne to take on the "manly" behavior of relying on reason to guide her. Austen goes so far as to offer a replacement for the meek, waiting woman: a contemplative woman who knows her own mind and understands and accepts her personal responsibilities. She does not accept, however, the typical masculine versions of reason and reasoned behavior. Austen adds a spiritual dimension by blending reason with the character's desire to achieve spiritual goals, to live virtuously exhibiting amiable and constant behavior. Readers understand Anne's acknowledgment of her fate, to live alone and without love, as an outgrowth of her virtuous constancy. She is not fickle or quick to change her mind or shallow in her affections or too swift to change her allegiances. All of these traits are cause for celebration in Austen's view. Anne Elliot contemplates, makes moral decisions, upholds her beliefs through appropriate actions, and is constant in her vigilance to virtue and to love. Anne's place in her universe, then, reflects the changing circumstances of her life, her growing awareness of those circumstances, and the effects of her actions on those changes. Her spiritual quest takes precedence over her social quest throughout the novel. Until the novel's conclusion, it seems that Anne Elliot's status in the social world cannot change.

Stages of Anne's Spiritual and Social Quests

The stages of Anne Elliot's quest are quite clear. There are recursive moments of nothingness, awakening, insight and naming throughout the novel. Anne quests for

wisdom and for comfort from her dedication to virtue. She foresees only more nothingness in her social position in the world but seeks spiritual comfort to support her.

The nothingness of Anne's life is clear. Like Elinor, Emma and Fanny, Anne has struggled through adolescence without support. Anne is literally motherless, just as Emma is. "[S]he had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste" (47). Lady Russell, while imperfect, is the only mother Anne has had for years. Again, like these three earlier heroines, Anne's father is also useless as a spiritual guide or comfort. Her father is even less of a father than the doting, foolish father in Emma; Sir Walter Elliot, more than being simply shallow and vain, shows active animosity towards Anne.

Anne struggles with this animosity and with the change in her person since she rejected Wentworth's marriage proposal. The great cost in this circumstance seems irredeemable, that rejection, occurring years before the novel begins, has left her physically depleted and lonely.

> A few years before, Anne Elliot had been a very pretty girl, but her bloom had vanished early; and as even in its height, her father had found little to admire in her, (so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own); there could be nothing in them now that she was faded and thin, to excite his esteem. (6)

This passage from the narrator's perspective confirms Anne's loss of beauty, but also shows Sir Elliot's harsh behavior towards his daughter. Later in the novel, Wentworth's own words are reported back to Anne through her sister, Mary: "You were so altered he should not have known you again" (60). The physical and emotional losses seem irrecoverable.

Her sister, Elizabeth, also has little feeling for or respect for Anne. On the family's relocating to Bath, Mary and Elizabeth discuss Anne's potential moving with the family: "'I cannot possibly do without Anne,' was Mary's reasoning; and Elizabeth's reply was, 'Then I am sure Anne had better stay, for nobody will want her in Bath'" (33). Anne's thoughts are revealed:

> To be claimed as a good, though in an improper style, is at least better that being rejected as no good at all; and Anne, glad to be thought of some use, glad to have any thing marked out as a duty, and certainly not sorry to have the scene of it in the country, and her own dear country, readily agreed to stay. (33)

She feels the slight of her family's rejection of her and seeks only to have some purpose in life, to serve some need.

Anne's acknowledgment of her place in the world, of the nothingness of her life, is only the start of her spiritual journey. While a necessary component, knowing who she is and what she represents is only the beginning. Having these, Anne moves through a series of events which make up, in essence, the stages of her spiritual growth or the trigger moments which allow this growth to occur. In Persuasion, as in most of Austen's novels, the heroine seeks solitude to examine the events, the characters, and the choices which make up her life and, in many of these solitary, quiet moments, makes important decisions.

Anne is a deeply self-reflective woman. She regularly seeks physical solitude and time to understand herself and to awaken to forces which determine the direction of her life. She draws back from social situations and evaluates her own performance and possible mistakes. In one of several important passages, the heroine is uncharacteristically ". . .at liberty. In her own room, she tried to comprehend it" (166).

Whatever the situation, Austen often shows her heroine resolving emotional and ethical questions privately. Besides critiquing situations, Anne applies this reasoning equally to personal behavior. On learning of Mr. Wentworth's marriage, and mistaking it to be that of Capt. Wentworth, she responds:

> She could now answer as she ought; and was happy to feel, when Mrs. Croft's next words explained it to be Mr. Wentworth of whom she spoke, that she had said nothing which might not do for either brother. She immediately felt how reasonable it was, that Mrs. Croft should be thinking and speaking of Edward, and not of Frederick; and with shame at her own forgetfulness, applied herself to the knowledge of their former neighbour's present state, with proper interest. (49)

Whatever Anne's personal reaction to news or people, she attempts to control that response and behave appropriately, much as Elinor does in Sense and Sensibility when she preserves the social front while Marianne sulks. Despite their personal suffering, both heroines maintain personal dignity and the propriety of the situation, as their value systems dictate. For example, "Anne suppressed a smile, and listened kindly" (64), or "Anne's shudderings were to herself, alone: but the Miss Musgroves could be as open as they were sincere, in their exclamations of pity and horror" (66). Both examples show Anne's attention to others' feelings (her genuine amiability), the propriety of her own actions, and her genuine insight into the nature of other people and her world.

During a quiet evening alone, Anne rationally re-evaluates her past and assesses her own responsibility for her situation, gaining insight into the realities of her life through contemplation. Anne names the problem and criticizes the situation. Her behavior has been limited by the cultural mandates on women's behavior. She has not been free to speak her mind or her devotion to Wentworth or to her family. Austen makes clear that destruction has fallen on Anne because she has followed these mandates.

In her critique, Anne makes an important observation on the abilities of men and women to act publicly.

> She would have liked to know how he felt as to a meeting. . . . Had he wished ever to see her again, he need not have waited till this time; he would have done what she could not but believe that in his place she should have done long ago, when events had been early giving him the independence which alone had been wanting. (58)

Had Anne been in Wentworth's position, she would have acted, but, as a woman she felt bound by propriety to wait. She obeyed Lady Russell; she obeyed the dictates of propriety while condemning them. While she cannot seek Wentworth, she does not understand his inaction and sees it only as anger and rejection. Anne recognizes the flaws in the patriarchal system of power. She recognizes that her own access to happiness and fulfillment has been thwarted by this system which expects women to be passive in their actions and in their spirituality. She condemns Wentworth for failing to act, a mistake she would not have made had she the freedom of more direct action.

On seeing Wentworth for the first time in eight years, Anne is nearly overcome. She escapes from the room saying, "'It is over! it is over!' . . . Mary talked, but she could not attend. She had seen him. They had met. They had been once more in the same room! Soon, however, she began to reason with herself, and try to be feeling less." The narrator continues: "Alas! with all her reasonings, she found, that to retentive feelings eight years may be little more than nothing" (60). This scene emphasizes Anne's battle with her feelings, her duty, and the situation in which she lives, and in almost every instance, Anne matures spiritually and emotionally through observation of others and through evaluation of her own actions and motives. "She hoped to be wise and reasonable in time; but alas! alas! she must confess to herself that she was not wise yet" (178). It

is very late in the novel before Emma Woodhouse can make such a statement of self-awareness. Anne is much more mature than Emma from the start, and her will to good survives even these crises of family. Anne has not achieved a state of perfection, however; she won't, she can't, but she is capable of keeping vigilant watch over her own faults and weaknesses. She can continue to grow, and the trials she faces allow her to do so.

In "The Look, the Body, and the Heroine: A Feminist-Narratological Reading of Persuasion," Robyn Warhol discusses another instance of Anne's growth over time, citing a maturing of her attitude toward Mrs. Musgrove, from matrophobic to understanding:

> After Louisa's injury, Mrs. Musgrove is lightly satirized for her preoccupation with young people's danger of being bumped on the head, but the tenderness of her concern for her daughter is treated with perfect seriousness. The shift in narrative attitude toward the emotional mother's body suggests a development in Anne's own increasing comfort with female bodily experience, and indicates that maternity, tenderness, and physicality can come together in Anne's own experience of marriage in the end. (18)

This change might also reflect both Anne's spiritual and social maturity; she continues to grow, simultaneously developing a more mature and womanly view of motherhood and marriage and learning to extend more compassion to others because she understands more clearly all human weaknesses. She moves closer to her own new naming of her body and her future role as mother and wife.

The outcomes of Anne's continuous inner questing also upset the normal gender boundaries of conduct. Readers see moments of Anne's spiritual growth and evidence of the new territory into which Austen takes her heroine. Anne remarks to Mrs. Smith on the nature of virtue and negatively defines her own spiritual, in this case Christian, values in the process:

> There is always something offensive in the details of cunning. The manoevers of selfishness and duplicity must ever be revolting, but I have heard nothing which really surprises me. . . . I have always wanted some other motive for his [Mr. Elliot's] conduct than appeared. (207)

Christian virtues do not include cunning, selfishness, and duplicity. Anne's remarks are especially important because they apply the virtues to both men and women. In this case, Mr. Elliot falls short of being a true Christian, but as the earlier discussion of Emma shows, women can fall prey to these weaknesses as well. Both Emma and Jane Fairfax suffer the consequences of their own deceits. Stated in positive terms, unselfishness, artlessness, and honesty are virtues to be practiced actively by men as well as women. Anne seems always conscious of trying to live by this value system and of holding other's behavior up to its measure.

The final three chapters also contain numerous references to Anne's insights and awakenings into the nature of herself and her world. Her need for quiet contemplation reflects her desire to understand and see more. In the last pages, comments such as these abound: "Anne went home to think over all that she had heard" (212) and "[His potential response] was left to Anne's imagination to ponder over in a calmer hour" (225). Anne desires solitude to sort out her feelings and thoughts and to balance these feelings with appropriate behavior.

> Half an hour's solitude and reflection might have tranquillized her; but the ten minutes only, which now passed before she was interrupted, with all the restraints of her situation, could do nothing towards tranquillity. Every moment rather brought fresh agitation. (238)

Anne finds it impossible to settle her thoughts and feelings when she is surrounded by others. The cultural mandate of always supervising or chaperoning women stands in the way of Anne's reasoning process.

> The absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle. . . . Would they only have gone away, and left her in the quiet possession of that room, it would have been her cure; but to have them all standing or waiting around her was distracting, and, in desperation, she said she would go home. (238)

In such a moment of extreme emotion, Anne wants nothing more than to have privacy to consider her feelings and to experience them without the restraints of propriety, without an audience. She cannot awaken to the deepest meaning of a situation while the demands of polite society keep her attention focused outward. Anne needs to escape to solitude to gain understanding, to reason through her feelings.

Part of Anne's struggle for purpose in life becomes apparent in moments when she must deal with more public situations. Readers see this when Anne evaluates Mrs. Smith's character: "Anne had reason to believe that she [Mrs. Smith] had moments only of languor and depression, to hours of occupation and enjoyment. How could it be?—She watched—observed—reflected—and finally determined that this was not a case of fortitude or of resignation only" (154). The scene serves several purposes; it gives credibility to Mrs. Smith's character so that we might believe her later explanation of Mr. Elliot's true self, but primarily, it testifies to Anne's thoughtful life. While Anne goes on with her life, paying attention to propriety and duty, she contemplates and makes decisions actively. She is not a blank cipher waiting to be filled by a father's or a husband's wisdom. She determines to make herself useful to others, to find meaning in giving to those who might value the gift.

Anne's perceptions, sometimes accurate, sometimes flawed, are used to reveal, among other things, the status of her own questing. Often, her perceptions are the only

clues to other people's feelings. In one example, readers see Anne's inaccurate assumptions. Anne delineates Wentworth's thoughts and actions:

> He had thought her wretchedly altered, and in the first moment of appeal, had spoken as he felt. He had not forgiven Anne Elliot. She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity. (61)

This speculation elevates his character and undermines hers. Anne seems to be speculating about what has happened inside Wentworth's head. The reader does not understand Wentworth's true motives until he reveals these, finally, to Anne. At that time, late in the novel, Anne's desire to see attachment in his behavior is vindicated. As Robyn R. Warhol explains, Austen's literary feminism is apparent in this novel in the author's management of focalization: "her use of Anne Elliot as the central consciousness through which the story gets transmitted" (Novel 6). Warhol argues:

> At the simplest level, it means that the novel's heroine must be almost obsessed with the act of looking, an activity which . . . was not associated with female characters in the novels of Austen's predecessors. This heroine has to look, for the conditions of narration depend entirely on her observing everything that ought to be told. (6)

Austen combines two tasks. First, narratively, Anne supplies the eyes and consciousness for seeing, reporting and evaluating all of the events of the novel. This, in itself, represents a strong feminist bent in Austen's story-telling. The second purpose achieved through this technique is to show Anne's spiritual and social growth over the period of the story and to show how her spiritual and social quests carry her through these events.

During the long walk to Anne's home when she and Wentworth are at last alone, they explain their motivations and perceptions. Later, Anne says, "I have been thinking

over the past, and trying impartially to judge of the right and wrong, I mean with regard to myself. . ."(246). Wentworth admits his own stubbornness when he answers, "But I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice. This is a recollection which ought to make me forgive every one sooner than myself" (247). Together, they assert that each bears guilt in maintaining their separation. Had Wentworth acted six years before, the couple would not have suffered so. Had Anne been more direct in her explanations or stronger in taking a stand, he might have understood her acquiescing to Lady Russell's persuasion. In the shadow of his misinterpretation, Anne's succumbing to persuasion seems to represent a fundamental lack of character. When Austen finishes her story, readers are convinced that the fundamental lack of character is Wentworth's. Had his code included Anne's devotion to constancy, their separation would have been short-lived.

In subtle ways, Anne's behavior represents a subversion of the gender code of behavior and morality. Anne's attempts at reasoned contemplation and subsequent action show the physical and emotional restrictions normally placed on women. Anne's dilemma is to renegotiate her life decisions and move closer to spiritual fulfillment. She has identified the nothingness of her life; she has awakened to the restricted nature of her own happiness. She has insight into the cultural boundaries which prevent her acting openly as she might desire, and she names her own value, her own potential sexuality and motherhood and aligns herself with a new supportive community. Anne Elliot maneuvers through this spiritual quest, keeping her personal value system intact.

Conclusions

Out of the near tragedy of Anne's life, her greatest spiritual blossoming occurs. She recognizes the restricted nature of the life she has led and establishes herself outside of those boundaries. She looks forward to a supportive community among the relatives and friends of Capt. Wentworth as she leaves her father's home and creates with her husband the new territory of her life, a territory in which friends and family appreciate the fineness of her spirit and intellect, a decided shift from her life with her actively hostile father and sisters. As Devoney Looser writes in "Jane Austen 'Responds' to the Men's Movement," "Austen's women would seem to offer even skeptics of feminism a palatable cultural compromise between doormat and feminazi; Elinor, Emma, and Elizabeth (not to mention Catherine, Anne, and Fanny) are women who can say 'no' and mean it but who will —it can be counted on—at one time or another say 'yes' (159). Anne gains personal power as she redraws, in physical and emotional terms, the boundaries of her life. She acknowledges the weakness of the patriarchy in which she lives, particularly the "false naming of power" as Christ terms it; she condemns that life by leaving it and looking forward to growth, potential and power in her own, new world.

Despite her adversity, Anne maintains a strong sense of virtue and allows nothing, not even her own potential happiness, to destroy what she alone has built — an almost Kantian code of conduct following the Christian ideals of the time. In this respect, Anne is much like Darcy in Pride and Prejudice or Knightley in Emma; each knows his place and performs his duty and works for good in spite of personal complications. Eighteenth-century manly virtue flows from contemplation into the action of proper behavior, and Austen shows in Anne that it should spring freely in both men and women. Alistair

MacIntyre states in After Virtue, "Hence a rational morality will lay down principles which both can and ought to be held by *all* men, independent of circumstances and conditions, and which could consistently be obeyed by every rational agent on every occasion" (45, his emphasis). Austen applies the universality of this statement by making the masculine pronoun generic and assuming that "every rational agent" includes all thinking women as well.

By performing her duty to Lady Russell and obeying her direction to reject Wentworth, Anne Elliot asserts her firm belief in the importance of duty and remains constant to her own standard for virtuous behavior. Ultimately, Anne accepts Wentworth on her own terms and finally persuades others that her standard of behavior shows amiable virtue, not stereotypical feminine weakness of will, not suasability.

Anne and Wentworth celebrate by professing their continued attachment to each other: "There they returned again into the past, more exquisitely happy, perhaps, in their re-union, than when it had been first projected; more tender, more tried, more fixed in a knowledge of each other's character, truth, and attachment; more equal to act, more justified in acting" (240-41). Anne's social quest, unacknowledged but eventually achieved, is a reunion with her chosen love in an equal partnership in which both parties are equal to act and more justified in acting. In this union, Anne will find status, economic and emotional independence (from her birth family) and the appreciation of those new family and friends mentioned earlier. How is this union also the culmination of Anne's spiritual quest?

The narrator steps in and explains the responses of others to the second engagement of Anne and Wentworth. In this case, as Anne says to Wentworth:

> . . . I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her advice. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides; and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean, that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience. I have now, as far as such a sentiment is allowable in human nature, nothing to reproach myself with; and if I mistake not, a strong sense of duty is no bad part of a woman's portion. (246)

She justifies her past actions to him by explaining in detail her obligation to Lady Russell and to her own value system. Any other behavior would have undermined her sense of her own virtue. In the discussion of Anne's constancy, the differences between her understanding of the term and Wentworth's masculine perspective become apparent. He would have persuaded her to reject this advice and her own sense of duty to accept him. In Austen's scheme, he would have been equally wrong, as Walzer's essay argues.

Anne's decision to obey Lady Russell and reject Wentworth has been the heart of her greatest struggle and the impetus for her greatest growth. She has come to terms with her earlier decision and maintains that it was the correct and proper one for her to make. Anne has succeeded, however, in overcoming the harshest consequences of that decision and has grown in the process. She is a stronger, more assured woman when she agrees to marry Wentworth. Her spirituality is intact.

Understanding Austen's use of Kantian philosophy makes Anne's true strength undeniable. Anne and Wentworth survive the ordeal with a clearer appreciation of each other and with a personal sense of humility. Their marriage should serve as an even stronger example than those of the Crofts and Harvilles of the value of dedication to virtue and to continued spiritual growth. Their mutual dedication to good should also, in

this case, make them both happy, as Anne has said earlier, "however oddly constructed such happiness might seem" (58). Readers know that Austen's last great heroine blossoms spiritually and socially just as she does physically; her bloom returns, but in a maturer form, and Anne becomes a stronger spiritual beauty.

Notes

[1] See Ernest Campbell Mossner's Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason: A Study in the History of Thought., J. S. Reynolds' The Evangelicals at Oxford 1735 – 1871 and Alfred Plummer's The Church of England in the Eighteenth Century for discussions of the changes in the role of the church and for explanations of the important theological debates of the period.

Epilogue

Jane Austen's novels served her nineteenth-century female readership in a variety of ways. A primary goal of this dissertation has been to demonstrate, through an examination of four of Austen's heroines' spiritual and social quests, the extent to which Austen's novels portray a new narrative of questing for her nineteenth-century readers. Clearly Austen avoids flagrant, external displays of spirituality and seems to avoid (and lampoon) those who do. Neither the writer nor her heroines mistake spiritual pretension for spiritual substance. Each of Austen's heroines shows creativity and growth through questing and trial, ultimately achieving a more active spirituality. Each story explores the many avenues of women's spiritual and social questing, and in sharing these avenues with her readers, Austen meets one of Carol Christ's measures of a spiritual quest; she "brings women's experiences and visions out into the open and through sharing transforms them from private into public reality" (Diving 128).

In Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance (1997), Cheryl Glenn writes about women's place in the history of rhetoric, their place in developing western culture since the time of the Greeks, and the differences between their actual lives and the portrayal of those lives in the public reality of literature. She says,

> For the past twenty-five hundred years in Western culture, the ideal woman has been disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement). Little wonder, then, that women have been closed out of the rhetorical tradition, a tradition of vocal, virile, public—and therefore privileged—men. (1)

This state of being silent, chaste and confined applies equally to women's role in spiritual affairs. As she discusses historiography, in which "the real and the discourse" are connected as one, Glenn questions: "As we resist the paternal narrative of rhetorical history, we are all working as if the real and the discourse were actually being joined in our texts, on our maps. We have no choice, for how can we know the world except through the words, ideas, beliefs it constructs?" (6). Austen's literature offers the remapping which Glenn describes by examining beliefs and sharing new definitions of words and new ideas with her readers. Her readers might, then, re-construct their worlds by using the examples of Austen's heroines as new maps for guiding the reality of their lives. Historically, the majority of narrative possibility was limited to that described by men for women. With men as the primary writers of literature, even literary versions of female voices were unreal. Glenn explains some of this rhetorical history of male writers writing in female voices: "That same male-written literature did little to transform women's apparently private and passive virtues into the public, active attributes that were so valuable to the conduct of the commonwealth and to participation in civic life. Women's literary voices, then, were dubbed. Men were doing the actual speaking" (136). This dubbing, according to Glenn, continued from the Renaissance through the conduct book and novel writing of the late eighteenth century. In her novels, Austen creates heroines speaking in authentic situations in authentic female voices giving her readers new, female models to follow.

How does Austen present this new territory? Readers can see the pattern of Christ's quest paradigm in Austen's novels. Her heroines identify the nothingness of their lives and positions in society, awaken to truth, gain insight into themselves and others and

find new ways to experience spirituality in the world. Austen offers the experiences of her heroines as role models for her readers. She awakens her readers to the silences in women's experiences which her heroines live. She names the pain which women might suffer and uses emptiness as an occasion for insight where the ability to face darkness is a strength, not a weakness. Austen criticizes the restrictive nature of her own culture which victimized women. She shows that women's problems are often sociological not personal and individual and that the circumstances creating these problems are often patriarchally supported.

In Sense and Sensibility, Austen shows that Elinor evaluates her own ability to act morally, to preserve her personal integrity and constancy. She shows the strength and reward in virtue and self-command. Austen contrasts Elinor with the conduct book heroines who are guided away from decision-making and directed toward obedience. Elinor quests for spiritual fulfillment when her chances for social fulfillment seem destroyed. She recognizes the emptiness of her life and the external forces which have created this emptiness; yet, Elinor struggles spiritually and socially to find herself and to find her place in the world. Austen's readers might identify with these struggles and find their own strengths to persevere.

Fanny Price in Mansfield Park shows Austen's readers that women might be constant and might determine their own codes of conduct. Readers see in Fanny a woman who might also be more moral and more constant than men. Austen shows that real women need not succumb to the stereotype of female inconstancy which other literature perpetuated. As the novel suggests, women in the early nineteenth-century were expected

to be docile, domestic and malleable. Fanny Price asserts herself and her values and, through her spiritual struggle, achieves both happiness and social success.

Emma Woodhouse shows that even women who have position, wealth and power might still find ways to grow both spiritually and socially. Emma also explores the nothingness which exists in women's lives despite the position, wealth and power which they might have achieved. Emma refutes the accepted definition of ladyhood concomitant with this success. She is not a meek, demure, obedient Lady. She shows that real women are strong, passionate and self-assured. They are not selfless, passive, silent, obedient or demure. A woman's true spirituality expresses itself actively.

Persuasion reinforces this active expression of spirituality. Anne Elliot's obedience and passivity nearly destroy her, physically and spiritually. She comes alive spiritually when she leaves timid suasibility behind and asserts her own new consideration of virtue. She represents a new feminine approach to spiritual behavior, one in which she guides herself and accepts her own value system and decision-making processes. Anne does this while maintaining a deep sense of obligation and consideration for the feelings of others.

Austen's heroines stand in particular contrast to the models which adherence to the conduct books would create. In both the actions and moral codes of Austen's heroines and the gaps that exist between them and the conduct book heroines, readers see the new territory Austen is creating for women's spiritual lives. In Poisoning the Minds of the Lower Orders, Don Herzog, in his discussion of women, conduct book writers and reading, says that, "Instructing women on their duties, Thomas Gisborne trembled at the thought of those circulating library texts, 'devoured with indiscriminate and insatiable

avidity. Hence the mind is secretly corrupted'" (66). Gisborne worried about the corrupting influence of fiction on the spiritual lives of young women. Herzog uses an irreverent quote from The Life of Johnson to exemplify typical attitudes towards women's spiritual behavior: "Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized[sic] to find it done at all." Herzog adds a more serious response from The Constitution and Order of the Congregational Church:

> One Congregationalist church permitted men to discuss any matters of policy that came up; "the sisters have the liberty of silently expressing their consent or dissent" (no mean feat), "but it seems plain from scripture they have no right of deliberation and reasoning." (424)

Austen's fiction teaches her readers to participate more fully in spiritual quests by becoming better readers of good fiction, forsaking this silence and taking on the responsibilities of deliberation and reason. The eighteenth and nineteenth-century codes for women's spiritual and social behavior constrained their personal development. Austen's fiction works to remove some of these constraints.

James Boyd White writes about such a shift in When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitutions of Language, Character, and Community. He includes Austen in his discussion of the reconstitution of language, the effect of this reconstitution on fictional character and community, its translation into the real world of the readers. When he writes about Emma, he says,

> One hears Jane Austen's voice in new ways, asking new questions, making new comments, and in the process one moves into an increasingly confident and intimate understanding of the text and its author. . . . [T]his is an ethical literature that includes among its central concerns the character of the reader . . . . This text teaches its reader to value himself [sic], and in doing this it teaches him the seriousness of the questions: who he is, who he becomes. (186)

Austen's fiction serves to move her readers to introspection. The heroines are of use particularly to nineteenth-century readers, serving as examples of the new ways in which women might experience their own spirituality. In writing about Austen's novels, White says, "At the end, if the book has done its work and we have done ours [as readers], we have become better readers, and for Jane Austen this means better people as well. This is a moral fiction, not because it teaches us that vice is punished. . . but by virtue of the capacities for perception and being that it realizes in its reader" (16). White explains that the value of a text is found in the community it establishes between the author and the reader. "It is here that the author offers his reader a place to stand, a place from which he can observe and judge the characters and events of the world he creates, indeed the world itself" (17). Austen stands in judgment of her world, and she teaches her readers to do the same.

In his introduction to Myth and Literature: Contemporary Theory and Practice, John B. Vickery writes that "the real function of literature in human affairs is to continue myth's ancient and basic endeavor to create a meaningful place for man in a world oblivious to his presence" (ix). Carol Christ's paradigm of a woman's spiritual and social quest takes this search into female and specifically spiritual territory. Jane Austen's fiction explores the nature of the spiritual realm and connects it concretely to the social worlds of her heroines and her readers, both of whom search for meaningful places in worlds often oblivious to them. The spiritual journey is within, but it propels the physical body along in the not-so-numinous world.

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