

VISION AND VISIBILITY: JANE AUSTEN'S OBSERVERS

**VISION AND VISIBILITY:  
POWER AND THE OBSERVER  
IN  
JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS**

**By**

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## Abstract

This thesis explores looking and being looked at in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* using psychoanalytical and Foucauldian approaches. In the first approach, a male spectator exerts power over a female object by gazing at her with desire. In the second, a gaze of surveillance exerts power over and disciplines the subjects in its sight.

*Pride and Prejudice* features several desiring gazes, particularly in ballroom and portrait scenes, where men not only gaze at women, but women actively labour to draw the desiring gaze. Moreover, women in the novel also gaze at men with desire. The novel also explores the limitations of the desiring gaze, class-based gazes, and the glance, which is based upon mutually-encoded knowledge rather than desire.

Looking in *Mansfield Park* operates like Foucault's panoptic gaze, in which perpetual visibility creates self-disciplining subjects. One such subject is Fanny Price, who learns to suppress her desires under the watchtower-like gaze of her uncle. The instability of *Mansfield Park* and of the panoptic gaze is exposed by the pervading theme of spectatorship, which empowers a passive observer such as Fanny and allows her to get her heart's desire.

In *Emma*, Foucault's theory of subjectivity is applied to gossip, which functions in conjunction with a community gaze to control the behaviour of Highbury's citizens. *Emma* undermines the authority of this gaze, as well as the gazes of characters such as

Emma, Mr. Knightley, and the Eltons, favouring instead a gaze that makes distinctions based upon passion rather than self-interest.

In *Persuasion*, the gaze draws attention to the heroine's body and her hidden inner self. Anne Elliot recognizes the limits of the community gaze of Bath, and can therefore express her inner feelings while still within its gaze. In *Persuasion*, the gaze is not resisted, but indifferently tolerated.

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## *Introduction*

# **Vision and Visibility: Jane Austen and the Gaze**

In one of the most emotionally-charged chapters of *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot and her family attend a concert where she hopes to see Capt. Wentworth, whom she loves, though she is uncertain if he loves her in return. Their concert encounter is characterized by an inability to make eye contact that thematically echoes their inability to openly communicate in the novel. During the intermission, Capt. Wentworth finally, slowly approaches Anne, who is seated at the end of a bench with a vacant space beside her. Their conversation consists of a gradual warming of looks and glances that begins with Capt. Wentworth expressing his disappointment with the singing:

Anne replied, and spoke in defence of the performance so well, and yet in allowance for his feelings, and so pleasantly, that his countenance improved, and he replied again with almost a smile. They talked for a few minutes more; the improvement held; he even looked down towards the bench, as if he saw a place on it well worth occupying; when, at that moment, a touch on her shoulder obliged Anne to turn around.—It came from Mr. Elliot. (190)

Austen builds tension in the scene by repeating short phrases of the same length and cataloguing Anne and Wentworth's gradual progress. The dash releases the tension, though not in the hoped-for manner, for the promising conversation is interrupted by Mr. Elliot, Anne's supposed suitor according to local gossip. When Anne turns back to Wentworth, he bids her "a reserved yet hurried sort of farewell" (190). Jealous of a man who he believes is a rival, he abruptly leaves the concert room, declaring that "there is



nothing worth my staying for” (190). In this scene, the fragile web of glances and looks disintegrates.

This passage illustrates the importance of acts of looking in Austen’s novels, especially for her heroines, who are often forced to convey or interpret the most intimate communications within a crowded social setting. Tony Tanner argues that Austen’s works deals with the recurring issue “of private communication in a predominantly public world in which various taboos on certain forms of direct address between the sexes are still operative” (235). Overcoming this problem requires a reliance upon observation, or what Tanner terms a “recourse to the eye” (236). Despite attending a public concert in full view of all those in the audience, Anne Elliot attempts to ascertain Wentworth’s feelings towards her by conversing with him, and observing his looks and gestures during the conversation. One theory of the gaze postulates that a gaze can indicate desire, and another that it can be a means of controlling others through surveillance. In this passage, looking is both sexually and politically charged. Though Anne never stares at Wentworth with a sustained gaze, her attempts to catch his eye (188) and her resolution to exchange at least “one friendly look” (189) before leaving signals an obvious sexual interest. Yet Anne and Wentworth’s tentative, frustrated dance of looks and glances takes place within a larger gaze, that of its audience, which resorts to watching its own members when there are no performers on the stage. As a result, Anne must obey the rules of social decorum and turn to Mr. Elliot when he requests her attention, even if she prefers to converse with Capt. Wentworth. She temporarily cedes authority to this other gaze and dutifully

translates a passage for a distant relation, but when she is “her own mistress again” (190), Anne turns back to Capt. Wentworth, and looks for the person who she wants to see.

At its most basic level, the gaze is what Douglas Murray calls “the ways in which men and women see, are seen and respond to being seen” (“Gazing” 42). A concept derived from Freud, the gaze has become a means of psychoanalyzing ocular relations between the sexes. In her seminal article “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” feminist film critic Laura Mulvey suggests that cinema satisfies a “primordial wish for pleasurable looking” (17), a wish that Freud calls scopophilia. Mulvey presents the scopophilic, desiring gaze along gender lines: the displayed object is always female, the spectator always male. This gendered concept of looking is echoed and extended in John Berger’s oft-quoted *Ways of Seeing*, in which he posits that “*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47). Like Mulvey, Berger suggests that the acts of looking and being looked at fall along the gender divide. However, Berger attributes an additional awareness to the female objects who “watch themselves being looked at.” The power of the desiring gaze lies in its ability to control the (female) object, as Kaja Silverman demonstrates in her analysis of Thomas Hardy’s *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*: “Within that novel the gaze never innocently alights on its object. Rather, it *constructs* its object through a process of colonization, delimitation, configuration and inscription” (7).

What happens, though, when the female object turns the desiring gaze back upon the male spectator? Beth Newman aligns the returned gaze with Freud’s reading of

Medusa, suggesting that when a woman looks back, she “asserts her ‘existence’ as a subject, her place outside the position of object to which the male gaze relegates her and by which it defines her as ‘woman’” (1032). To look back becomes the most powerful act a woman can perform because the power to control the gaze is subverted and taken over by the female object. Newman cautions, however, that even though looking back empowers a woman, it still maintains the spectator/object hierarchy. Reversing the positions of male and female does not allow the woman to escape “patriarchal specular relations” (1032): “Such a masquerade can register a protest against the gender conventions it mimics, but there is no clear evidence that it can dismantle them” (1033). In a similar vein, Douglas Murray adapts the term scopophilia to describe “a desire to attract the attention of male gazers” (“Gazing” 45). While this also maintains the spectator/object hierarchy, Murray’s re-conception further empowers the woman by implying that the female object derives pleasure from being looked at. Pleasure in specular relations is not limited to the male spectator.

While much critical attention to the gaze rests upon psychoanalytical concepts of desire and lack, the gaze can also be considered in terms of discipline and surveillance. In *Surveiller et Punir (Discipline and Punish)*, Michel Foucault outlines the rise of the modern prison system using Jeremy Bentham’s concept of the Panopticon. Never built, the Panopticon was designed to ensure the continuous and full visibility of its inmates. It was a proposed prison consisting of,

at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the

windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. (200)

The aim of the panoptic structure is to ensure discipline by presenting the possibility that one could be watched at any one moment. The central watchtower is designed to hide the presence of the guard from the inmates, preventing them from knowing if or when they are being watched at any particular moment. The continual threat of observation becomes a state of constant observation, and the watchtower stands as a permanent reminder of this perpetual visibility. As a result, Foucault postulates, power functions automatically upon the panoptic subjects, for they always behave: “visibility is a trap” (Foucault 200).

The presence of the desiring gaze in Austen’s novels is pervasive. One of her most prolific gazers is Fitzwilliam Darcy, the hero of *Pride and Prejudice*. Chapter one examines the various gazes in *Pride and Prejudice* with a specific focus on the ballroom and portrait scenes, and female scopophilic objects such as the ever-assiduous Miss Bingley. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the ballroom gaze combines a desiring gaze with a Foucauldian, evaluative gaze to further the economic concerns of marrying well. It emanates from a critical yet desirous public eye that understands the value of two rich, eligible bachelors newly arrived upon the neighbourhood marriage market. *Pride and Prejudice* also details, then subverts, the operations of the desiring gaze, for Austen’s female characters notice themselves being noticed, and by acting scopophilically and drawing the male gaze, are capable of employing this gaze to attain their own ends.

Finally, *Pride and Prejudice* presents an alternative way of seeing, the glance, which operates upon shared knowledge rather than a hierarchy of power.

Chapter two continues an exploration of the sexual nature of gazes, specifically those that are turned towards *Mansfield Park*'s shy and timid heroine, Fanny Price. It also examines how Foucault's theories of the panoptic subject can be applied to the novel and the way in which the Mansfield Estate operates upon principles of power similar to those pervading the Panopticon. The prison-like qualities of Mansfield Park notwithstanding, the most notable parallel occurs in the figure of authoritarian patriarch Sir Thomas Bertram, who functions as a figurative guardian in the watchtower. The dissonant ending and the recurring, insistent theme of spectatorship question the construct of a panoptic gaze and subject creation, and ultimately, the novel's troubling ending undermines all that comes before it.

In Chapter three, the problem of the unstable narrative voice of *Emma* is explored in relation to its narrative gaze, which proves to be equally unstable. Gossip in *Emma* operates upon principles later laid down by Michel Foucault, and derives its power by distributing its authority amongst all the households of Highbury. In *Emma*, this community gaze, the desiring gaze and even the glance are also shown to be vulnerable to manipulation, as is the gaze of supposed authority figure Mr. Knightley. *Emma* ultimately privileges sincere, exclamatory declarations, which have their ocular equivalent in the intense communicative looks exchanged by Emma and Mr. Knightley. Additionally, Emma must adjust her gaze and begin making distinctions based upon passion rather than vanity and self-interest.

This thesis concludes with an examination of the interaction of an inner self with the public world. In *Persuasion*, the gaze functions to draw attention to both the female and male body, and the narrative gaze specifically creates an inner life and inner self for the heroine, Anne Elliot. A novel concerned with the development and relationship between an inner and outer life, *Persuasion* favours Anne's inner gaze over the superficial gazes of her family, a superficiality that is echoed in the Bath gaze. To look is not enough in *Persuasion*, however, for Anne must speak and articulate her inner emotions before the novel can be resolved. What sets Anne apart from other heroines such as Fanny Price, who resists Sir Thomas's panoptic gaze, is an ability to coexist with the gazes around her. Anne does not resist the Bath gaze, but merely accords it the limited respect it deserves.

Owing to space and time constraints, I will be unable to examine Austen's two other completed novels<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, while the chapters of this thesis are linked by the theme of looking, it would be reductive to attempt to impose a single argument upon these four novels. Austen began the first, *Pride and Prejudice*, in 1796 (Le Faye 4), and finished *Persuasion* in 1816 (Le Faye 11). Since the writing of the novels occurred over a period of twenty years, it would be difficult to argue convincingly that Austen wrote with a single, sustained attitude towards the gaze and the complexities of looking. Each

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<sup>1</sup> For an application of Foucault's theories of reading the body to *Northanger Abbey*, see Paul Morrison's "Enclosed in Openness: *Northanger Abbey* and the Domestic Carceral" in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 33.1 (1991): 1-23. Claudia L. Johnson discusses the gender politics of the gaze in *Sense and Sensibility* in "A 'Sweet Face as White as Death': Jane Austen and the Politics of Female Sensibility" in *Novel* 22.2 (1989): 1-23. The theme of observation is also prominent in Austen's last work,

chapter treats the novels as distinct from one another, although comparisons do arise. The comparisons, however, are not meant to be read in terms of Austen's development of an ultimate theory of looking. Rather, they are intended to illuminate intriguing points, and illustrate instead the diversity within and richness of the Austen canon. It is a body of work in which a famously figuratively-blind heroine who has "never seen the sea" (*E* 101) can be followed by heroine who lingers and gazes "as all must linger and gaze on a first return to the sea, who ever deserve to look on it at all" (*P* 96)<sup>2</sup>.

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the fragment of the novel *Sanditon*, as Juliet McMaster discusses in "The Watchers of Sanditon" in *Persuasions* 19 (1997): 149-159.

<sup>2</sup> I have used the generally accepted standard abbreviations for Austen's novels in this thesis: *NA* for *Northanger Abbey*, *SS* for *Sense and Sensibility*, *PP* for *Pride and Prejudice*; *MP* for *Mansfield Park*, *E* for *Emma*, *P* for *Persuasion*, and *L* for the *Letters*.

*Chapter One*

**The Limits of Looking: Gazing and Glancing in *Pride and Prejudice***

*“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.”*

– *Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen’s famous, ironic maxim that begins *Pride and Prejudice* sets the tone for a novel which encompasses at least four weddings, as well as one supposed elopement and one foiled one<sup>3</sup>. Marriage is as much a priority in the novel as it is for Mrs. Bennet, who considers getting her daughters married “the business of her life” (5). Mrs. Bennet’s overwrought enthusiasm is rooted in economics, stemming from the legal entail that prevents any Bennet daughter from inheriting her father’s estate and providing her with financial security. Each Bennet daughter will inherit a paltry lump sum of £1,000 after the death of her parents, which, invested at four percent per annum, will only provide her with £40 a year to live on (106). Additionally, entailing the estate away from the female line means that an unmarried Bennet sister must rely on others to provide her with a home as she grows old. Charlotte Lucas makes this point abundantly clear when

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<sup>3</sup> They are, respectively: the marriages between Charlotte Lucas and Mr. Collins, Lydia and Wickham, Jane and Mr. Bingley, and Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy; the elopement of Lydia and Wickham; and the attempted elopement of Georgiana Darcy and Wickham. The novel also mentions in passing the marriage of Col. and Mrs. Forster, the hoped-for marriage between Georgiana Darcy and Mr. Bingley, and the peculiar engagement between Mr. Darcy and Anne de Bourgh.



she marries the “irksome” Mr. Collins “solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment” (122). Marriage of this kind in Austen is a “business” indeed.

This kind of business of marriage is conducted in drawing rooms, at dinners and during country walks, but it is most predominant in the public spectacle of the ballroom. “To be fond of dancing,” the narrator only half-facetiously tells us, “was a certain step towards falling in love” (9). While most critical attention on the ballroom draws parallels between dancing and marriage, only Jacqueline Reid-Walsh suggests that in the ballroom, Austen’s heroines are “the subject of much gazing and criticism from the people around them” (“Entering” 123). Among other “arenas of courtship” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (115), the ballroom could be considered a marriage market of sorts, one in which people are displayed and display themselves to attract potential mates. In Austen, the ballroom becomes the place where the desiring gaze meets the gaze of discipline, where discipline in the form of decorum becomes the desired currency with which men are evaluated as potential husbands for the “surrounding families” (*PP* 3) who view them as, to use a modern phrase, “marriage material.”

Fanny Price’s coming out ball in *Mansfield Park* best illustrates the way in which a ballroom can display one’s suitability for marriage. Marking Fanny’s formal entrance and “first appearance” into society (266), the ball signals her emergence as a marriageable young woman. Not comprehending that the ball is being held specifically for her, Fanny herself hopes only to “dance without much observation” (267). Fanny Price, in fact, is a young woman who shrinks from any gaze or look that is turned in her

direction. As Douglas Murray notes, Fanny “does not relish the gaze of others” (“Spectatorship” 14), and “most fears the male sexual gaze turned upon her” (15). In “Gazing and Avoiding the Gaze,” Murray coins the term “scopophobic” to describe the need to escape being seen (46). While Murray applies this term to Elizabeth Bennet’s desire for occasional solitude and Anne Elliot’s cultivation of invisibility, it also quite accurately describes Fanny’s personality. As a result of her scopophobic nature, Fanny is an acute observer of those observing her. Fanny does not ‘look back,’ thus returning the gaze and disrupting the perceived power of the male spectator, but her sensitivity to being looked at conveys the intensity and pervasiveness of the gaze in the ballroom.

Fanny’s sensitivity begins with the “horror” she experiences upon learning that Sir Thomas expects her to occupy the place of honour and lead the ball (275), and continues until “she could suppose herself no longer looked at” (276). Those looking at Fanny find many admirable qualities, ones which the narrator ironically lists in seemingly increasing order of importance: “She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas’s niece and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour” (276). It is an intriguing list, cataloguing Fanny’s attractive physical appearance, her modest personality, her social status as Sir Thomas’s niece, and the fact that a suitor has already marked her out as desirable. The criteria for the marriage market have been established.

The connection between the ballroom and the marriage market is most clearly presented in Sir Thomas’s motives for holding the ball. Though he shares William’s wish to see Fanny dance, Sir Thomas also uses the ball to test Henry Crawford’s feelings for

Fanny. He is not disappointed: “the suspicions whence [...] this very ball had in a great measure sprung, were well founded. Mr. Crawford was in love with Fanny” (280). The narrator furthers the comparison when ironically commenting on Sir Thomas’s motives for sending an exhausted Fanny up to bed before the ball is completely over: “It might occur to him [Sir Thomas], that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness” (281). The analogy is clear: a ball is an ideal way to display Fanny’s marriageability by revealing her persuadableness as a niece and wife.

The shift from the smaller, private ball at Mansfield Park to the larger balls in *Pride and Prejudice* introduces a new element into the network of marriage and gazing, that of a public gaze. The balls in *Pride and Prejudice* certainly contain a fair number of desiring looks, most notably Mr. Darcy’s frequent, uncontrollable stares directed at Elizabeth Bennet. The first time Darcy appears in the novel, however, he is presented through a public perspective rather than from the point of view of a single spectator:

Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Mr. Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration. (10)

Echoing the criteria used to evaluate Fanny Price, Mr. Darcy’s handsome physical appearance is soon established, as is his immense personal wealth. Intriguingly, the spectators in this case gaze at a male object, and both the male and female gazes are desirous, focusing on Darcy’s physical appearance. At this point of the ball, Mr. Darcy is the most desirable new arrival, with Mr. Bingley running a close second. While not all

the ladies desire Darcy for themselves, they could (like Mrs. Bennet) desire him on behalf of their unmarried daughters, nieces, friends or neighbours. Sir William Lucas calls a marriage between Jane and Mr. Bingley “a certain desirable event” (92), and Miss Bingley ironically uses the term to tease Darcy about his admiration of Elizabeth’s fine eyes (52). Bingley and Darcy’s desirability as husbands rests upon their large fortunes. Significantly, desire does not characterize Charlotte and Mr. Collins’s marriage. Rather, Charlotte acknowledges her “desire for an establishment” (122) as her primary incentive to marry. Desire in a marriage market, then, is based on economics. It is a displaced desire that points to a lack of eligible, rich, young men in the community.

The power inherent in the ballroom gaze is an evaluative one. Aided by the public eye, public opinion soon determines that Mr. Darcy is “the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world” (11). His character, once revealed, counts against Mr. Darcy and favours Mr. Bingley, who displays “such amiable qualities” as making himself agreeable, dancing every dance, and talking of giving his own ball at Netherfield (11). In the ballroom, how well a person conducts himself also affects his value as a future husband. And while there are certainly no complaints over Darcy’s monetary fortune of ten thousand a year, he loses popularity through his inappropriate behaviour and rather too strict adherence to decorum.

Decorum, in fact, was a word that permeated the eighteenth-century ballroom. In “‘Entering the World’ of Regency Society: the Ballroom Scenes in *Northanger Abbey*, ‘The Watsons’ and *Mansfield Park*”, Jacqueline Reid-Walsh outlines what she calls the “stringent rules of etiquette” that must be followed during a ball. Men have the power of

asking while women have only the power of refusal; a woman can only legitimately refuse if she is pre-engaged to another partner (as Elizabeth regretfully is to Mr. Collins) or if she decides not to dance at all that evening (117). If a woman misapplies these rules, she could be penalized by being forced to sit out the next two dances (117). Additionally, “a woman who turned down a proposal from one partner must not dance with another” for that same dance (Adams 56). Elizabeth, for example, refuses the clumsy Mr. Collins’s invitation to dance again, but is annoyed because this refusal “put it out of her power to dance with others” (*PP* 102). Men are also subject to certain rules of decorum, which is why Bingley, who “danced every dance” (10), is favoured over Darcy, who only dances twice. The responsibility for ensuring that the ball runs smoothly falls on the gentlemen, and Mr. Darcy’s refusal to dance with Elizabeth although gentlemen are scarce signals his lack of social grace (Jones 319 n.4). Darcy, in fact, exhibits strong anti-social behaviour during his first public appearance:

His manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity. [...] Mr. Darcy danced only once with Mrs. Hurst and once with Miss Bingley, declined being introduced to any other lady, and spent the rest of the evening in walking about the room, speaking occasionally to one of his own party. His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world. (10-11)

His large fortune and aristocratic background notwithstanding, Mr. Darcy’s popularity falls when his manners are found disagreeable.

The public gaze that monitors decorum is one based on a Foucauldian concept of surveillance and observation, not solely on desire. In order to determine a person’s manners properly and accurately, the public eye employs a gaze of acute observation.

Langdon Elsbree proposes that the rules of the dance, like the rules of courtship, “may or

may not be sanctioned by the community, itself a body of spectators” (368). Who controls this body of spectators? While Douglas Murray suggests that Lady Catherine is the panoptic centre of *Pride and Prejudice* (“Gazing” 45), Mrs. Bennet also commands an extensive memory and intelligence network. Mrs. Bennet, in fact, seems to be a more natural observer than Lady Catherine, who gathers her information second hand by asking questions (Murray notes that her favoured form of the sentence is the interrogative [45]). Mrs. Bennet has a most reliable memory about details of balls. Arriving home after the first assembly ball, Mrs. Bennet launches into a *tour de force* recounting of Mr. Bingley’s dance partners:

First of all, he asked Miss Lucas. I was so vexed to see him stand up with her; but however, he did not admire her at all: indeed, nobody can, you know; and he seemed quite struck with Jane as she was going down the dance. So, he enquired who she was, and got introduced, and asked her for the two next. Then, the two third he danced with Miss King, and the two fourth with Maria Lucas, and the two fifth with Jane again, and the two sixth with Lizzy. (13)

Clearly, Mrs. Bennet, whose life’s solace is “visiting and news” (5), possesses an impressive memory. In addition to being detailed by Mrs. Bennet’s individual eye, balls are discussed and shared within the community for days afterwards, essentially ensuring no privacy for their participants: “That the Miss Lucases and the Miss Bennets should meet to talk over a ball was absolutely necessary” (18). This guarantee that behaviour and occurrences at a ball would be reviewed in such minute detail and with such regularity makes it rather difficult to escape this particular public eye.

The public eye, however, gives way to more private, intimate ways of looking. All three significant balls take place in the first third of the novel: the assembly ball, the gathering at Lucas Lodge, and the Netherfield ball. Austen uses the three balls to

establish the evaluative function of the public gaze. More importantly, the public opinion arising from the public gaze inclines Elizabeth Bennet towards believing the worst of Mr. Darcy, a feeling on which Wickham capitalizes by lying to her about Darcy's past behaviour towards him. Elizabeth shares the public view that Mr. Darcy is "the most disagreeable man in the world" (11), and later admits to the bias this created in her mind: "I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason" (225). The public opinion that arises from the glare of the public eye in the ballroom is unstable and unreliable. Though the public gaze passes judgement swiftly and decidedly, it does not always do so accurately. Outside the ballroom, Austen re-evaluates the public gaze and examines more intimate ways of seeing.

Of the different ways of seeing that can occur between individuals, the gaze that signifies desire is among the most intimate. One of the most memorable gazes in *Pride and Prejudice* is the gaze with which Darcy stares at Elizabeth<sup>4</sup>. Darcy's development from an ill-mannered man who slights Elizabeth to an ardent admirer is traced through the way that he looks at her:

Mr. Darcy had at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty; he had looked at her without admiration at the ball; and when they next met, he looked at her only to criticise. But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally mortifying. (23)

Darcy's gaze is one that falls under the gaze of desire as analysed by Mulvey and Berger, one that maintains the male spectator/female object division. Motivated by a clear

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<sup>4</sup> It is a gaze that translates particularly well to screen, as the adapters of the 1995 BBC mini-series of *Pride and Prejudice* used to full effect. For a more complete analysis of how this production turns the

physical attraction, Darcy cannot help but look at Elizabeth Bennet, “meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow” (27). After Elizabeth walks three miles from Longbourn to Netherfield, Darcy admires “the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion” (33). His gaze is steady and purposeful, and by no means accidental. While Elizabeth plays piano at Rosings, Darcy rudely leaves Lady Catherine in mid-conversation and, moving “with his usual deliberation towards the piano forte, stationed himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer’s countenance” (174). Darcy’s growing attraction is reflected in the intensity of his gaze. He himself is aware of this, and comically abstains from gazing at Elizabeth during her last day at Netherfield: “though they were at one time left by themselves for half an hour, he adhered most conscientiously to his book, and would not even look at her” (60). For Darcy, even a brief look constitutes too much attention and potential betrayal of his feelings.

If Darcy follows Berger’s maxim that men look at women, Elizabeth could presumably be a woman who, to use Berger’s terms, watches herself being looked at. The self-possessed Elizabeth sees that she is being observed by Mr. Darcy, but though she notices “how frequently Mr. Darcy’s eyes were fixed on her” (51), she cannot understand why:

She hardly knew how to suppose that she could be an object of admiration to so great a man; and yet that he should look at her because he disliked her, was still more strange. She could only imagine however at last, that she drew his notice because there was a something about her more wrong and reprehensible,

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desiring gaze upon Darcy, see Lisa Hopkin’s “Mr. Darcy’s Body: Privileging the Female Gaze” in *Jane Austen’s Hollywood* (eds. Sayre and Troost, 2001, p. 111-121).



according to his ideas of right, than in another person present. The supposition did not pain her. She liked him too little to care for his approbation. (51)

Nevertheless, even if she does not care for Darcy's approbation, Elizabeth's interest is certainly piqued by him. By showing awareness of and actively responding to Darcy's gaze, Elizabeth does not act like the female object of the desiring gaze, therefore questioning Berger's assertion that women can only be objects of the gaze. She does not merely watch; she engages. Ever one to rise to a challenge, Elizabeth sees Darcy noticing her with his "satirical eye" (24), and plans to respond by "being impertinent myself, [or] I shall soon grow afraid of him" (24). Mark Hennelly Jr. suggests that Elizabeth reacts to Darcy's gaze with a "half-conscious coquetry that wins Darcy" (194). Elizabeth certainly baits Darcy, archly challenging him to "despise me if you dare" (*PP* 52).

In fact, though Darcy is the predominant "gazer" in the novel, he is by no means alone. Both Caroline Bingley and Elizabeth Bennet possess heightened powers of observation. Caroline Bingley looks for one reason and one reason only: Darcy. Whether she is looking at him, looking for him or observing the behaviour of people around him, Caroline Bingley's world revolves around Darcy. In the same manner that Darcy's staring at Elizabeth indicates his growing attraction to her, Miss Bingley's staring at Darcy indicates that she is drawn to him. Unlike Darcy, Caroline Bingley is more aggressive in her pursuit. Outside the marriage market of a ballroom, the gaze still operates in terms of desire. In the case of Caroline Bingley, it is not enough to gaze. She augments the gaze by employing it to place herself in Darcy's line of sight. When the men enter the Netherfield drawing room, for example, Miss Bingley ceases to pay any attention to Jane: "Miss Bingley's eyes were instantly turned towards Darcy, and she had

something to say to him before he had advanced many steps” (54). Additionally, Caroline Bingley employs a rather restless watchfulness to draw Darcy’s attention to herself, even if they are both reading and supposedly looking at their books: “Miss Bingley’s attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr. Darcy’s progress through *his* book, as in reading her own; and she was perpetually either making some inquiry, or looking at his page” (57).

Despite all her watchfulness, Miss Bingley’s most significant attempt to draw Darcy’s attention reveals her scopophilic nature and her conscious positioning of herself as the object rather than the spectator. Laura Mulvey uses the term scopophilia to describe a pleasure in looking (16), but Douglas Murray uses the term to describe an unhealthy desire to be *looked at*<sup>5</sup>. He convincingly cites the “sad case of Jane Bennet” (“Gazing” 45) as the epitome of his concept of scopophilia, describing how Jane’s frequent smiles indicate her exhibitionist need to be seen. Caroline Bingley’s smiles do not attract the same attention as Jane’s do, but she certainly understands the value of being looked at. Miss Bingley’s attempts to watch Darcy and capitalize on opportunities to ingratiate herself with him are scopophilic. In the examples listed above, the female gaze becomes the bait designed to draw the male gaze. In her most blatant ploy to draw Darcy’s gaze, Miss Bingley engages in scopophilic behaviour by walking about the drawing room, showing off her elegant figure. Her lone turn about the room fails to elicit Darcy’s attention, however, and she persuades Elizabeth to join her. Miss Bingley is not disappointed by the result: “Miss Bingley succeeded no less in the real object of her

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<sup>5</sup> In this thesis, I follow Murray’s usage unless otherwise specified.

civility; Mr. Darcy looked up” (56). Miss Bingley’s triumph is a rather sour one, of course, since she succeeds only in further revealing Darcy’s growing attraction to another woman. Additionally, her invitation to Darcy to join them offers him the opportunity to expose the relationship between the gazer and the object of the gaze. His negative response demonstrates that he knows that her true motivation for walking is to render herself scopophilic: “you are conscious that your figures appear to the greatest advantage in walking [...]; I can admire you much better as I sit by the fire” (56). Darcy applies this motive to both Miss Bingley and Elizabeth, and though only Miss Bingley is conscious of this reason, it is possible that Elizabeth is also subconsciously responding to Darcy’s interest.

As engineered by Caroline Bingley, Berger’s spectator/object relationship stands: “Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47). As Darcy demonstrates, men are also aware of women watching themselves being looked at by men. More importantly, Austen gives a female character the agency to produce this situation. Unlike the passive Jane Bennet, whose scopophilic nature is based on her infamous, passive smile, Caroline Bingley actively attempts to attract the male gaze. In a society where attracting a husband is an economic necessity, scopophilia becomes a sexual tool. The scopophilic women in *Pride and Prejudice* display this quality with varying degrees of success. The beautiful Jane Bennet, for example, draws men’s attention without any effort. She is, in Bingley’s words, “the most beautiful creature I ever beheld” (11), and Darcy acknowledges her to be “the only handsome girl in the room” (11), even if she smiles “too much” (16). Unlike Miss Bingley’s plots and

contrivances to attract Darcy, Jane's scopophilic nature is presented as instinctive. At a dinner party, for example, Elizabeth wonders where Bingley will seat himself: "On entering the room, he seemed to hesitate; but Jane happened to look round, and happened to smile: it was decided. He placed himself by her" (340). Not all scopophilic characteristics are used to attract attractive men, however. The sensible Charlotte Lucas displays subtle scopophilic tendencies to draw the attention of Mr. Collins as much towards herself as away from Elizabeth. Considering that she finally marries him, Charlotte's motives become less selfless and more calculated. At the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth is plagued by the constant presence of Mr. Collins, and is relieved only by Charlotte, "who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Collins's conversation to herself" (102). After Elizabeth has rejected Mr. Collins's marriage proposal, Charlotte again makes herself the object of his attentions by listening to him. Elizabeth interprets this as kindness to herself, but Charlotte's scheme "was nothing less, than to secure [Elizabeth] from any return of Mr. Collins's addresses, by engaging them towards herself" (121). Like Jane, Charlotte ultimately succeeds in her scopophilic attempts. Unlike Jane, Charlotte is more active in drawing Mr. Collins's attention, and her husband is characteristically tiresome rather than characteristically agreeable.

If Jane and Charlotte demonstrate the success of scopophilic power, Caroline Bingley's failure exposes its limits. The difference between Miss Bingley and Charlotte's attempts lie in the man whose gaze each tries to attract. An inadequate lover, Mr. Collins considers himself well versed in the behaviour of polite society, and attributes Elizabeth's straight-forward rejection to the "wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to

the usual practice of elegant females” (108). Elizabeth rejects any pretensions to the title of “elegant female” and stymies Mr. Collins’s expectations of how a young woman behaves. Charlotte Lucas recognizes that Mr. Collins only understands a particular codified type of behaviour when he interacts with women, and she employs such behaviour to attract him. By making herself scopophilic, Charlotte operates within a pre-established behavioural code, one that Mr. Collins recognizes and interprets well enough to propose to Charlotte three days after proposing to Elizabeth.

Mr. Darcy, on the other hand, does not subscribe to the same social conventions as Mr. Collins. Not one to dance at a ball or “recommend himself to strangers” (175), Mr. Darcy lacks the social graces that Mr. Bingley abundantly possesses and that Mr. Collins mistakes for genuine interaction. Miss Bingley fails to attract Darcy’s gaze because she follows conventions that he does not. Elizabeth best summarizes this when she explains to Darcy the reasons he fell in love with her:

The fact is, you were sick of civility, of deference, of officious attention. You were disgusted with the women who were always speaking and looking, and thinking for *your* approbation alone. I roused, and interested you, because I was so unlike *them*. [...] in your heart, you thoroughly despised the persons who so assiduously courted you. (380)

Elizabeth’s description perfectly suits the ever-officious Miss Bingley who so “assiduously courted” Darcy. Additionally, Darcy himself expresses a dislike of any plotting or scheming. When Miss Bingley declares that Elizabeth is “one of those young ladies who seek to recommend themselves to the other sex, by undervaluing their own” (40), she calls it “a paltry device, a very mean art” (40). Ironically, Miss Bingley attempts to attract Darcy’s attention by employing the exact art that she demeans, that of cutting

down a member of her own sex. Darcy does not let this go unnoticed in his sharp reply: “there is meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation” (40). Miss Bingley may try to attract Darcy by making herself scopophilic, but she succeeds only in exposing herself as a calculating schemer.

In addition to participating in a desiring gaze in an attempt to attract Darcy’s, Caroline Bingley employs a Foucauldian gaze when she looks at Elizabeth. Miss Bingley’s watchfulness of Elizabeth indicates her class sensitivity towards someone whom she would view as a pretentious upstart. She is joined in her wary watch by the snobbish Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Ironically, these two women who share such concern with their class and connections approach the issue from opposite sides. Strictly speaking, Miss Bingley is more of a social upstart than Elizabeth Bennet is. As Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine, she is “a gentleman’s daughter” and in that respect is entitled to marry Darcy, a gentleman (356). Miss Bingley, on the other hand, does not descend from landed gentry and is not a gentleman’s daughter. Instead, the Bingley fortune is “acquired by trade” and though they are “in the habit of associating with people of rank” (15), they are not aristocrats themselves. The newness of the Bingley fortune is especially striking when compared with the Darcy estate. Bingley is in the process of purchasing an estate and building his library, whereas Darcy, who is descended from nobility on the maternal side and “ancient, though untitled” families on his father’s (356), can boast a library at Pemberley that is “the work of many generations” (38). Darcy himself does not condescend because of rank, but his aunt does. Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who “likes to have the distinction of rank preserved” (161), is the embodiment of aristocratic snobbery.

While *Pride and Prejudice* certainly does not endorse the condescending attitude of Lady Catherine, distinguishing between different ranks is of the utmost importance. As Juliet McMaster puts it, “Austen was no snob, though she knew all about snobbery” (“Class” 129). Instead, McMaster argues that Austen “registers exactly the social provenance of each of her characters, and judges them for the ways in which they judge each other” (129). Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley frequently judge others by their status in society. Miss Bingley, for example, laughs “heartily” at Jane Bennet’s “vulgar relations” (37), which include an attorney uncle in Meryton and a tradesman uncle in London who “lives somewhere near Cheapside” (36). Lady Catherine is aghast that Elizabeth, “a young woman without family, connections, or fortune” would ever consider marrying Mr. Darcy (356) and thus pollute “the shades of Pemberley” (357). These judgements convey a heightened sensitivity to class in Miss Bingley and Lady Catherine, an awareness expressed through the intensity of each woman’s gaze.

Lady Catherine de Bourgh occupies what she believes is a central position in her society. The patroness of her neighbourhood, she cannot bear to be excluded from any goings-ons, no matter how trivial. To facilitate her officious interference, Lady Catherine unofficially employs Mr. Collins as a spy; he reports “the minutest concerns” of the parish to her so that she can call on her villagers and “settle their differences, silence their complaints, and scold them into harmony” (169). As Douglas Murray argues, Lady Catherine is potentially a very powerful information centre (“Gazing” 45), even if much of her observation is done second-hand. Her seat of power, as it were, is Rosings Park with its numerous glazed windows (161). Rosings itself is a status symbol, an

ostentatious spectacle of the wealth and rank that Lady Catherine wishes to preserve. The power of Lady Catherine's gaze, however, is undermined by Elizabeth's ability to look at Rosings without being awed. Elizabeth sees Rosings as "mere stateliness of money and rank" which "she thought she could *witness* without trepidation" (161, emphasis added). Additionally, though the nervous Maria Lucas does not know "which way to look" in the Rosings's drawing room (162), Elizabeth "found herself quite equal to the scene, and could observe the three ladies before her composedly" (162). It bodes ill for Lady Catherine that a "pretentious upstart" (356) such as Elizabeth Bennet can look on Rosings Park and fail to be overwhelmed. Additionally, Lady Catherine mistakenly gives credence to the public gaze that she transfers from the ballroom to society in general. She believes that if Elizabeth marries Darcy, she will "disgrace him in the eyes of everybody" (357) and "ruin him in the opinion of all his friends, and make him the contempt of the world" (358). But as we have seen, public perception is hardly reliable or effective. Ultimately, the power of Lady Catherine's gaze is undermined by Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage. For once, she cannot lecture people into doing her will.

Miss Bingley's Foucauldian gaze also exhibits limited power. While Lady Catherine's Foucauldian gaze is an attempt to control her environment, Caroline Bingley gazes to watch Elizabeth Bennet. At Pemberley, for example, Miss Bingley rather unabashedly observes Elizabeth Bennet: "Elizabeth soon saw that she was herself closely watched by Miss Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss Darcy, without calling her attention" (268). Though it seems that Miss Bingley is closely observing a rival for Mr. Darcy's affection, this gaze is actually class motivated. It is



questionable exactly which aspect of Mr. Darcy attracts Miss Bingley: the man, or the fortune, rank and aristocratic roots. Miss Bingley, is, after all, a very class-conscious woman. She is anxious for her brother to purchase a permanent estate (15), therefore “buying his way into the gentry” (McMaster, “Class” 124). While Bingley’s friendship with Darcy raises his prestige (McMaster, “Class” 124), marrying into the Darcy family would cement the connection. In this context, Miss Bingley’s watchful observation of Elizabeth becomes more than one woman eyeing her rival. In this respect, she and Lady Catherine are alike. Lady Catherine seeks to protect the ancient Darcy family’s reputation from ruin, and equates her ever intrusive gaze with a misguided power of rank. Caroline Bingley also becomes a class sentinel, jealously guarding her newly acquired status and Darcy, the means by which she hopes to establish herself further in society.

What of Elizabeth Bennet, then, the woman of the “fine eyes” (27) who causes Lady Catherine and Miss Bingley such grief? Indifferent to, though not unaware of, the class difference between Darcy and herself, Elizabeth also eludes the mechanics of the desiring gaze, and eschews using any scopophilic measures to attract Darcy. Not only does she abstain from employing any of Charlotte or Miss Bingley’s ruses, she does not even realize that she is drawing his gaze. Additionally, though Darcy is drawn to Elizabeth’s dark eyes and pleasing figure (23), Elizabeth also attracts his gaze when she is not merely displayed. She and Colonel Fitzwilliam converse with “so much spirit and flow” (172) that “*His* eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity” (172). In this case, the energy of Elizabeth’s conversation, not the attractiveness of her appearance, draws Darcy’s gaze. Elizabeth’s refusal (conscious or

not) to employ the gaze to her advantage indicates that scopophilia is not the only means by which women can attract the attention of men. While Jane Bennet only smiles, Elizabeth laughs.

Despite Darcy's constant gaze, Elizabeth's perception and understanding make her gaze the most powerful one in the novel. It enables her to assess many of the situations she encounters correctly. She is not deceived as to the state of her parents' marriage, never having been "blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband" (236). With her "quickness of observation" (15), she also notices that Mr. Bingley's sisters display "proud and conceited" manners (15), manners which the ever-amiable Jane is prone to overlook. Elizabeth's eyes, however, are not perfect, and she shows her fallibility when judging Mr. Darcy and Mr. Wickham. Eventually, she reverses her opinion of the two, and ruefully realizes that "one has got all the goodness, and the other all the appearance of it" (225). Elizabeth's progression towards this realization involves adjusting how she sees. Darcy's letter alters Elizabeth's opinion of him, but her feelings do not significantly change until she and the Gardiners take a tour of Pemberley. There, in a scene that involves a portrait of Darcy, the mechanics of the gaze break down completely. Only then can Elizabeth "see" Darcy accurately.

Throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, Darcy and Elizabeth's attempts to understand each other have been presented in terms of drawing and portraiture, with each repeatedly presenting character sketches of the other. At the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth obliquely questions Darcy about his conduct to Wickham, and Darcy asks her "not to sketch my character at the present moment" (94). Elizabeth extends the metaphor by protesting that

“if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity” (94). At Rosings, Darcy describes Elizabeth as someone who finds “great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own” (174), making her laugh at this “picture of herself” (174). Pictures and character are linked, and the quest for a “faithful portrait” (91) leads to Pemberley.

When she confronts the literal picture of Darcy, Elizabeth is in the midst of revising her mental picture of him. In addition to providing information about the house itself, housekeeper and tour guide Mrs. Reynolds has offered a glowing portrayal of her employer, calling Mr. Darcy “the best landlord, and the best master” (249). This description runs through Elizabeth’s mind as she stares at Darcy’s large portrait:

Every idea brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and *fixed his eyes upon herself*, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (251, emphasis added)

The phrase “fixed his eyes upon herself” gives rise to what Isobel Armstrong calls “an amazing moment of syntactic ambiguity” (xxi). As outlined by Peter Sabor, the ambiguous syntax leads to multiple interpretations. It “allows both Elizabeth and the portrait of Darcy (and by extension Darcy himself) to be fixing his eyes upon her; either Elizabeth is becoming Darcy, looking at herself through his eyes, or she finds herself unable to evade his gaze” (233). Rachel M. Brownstein reads no ambiguity in the scene, arguing that Elizabeth examines the portrait “at leisure from a position of strength, activating its gaze as her own” (53). Katrin R. Burlin argues that being “fixed” to one place allows Elizabeth to project another point of view, to “think about the process of

someone else's viewing her" (160). Tony Tanner avoids the question completely by incorrectly citing the quotation as "she fixed his eyes" (119), thus making "Elizabeth unequivocally the active agent" (Sabor 233).

No matter who is actively gazing, Elizabeth is still an object. She stands in front of the portrait and, like Caroline Bingley, wills Darcy to look at her. On the other hand, by placing herself directly in front of the canvass, Elizabeth also takes up the best position to view the portrait of Darcy. Ironically, up to this point of the novel, this portrait is the most accurate representation of the original that Elizabeth has encountered. The link between character and portraiture is invaluable here. The literal portrait and the figurative character sketch combine to soften Elizabeth's feelings towards the original. It is the first time that she begins to accurately "see" Darcy and his character.

In fact, though the portrait's eyes are fixed upon Elizabeth, the focus of her thoughts is himself, not how he sees her. While the grammar of the novel may play tricks on the reader, the passage itself clearly traces a shift in Elizabeth's idea of Darcy: "she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression" (251). The entire passage breaks down the dichotomous, male spectator/female object structure of the gaze by conflating those gender-based roles. Elizabeth simultaneously acts as the spectator and the object, and so does Darcy. Additionally, if Elizabeth's ability to gaze is only suggested here, she later becomes a Darcy-like observer: "Darcy had walked away to another part of the room. She followed him with her eyes, envied every one to whom he spoke, had scarcely patience enough to help anybody to coffee; and then was enraged

against herself for being so silly!” (341). The roles are reversed; Elizabeth watches Darcy. The evening ends with a shared visual experience in which both principal players strain to catch a glimpse of the other: “They were confined for the evening at different tables, and she had nothing to hope, but that his eyes were so often turned towards her side of the room, as to make him play as unsuccessfully as herself” (342). During the evening, the position of the watcher is taken up by the woman, and then shared by both the woman and the man.

By the Pemberley portrait scene, the gaze has been rendered ineffective. The power of the gaze has already been limited because it can be misinterpreted by others. Charlotte, for instance, cannot completely fathom why Darcy continually stares at Elizabeth. Though she suspects partiality on his side, she is stymied by her observations of his behaviour: “He certainly looked at her friend a great deal, but the expression of that look was disputable. It was an earnest, stedfast gaze, but she often doubted whether there were much admiration in it, and sometimes it seemed nothing but absence of mind” (181). Darcy piques Elizabeth’s interest by frequently gazing at her, but no matter how often he sits and stares, the object of his desire does not reciprocate his feelings. By outright rejecting his proposal of marriage, Elizabeth undermines the power of Darcy’s gaze and the structure of the desiring male gaze over all. Significantly, it is not until their gazes merge in the portrait scene that Elizabeth can change her opinion about him. This merger, the conflation of watcher and object, further destabilizes the concept of the desiring gaze.

Finally, the limitations of the gaze are illustrated in the key proposal scene of *Pride and Prejudice*. As Beth Newman argues in her discussion of the gaze in *Wuthering Heights*, reversing the spectator/object roles in the gaze is not enough to undermine it: “a gaze that escaped patriarchal specular relations would not simply reverse the positions of male and female, [...] but would eliminate the hierarchy altogether” (1032). Newman convincingly suggests that a gaze that steps outside “patriarchal specular relations” “cannot be represented, since representation is always already dominated by masculine power structures (including specular ones)” (1037). Austen employs a similar linguistic absence in her proposal scenes. In *Emma*, for instance, the narrator does not report Emma’s response to Mr. Knightley’s proposal, but only that Emma says “Just what she ought” (431). This linguistic absence is repeated in *Pride and Prejudice*, where the reader learns only that Elizabeth “gave him to understand, that her sentiments had undergone so material a change [...] as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances” (366). The proposal scene in *Pride and Prejudice* also lacks the desiring gaze. When Elizabeth accepts Darcy’s proposal, she “could not look” at him (366): “Had Elizabeth been able to encounter his eye, she might have seen how well the expression of heart-felt delight, diffused over his face, became him” (366). The scene that contains the most emotional, “heart-felt” expression of feeling in the entire novel is presented without a gaze. The gaze is not powerful enough to overcome Elizabeth’s emotions; she is unable to look.

To focus purely on the gaze would be to ignore another form of looking in Austen that, while not as dominant, is equally crucial. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen imbues the

glance, brief and momentary, with even more power than the sustained gaze. From the surreptitious glance of amusement to the quick glance that receives and conveys knowledge, this fleeting form of looking illuminates the limitations of the gaze while also encountering limitations of its own. While the gaze is heavily theorized in terms of psychoanalytical desire and Foucauldian power, the glance has received little critical attention. One notable exception is Austen biographer Carol Shields, who uses the glance (which she wryly calls the “g-word” [3]) as a metaphor for Austen’s writing, arguing that Austen’s attention to her historical background is achieved through authorial glances rather than direct references. Shields reads incredible power in the glance in Austen’s novels:

If, in an Austen novel, a woman’s tongue is obliged to be still, her eye becomes her effective agent, one piercing look capable of changing the narrative direction—even a half glance able to shame or empower or redirect the sensibilities of others.

[...] A spark is struck and apprehended; the head turns on its spinal axis; the shoulders freeze; the eyes are the only busy part of the body, simultaneously receiving and sending out information, so that a glance becomes more than a glance. It is a weapon, a command, or a sigh of acquiescence. (2)

The glance, according to Shields, is a means of communication, a way of looking that “always assumes a degree of mutually encoded knowledge” (2).

Austen indeed presents the glance in *Pride and Prejudice* as a means of conveying specialized or privileged knowledge. Excessively amused by the sycophantic nonsense of Mr. Collins, Mr. Bennet requires “no partner in his pleasure” (68) “except in an occasional glance at Elizabeth” (68). In this case, Mr. Bennet glances at Elizabeth to convey his enjoyment of the absurdly verbose clergyman covertly. Jane Bennet silently calls Elizabeth out of the room after receiving a letter from Netherfield: “a glance from

Jane invited her to follow her up stairs” (116). In these examples, a glance is necessary and more efficient than speech. It is more efficient in its brevity and swiftness, and necessary because to verbalize what the glance conveys would be to draw attention to Mr. Bennet and to Jane, respectively. Exposing his amusement would be indecorous of Mr. Bennet, and mentioning the letter from Miss Bingley could draw the unwanted attention of husband-hungry Mrs. Bennet. The glance also indicates an intimacy shared between the two people involved. It is a private exchange based on previously shared knowledge.

If the gaze in *Pride and Prejudice* is mainly associated with its hero, the novel’s most proficient employer of the glance is, most appropriately, its heroine. Unlike Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet employs the glance more effectively than he employs the gaze. No matter how often Darcy gazes at her, Elizabeth does not reciprocate his feelings. Her glance, however, empowers her and, in an important scene at Pemberley, allows her simultaneously to triumph over Miss Bingley, to endear herself to Miss Darcy and to captivate Darcy even further. That chapter, in which Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner call on Georgiana Darcy at Pemberley, is devoted to detailing the different ways that people see and react to being seen. It begins with a scene of women only. Aunt and niece are shown into a saloon where four other women have already convened: their hostess, her companion Mrs. Annesley, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley. The ensuing conversation is stilted, mostly carried on by Mrs. Annesley and Mrs. Gardiner, with “occasional help” from Elizabeth (267). The information conveyed by what Elizabeth sees, however, is rich and rewarding. She notes that the acutely shy Miss Darcy “looked as if she wished for



courage enough to join” the conversation (268). Elizabeth also notices Miss Bingley looking at her with what Mark Hennelly Jr. calls her “basilisk stare” (195): “Elizabeth soon saw that she was herself closely watched by Miss Bingley, and that she could not speak a word, especially to Miss Darcy, without calling her attention” (268). Austen builds a network of looks and glances that conveys more about the women in the room than their spoken conversation, which she does not report. The network includes the young Miss Darcy, who is clearly not as adept an observer as Elizabeth and Miss Bingley. Still learning to interpret looks and glances, she does not think to offer refreshments until after “many a significant look and smile from Mrs. Annesley to Miss Darcy had been given” (268).

After developing the scene of rival women and the looking that occurs between them, Austen then introduces a new character to focus on—Mr. Darcy enters the room. His entrance causes everyone suddenly to become a sensitive observer. Elizabeth

saw that the suspicions of the whole party were awakened against them, and that there was scarcely an eye which did not watch his behaviour when he first came into the room. In no countenance was attentive curiosity so strongly marked as in Miss Bingley’s. [...] Miss Darcy, on her brother’s entrance, exerted herself much more to talk; and Elizabeth saw that he was anxious for his sister and herself to get acquainted, and forwarded, as much as possible, every attempt at conversation on either side. Miss Bingley saw all this likewise [...]. (269)

At his entrance, Darcy holds the power to draw everyone’s attention and eye. Yet the network of looking is not unidirectional. In addition to noticing Darcy, Elizabeth sees that his sister becomes more talkative, and that he promotes conversation between them. Miss Bingley angrily notices as well, and ill-advisedly attempts to retaliate by mentioning the “—shire militia” and by association George Wickham (269), whom Miss Bingley

knows only as a man hated by Darcy and favoured by Elizabeth. Unbeknownst to Miss Bingley, Mr. Wickham had once tried to seduce Georgiana Darcy and marry her for her immense fortune, a scheme that her brother prevented.

Alluding to George Wickham, then, is an unwise thing for Miss Bingley to do, but it provides an excellent opportunity to examine the manner in which various forms of looking converge and interact in *Pride and Prejudice*. Mr. Darcy of the penetrating gaze is characterized as an “acute and unembarrassed” observer (261). His sister, on the other hand, is shy and fearful of doing wrong (267), rendering her a novice watcher at best. Miss Bingley and Elizabeth are careful observers and watchers. Both, as I have suggested, are as capable of gazing as Darcy is, and both are skilled at observing and quickly comprehending a situation, understanding that Darcy encourages Elizabeth and Georgiana’s conversation to introduce Elizabeth into the family circle. Their powers of observation, however, differ in their capacity to glance. Elizabeth possesses the quick understanding required to receive and provide information through a glance, while Miss Bingley does not. After Miss Bingley mentions the militia, Elizabeth composes herself and “answered the question in a tolerably disengaged tone” (269). At the same time, she quickly assesses the behaviour of Darcy and his sister with a glance: “an involuntary glance shewed her Darcy with an heightened complexion, earnestly looking at her, and his sister overcome with confusion, and unable to lift up her eyes” (269). That the glance is “involuntary” suggests that this means of looking is natural to Elizabeth. The behaviour of Mr. and Miss Darcy is also consistent with their general skill at seeing; Miss Darcy cannot look at anyone at all, while Mr. Darcy (in what seems to be his default setting)

stares at Elizabeth, wondering how she will respond. Unlike Elizabeth, Miss Bingley fails to notice how her sally affected the two people she would least want to offend. Her failure indicates the limitations of her own powers of observation. Instead, she is merely “vexed and disappointed” that Elizabeth is not discomposed.

In this case, knowledge that Elizabeth already possesses (that of Wickham’s true nature) enables her to gauge the reactions she sees accurately. Her glance allows her to “read” the situation more accurately than Miss Bingley, and because of her privileged knowledge, she can deflect the implied insult. In this respect, Elizabeth holds the most power, for she can act upon this information. Darcy and his sister are immobilized and cannot act, and Miss Bingley does not realize the full implications of her comment. Additionally, Elizabeth glances “*while* she spoke” (269, emphasis added), therefore connecting her ability to glance with the power to control a potentially awkward social situation.

However, even the glance, as powerful as it is, has its limits. Unlike the gaze, which attracts attention, the glance is by nature subtle and not publicly displayed. Rather, it is a means of communicating, of receiving and providing knowledge, and is therefore more effective in achieving its goal. However, the glance is limited in its effectiveness because the knowledge it communicates must be “mutually encoded” (Shields 2). In other words, the glance cannot impart new knowledge; it can only expand upon or allude to knowledge that already exists. Near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth is unsure why Darcy accompanies Bingley when he calls at Longbourn. Bingley clearly calls to renew his courtship of Jane, but Elizabeth’s attempts to discern Darcy’s motives

fail and frustrate her: “She had ventured only one glance at Darcy. He looked serious as usual” (335). As the visit progresses, Elizabeth gives in to her curiosity and occasionally “raised her eyes to his face” (336), only to find Darcy as often “looking at Jane, as at herself, and frequently on no object but the ground” (336). Elizabeth is puzzled by his behaviour, and no amount of glancing provides her with an answer. This lack of communication stems from, ironically, a mutual uncertainty in both principles as to how each feels about the other that is expressed in similar language. Elizabeth wonders why Darcy comes at all, if he is only going to be what she interprets as “silent, grave, and indifferent” (339). Darcy believes likewise, and explains that he refrained from talking to Elizabeth because she acted “grave and silent, and gave me no encouragement” (381). Like the gaze, then, the glance also has its limitations.

Originally titled *First Impressions*, *Pride and Prejudice* is certainly a novel about reassessing initial opinions and examining perception. A significant aspect of this examination is the manner in which the novel’s characters gaze and glance. The public gaze that operates in a ballroom combines characteristics of the desiring gaze with a disciplinary Foucauldian gaze. The public gaze is crucial to *Pride and Prejudice* because it affects the way Elizabeth initially views Darcy. Elizabeth begins the novel by deferring to public opinion, and promising her mother that she will never dance with Mr. Darcy (20). This colours her interactions with him at Netherfield, and results in what Jan Fergus calls “Austen’s high comedy” in which Elizabeth persistently misinterprets or twists Darcy’s words and actions to suit her preconceived notion of him (118). As Elizabeth

starts to alter her opinion of Darcy, the novel begins to concentrate on more intimate ways of seeing, and leaves the glare of the ballroom gaze behind in Volume One. Darcy's desiring gaze is frequently detailed, and indicates his growing attraction towards Elizabeth. Ultimately, the gaze in *Pride and Prejudice* ceases to be distinctly male or female in the Pemberley portrait scene where Elizabeth fixes the eyes of the represented Darcy upon herself. Elizabeth's feelings towards him noticeably soften once their gazes merge and she is able to see herself through her own eyes as well as through Darcy's; for the first time, their gazes are aligned. This alignment leads to the most intimate way of seeing in *Pride and Prejudice*: glancing. To be able to glance is to be empowered, as the scene where Elizabeth and Mrs. Gardiner call at Pemberley illustrates. Finally, despite the attention this novel pays to eyes and to seeing, the most emotionally climactic scene of the novel witnesses the failure of looking. Though the reader sees the joyful expression on Darcy's face when Elizabeth finally accepts his proposal, she does not. That Elizabeth is unable to look hints at the limitations of looking in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth does not need to look at Darcy to receive or convey any more information during their proposal scene. When it comes to heart-felt, sincere declarations of love, the politics of looking are not necessary.

*Chapter Two*

**Play or Panopticon?: The Paradoxical Gaze of *Mansfield Park***

The old adage has it that home is where the heart is, but home for Fanny Price is better associated with the eye. Several types of looking permeate Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, including the desiring gaze that is so prominent in *Pride and Prejudice*. That Fanny is a young woman who intensely fears being seen is evident. More intriguing is the pervasiveness of the Foucauldian gaze at Mansfield Park. The gaze that emanates from authoritarian patriarch Sir Thomas Bertram is reminiscent of the power constraints imposed by the gaze of eighteenth-century thinker Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Never built but much discussed, the Panopticon was to function as the ideal prison, and the principles of the Panopticon could theoretically be applied to other social infrastructure such as schools and hospitals. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny becomes the model prisoner under the rule of the panoptic gaze, and in the process, she learns to become a better observer than anyone else. Finally, Fanny exhibits an alternative gaze, one based on spectatorship, that contravenes and subverts the panoptic gaze that appears so powerful in the text.

Trying to persuade Fanny to play the small role of the cottager's wife in *Lovers' Vows*, Tom Bertram claims that the role is barely a speaking one. The role is important,

Tom insists, because “we must have you to look at” (145). What Fanny Price fears most, however, is to be looked at, and her trepidation gives rise to her famous declaration, “Indeed, I cannot act” (145). After all, although Fanny objects to the theatricals because her uncle Sir Thomas Bertram would not approve, she fears “exposing herself” (153) so much that it makes her “inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples” (153). Fanny’s intense aversion to being seen makes her the most scopophobic of all of Austen’s heroines. While Douglas Murray considers Elizabeth Bennet’s minor scopophobia as “merely the healthy personality’s desire for occasional solitude” (“Gazing” 46), and *Persuasion*’s Anne Elliot is characterized by a “habitual” tendency to be overlooked and invisible (50), Fanny Price withdraws from any gaze that is turned towards her. When she first arrives at Mansfield Park, ten-year-old Fanny is described as a “timid and shy” girl who is constantly “shrinking from notice” (12). This does not change as the years progress, and as a result, Fanny becomes so invisible that she nearly blends in with the furniture. Nobody notices that she is even present in the drawing room until “her own gentle voice speaking from the other end of the room, which was a very long one, told them that she was on the sofa” (71).

Of all the different gazes, Fanny most fears the gaze of desire. Henry Crawford’s proposal only increases Fanny’s already strong aversion to his attentions. Aware that he desires her, Fanny finds even dinnertime seating arrangements trying: “though nothing could have tempted her to turn her eyes to the right hand where he sat, she felt that *his* were immediately directed towards her” (304). Henry Crawford understands the correlation between gazing and attraction, and like Miss Bingley’s attempting to draw

Darcy's attention, he labours to attract Fanny's gaze. Unlike Miss Bingley, Mr. Crawford partially succeeds in employing the art of scopophilia. When Henry effectively reads Shakespeare in the Mansfield Park drawing room, Edmund watches Fanny and notices

how she gradually slackened in the needle-work, which, at the beginning, seemed to occupy her totally; how it fell from her hand while she sat motionless over it—and at last, how the eyes which had appeared so studiously to avoid him throughout the day, were turned and fixed on Crawford, fixed on him for minutes, fixed on him in short till the attraction drew Crawford's upon her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken. Then, she was shrinking into herself, and blushing [...]. (337)

It bodes ill for Mr. Crawford, however, that Fanny only pays attention to him when he is acting. She considers him a first-class actor, acknowledging during the *Lovers' Vows* rehearsals that “as far as she could judge, Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor of all” (165). Fanny's attitude towards Mr. Crawford's acting ability is echoed in her denial that she could have anticipated his proposal. She does not misread the intentions of his gaze, but suspects its sincerity. She doubts that his attentions “had any meaning” and tells Edmund that he only seemed to be taking “very idle notice of me” (353). Ultimately, Fanny “put it down as simply being his way” (362-63). Though Fanny is correct to doubt Mr. Crawford's sincerity, one suspects that she is also trying to deny the credibility of any further gazes directed her way.

If Fanny cannot cope with the gaze of a single admirer, she is sorely tested at her coming out ball. Murray notes that Fanny's distress over the ballroom stems from the possibility of sexual gazes being directed at her (“Spectatorship” 17). As I discussed in chapter one, the ballroom is the place where people become the objects of the scrutinizing public gaze associated with the marriage market. Sir Thomas displays Fanny



to test Henry Crawford's growing attentions to her, as well as to convey her desirability as a wife to the general public. The ball also provides additional opportunities for Henry Crawford to gaze upon Fanny and further convey his attraction. Appropriately, some of Fanny's discomfort during the ball is caused by objects designed to attract attention—the necklace, the chain and the cross. Until the day before the ball, Fanny had no gold chains at all, resorting to fastening William's amber cross around her neck with a ribbon.

Owning two gold chains signals Fanny's entrance into a more scrutinizing world, one that will notice the dress and jewellery that she wears. A more ostentatious piece of jewellery than Fanny is accustomed to wearing, the Crawfords' necklace of "gold prettily worked" (258) sits uneasily upon her neck. It is unfavourably compared to Edmund's "plain gold chain" that is "perfectly simple and neat" (262). As a matter of decorum, Fanny wears both to the ball. Barbara K. Seeber notes that the Crawfords' necklace "is used to allow Henry to make unwanted advances towards Fanny" (101). Wearing it is a tacit symbol of being marked by Henry, further positioning Fanny as someone on display. Henry Crawford notices the necklace, and Fanny's scopophobic mind transforms his gaze into a leer:

she saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace—with a smile—she thought there was a smile—which made her blush and feel wretched. And though there was no second glance to disturb her, [...] she could not get the better of her embarrassment, heightened as it was by *the idea of his perceiving it*, and had no composure till he turned away to some one else. (274, emphasis added)

In addition to becoming flustered if a male gaze is turned upon her, Fanny is doubly disconcerted if the gazer notices her initial embarrassment. For Fanny, "the idea of his perceiving" her discomfort is worse than the gaze itself. Mary Crawford also notices the

necklace, chain and cross, and Fanny finds the sister's response even more oppressive than the brother's. Miss Crawford's "eyes and smiles were immediately and more unequivocally directed as her brother's had been" (274), and Fanny hastens to stop her "intended compliments and insinuations" with the true explanation (274). Projecting her own scheming abilities onto Fanny, Mary Crawford seems about to suggest that Fanny did not lack a chain after all, and only begged to borrow a necklace to increase her intimacy with Miss Crawford and her brother. Miss Crawford fails to recognize the intensity of Fanny's scopophobia, and succeeds only in upsetting her further.

Fanny has only one declared suitor in the novel, but she is also subjected to another sexual gaze, that of Sir Thomas Bertram. It is a gaze that also focuses upon her body and physical development into a young woman, and though Edmund may claim that "it is but an uncle" (198), this gaze is quite disconcerting. Upon Sir Thomas's dramatic return from Antigua, Fanny must gather up enough courage to enter the drawing room and face him for the first time. His behaviour astonishes her:

Sir Thomas was at that moment looking round him, and saying, 'But where is Fanny?—Why do not I see my little Fanny?', and on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown! [...] He led her nearer the light and looked at her again. (177-78)

Surprised and confused by this focus upon herself, "Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed" (178). We later learn from Edmund that Sir Thomas approves of Fanny's body only. Though Sir Thomas thinks that Fanny is "very pretty" (197), Edmund regrets that his father limits his compliments to Fanny's "person" (197). "You must put up with it," Edmund tells her, "and trust to his seeing as much

beauty of mind in time” (197). Sir Thomas’s gaze upon Fanny’s body is so intense that Barbara K. Seeber argues convincingly that it constitutes a form of sexual abuse. Seeber suggests that “Fanny’s subjection to sexual remarks and scrutiny and her visible discomfort and anxiety” fall within the parameters of a definition of sexual abuse that, while it does not include physical contact, still results in emotional trauma (104).

Between the gazes of Henry Crawford and Sir Thomas, Fanny Price is a young woman inundated with unsolicited and unwanted gazes. One begins to wonder if Fanny is capable of resisting this seemingly powerful pair of sexual gazes, or if she is destined to be a blushing wallflower for the rest of her life. Unlike Caroline Bingley, Fanny does not use the mechanics of the desiring gaze to attract any man’s attention, nor would she ever dare to. She seeks a gold chain for William’s amber cross not so much to attract attention as to avoid disappointing her brother if she does not wear the cross at all (254). Instead of asking for a new dress for her ball, Fanny wears the gown Sir Thomas bought her for Maria’s wedding (272). Fanny is also unlike Elizabeth Bennet, who is capable of gazing at Darcy with a desiring gaze of her own. Rather, Fanny’s one point of minor resistance is achieved by her inability to ever become comfortable with “the idea of being worth looking at” (198). Paradoxically, Fanny’s resistance is her subjection taken to extremes. “You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at” Edmund tells Fanny (198), and yet she never does. Appropriately, it is the scopophilic Mary Crawford who notices how unlike other women Fanny is, pointing out that she seems “almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of neglect” (198). Fanny is not adept at following scopophilic conventions the way Miss Crawford is. One is

reminded of the way Mary attractively arranges herself and her harp in the window of the parsonage: “A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself and both placed near a window, cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn, surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man’s heart” (65). That Fanny never perfects this art is best illustrated by her coming out ball and its aftermath. The ball itself, as John Wiltshire argues, does not achieve its ostensible purpose. Fanny’s behaviour does not change after her official coming out; she conducts herself in exactly the same manner as she did before. Unlike Tom Bertram’s acquaintance Miss Anderson, who “stared me out of countenance, and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look” after she comes out (50), Fanny’s behaviour does not change. Wiltshire notes that “After the ball, after the proposal, Fanny’s demeanour—the shyness, the averted face, the few, reluctantly spoken, words—is still that of a girl not ‘out’” (*Body* 101). Socially, Fanny remains within the Mansfield circle, visiting only as far as the Parsonage. Fanny does not follow the conventions that require a quiet girl to alter her behaviour so drastically, and submission to being constantly looked at is a part of that convention. In this albeit minor respect, Fanny resists the male sexual gaze.

Fanny experiences so much difficulty avoiding or coping with sexual gazes because she is constantly exposed to another type of gaze in *Mansfield Park*, one that renders her a constant object, one that is subject to the power of the gazer. This gaze is the gaze of surveillance, the panoptic gaze. This gaze, which focuses upon the operation of power upon the body, is most famously examined by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. In his book, Foucault uses the Panopticon as a model to illustrate how power,

when exercised through the gaze of a guard in the watchtower, must necessarily be “visible and unverifiable” (201). Although Jane Austen lived and wrote almost two centuries before Foucault, principles of the Panoptic gaze are evident in *Mansfield Park*. The novel contains a similar type of gaze through the behaviour of Sir Thomas Bertram and in the very structure of the Mansfield Estate. There are imperfections, however, and while the Foucauldian gaze is embodied by Sir Thomas, it is also corrupted by Mrs. Norris, and subverted by Fanny Price, who, all the while, remains the perfect Panoptic subject.

The first direct reference to a prison in *Mansfield Park* is not to the Mansfield estate, but rather to Sotherton Court. Ironically, it is mentioned by its owner, Mr. Rushworth. Complaining about his estate’s unattractiveness and need for extensive renovations, Rushworth declares that “when I got back to Sotherton yesterday, it looked like a prison—quite a dismal old prison” (53). Indeed, Sotherton is characterized by confinement during the excursion that the Bertrams and Crawfords undertake. The visit begins with a rather exhaustive tour of the Sotherton house, which ends at a door that leads outside: “the young people, [...] as by one impulse, one wish for air and liberty, all walked out” (90). Upon encountering an iron gate, Maria Bertram dispatches Rushworth to fetch the key. It is clear that Maria views the gate symbolically: “But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. I cannot get out, as the starling said” (99). Maria refers here to Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, and the imprisoned Yorick’s observation of a starling in a cage. Ironically, Maria later chooses the confinement of Sotherton when she is offered a possible reprieve. Sir Thomas, upon

returning from Antigua and realizing that Rushworth is “an inferior young man” (200), addresses Maria on the topic and asks her if she is determined to marry Rushworth.

Maria, however, believes that her options are limited and feels that she is choosing between two prisons. For Maria, the deciding factor is the degree of independence she would be allowed in each situation:

Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit. (202)

Maria is determined that Henry Crawford should not have the satisfaction of knowing that she rejected “Sotherton and London, independence and splendour” for his sake (202).

In her mind, Sotherton is no longer as oppressive as she considered it to be. Mansfield becomes the prison, and Sotherton, by comparison, is associated with independence.

Thus, Maria chooses what she considers the less oppressive path and marries Rushworth.

Physically, there is no house more confining than the Price home in Portsmouth. There Fanny mistakes a parlour for a “passage-room to something better” (377-78) and the room that she shares with her sister is so “confined and scantily-furnished” that it makes her “think with respect of her own little attic at Mansfield Park” (387).

Portsmouth, however, is not characterized by the Foucauldian gaze that is so crucial to the operation of the Panopticon. Although Mr. Price has fiercely yelled for peace and quiet so he can read his newspaper, three younger Price boys “all burst into the room together and sat down. [...] they were still kicking each other’s shins, and hallooing out at sudden starts immediately under their father’s eye” (383). Space might be limited in

Portsmouth, but also absent is the authoritarian gaze so crucial to Bentham's conception of the ideal prison.

Despite the thematic allusions to Sotherton's confinement and the physical claustrophobia Fanny experiences in Portsmouth, Mansfield Park is the most panoptic household in the novel. Sir Thomas Bertram acts as the source of the panoptic gaze in the prison that is his estate. He believes in unidirectional, authoritarian rule, and disguises it in the form of benevolent concern. Though he advises Fanny to go to bed before the ball is over, it is "the advice of absolute power" (280). Maria certainly feels the want of independence she had experienced while her father was away (202), and even dutiful Edmund notices that evenings at Mansfield Park are less animated after his father's return (196). From the beginning, Sir Thomas's power is associated with looking. Newly-arrived Fanny is "awed by Sir Thomas's grave looks" (14), a habit she does not break. She fears the same "grave looks directed to her" almost a decade later as Sir Thomas decides whether she is to have the carriage to dine at the Parsonage (218). Significantly, the apprehension that Fanny and the Bertram children experience upon Sir Thomas's surprise return from Antigua is presented in visual terms. The act of *appearing* before Sir Thomas when he returns from Antigua is a "dreadful duty" for Fanny (177), even though she cannot be held responsible for the theatricals. In fact, all the Bertram children are alarmed by their father's return, despite Julia's spiteful declaration that "*I need not be afraid of appearing before him*" (175). Sir Thomas's eye is so discomfiting that Fanny edges "back her chair behind her aunt's end of the sofa," screening herself from notice (185). Fanny's scopophilia is certainly operating here, but it is not the only reason she

inches back. If Fanny does not like being seen in general, she specifically does not relish the gaze of her uncle.

Sir Thomas's gaze, though imbued with the power of a patriarch, is not perfect. By virtue of being the panoptic centre, Sir Thomas cannot see everything. Aware that they are being watched, the members of his family alter their behaviour to conform with his expectations. Mrs. Grant notes how Sir Thomas's "fine detached manner [...] keeps every body in their place" (162). Though he presides over Mansfield Park with an authoritarian air, Sir Thomas is not an involved parent; a certain selectivity permeates his dealings with his children. For example, after discussing the theatricals with Edmund, "He did not enter into any remonstrance with his other children: he was more willing to believe they felt their error, than to run the risk of investigation" (187). The limits of Sir Thomas's gaze are best demonstrated by his misjudgement of the characters of his daughters. Though he means well, Sir Thomas "was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him" (19). Tom Bertram rarely stays in the country, but prefers to leave the estate, and his father's gaze, to indulge himself at the racetrack, in London, in Weymouth — anywhere that is not Mansfield. And if they must be at Mansfield Park, the Bertram children learn to alter their behaviour around their father, resisting his gaze the best way they know how.

Sir Thomas's gaze is not the only one to avoid and resist at Mansfield Park. Using her officiousness and interference, Mrs. Norris also attempts to wield some power as a source of a panoptic gaze. Mrs. Norris, however, is in a much different position within the family from that of Sir Thomas. Related to him by marriage only, she does not even



live in the Mansfield great house, although she certainly spends considerable time there. Her claims to power are more tenuous than Sir Thomas's, and reflect her lack of standing within the family rather than any real power she may retain. Within the family circle, she is a marginal figure, and she knows it. John Wiltshire perceptively notes that Mrs. Norris "punishes others for her own dependency and frustration" (*Body* 91). He analyzes how Fanny specifically "becomes the scapegoat upon whom Mrs. Norris can exercise her frustrations and baffled energies" (92). Aspiring to a position of power without ever achieving it, Mrs. Norris possesses a gaze that is equally frustrated. In Sir Thomas's mind, her gaze is divorced from the ideal moral judgment required to control the behaviour of his children: "in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention, and in Edmund's judgment, he had sufficient confidence to make him go without fears for their conduct" (32). Though Mrs. Norris is certainly watchful, Sir Thomas's early assessment that she lacks the proper judgment is correct: Mrs. Norris does not oppose the theatricals at Mansfield Park, "having never seen any of the impropriety which was so glaring to Sir Thomas" (188). She also possess a "blindness of affection" (463) towards the Bertram daughters, specifically Maria, and sees only negative qualities in Fanny. Angered that Henry Crawford proposed to Fanny and not Julia, but ordered by Sir Thomas to say nothing to Fanny, Mrs. Norris "only looked her ill will" (332). Mrs. Norris finds fault with Fanny every time she looks at her, and presumes to take up the position of the all-seeing eye to criticize, claiming that "there is a something about Fanny, I have often observed it before, [...] she certainly has a little spirit of secrecy, and independence, and

nonsense, about her” (323). Mrs. Norris’s gaze is one of frustrated power, exercised upon a subject who is even more powerless.

Despite Sir Thomas’s imperfect panoptic gaze and Mrs. Norris’s corrupt one, Fanny Price develops into Foucault’s model inmate in the absence of the model gaze. Foucault postulates that eventually, a prisoner in the Panopticon will begin to police himself:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (202)

Fanny Price is one such subject, and her subjection begins even before she arrives at Mansfield Park. On the trip there, trapped in a carriage with Mrs. Norris, Fanny receives her first lecture about “her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behaviour which it ought to produce” (13). The expectations are clear, and as a result, homesick, nervous, ten-year-old Fanny believes that it is “a wicked thing for her not to be happy” (13). The process of subjection continues as Fanny grows up. She soon learns the habits of her new family, and “she began at least to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them” (17). By the time she is eighteen, Fanny possesses a highly-developed sense of what constitutes right and wrong in the world of Mansfield Park. This heightened morality has been criticized by Austen fans and scholars alike, and, along with Fanny’s pronounced physical weaknesses, is the source of much reader animosity. In his influential essay on *Mansfield Park*, Lionel Trilling declares that “Nobody has ever found it possible to like the heroine of *Mansfield Park*”

(212), claiming that Fanny is “overtly virtuous and consciously virtuous” (212). Nina Auerbach calls Fanny, among other things, “a charmless heroine who was not made to be loved” (221).

It does often seem that Fanny is quick to blame herself. She is the only person who refuses to act in the theatricals, and is made to feel that even attending rehearsal is a punishable act. Mrs. Grant is unable to attend the fateful last rehearsal, and Fanny is solicited to read the role of the cottager’s wife. Rather than be upset with Tom Bertram, Fanny holds herself responsible: “why had not she rather gone to her own room, as she had felt to be safest, instead of attending the rehearsal at all? She had known it would irritate and distress her—she had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished” (172). This self-debasing attitude arises again when Mary Crawford monopolizes Fanny’s horse. Fanny does not show her disappointment and jealousy when Edmund and Mary come up the path to the house, but rather, “she began then to be afraid of appearing rude and impatient; and walked to meet them with a great anxiety to avoid the suspicion” (68). Fanny presents herself as a perfect, grateful dependent by suppressing her feelings. What critics such as Trilling and Auerbach fail to realize is that much of Fanny’s morality has been assimilated from Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris. Fanny is not solely responsible for her unlovable qualities. She is their model pupil, schooled in the art of appearing as a properly humbled poor relation.

Unlike her cousins, who police themselves only when their father is present, Fanny is the only “inmate” of Mansfield Park who has fully internalized the constraints imposed by Sir Thomas’s gaze. She behaves herself constantly, even when Sir Thomas is

not in the country. This process of internalization echoes the process which Bentham attempted to achieve by designing his Panopticon to “induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). This state depends upon the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Power is visible in the form of the watchtower, which every inmate in his individual cell can see; it is unverifiable because the inmate cannot know if the guard, who is hidden from view within the tower, is watching him at any particular moment (Foucault 201). Sir Thomas’s departure for Antigua produces a situation where power becomes suddenly *invisible* and unverifiable instead. Though he leaves matters to “Mrs. Norris’s watchful attention” and “Edmund’s judgment” (32), both prove fallible. Mrs. Norris sketches a selective portrait of Rushworth’s character by ensuring that Sir Thomas hears “nothing but the perfectly good and agreeable” about Mr. Rushworth so that he approves a marriage that she takes credit for arranging (40). Edmund’s judgement is affected by Mary Crawford, and he finally capitulates and agrees to act in *Lovers’ Vows*. Their figurative watchtower absent, the Bertram children delight in the absence of their father, and convert two of his favourite rooms (the drawing room and billiard room) into a theatre. Maria Bertram and Henry Crawford engage in flirtation so ill-concealed that even dense Mr. Rushworth notices it (464). Amidst this flurry of inappropriate activity, Fanny Price maintains her judgement, which is also a projection of Sir Thomas’s. At Sotherton, Edmund wanders off with Mary Crawford on a “serpentine” path (94), which leaves Fanny as the sole moral compass of the party. She symbolically warns Maria against passing around the edge of an iron gate, exclaiming that “you will certainly hurt

yourself against those spikes—you will tear your gown—you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha” (99-100). The sexual and moral implications of Maria’s tearing her gown and slipping into the ha-ha with Henry Crawford are clear. Fanny has completely internalized the constraints of power and the expected modes of behaviour imbued in Sir Thomas’s gaze. She is the perfect panoptic subject, one who supports Foucault’s claim that “the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary” (201).

The subversive irony of *Mansfield Park* lies in this perfection. By internalizing the power constraints of the panoptic gaze, Fanny has also internalized the ability to observe herself closely. She soon directs her practised eye onto everyone else at the Mansfield estate, while still watching herself, and judges what she sees with the same criteria espoused by Sir Thomas. After the Sotherton excursion, for example, Fanny “could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without observation, and seldom without wonder or censure” (115). Due to her fierce scopophobia, Fanny’s gaze is unnoticed. Everyone else is so preoccupied with his or her own preparations during rehearsals that Fanny can move and act freely without “being seen or missed” (160). She regrets that she is so “sad and insignificant” (159-60), but this near-invisibility, along with her intense scopophobia, renders Fanny an adept observer. Though Fanny learns her watchfulness from Sir Thomas, her gaze is more than just a transposed version of his. Instead, hers is an alternative gaze, the result of an observer judging from a moral rather than patriarchal or economic centre, but doing so inconspicuously. Sir Thomas’s gaze conveys power, but his family members attempt to resist it by altering their behaviour around him. Foucault

believes that the Panopticon is “a diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form” and that it is “polyvalent in its applications” (205): “Whenever one is dealing with a multiplicity of individuals on whom a task or a particular form of behaviour must be imposed, the panoptic schema may be used” (205). Foucault posits that the family is one of those polyvalent uses (215), but *Mansfield Park* demonstrates otherwise. There are limits to applying the panoptic model to a family; Sir Thomas cannot stand as the constant surveyor of the Panopticon as the watchtower does. When he is not visible, the discrepancy between his children’s behaviour and their actual desires is uncovered. A great deal of this discovery is evident to Fanny’s eye, but only because she is an unobtrusive observer. Fanny sees what Sir Thomas cannot because people do not alter their behaviour around her, mainly because they do not even notice that she is present.

To what purpose does Fanny gaze? It is certainly not to exercise power over those whom she sees. Fanny gazes partly because she has been brought up to do so, having internalized Sir Thomas’s practice. If she is indeed the perfect panoptic subject, the reason Fanny observes is because to do so has been instilled in her. A better question would be, what results from Fanny’s gaze? At Mansfield Park, Fanny watches to obtain information. A one-woman intelligence service, Fanny gathers information with an alacrity that Lady Catherine de Bourgh would envy. The task of acquiring information, however, does not prevent Fanny from reacting to what she sees, and potentially colouring her perceptions. Though Margaret Kirkham believes that Fanny possesses “a clear, critical, rationally judged mind” (239), Susan Morgan argues that Fanny acknowledges a reality beyond herself, and that this openness to the world makes her

perceptive, but also vulnerable: “Fanny’s persuadableness means that she does not, even as a quiet observer, understand people in neutral ways. She is involved with what she sees” (160). This is true to a certain extent. Fanny, who is so often accused of being passive, reacts strongly in several situations. Morgan notes how excessively happy she is as she saves the scrap of a note Edmund started to her, or how quickly Mrs. Norris can move her to tears (159). Fanny is not a passive, emotionless observer, but one who reacts to what she sees. One of her most trying experiences occurs in her East room as she watches Edmund and Mary rehearse as lovers Anhalt and Amelia:

To prompt them must be enough for her; and it was sometimes *more* than enough; for she could not always pay attention to the book. In watching them she forgot herself; and agitated by the increasing spirit of Edmund’s manner, had once closed the page and turned away exactly as he wanted help. [...] when again alone and able to recall the whole, she was inclined to believe their performance would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it, as must ensure their credit, and make it a very suffering exhibition to herself. (170)

Fanny certainly suffers much from watching the man she loves court another woman under the guise of rehearsal. What she feels, however, results from accurate observation. If Fanny had the selective vision of her uncle, she would impute the naturalness of the rehearsal to acting skills, and deny any ulterior emotions. Instead, Fanny accurately observes, and has time for rational recollection afterwards, even though her reflections pain her.

On a more practical front, Fanny’s observations enable her to refuse Henry Crawford’s marriage proposal. The confrontation in the East room between Sir Thomas and Fanny rests upon their different views of Henry Crawford’s character. Sir Thomas is amazed at Fanny’s refusal, for he sees Henry Crawford as a young man “with every thing

to recommend him; not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to every body” (315-16). Fanny disagrees, but cannot give Sir Thomas her reason for refusal: “Her ill opinion of him was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins’ sake, she could scarcely dare mention to their father” (317-18). Fanny does not explain her reasons because she feels obligated to protect her cousins: “Maria and Julia—and especially Maria, were so closely implicated in Mr. Crawford’s misconduct, that she could not give his character, such as she believed it, without betraying them” (318). Her position as panoptic subject enables her to assess Mr. Crawford correctly, but it also prevents her from sharing her motives with Sir Thomas, who sees her as only “wilful and perverse” instead (318). Ultimately, Fanny is vindicated. Henry Crawford’s vanity overcomes his attempts at constancy, he seduces Maria, and Fanny is shown to be right in refusing him.

Based on her behaviour as a moral centre and her vindication in refusing Mr. Crawford, it is tempting to view Fanny as a paragon of virtue, no matter how unlikeable that makes her. Fanny, however, is a creation of Jane Austen, who once claimed that heroines who were “pictures of perfection [...] make me sick and wicked” (*L* 335). Upon closer examination, Fanny Price does not emerge untarnished. Despite her declaration to the contrary, Fanny is the best actor Mansfield has ever produced, and her greatest act is hiding her love for Edmund<sup>6</sup>. She is aware that marrying Edmund could be construed as,

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<sup>6</sup> For an excellent discussion of how all the inhabitants of Mansfield Park are actors off-stage, see Claudia L. Johnson’s *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*, pp. 100-1. Johnson sees Sir Thomas as “the most assiduous of actors at Mansfield Park” (101). I would argue, however, that Fanny’s performance is even more impressive because it is based on the internalized morality of Sir Thomas’s gaze. Sir Thomas never doubts his motives, while Fanny is not even aware of them. Fanny is the best actor of all because she even fools herself.



in Mrs. Norris's words, "morally impossible" (6), and Fanny feels that it is her "duty" to resist feelings that she considers a "presumption" (264): "to think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity" (264). It is highly appropriate that a novel that prominently features theatricals would be so concerned with the acting that occurs off-stage. Fanny's acting, however, differs from the acting performed by her cousins. The Bertram children also repress their feelings in front of Sir Thomas, but that is in an effort to resist his panoptic gaze. Fanny's motives are more complex.

Though Fanny is an adept actor, she is usually associated with nature in *Mansfield Park*. Fanny, who has "been given a taste for nature in early life" (113), admires the "growth and beauty" of the shrubbery at the Parsonage (208) and enjoys seeing Mansfield Park bloom in the springtime (446). Her preference for nature over artifice is best demonstrated during an evening at Mansfield Park, where she, Edmund and Miss Crawford are stationed at the window while the others are singing at the pianoforte. A contrast is established—the arranged artificial candlelight versus the constellations of stars; the "harmony" of the twilight versus the harmony of the glee (113). Mary Crawford wanders back to the piano, and Fanny expresses a wish to go out onto the lawn and star gaze with Edmund. She is mortified to see him gravitate towards the piano and Mary, but Fanny herself remains by the window, the only person left to enjoy the twilight view (113). Fanny's affinity with nature is clear, and it is also evident that she is alone in this relationship. Associated with nature but not above acting, Fanny embodies the conflict between nature and artifice. Fanny's acting is less like her cousins' altered behaviour and

more like intense repression. She acts in order to mask, and she masks because, as the perfect panoptic subject, she must conform to an established code of behaviour. Her act becomes naturalized because the power structure that compels her to act has been naturalized within her. Fanny's affinity to nature is a hint that she is susceptible to being naturalized, which is exactly what occurs with Sir Thomas's panoptic gaze.

Paradoxically, Fanny acts because it is natural for her to do so.

*Mansfield Park* naturalizes more than just Fanny's gaze; it also naturalizes watching in general through its presentation of spectatorship<sup>7</sup>. Fanny often assumes the position of a spectator, most obviously during the rehearsals for *Lovers' Vows*. In addition to being forced to watch Edmund and Mary rehearse, Fanny finds that "it was a pleasure to *her* to creep into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act" (165). She is useful to the actors "sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator" (165). The spectator position is a privileged one. I have already discussed how Fanny's internalization of the panoptic gaze enables her to be a better observer than Sir Thomas. Fanny herself is aware of this, as she points out to Edmund when they discuss the behaviour of Maria and Mr. Crawford during rehearsals. "As a by-stander," Fanny says to him, "perhaps I saw more than you did" (350). The spectator in *Mansfield Park* occupies such an important position that he or she gradually becomes a part of the scene and is in turn observed. Edmund, for example, watches "the progress of [Fanny's] attention" as Henry Crawford acts yet again, this time by reading Shakespeare (337): "the eyes which

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<sup>7</sup> Since much of the theoretical and critical work on the gaze stems from film theory, the term *spectator* usually refers to a male viewer in a position of power, deriving pleasure from gazing at a female object on the screen. My use of the terms *spectator* and *spectatorship* in this chapter differs from the way it is used by film theorists; it is less concerned with desire and more with the power of surveillance.

had appeared so studiously to avoid him throughout the day, were turned and fixed on Crawford” (337). Fanny is not the only one caught watching. During an evening at the parsonage, William and Fanny remain at the otherwise deserted card table while the others gather around the fire: “Henry Crawford’s chair was the first to be given a direction towards them, and he sat silently observing them for a few minutes; himself in the meanwhile observed by Sir Thomas” (249). The division between seeing and being seen blurs; it is suddenly possible to be both simultaneously. The act of watching, of being a spectator, becomes both a part of the scene, and further removed from it. In these examples, Edmund and Sir Thomas are removed from the action even further, occupying another level of observation. In this case, the spectator is moving further and further away from that central tower of the Panopticon, yet by moving away, he or she is able to see more.

The alternative gaze that Fanny exhibits, the one that absorbs and then subverts the Foucauldian, panoptic gaze, is that of the spectator. In the former, one observer passively watches the actions (or acting) of others, gleaning information but by no means controlling their behaviour. In the latter, one watcher exercises power to control the actions of many. Fanny, who embodies both gazes, is a Foucauldian gazer because she has internalized Sir Thomas’s gaze, and a spectator because she occupies a subordinate position within the household and therefore exercises no power or control over what she sees. The prevalence of the spectator’s gaze suggests that Mansfield Park itself is also a theatre, one that extends beyond Sir Thomas’s renovated drawing and billiard rooms. The parallels between Mansfield Park and the play within the novel, *Lovers’ Vows*, are not

coincidental. In the play, an authoritative father attempts to marry off his daughter with no regard for her personal feelings, much as Sir Thomas does successfully with Maria and unsuccessfully with Fanny. It features the clergyman Anhalt, played by the soon-to-be-ordained Edmund, wooing headstrong and witty Amelia, played by the headstrong and witty Mary Crawford. Mr. Rushworth is given the role of the rejected suitor, which he fills in the novel as the rejected husband. The play's one constant spectator, Fanny, is also the constant observer of the house. From the centre of the Panopticon, Sir Thomas's gaze emanates, and from the margins, Fanny Price acts as a spectator. *Mansfield Park*, then, becomes both Panopticon and play.

Though the architectural models of Panopticon and playhouse use two conflicting types of gazes, they both involve fabrication. One concerns itself with the fabrication of a narrative, and of an alternate, microcosmic universe; the other, of subjects. The principles of power involved in building the Panopticon are also involved in creating a society "not of spectacle, but of surveillance" (Foucault 217): "the individual is carefully fabricated in [the social order], according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (217). Appropriately, Foucault compares the society of panoptic surveillance to the theatre, suggesting the opposing nature of the two concepts: "We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine" (217). That he refers to the Panopticon as a machine demonstrates the constructed, manufactured nature of the panoptic principles, one that mirrors the principles of acting. Both methods also attempt to present the unnatural as natural. Fanny represents both of these extremes. She has naturalized the

panoptic gaze, but also seems to fulfil a natural role as spectator on and off the Mansfield stage.

It is this attempted cover up, the substitution of natural for unnatural, that the highly discomfoting ending of *Mansfield Park* calls attention to. One wonders at Fanny's ability to be happy while so many others suffer. When Fanny learns that Edmund is to bring her and Susan back to Mansfield, Fanny feels that she is "in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy while so many were miserable. The evil which brought such good to her!" (443). The fall of the house of Bertram is a hard one indeed. Maria loses her good standing in society, Mrs. Norris is subsequently "quieted, stupified, indifferent" (448), Tom has been deathly ill, Lady Bertram worries about her son, and Edmund is nursing both his brother and a broken heart. Despite all this, we learn that Fanny "must have been a very happy creature" (461), for she is home, she is back at Mansfield Park. Sir Thomas's very misery is cause for Fanny's happiness: "when Sir Thomas came back she had every proof that could be given in his then melancholy state of spirits, of his perfect approbation and increased regard" (461). A dissonance pervades the final chapters; Fanny is emotionally out of step with the rest of the Mansfield household. The dissonance continues as we learn about but do not witness Edmund trading Mary Crawford for Fanny Price as the object of his love. "What could be more natural than the change?" the narrator asks (470). Whether or not the question itself is facetious, the narrator's claim that the change is "natural" is suspicious, given that the entire novel exposes attempts to present the unnatural as natural.

By marrying Edmund, two opposing goals are accomplished. First, Fanny's concealed, repressed desire for Edmund is fulfilled. She gets what her heart desires. John Wiltshire has noted how the rebellious nature of Fanny's desires is what signifies her resistance. Analyzing Fanny's reaction to the East room rehearsal, Wiltshire argues that "Fanny is telling herself and telling herself vehemently what her social position is, and what she may or may not think and desire: but the vehemence itself is the rebellious or libidinal element seeking its displaced expression" (*Body* 94). Fanny's way of expressing her desires does not turn her into Auerbach's Romantic devouring monster (212), but she does crave, and her ability to gaze, ironically learned from the patriarchal system that aimed to quash her desires, enables this. Secondly, however, marrying Edmund results in Fanny's moving further into the family circle. She loses her position as a subordinate poor relation and becomes Sir Thomas's ideal daughter: "Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted" (472). This means that Fanny also loses her ability to resist when she finally attains what she desires. The bystander who could see so much is taken into the bonds of the family and becomes a bystander no more. Though Sir Thomas regrets his earlier, stern and oppressive behaviour, his hope that Fanny and Edmund will marry is expressed in the familiar terms of confinement: "Sick of ambitious and mercenary connections" (471), Sir Thomas is "anxious to *bind* by the strongest *securities* all that remained to him of domestic felicity" (471, emphasis added). Fanny's absorption into the family is especially troubling given the small acts of power she experiences at Portsmouth. One wonders what has become of the young woman in Portsmouth who

expressed so much surprise at the power of choice involved with subscribing to a circulating library, or at the influence that she could exert over a younger sister.

Thus, the final paradox of *Mansfield Park* allows Fanny Price to triumph by rewarding her with what she has always dangerously desired, but makes it a condition of her triumph that she loses the special potency of her gaze. The last we hear of Fanny Price, she has acquired a gaze that echoes Sir Thomas's in its selectivity. Upon the death of Dr. Grant, the Mansfield living goes to Edmund, and Fanny and Edmund move to the estate:

the parsonage there, which under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach but with some painful sensation of restraint or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as every thing else, within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park, had long been. (473)

It is a curious ending filled with too many modifiers for comfort. Mansfield Parsonage is as “thoroughly perfect” in Fanny’s eyes as “every thing else.” The passage is especially suspicious given Fanny’s ruminations upon the powers of memory while sitting in shrubbery of that very parsonage:

If any one faculty of our nature may be called *more* wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. [...] The memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient—at others, so bewildered and so weak—and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond controul!—We are to be sure a miracle in every way—but our powers of recollecting and forgetting, do seem peculiarly past finding out. (208-209)

This becomes an ironic foreshadowing of Fanny’s own memory failure. Conveniently forgetting the abuse she suffered at the hands of her aunt Norris and the trepidation of calling upon Miss Crawford, Fanny adjusts her vision and no longer acts as the observant spectator that she once was. By the novel’s end, the reader can answer the question that so perplexes Mary Crawford (48): Is Miss Price ‘in’ or ‘out’? Alas, she is ‘in’.

### *Chapter Three*

## **The Imaginist: Distinctions and Narrative Authority in *Emma***

Critical wisdom consistently places *Emma* at the apex of Austen's canon and amongst the greatest novels of English literature, praising its winning characterization of a potentially unlikeable heroine and near-perfect formal technique. Of all the novels, *Emma* in particular is noted for the manner in which free indirect discourse successfully manipulates the reader's point of view. In his highly influential book *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt praised Austen for integrating the internal, psychological narration used by Samuel Richardson and the external, intrusive narrative technique of Henry Fielding. Austen, Watt claims, "was able to combine into a harmonious unity the advantages both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment, of the internal and of the external approaches to character" (310). Though Watt does not give this merging of internal and external narrative a name, he is certainly alluding to the technique of free indirect discourse, a point made by Casey Finch and Peter Bowen (5). A narrative technique that utilizes a third-person omniscient narrator but also accesses the internal thoughts and feelings of characters, free indirect discourse (also known as free indirect speech) is indirectly reported speech or thought that retains the idiom of the character without explicit attribution (Mezei 68). Austen skilfully employs the technique in *Emma*, taking up the idiomatic discourse of her characters sometimes for only a sentence or a sentence



fragment. When examining the suitability of the Crown Inn for a ball, for instance, the thoughts of Emma and the Westons are presented indirectly: “Every body invited, was certainly to come; Frank had already written to Enscombe to propose staying a few days beyond his fortnight, *which could not possibly be refused*. A most delightful dance it was to be” (256, emphasis added). These thoughts are not placed in quotation marks, and attributions are not made. We can guess, however, that the second clause concerning Frank and Enscombe is contributed by his gregarious, optimistic father, who displays a characteristic assured certainty.

Though this shifting narrative voice resolves issues of how to present the inner consciousness of a character while retaining an external narrator, it also leads to multiple readings and interpretations, since it is sometimes difficult to know which thoughts to treat ironically. *Emma* is indeed a story about readings and misreadings, particularly those of its heroine, through whom most of its action is presented. A rereading of the novel allows the reader to understand the mysterious behaviour of some characters and appreciate the irony of many statements, but it can also produce frustrating conflicting interpretations and a loss of reader confidence. As Tara Ghoshal Wallace puts it, “‘Why didn’t I see this before?’ often leads to ‘Maybe it isn’t there’, so that I careen from wild surmise to shamefaced conviction that I’m overreading” (78). In “The Secret Languages of *Emma*,” Juliet McMaster examines and deconstructs various equivocating speeches in *Emma*, demonstrating how conversations in the novel are fraught with double and sometimes triple meanings. Questioning speech and discourse quickly leads to questioning perception: “One of the great preoccupations of *Emma* is the subjectivity of

perception and the way in which judgements depend on the personality and prejudices of the judge” (Stafford xii). What Emma sees, in other words, depends upon what Emma wants to see.

The style of free indirect discourse and the distance between narrator and character that it creates prevents a conflation of Emma’s gaze with *Emma*’s gaze. Though the novel is certainly told through Emma’s point of view, the narrator is still a third-person omniscient being (Finch and Bowen presume a female narrator [6]) who controls the presentation of the text. This distance encourages readings that challenge narrative authority in the text, resulting in a domino effect of perpetual questioning. After expressing her frustration, Wallace concludes that “*Emma* sometimes privileges narrative authority, asking readers to trust what they are told, and sometimes urges readers to resist, to read against the grain, to challenge *any* voice that claims to be authoritative” (78). While Wallace intriguingly analyzes the novel and reads Harriet Smith as less silly and Jane Fairfax as more accountable, her examination pulls *Emma* apart without reassembling it. The “sometimes” of Wallace’s solution frustrates as much as *Emma*’s elusive narrative authority. *When* should readers trust the narrator’s voice, and when should they not? If speech and discourse in *Emma* are open to so much interpretation, then are the various forms of looking questionable as well? Can examining the way looking is presented in the novel resolve some of the narrative difficulties? Finally, if the narrative voice is so suspect, what should we make of a narrative gaze (if one exists) in the novel?

A discussion of perception in *Emma* cannot begin without examining the voices that make up “the large and populous village” of Highbury (7). Best represented by the garrulous Miss Bates, Highbury’s voices knit a network of gossip that discusses everything from Mr. Perry’s carriage to Emma’s matrimonial prospects. Casey Finch and Peter Bowen propose that gossip operates upon principles of power similar to those of the Foucauldian gaze. Gossip in the novel amounts to a form of mild surveillance: “Through covert insinuation rather than overt pressure, gossip delineates a circle of consensual values, a circle that simultaneously identifies the community of Highbury and exercises mild disciplinary control over its members” (7). The power of gossip lies in how it

naturalizes authority over the home by bringing the home under the purview of the public or, rather, by diffusing itself amongst all homes, where its power is irresistible because it seems to have no fixed, absolutely visible source. [...] gossip functions as a powerful form of authority because its source is nowhere and everywhere at once. (2)

Foucault postulates a similar means of distributing the power of the gaze in *Discipline and Punish*, one that involves “a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert” (214). A similar faceless gaze affects the behaviour of those in Highbury. The power of this community gaze, as I call it, is one of exposure, which produces the ability to control behaviour that is so crucial to Foucault. Frank and Jane’s lovers’ quarrel occurs because she wisely foresees the power of this community gaze; Jane will not allow him to accompany her back to the Bates residence, for “Had we been met walking together between Donwell and Highbury, the truth must have been suspected” (441). Emma, of course, does not escape the prying eyes of Highbury either. She is aware that her position

among the first families of Highbury makes her particularly vulnerable to the glare of the community gaze. Despite her marked dislike of them, Emma decides that she must give a dinner for the Eltons because she “must not do less than others, or she should be exposed to odious suspicions, and imagined capable of pitiful resentment” (291). Highbury is indeed a “neighbourhood of voluntary spies” (NA 198).

Finch and Bowen leave no room for resisting the power of gossip (and therefore of the community gaze) in their analysis of *Emma*, but it is important to note the extent to which gossip relies upon vision. The voluntary spies of Highbury might be able to control the behaviour of those in their community, but this community also depends upon conversation to further proliferate its power. The fear of disclosure, after all, is what motivates Jane’s caution, and this disclosure would be accomplished through speaking. The gossips of Highbury must have something to talk about, and the talkers often resort to what they observe to supply topics of conversation. The guests at the Hartfield dinner party, for example, discuss Frank Churchill, the wonders of the British postal system, and handwriting: “The varieties of hand-writing were farther talked of, and the usual *observations* made” (297, emphasis added). In conversation, making observations is a standardized form of social small talk. Before the ball at the Crown Inn begins, the early arrivals, “having nothing else to do, formed a sort of half circle round the fire, to *observe* in their various modes, till other subjects were started, that, though May, a fire in the evening was still very pleasant” (320, emphasis added). Making observations also becomes an empirical exercise in Highbury. The awkward atmosphere of Harriet’s visit to the Martins becomes warmer when Mrs. Martin suddenly says that she thinks Harriet

has grown, prompting them to remember when “she had been measured last September” and examine the “pencilled marks and memorandums on the wainscot by the window” (187). After hearing about his engagement, Emma shortens a discussion of whether Mr. Elton is a tall man by voicing the presumed opinions of those present: “‘Who shall answer that question?’ cried Emma. ‘My father would say ‘yes,’ Mr. Knightley, ‘no;’ and Miss Bates and I that he is just the happy medium” (174). Jane Fairfax, who asked the question, has discussed Mr. Elton before, for as her aunt reminds her, “I told you yesterday he was precisely the height of Mr. Perry” (175). Taking notice and making subsequent observations is an integral aspect of talking in Highbury. That Mr. Elton’s height arises as a topic of conversation not once but twice, and that making observations sometimes constitutes small talk, indicates the staleness of the conversation in Highbury. In this village that is not quite big enough to be a town, people do not run out of things to talk about—they merely talk about them again.

One person Highbury certainly talks about is Emma Woodhouse, a fact of which she is fully aware. Emma is someone who “sees herself completely through the gossip of her neighbours” (Finch and Bowen 11). Emma understands gossip, and therefore also understands the community gaze aligned with it. Flirting with Frank at Box Hill, for instance, Emma mentally writes the sentence that will be sent off in letters to Maple Grove and Ireland: “Mr. Frank Churchill and Miss Woodhouse flirted together excessively” (268). Yet Emma does not so much believe that she is a part of the Highbury community as that it is a part of her. Susan Morgan suggests that Emma “considers herself a creator and the people around her as expressions of her will” (28).

Hartfield, “in spite of its separate lawn and shrubberies and name, did really belong” to Highbury (7), even if it is physically “a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate” (136). Emma’s geographical condition reflects her condition as an observer and citizen of Highbury. She is simultaneously inside and outside, centered and decentered, or, as Tony Tanner puts it, “ec-centric” (189). Her social condition relies upon simultaneously being a part of Highbury, but also on being first and therefore above most of the society Highbury can offer her. This self-elevation gives rise to Emma’s creationist, “imaginist” (335) tendencies. She privileges her own voice, her own opinions, and her own observations to the point of scripting and performing the debate over whether Mr. Elton is a tall man, assuming every speaking role.

The debate over Mr. Elton’s height also illustrates at its most basic level the tendency of Highbury residents, by virtue of the multiplicity of their gazes, to hold different views on the same topic. A more complex examination of the multiplicity (and fallibility) of gazes is the episode of Harriet’s portrait, in which Emma attempts to manipulate the network of gazes around a piece of artwork. Reminiscent of but quite unlike the portrait scene in *Pride and Prejudice*, this episode explores what happens when a portrait is not an accurate representation of its original. Emma fulfills her artistic drive by not only painting an embellished portrait of Harriet, but also by arranging how the sitting will transpire. Though Austen predates feminist film theory by almost two centuries, she demonstrates in *Emma* an understanding of the way men and women are supposed to interact as the source of a desiring gaze and as its object. By turning Harriet into a work of art to be displayed, Emma clearly positions her as an object to be gazed at.

Ironically, this episode reifies Emma and Harriet's entire friendship, one based upon Emma's attempts to polish and refine Harriet. After their first meeting, Emma decides that Harriet "wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect. *She* would notice her; she would improve her" (23). Emma the portrait painter means to "throw in a little improvement to the figure, to give a little more height, and considerably more elegance" (47). Harriet *as* canvass becomes Harriet on canvass. Not content with posing Harriet, Emma also attempts to position Elton as the spectator, and gives him credit for stationing himself "where he might gaze and gaze again without offence" (46) though he is actually "watching every touch" of her pencil (46), and not her model. In Emma's mind, it follows that the man who gazes at a portrait of Harriet must also be the admirer of Harriet herself.

Unlike the portrait of Darcy, which is the most accurate representation of him that Elizabeth encounters in *Pride and Prejudice*, the portrait of Harriet is nothing but exaggerations. These embellishments do not go unnoticed. Mrs. Weston observes that Emma gives Harriet "the only beauty she wanted" by adding prettier eye brows and eyelashes (47-48). Mr. Knightley declares that Emma has "made her too tall" (48), and Mr. Woodhouse, characteristically concerned about drafts, worries that "she must catch cold" (48). The portrait itself is set outdoors on "a warm day in the summer" (48), though the sitting occurs at Hartfield sometime in the fall. Peter Sabor reads these embellishments as Emma's "wish to raise Harriet's value and social standing by making her the subject of a portrait, and hopes to endear her to Elton in doing so" (222). Annette M. LeClair examines the scene in terms of authority and the difficulties of ownership of

work. Emma, LeClair argues, means to re-form Harriet as society's image of what a proper gentleman's wife should be. The portrait never becomes Emma's own because "it simply reproduces shapes that society has already drawn for her" (117). In the same manner that Emma cannot truly own the portrait, she also cannot control the gazes operating within her contrived situation that are similarly based upon social expectations of acceptable courtship. Once displayed, the portrait enters the public sphere, and the dissent is deafening. Only Mr. Elton claims that he "never saw such a likeness" (48), and his eye is one that Emma cannot respect. For Sabor, response to the finished work "provides insight into the various characters in the novel" (223). The various responses also expose the difficulty of securing a unanimous, unified gaze from a community, and demonstrate how little power Emma actually holds over her work of art.

How is it that Emma completely misunderstands Mr. Elton's romantic intentions? His behaviour is quickly decoded by John Knightley, who slyly tells Emma that "he seems to have a great deal of good-will towards *you*" (112). Mr. Elton's attentions do not escape the community gaze of Highbury either; a potential match is conjectured but quickly scuttled by Miss Bates and her circle of gossips. Discussing Mr. Elton's engagement to Augusta Hawkins, Miss Bates, who always says more than she realizes, lets slip that "I had always rather fancied that it would be some young lady hereabouts; not that I ever—Mrs. Cole once whispered to me—but I immediately said, 'No, Mr. Elton is a most worthy young man—but'" (176) and that "nobody could wonder if Mr. Elton should have aspired—Miss Woodhouse lets me chatter on" (176). Emma's confusion arises partly because she tends to hold to her initial assessments despite any evidence to



the contrary. Mr. Elton would always be the lover of Harriet, and any behaviour otherwise is reinterpreted to align with her assertion. Emma, however, cannot be held fully responsible for the confusion. Throughout the first volume of *Emma*, she and Mr. Elton play at courtship, at being lovers. In the same way that both misread each other's language of courtship, both also misread the language of gazes.

Ironically and fittingly, "courtship" in *Emma* is literally a charade, namely Elton's riddle that he submits to Emma ostensibly for Harriet's collection. Emma and Mr. Elton are both well-versed in the importance of looking during courtship, but Emma misreads Mr. Elton's looks. As he submits his charade, "There was deep consciousness about him, and he found it easier to meet her eye than her friend's" (71). Juliet McMaster has traced the literary conventions of love which Austen's novels follow and from which they deviate, and notes that the "time-honoured convention of the force of the eyes, the exchange of looks between lovers, remains a strong influence in the novels" (*Love* 22). In this case, however, Emma and Mr. Elton gaze at cross-purposes. She attributes to him a self-consciousness that he does not possess, and he believes he is indicating the object of his affections by staring at her. This misunderstanding is not completely Emma's doing, for Elton inconsistently uses whatever conventions he can. The charade's final couplet refers to both a ready wit and a soft eye (71), a combination that neither matches the simple-minded, blue-eyed Harriet, nor the clever Emma, whose eyes are hazel. As Emma exclaims, "Who could have seen through such thickheaded nonsense?" (134).

Emma herself begins to see through Mr. Elton during the Randall's Christmas party, where he employs a range of scopophilic techniques to draw her attention. While

female Austen characters such as Caroline Bingley and Charlotte Lucas employ the mechanisms of the desiring gaze as a sexual weapon in *Pride and Prejudice*, the gender separation of male spectator and female object is maintained. In *Emma*, Austen further undermines this dichotomy by making the man the scopophilic being. Mr. Elton's efforts are just as pointed as Miss Bingley's. She praises Darcy on the evenness of his handwriting (*PP* 48), he praises Emma for the improvement in Harriet (*E* 42). Both Mr. Elton and Charlotte Lucas attempt to draw the attention of their intended targets by conversing with them. Emma finds Elton particularly obnoxious during dinner, where "he not only sat at her elbow, but was continually obtruding his happy countenance on her notice, and solicitously addressing her upon every occasion" (*E* 118). Elton obtrudes himself into Emma's field of vision in a similar (though not identical) way that Miss Bingley does with Darcy: "But when the gentlemen entered, [...] Miss Bingley's eyes were instantly turned towards Darcy, and she had something to say to him before he had advanced many steps" (*PP* 54).

However, Mr. Elton and Miss Bingley are two very different scopophilic beings. While *Emma* demonstrates that men indeed can be scopophilic, Mr. Elton, by virtue of his gender, has more power than Miss Bingley does and therefore threatens Emma in a manner that Miss Bingley cannot do to Mr. Darcy. Miss Bingley displays herself in an effort to draw Darcy's gaze, whereas Mr. Elton, by obtruding and rudely sitting between Emma and Mrs. Weston on the sofa, aggressively places himself *inside* Emma's gaze (124). He is more active than Miss Bingley, who must rely upon Darcy to look up. Darcy can pointedly and sometimes rudely ignore Miss Bingley's attentions, whereas Emma

must rebuff Mr. Elton while still behaving according to the codes of polite society. Emma is surprised at Mr. Elton's "assuming to himself the right of first interest in her" (125), but is too "provoked and offended to have the power of directly saying any thing to the purpose" (125). All she can do is "give him a look" and move to another seat (125). Finally, making herself the scopophilic object is the only real recourse Miss Bingley has to indicate her attraction to Darcy. For Mr. Elton, employing scopophilic methods to draw Emma's gaze is a precursor to a verbal declaration and proposal.

The disaster that is Mr. Elton's courtship of Emma demonstrates the danger of manipulating gazes. The desiring gaze, in this case, fails because Emma and Mr. Elton merely play at courtship, and misread each other's signs. His signs, however, are not associated with any genuine affection. Though the desiring gaze is manipulated and abused, the gaze itself is not criticized so much as its manipulators are. Mr. Elton and Emma merely look for predetermined, socially constructed signs of desire and not desire itself, and Mr. Elton has completely divorced any genuine desire from the gaze in his manipulation. He plays with the gaze with the same skill that Frank Churchill plays with language. In the company of men, Mr. Knightley warns Emma, Mr. Elton has spoken of marrying for money rather than love (66). In the case of Emma and Harriet, Harriet becomes the eternal object, art project and subject in one. Harriet finally steps out of the object position by voicing her own desire for Mr. Knightley. Not only does Harriet reject being the object of Emma's creative gaze, but Emma rejects her own imaginist gaze as well, exclaiming, "Oh God! that I had never seen her!" (411). In a novel where both the

hero and heroine learn to favour “plain dealing” (341), manipulating people’s perceptions is unacceptable.

Despite the poor precedence set by Mr. Elton, *Emma* contains several examples of genuine desiring gazes, one of which is manipulated to be disguised, and two of which go unrecognized. The suspicions of any students of the desiring gaze would quickly be piqued by Frank Churchill’s tendency to stare at Jane Fairfax. Emma frequently catches him staring at Jane, but he cleverly deflects suspicion. When Emma notices Frank “looking intently across the room at Miss Fairfax, who was sitting exactly opposite,” he excuses himself by claiming that he is so distracted by her odd hair style that “I cannot keep my eyes from her” (222). It is not an outright lie, for as Juliet McMaster as shows, Frank is the master of secret languages (“Secret Languages” 124), and he truthfully cannot keep his eyes from Jane Fairfax. While Frank busily manufactures excuses to hide his desiring gazes, Emma and Mr. Knightley desire each other without realizing it. Emma’s epiphany that “Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself” (408) is preceded by several hints, including her misapplied concern for nephew Henry’s lost inheritance if he marries Jane Fairfax (224). One of the clearest indications of her desire is the manner in which she looks at Mr. Knightley at the Crown Inn ball:

His tall, firm, upright figure [...] was such as Emma felt must draw every body’s eyes; and, excepting her own partner, there was not one among the whole row of young men who could be compared with him.—He moved a few steps nearer, and those few steps were enough to prove in how gentlemanlike a manner, with what natural grace, he must have danced, would he but take the trouble. (326)

Despite John Wiltshire’s argument that this telling moment does not amount “convincingly to a demonstration of desire” (*MP, E, P* 73), Emma’s gaze is one

preoccupied with Mr. Knightley's body, a key tenet of the desiring gaze. Additionally, she regularly watches him more than she watches anyone else, and experiences scopophilia in the sense that she experiences pleasure when looking at him. Mr. Knightley experiences the same pleasure when he declares that "I love to look at her" (39). Underlying this mutual scopophilic experience is a sublimated desire that does not surface until the end of the novel.

One cannot discuss *Emma* without discussing class, and the novel indeed features a gaze that relies upon class distinctions. This class-conscious gaze is epitomized by Mrs. Elton, who displays similar scopophilic attributes as her husband. However, while Mr. Elton attempts to draw Emma's gaze of desire, Mrs. Elton desires the community to accord her a look that confirms her status in Highbury. A newly-married woman, Mrs. Elton cannot attempt to draw any desiring gazes from the (few) eligible young men of Highbury. Rather, she prefers to draw a gaze based upon status, conferred by someone such as the unacknowledged patriarch of Highbury, "this dear old beau of mine" (302), Mr. Woodhouse. Paul Delany suggests that Austen's novels explore "two distinct social hierarchies, one of 'class' and one of 'status'" (533). Delany defines class as "the stratification by capital, income, and economic productivity" (534). In terms of income, Augusta Hawkins is relatively well-to-do, with an independent fortune of "10,000*l.* or thereabouts" (181). Where this money comes from, however, affects her status, a more nebulous term that encompasses style of life, connection with landed estate, and "sheer length of tenure" (Delany 534). Mr. Knightley, whose family has owned the Donwell Abbey land since 1540 (Delany 534), has the highest status in the novel. Though the

Woodhouses are “first in consequence” in Highbury and descend from “the younger branch of a very ancient family” (136), they rank second to the Knightleys owing to the mysterious unnamed origins of their family fortune that “comes from other sources” (136). Emma the snob sharply analyzes the early reports of Miss Hawkins using these criteria of rank and class. Bringing “no name, no blood, no alliance” (183), Mrs. Elton descends from trade: “As to connection, Emma was perfectly easy” (183), persuaded that Mr. Elton had “done nothing” to elevate himself (183). Mrs. Elton brings money, but in a world where status is connected with owning property, she is the one who moves up by marrying Mr. Elton, who despite only being able to claim alliances “in trade” (136), at least owns “some independent property” (35).

The term ‘status’ necessitates a society to accord the desired recognition. For Mrs. Elton, this recognition must come from Highbury, and she therefore attempts to draw the community gaze at every opportunity. A newcomer, Mrs. Elton works to secure her place in Highbury society, and if she cannot change her class, she can inflate her status. Though the Eltons do not dine with the Woodhouses, they associate with many of the first-rate families in the neighbourhood, notably the Coles and, of course, Mr. Knightley. Mrs. Elton is particularly skilled at exploiting her status as a married woman, capitalizing on Mr. Woodhouse’s gallant maxim that “A bride [...] is always the first in company, let the others be who they may” (280). Mrs. Elton’s endeavours are aggressive. She consistently calls attention to how she must be first, including leading the way at the Hartfield dinner party (“Must I go first? I really am ashamed of always leading the way” [298]) and expecting to lead the ball at the Crown Inn (325), a ball which she believes is held “to do

me honour” (324). Not content to lead at assemblies, Mrs. Elton insists on leading Highbury into the fashionable world, and dreams of holding “one very superior dinner party” to “shew them how every thing ought to be arranged” (290). The ubiquitous barouche-landau and her showy outfit to gather strawberries at Donwell Abbey, complete with basket and bonnet (358), are other attempts to portray herself as a doyenne of fashion. Within the ballroom, Mrs. Elton expects to lead the Crown ball with Frank Churchill, and “was very evidently wanting to be complimented herself—and it was, “How do you like my gown? — How do you like my trimming?—How has Wright done my hair?” (324). All this is done to attract the attention of those in the ballroom, for she assumes that “everybody’s eyes are so much upon me” (324).

While Mrs. Elton believes that she controls the community gaze, to a certain extent, it also controls her. She assumes that she is the one drawing the gaze, and does not realize that the community gaze is already there, surrounding her and determining her conduct. Mrs. Elton’s actions have been influenced by the time she spent within the Bath gaze, and her behaviour does not change when she arrives in Highbury. A woman whose “Bath habits made evening-parties perfectly natural to her” (290), Mrs. Elton continues to act according to that city’s expected modes of behaviour. Additionally, while being the newcomer in Highbury accords her a certain status in the community gaze, it is that gaze that prompts Mrs. Elton to think that she comes “with superior knowledge of the world, to enliven and improve a country neighbourhood” (281). The gaze impels Mrs. Elton to live up to her general reputation as a clever and agreeable woman, which is the praise that “passed from one mouth to another” when she first arrives (281). As a result, Mrs. Elton

plays at being the fashionable young woman of Highbury. In this sense, she a perfect match for her husband, who played at being a lover of Emma.

A singular moment where Mrs. Elton is looked at, however, deflates any of her “airs of pert pretension” (279) and establishes the contrast between feigned and genuine elegance in *Emma*. John Knightley, who has claims to the Highbury community but is not a part of it, attends the Hartfield dinner party, where he meets Mrs. Elton for the first time. In a sentence that “both sparkles and cuts” (Delany 542), Austen distinguishes between straining for the gaze, and subtly drawing it:

Mrs. Elton, as elegant as lace and pearls could make her, he looked at in silence—wanting only to observe enough for Isabella’s information—but Miss Fairfax was an old acquaintance and a quiet girl, and he could talk to her. (292-93)

This sentence illuminates the difference between labouring to draw attention, and drawing it naturally. It is Jane’s elegance, in fact, that draws many people’s gazes. Even Emma, who jealously dislikes her, can honestly say that “She is a sort of elegant creature that one cannot keep one’s eyes from. I am always watching her to admire” (171). Mrs. Elton, on the other hand, is falsely and incompletely elegant, “very elegantly *dressed*” (281, emphasis added) in her “lace and pearls” (292), but no more. Like her fortune of “so many thousands as would always be called ten” (181), Mrs. Elton requires embellishing.

One place where Mrs. Elton particularly wishes to shine is the ballroom, which in *Emma* is also dominated by the ubiquitous community gaze. The ballroom gaze in *Pride and Prejudice* combined the desire for a husband in the competitive marriage market with a Foucauldian surveillance of every participant’s behaviour. The ballroom gaze as it is



presented in *Emma*, however, is hardly the gaze in question. In a community as small as Highbury, eligible young men are scarce commodities, and the Highbury marriage market is in a slump. Though Mr. Knightley would like to see Emma in love with someone, “there is nobody hereabouts to attach her” (41). Owing to this shortage, then, the ballroom gaze discussed in chapter one accedes to the more dominant community gaze, one which also stems from Foucauldian power dynamics. The ballroom is a perfect venue for a gaze that regulates the behaviour of those in its sight without the more specific effect of determining a young man’s desirability based on his decorous behaviour. It is this gaze that Mrs. Elton is concerned with when she assumes that she will lead the ball.

Balls and dances in *Emma* also feature other, more intimate gazes, gazes which occurred outside the ballroom in *Pride and Prejudice*. Emma experiences pleasure in being admired at the impromptu dance at the Coles’ party, where she is aware that she and Frank Churchill make “a couple worth looking at” (230). One can safely assume that they make a similarly handsome couple at the Crown Inn ball, where she and Frank dance at least the first two dances together. Moreover, even while Emma enjoys the attentions of those gathered at the Coles’, she still searches for Mr. Knightley to see if he will ask Jane Fairfax to dance:

Emma found time [...] to look about, and see what became of Mr. Knightley. This would be trial. He was no dancer in general. If he were to be very alert in engaging Jane Fairfax now, it might augur something. There was no immediate appearance. No; he was talking to Mrs. Cole—he was looking on unconcerned. (229-30)

Here, Emma's gaze hints at her desire, but it also evaluates Mr. Knightley's behaviour to detect any signs of love for Jane. Emma is able to find Mr. Knightley amidst an even larger crowd at the Crown ball: "There he was, among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing" (325). While Emma dances and Mr. Knightley watches, in fact, they engage in their own private dance, one of looks and glances: "Whenever she caught his eye, she forced him to smile; [...] He seemed often observing her" (326). After Mr. Knightley rescues Harriet Smith by dancing with her, Emma's "eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked" (330). In addition to Emma's fixating upon Mr. Knightley's figure and the grace with which he moves, this ocular communication further indicates their mutual attraction. The only other examples of similar communications are the glances shared between two married couples, the Westons and the Eltons. The glance, as noted in chapter one, relies upon mutually shared knowledge. In the case of the Westons, it is "a glance or two between him and his wife" that assures him that Emma is not devastated over Frank's secret engagement (400). The Eltons, despite all their faults, display a similar alignment of looking that reveals a matching mean understanding. As Mr. Elton is about to publicly embarrass Harriet by refusing to dance with her, Emma notices that Mrs. Elton, "who was standing immediately above her, was not only listening also, but even encouraging him by significant glances" (327). It is a defeat for Harriet Smith, but a triumph for the glance.

Since Emma and Mr. Knightley are so adept at communicating with their eyes, it is helpful to examine Mr. Knightley's gaze and powers of perception in the novel. For many readers and critics, Mr. Knightley is as good as his name. He is the knight who

rescues Emma, a man who is “always correct in his careful observations” (Tanner 198) and demonstrates “instructive perfection” for Emma to follow (Trilling *Emma* xxii). “Mr. Knightley,” declares Louise Flavin, “is the standard of good judgment and trustworthiness in the novel” (55). Mr. Knightley, however, is not as perfect as he might seem. Mary Waldron demonstrates that he is not beyond reproach, but is instead “involved in the same kind of social/moral confusion as Emma and all the other characters” (142). Waldron performs a close reading of Mr. Knightley and Emma’s argument about Harriet’s rejection of Robert Martin, and shows the logic behind Emma’s points and the inconsistencies in Mr. Knightley’s. His jealousy over Frank Churchill tarnishes his reputation as a careful observer, and though he chastises Frank for impulsively going to London to get his haircut (206), he also acts abruptly when carrying out the “sudden scheme” (385) of visiting Brunswick Square to avoid watching what he perceives to be the final stages of Frank and Emma’s growing intimacy. Despite this, Mr. Knightley is still viewed as a correct judge of character and the novel’s moral centre, and his views are therefore frequently aligned with those of the narrator. In her discussion of free indirect discourse in *Emma*, Kathy Mezei associates the narrator with “an ironic, masterly (Knightley) voice, the voice of social approbation” (74). Even though most of the novel is told through Emma’s point of view, Mr. Knightley is the character who presumably assumes the mantle of narrative authority. *Emma*, however, is a novel that shows how unreliable and vulnerable to manipulation gazes can be. Though Mr. Knightley’s viewpoint initially seems careful and correct, an examination of chapter forty-one, which is told from his perspective, shows otherwise.

At the level of plot, Mr. Knightley's chapter furthers the storyline by showing an episode that cannot be relayed through Emma. Frank Churchill's blunder about Mr. Perry setting up his carriage escapes Emma, who has hurried ahead into Hartfield to prepare for her guests. More importantly, the chapter becomes an extended exercise in observation. Mr. Knightley's initial dislike of Frank is exacerbated by what he perceives to be "some inclination to trifle with Jane Fairfax" (343). Like Emma at the Coles' party, Mr. Knightley catches Frank in the act of staring at Jane: "he had seen a look, more than a single look, at Miss Fairfax, which, from the admirer of Miss Woodhouse, seemed somewhat out of place" (343-44). Unlike Emma, Mr. Knightley is not distracted by Frank's cover story about an illicit romance between Jane and Mr. Dixon. Frank's blunder about Mr. Perry's carriage provokes another set of looks between himself and Jane, looks that are also perceived by Mr. Knightley, who sees Frank trying "to catch her eye—he seemed watching her intently" (346). Once inside Hartfield and seated around a circular table that facilitates the watching of other people, Mr. Knightley assumes the position of an all-seeing eye: "Mr. Knightley was so placed to see them all; and it was his object to see as much as he could, with as little apparent observation" (347). From his vantage point, Mr. Knightley (and the reader) is able to watch Emma and Frank's behaviour and Jane Fairfax's response. Their conduct is certainly odd and suspicious, as Jane and Frank argue using their eyes and the letter blocks. Upon given the word 'Dixon' to unscramble, Jane "was evidently displeased; looked up, and seeing herself watched [by Frank], blushed" (349). This all occurs under Mr. Knightley's eye, and after everyone leaves, "his thoughts were full of what he had seen" (349).

To this point, the chapter has been filled with direct dialogue (344-346) and Mr. Knightley's observations. Even though Mr. Knightley's observations of Frank's odd behaviour are correct in this case, he is predisposed to be suspicious about Frank. The source of this suspicion becomes clear when we examine his thoughts. After Harriet decodes the word 'blunder' and Jane blushes, Mr. Knightley senses that this is somehow related to the carriage, "but how it could all be, was beyond his comprehension" (348). The paragraph then enters Mr. Knightley's mind using free indirect discourse and assumes his idiomatic thought pattern, one characterized by short, direct sentences and a bias against Frank Churchill:

How the delicacy, the discretion of his favourite could have been so lain asleep! He feared there must be some decided involvement. Disingenuousness and double-dealing seemed to meet him at every turn. These letters were but the vehicle for gallantry and trick. It was a child's play chosen to conceal a deeper game on Frank Churchill's part. (348)

The accuracy of Mr. Knightley's opinion of Frank is tempered by his obvious partiality and concern for Emma and his erroneous belief that she is romantically attached to Frank. His as-yet-unrecognized attraction to Emma is suggested by the reasons he uses to justify voicing his suspicions to her, reasons which are also presented in free indirect discourse: "he must—yes, he certainly must, as a friend—an anxious friend—give Emma some hint, ask her some question. He could not see her in a situation of such danger, without trying to preserve her. It was his duty" (349). The dashes, the repeated stress on 'friend' and his emphatic conclusion that duty is his sole motivation reveal a concern for Emma that is beyond platonic, as does the rather glaring absence of any concern for Jane Fairfax.

Mr. Knightley's chapter is indeed an anomaly in a novel that is told chiefly from Emma's perspective. What, then, is Austen's purpose in giving him a chapter? Plot-wise, the blunder over Mr. Perry's carriage is important, but could have been presented in an alternate situation through Emma's point of view. In this chapter, we finally see Emma from an external perspective, but Mr. Elton's proposal and Frank Churchill's letter also express interpretations of Emma's behaviour. Granted, both are biased (Mr. Elton believes that Emma is encouraging him [132], Frank that she sees through him [439]), but so is Mr. Knightley, as his strong concern for Emma indicates. Does this chapter demonstrate an example of Mr. Knightley's critically-acclaimed heightened powers of observation? Though he correctly surmises that there is "something of a private liking, a private understanding even" between Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax (344), Mr. Knightley "could not understand it" (343). Mr. Knightley sees, but because he lacks Emma's imaginist tendencies, he cannot make conjectures based upon what he observes. What is actually accomplished in the chapter is the revelation of Mr. Knightley's personal bias and feelings. Though his animosity towards Frank Churchill has been clear for some time, it is only in this chapter that we see that he perceives Emma as his "favourite" (348) and seeks to protect her so warmly. The chapter, then, is not designed to relay the accuracy of Mr. Knightley's observations, but to reveal his feelings and biases. This in turn further suggests the unreliability of the gaze in *Emma*. Instead of privileging or endorsing Mr. Knightley's point of view, the chapter reveals it to be as unstable and coloured as Emma's.

The acts of looking in *Emma* examined so far have been rather unreliable. The community gaze associated with gossip wields limited power, but derives its power from the articulation of observations in Highbury. Emma attempts to appropriate the power of this gaze to control the behaviour of others by plotting and matchmaking. Her realm of fantasies requires being able to control the mechanics of the desiring gaze, which she attempts to do in the portrait scene. Emma, however, can no more determine the gazes of those around her than she can control the criticisms of Harriet's portrait. She is unable to identify the desiring gaze in her dealings with Frank Churchill or Mr. Knightley as much as she is unable to control it with Mr. Elton. That Mr. Elton can play with the conventions of the gaze to court Emma, and that Mrs. Elton can play at being an elegant woman to court the Highbury community, further illustrates how vulnerable to manipulation the gaze can be in the novel. Even Mr. Knightley, the upright holder of English masculinity, allows his emotions to colour his gaze, rendering it biased and suspect. The narrative gaze, then, is as difficult to grasp as the narrative voice.

Despite the confusion and misinterpretation of its gazes and voices, *Emma* displays a type of speech and an equivalent type of looking that can be trusted. As Mr. Elton's confused and confusing usage of the visual conventions of courtship have shown, the acts of looking that are most distant from genuine feelings are also those most prone to misinterpretation and manipulation. To find a reliable voice or a reliable gaze, it is necessary to look for instances where the emotion behind the declaration or gaze is strong. *Emma* is a novel that appreciates all that is "decided and open" (460), and its treatment of the gaze and the voice reflects this. The most open and decided speeches are

the exclamations, the instances where we see a “spontaneous burst of Emma’s feelings” (411). The most notable example occurs after Harriet has admitted that she is in love with Mr. Knightley, prompting Emma’s “Oh God! that I had never seen her!” (411). Emma’s condemnation of Frank Churchill is similarly spontaneous: “Impropriety! Oh! Mrs. Weston—it is too calm a censure. Much, much beyond impropriety!— It has sunk him, I cannot say how it has sunk him in my opinion. So unlike what man should be!” (397).

While spontaneous bursts of feeling are usually verbal, there are also instances where a look can convey just as much as, and even more, than speech. Without speaking, which the novel has shown can be manipulated and misunderstood, Mr. Knightley conveys his love for Emma through a single, intense look. During the proposal scene, “He stopped in his earnestness to *look the question*, and the expression of his eyes overpowered her” (430, emphasis added). This follows several misinterpreted speeches between Emma and Mr. Knightley, during which she thinks that he is in love with Harriet, and he believes that she is broken-hearted over Frank Churchill. Emma herself is capable of expressing her feelings through a look. When she learns that Harriet is engaged to Robert Martin, “her eyes, in eager gaze, said, ‘No, this is impossible!’” (471). Though Austen terms Emma’s visual exclamation a gaze, it is more than that. The ability to communicate purely by looking differs from the gazes which express desire and the community gaze that exerts control. This looking also differs from the glance, which depends upon mutually shared knowledge. This type of looking conveys information, such as Jane Fairfax’s desire to communicate privately with Emma, even though Mrs. Elton is also present: “The wish of distinguishing [Emma], as far as civility permitted, was very



evident, though it could not often proceed beyond a look” (457). Those who are most adept at conversing with their eyes are Mr. Knightley and Emma. Mr. Knightley learns that Emma has just returned from calling on the Bates the day after the Box Hill excursion, and “It seemed as if there was an instantaneous impression in her favour, as if his eyes received the truth from her’s, and all that had passed of good in her feelings were at once caught and honoured.—He looked at her with a glow of regard” (385). He looks at her, she looks at him, information is exchanged, but not a word is spoken.

This intimate manner of looking plays out against a grid of power relations, specifically those of class. The two people who are most skilled at silently communicating with each other are also the two who occupy the highest class and rank. They are also, however, the two who are the outsiders of Highbury; Emma, as I suggested earlier, is de-centered owing to her class and geography (Highbury affords her no equals of class, rank or intellect) and Mr. Knightley, despite acting as magistrate and taking care of parish business with Mr. Weston, Mr. Elton and Mr. Cole, resides at Donwell Abbey, which is in another parish altogether. Additionally, though the Woodhouses are “first in consequence” in Highbury (7), Emma’s place as “first” is more and more undermined as the novel progresses. The obvious usurper is Mrs. Elton, who crassly exploits her state as a married woman to elevate her status. Yet it is Emma who purposely sets herself apart from the “second rate and third rate of Highbury” (155), who wants the “power of refusal” over the Coles (208), and who is well on her way to living “in solitary grandeur” (208). While Emma busies herself with setting herself above the society of Highbury, Highbury itself is changing. The Coles have become rich enough in the last one or two

years to afford a new dining room and piano, and the Perrys talk of setting up a carriage. Even Mr. Elton, a relative newcomer with connections in trade, has the audacity to propose to Emma. Emma's class-based condemnation of Mr. Elton's proposal is presented with visual imagery. She denounces him for having the audacity to "raise his eyes" to her (135) and to "*look down* upon her friend, so well understanding the gradations of rank below him, and be so *blind* to what rose above" (136, emphasis added). What Emma must do is adjust her own vision and make her own class-conscious gaze more accommodating.

This does not mean that Emma stops being discriminatory, but that she must change the basis of her discrimination. Ultimately, *Emma* and Emma privilege a gaze based on distinctions of worth and genuine feeling, rather than of class or even of rank. She even grudgingly credits the Coles for expressing themselves "so properly" and with "so much consideration for her father" (208), and is astute enough to value the natural elegance of Jane Fairfax over the vulgarity of Mrs. Elton. The ocular communication that occurs between Emma and Mr. Knightley also conveys genuine, pure feeling. Emma finds that she cannot fully respect Mr. Weston's character because he is too gregarious to discriminate: "to be the favourite and intimate of a man who had so many intimates and confidantes, was not the very first distinction in the scale of vanity" (320). Being offended on the level of vanity does not seem like a significant offense, but Mr. Weston's lack of distinction bruises more than Emma's ego. It is his universal friendliness that leads to the amalgamation of the two Box Hill parties into the one disastrous excursion (353). Emma's epiphany about Mr. Knightley consists in knowing that "much of her

happiness depended on being *first* with Mr. Knightley, first in interest and affection” (415). Emma is no longer vainly concerned with ranking first with a friend such as Mr. Weston. Rather, she now worries that she will lose her favoured status with Mr. Knightley, upon whom much of her happiness depends.

The distinction Emma makes between passion and interest for Mr. Elton comes to bear upon her decision to marry Mr. Knightley. Mr. Knightley believes that Mr. Elton is motivated by an interest to marry for money, rather than passion, while Emma attributes to Mr. Elton a “strong passion at war with all interested motives” (67). For Mr. Elton, interest triumphs over passion, though that secures him a wife of less than ten thousand pounds. Paul Delany argues that “in accordance with the conventions of romance, Emma and Mr. Knightley are free at the end to be passionate about each other, because their fortunes are both large and roughly equal, thus cancelling out any motive of ‘interest’” (537). Emma does have a status-based interest in marrying Mr. Knightley, however, for it will align her with a much older family and the prestigious Donwell estate, an act for which she has already commended Isabella (358). Marrying Mr. Knightley would further cement Emma’s rank among the first in Highbury and consolidate their estates; the Donwell estate can reabsorb the missing notch that is Hartfield. Much of Mr. Knightley’s status is associated with Donwell, the epitome of “English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (360). Delany argues that the novel privileges benevolence over any considerations of rank, class or gender, and that Emma will find a legitimate outlet for her creative energies “as the wife of Mr. Knightley and the mistress of Donwell Abbey” (548). Nevertheless, even if Emma does accomplish all this, she does not set up house at

Donwell Abbey as the novel ends. Obviously, Emma will eventually move there, but *Emma* does not offer its readers a glimpse into a future where Emma gives birth to the Donwell heir. Austen had the option of explicitly telling readers what happens to the principle characters, as she does in *Mansfield Park*, where everyone is tidily disposed of. Instead of moving Emma to Donwell Abbey and cementing her position as first in her society, however, Austen relocates Mr. Knightley to Hartfield. The end of *Emma* sees its heroine gaining the hand of the man she loves, but not fully realizing the status potential of the marriage. Emma marries for passion and not for interest, distinguishing between being first with Mr. Knightley and being first in Highbury. The promise of the passion in the intimate looks shared by Emma and Mr. Knightley is fulfilled through this marriage, with Emma gathering her true friends, including Mr. Knightley, around her. The final sentence of *Emma* unites the importance of vision and the importance of making distinctions based on the correct standards; it is only a “small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony” (484).

## Chapter Four

### “The White Glare of Bath”: Vision and the Self in *Persuasion*

Acceding to a nostalgic, sentimentalized reading of Austen’s final completed novel, some critics of *Persuasion* dwell upon its ‘autumnal’ qualities, reading its story of mature love as a bittersweet message of loss written by an unmarried, middle-aged woman in failing health. Tony Tanner argues that “the dominant mood before the end is autumnal, nostalgic, a sense of the most significant period of experience being in the past, recollectable but irretrievable and unrepeatable” (214). Roger Gard is particularly effusive about the nostalgic qualities of *Persuasion*, calling it a “late work” around which “the word ‘autumnal’ inevitably hovers” (182). To read *Persuasion* in this manner, however, is to ignore what could truly be called Austen’s last work, her unfinished fragment of a novel *Sanditon*, which she started after finishing *Persuasion*. It is also to draw a correlation between an author’s text and her life that simply will not hold. As Claudia L. Johnson warns, “The underlying assumption that Anne’s autumn and Austen’s are complementary [...] is of course teeming with fallacies” (*Jane Austen* 144). An emerging, alternate reading of *Persuasion* that is equally popular argues the opposite point. Rather than being an exploration of mature and maturing love, bittersweet and somewhat painful, *Persuasion* is read as a fairytale, a restoration of youth and vitality best exemplified by Anne Elliot’s returned good looks. Jacqueline Reid-Walsh suggests

that the tone of the novel is “springlike in its return to the spirit of youthful love and intensity” (“Romance” 223) and that Austen is acting “like a fairy godmother, to be imbuing Anne with a return of youth and beauty” (223). Alan Richardson notes the Cinderella shadings of Anne’s two rather deficient sisters, arguing that Austen “deploys a Cinderella plot to set off the virtues of an undervalued heroine, Anne Elliot, to the detriment of her spoiled siblings” (145). Jocelyn Harris compares Anne’s returning bloom to the magical transformation of the Loathly Lady into the lovely young woman in the tale told by Chaucer’s Wife of Bath. In Anne’s case, the cause of the transformation is less magical but equally effective: the return of Capt. Wentworth (275-77). For Douglas Murray, *Persuasion* is “a story of increasing visibility, a fairy-tale in which a forgotten princess gradually materialises” (51). Taken together, these fairy-tale readings imply Anne Elliot’s dependence upon a fairy godmother, a *deus ex mechina* of sorts, to fabricate her happy ending for her. This robs her of any agency in her development throughout a novel where the constitution and expression of self is as much a concern as the titular theme of persuasion. Being persuaded, after all, implies a lack of confidence in one’s own thoughts, instincts and feelings. Self and the existence of self is a central concern in *Persuasion*; from the beginning, we learn that Anne “was nobody with either father or sister” (5). In *Persuasion*, Austen explores a heroine who is entirely attuned to her inner self, whose gaze is imbued with a morality that other characters lack, and who becomes a woman who takes control of her own fate and becomes an agent of her destiny.

Anne Elliot, the heroine of *Persuasion*, exists in a seemingly-contradictory state in the novel. She is viewed as a “nobody” by her family (5), but possesses a body of which readers are fully aware. The primary means of presenting Anne’s body is through the narrative technique of free indirect discourse. Unlike *Emma*, where the distance between the narrator’s and Emma’s points of view produces much of the comic effect, *Persuasion* features a heroine whose gaze is predominantly (though certainly not always) indistinguishable from that of the narrator. We do not know, for example, whether it is the narrator or Anne describing an evening gathering at Uppercross, in a passage where Anne’s thoughts are characteristically focused upon Capt. Wentworth:

With the exception, perhaps, of Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who seemed particularly attached and happy, (Anne could allow no other exception even among the married couples) there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement. (63-64)

It is difficult to untangle which thoughts originate in Anne and which derive from a third-person omniscient narrator. The privileging of the Crofts’ marriage occurs throughout the novel, and it is a relationship that is clearly endorsed by the book as well as by Anne. The parenthetical phrase reports Anne’s thoughts, but it does so in third person. The two final sentences are authoritative and suggest a narrator, yet their intensity also suggests Anne’s despair at her current standing with Wentworth. Differentiating between Anne and the narrator, in this case, is next to impossible.

This closeness allows the reader to better understand Anne’s sense of isolation by offering glimpses of her loneliness, such as the incident where Wentworth, noticing her fatigue from a country walk, hands her into the Crofts’ carriage:

Yes, —he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her a rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her which all these things made apparent. [...] She understood him. He could not forgive her. — but he could not be unfeeling. (91)

That Anne refuses to consider any alternate, romantic motives to Wentworth's actions indicates how strained and irreparable she believes their relationship is. Her tendency to think the worst of her situation hints at her isolation. Intertwining her gaze with the narrative gaze also allows readers to experience the physical sensations that Anne does. More than once in the novel, Anne blushes, feels agitated, or gets dizzy (though, significantly, she never faints). While Judy Van Sickle suggests that "Anne is unafraid of physical sensation and excitement" (43) and that she is "comfortable with discomfort" (44), it is more likely as Robyn Warhol argues: "Anne's emotional experience is intense but often painful; her situation as focal character means she is subject to a full range of sensations that she is obliged—as the novel's central consciousness—to register" (34-35). Reader empathy that results from Anne's pain often saves her from ironic criticism: "the sensory empathy of reader with Anne curtails any irony at her expense while permitting it in relation to all the other characters" (Beer xvii). This empathy also calls attention to Anne's body as a physical, tangible vessel, one that can be separated from Wentworth by the "large bulky figure" of Mrs. Musgrove on the sofa (68), that can "start" when it sees Wentworth from a shop window (175) or tremble when covertly communicating to him (225). Warhol also suggests that because looking is a physical action, a function of "those organs called the eyes" (23), representations of looking "continually draw attention in this text to the heroine's own body: its placement on the scene she is observing, its



visceral reaction to what she sees, and its appearance as mirrored in the remarks of others on Anne's 'looks'" (23). Anne's body is an implied yet constant presence in the novel.

Anne's awareness of her body is, perhaps, not so surprising considering her father's obsession with his. The beginning and end of Sir Walter's character, we are told, is vanity, "vanity of person and of situation" (4). Sir Walter is the ultimate scopophilic being, a narcissist who derives pleasure both from looking and from being looked at. His is a self-consuming love: "the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts [of beauty and a baronetcy], was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion" (4). Sir Walter has passed his scopophilic traits to at least two of his daughters. Elizabeth is "fully satisfied of being still quite as handsome as ever" (7), though her enjoyment in seeing her name reflected back to her in the Baronetage has waned with the passing of each winter (7). Mary, exemplifying what Douglas Murray calls "exhibitionism thwarted" ("Gazing" 49), takes scopophilia to an extreme. Rather than taking pleasure in being looked at, she experiences discomfort if she is not the centre of attention, and is "very unfit to be left alone" (*P* 37): "being alone, her being unwell and out of spirits, was almost a matter of course" (*P* 37).

Although Anne is aware of her own body, she does not share her father and sisters' need to have others look at it. In fact, as much as her body is felt in the novel, it is barely seen in the first volume. There are no ballrooms in *Persuasion*, and the closest Anne gets to attending a dance are the casual ones that occur at Uppercross. Even there, she opts for invisibility, choosing to play the accompaniment instead of dance, and hopes only "to be unobserved" (71). In addition to being neglected and overlooked by her

family, Anne sometimes contrives to be out of the way, pleading a headache and little Charles Musgrove's health to avoid an evening party with Capt. Wentworth (77). Anne's invisibility also enables her to glean important information. Overhearing Capt. Wentworth and Louisa while hidden by a hedgerow, Anne "feared to move, lest she should be seen" (88). Like the perpetually-unnoticed Fanny Price, Anne is an adept observer because no one pays any attention to her: "With a great deal of quiet observation, and a 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 [with Mrs. Clay] were more than possible" (34). Anne, however, does not observe solely to gather information for her own means, and certainly not to the extent that Fanny does in her claustrophobic Panopticon of a home. Instead, Anne's gaze is one that also focuses on other bodies, most particularly Wentworth's. It is also, then, the gaze of desire. Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse occasionally gaze at men in this manner, but certainly not to the extent that Anne does. While Anne gazes the most, hers are curtailed, for she never looks without immediately looking away out of embarrassment or awkwardness. While this possibly suggests Austen's discomfort with the concept of a female spectator, the presence of a dominant female gaze, and the alignment of this gaze with that of the narrator, alternately suggests the potential power inherent in a female gaze of desire. Anne's power is her ability to gaze with this two-fold purpose of desiring and gathering information. During their first, accidental meeting at Uppercross cottage, "Her eye half met Captain Wentworth's" (59). Despite this brief look, she is able to ascertain that "the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing,

manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth” (61). Anne constantly looks at Wentworth, interpreting his actions according to her previously-acquired knowledge of him. On the hill near Winthrop, the residence of the Hayters, Mary literally and figuratively looks down upon the Musgrove’s poorer relations, assuring Wentworth that she herself has never been in the house more than twice. In response, Wentworth gives her “an artificial, assenting smile, followed by a contemptuous glance, as he turned away, which Anne perfectly knew the meaning of” (86). Most notably, Anne is able to interpret Wentworth’s actions and words in the octagon room in Bath, correctly surmising that “his half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance,—all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least” (185) and concluding that “he must love her” (186).

It is in Bath, in fact, where Anne Elliot begins to gain more visibility, to be more noticed. This is partly due to the panoptic qualities of eighteenth-century Bath, a city obsessed with the status of its inhabitants. Developed ostensibly to capitalize upon the medicinal properties of its water (for which the crippled Mrs. Smith is there), Bath was also a social resort where Mr. Elton can find a wife in less than three months, and a site of sexual intrigue where Mr. Elliot can conspire with Mrs. Clay. Bath was, in short, a place to see and be seen. Its architecture suggests an awareness of visibility and a design towards facilitating the doubled scopophilic viewing that Sir Walter values so highly: “Eighteenth-century Bath is a city of enclosure, Squares and Circuses of geometric design” (Wiltshire, *Body* 159). One of these circular designs was the Circus, a large, originally completely-paved space, enclosed by a circle of townhouses: “three streets

approach it, dividing the circle of buildings into three great arcs, while the facades themselves are composed of three horizontal tiers one upon the other” (Cunliffe 132). The buildings all face inwards, and the centre of the Circus was designed as a site for people to promenade and be seen<sup>8</sup>. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine and her party escape to another architectural marvel of Bath, the Royal Crescent, after a disappointing morning in the Pump Room. The benefits of this change are social rather than healthful, for the Crescent is where they “breathe the fresh air of better company” (NA 35). The specular economy of Bath, in fact, rests upon the tendency of its visitors and residents to walk: “a fine Sunday in Bath empties every house of its inhabitants, and all the world appears on such an occasion to walk about and tell their acquaintance what a charming day it is” (NA 35).

For Anne Elliot, however, Bath is a place where she can no longer be invisible Anne. She dislikes the city, and dreads “the possible heats of September in all the white glare of Bath” (33). Bath has eyes everywhere that seem to see everything. The principles of power of the Bath gaze are the same ones that lie behind the community gaze of Highbury, and like the Highbury gaze, the Bath gaze proliferates its control through gossip. The anonymity of the source of gossip increases the power of the Bath gaze by distributing the power amongst all the watchers of Bath and thereby masking its source. This constant surveillance forces its inhabitants to behave according to certain social restrictions. Unlike Highbury, however, the inhabitants of the Bath gaze *seek* visibility rather than avoid it. While the Highbury gaze controls its residents by threatening

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<sup>8</sup> See page 133 of Barry Cunliffe’s *Bath* for a visual representation of the Circus then and now.

exposure, the Bath gaze is powerful because it threatens to withhold it. Sir Walter and his self-important counterparts perfectly embody this scopophilic gaze. As John Wiltshire points out, Bath “seems to function in this novel as the symbol—the structural embodiment and institutionalisation—of [Sir Walter’s] own vanity and snobbery” (*Body* 159). Like Sir Walter, the Bath gaze evaluates according to rank and physical appearance. In Bath, John Wiltshire writes, “the body is perceived as an object; it’s to be prized or appraised, like handsome furniture, as a commodity” (*Body* 161). Sir Walter assumes that his own body and rank are prized in Bath, and that “of course” Mr. Elliot would have heard of his residing in Bath, even if the younger man is only in the city for one day (138). Sir Walter also acts as a judge of such prestige; one cannot forget his standing at the window of a shop on Bond Street counting eighty-seven women go by “without there being a tolerable face among them” (141-42). Like Sir Walter, the Bath gaze also assesses rank and beauty. Mrs. Wallis is “said to be an excessively pretty woman”(141), and Mrs. Smith operates a surveillance system that rivals Lady Catherine’s. Even before Anne gives her report of the concert the morning after, Mrs. Smith has already heard the details “through the short cut of a laundress and a waiter” (193).

Like the Highbury gaze, the Bath gaze surprises in its perceptiveness. The community of Bath discusses people and events with frequent accuracy. When Mrs. Smith explains why she supposed that Anne and Mr. Elliot were to be married, Anne initially believes that her “authority is deficient” (205). She is thus surprised to hear so much of her personal history repeated back to her. Moreover, the Bath gaze does assign the Elliots and other people of rank a certain amount of regard. In Bath, Mr. Elliot tells

Anne, “Sir Walter Elliot and his family will always be worth knowing, always acceptable as acquaintance” (151). As selfish and cold-hearted as Mr. Elliot turns out to be, he is correct in his assessment of rank in Bath. Even he acknowledges that though the Dalrymples are “nothing in themselves, [...] they had their value” (150). The value Mr. Elliot speaks of here is the value of social standing. Elizabeth, Anne and Mr. Elliot are recognized on sight by the ladies of Mr. Wentworth’s party in the shop (177), and, in keeping with a community gaze, the ladies proceed to gossip about them once they leave (177-78). As Douglas Murray notes, “the Elliots *are* continuously talked of by the Mrs. Smiths and Nurse Rookes of this world, and few refuse their invitations” (“Gazing” 49-50).

It is within this glaring Bath gaze that Anne and Capt. Wentworth attempt to continue their covert courtship, although their attempts are frequently frustrated and stymied. In Bath, suggests John Wiltshire, “there is a sense of personal communications having to be made within a crowded, complex world, in continual danger of being thwarted, interrupted or twisted by the projects and emotions of other” (*MP, E, P* 81). As a result of this pressure, Anne and Wentworth “communicate with each other through the slightest signs—they move by degrees and halves of degrees” (Van Sickle Johnson 49). Within the Bath gaze, Anne and Wentworth never meet privately, but always in public or in rooms where other people are present. They encounter each other in shops, at a concert or in a room full of people at an inn, and therefore must resort to glances, to gestures, and to brief yet meaningful conversations to convey their emotions. As Juliet McMaster notes, Anne and Wentworth’s initial estrangement “is emphasised by their failure to meet

each other's eyes [...]; their continuing misunderstanding in Bath is signalled again by their failure to manage glances" (22-23). During numerous evenings at Uppercross, Anne "had no reason to suppose his eye wandering towards her while he spoke" (63), and "Once she felt that he was looking at her—observing her altered features, perhaps, trying to trace in them the ruins of the face which had once charmed him" (72). Anne fares somewhat better in Bath, but even at the concert, "her eye could not reach him" (186): "As her eyes fell on him, his seemed to be withdrawn from her. [...] It seemed as if she had been one moment too late; and as long as she dared observe, he did not look again" (188).

The province of looking and glancing is not limited to women alone; Wentworth himself possesses an expressive eye. Discussing his wish to marry with his sister, for example, he claims that he will not be particular, although "his bright, proud eye spoke the happy conviction that he was nice" (62). His glances convey contempt (86), renewed attraction (104), and inquiry (224). Notably absent from his vocabulary of looks, however, is the desiring gaze—he is the anti-Darcy. Wentworth never gazes at Anne in the same manner that Darcy gazes at Elizabeth; instead, his desire is indicated by an inability to meet Anne's eye. In the octagon room before the concert, Wentworth cannot look directly at Anne when discussing Louisa and Benwick's engagement: he is "not looking exactly forward" (182), reminded of his own near escape from being locked in an unwanted engagement with Louisa, a woman he clearly views as Anne's inferior. When Wentworth does look directly at Anne, it is a look more akin to those that pass between Mr. Knightley and Emma, a look that conveys information or attempts to communicate

little from home, too little seen. Her spirits were not high. A larger society would improve them. She wanted her to be more known” (15). While Lady Russell’s opinions are not emphatically endorsed, they are also not unvalued. Anne has spent eleven years in the “scanty neighbourhood” of Kellynch to Elizabeth’s thirteen (7), and has cultivated an inwardness that has hardened her to the affronts that still offend Lady Russell.

Anne herself understands the value of moving from one “little social commonwealth” to another (42), even if it is only to learn “the art of knowing our own nothingness beyond our own circle” (42). Becoming exposed to new places and people, the novel seems to suggest, is a necessary aspect of character development. Nevertheless, Anne’s understanding of getting out in the world differs from Lady Russell’s assessment in one key point. Lady Russell believes that moving into a larger society and being better known to others will raise Anne’s spirits. Anne, on the other hand, believes that it is necessary to deflate the proud spirits of her family, and wishes that they could “have her advantage in seeing how unknown, or unconsidered” Kellynch affairs are at Uppercross (42). For Anne, exposure to the world is a humbling reminder of one’s insignificance. Sir Walter and Elizabeth, on the other hand, believe that they are gracing the world with their presence, and benefiting society in the process.

The difference between Anne and her family is that she possesses an inner life that she keeps private from her father and sisters. Julia Prewitt Brown perceptively discusses the paradoxical, ambiguous nature of privacy in *Persuasion*, arguing that “at every point at which the novel suggests that privacy is bad, for example, it also suggests that privacy is good” (133). Brown continues by arguing that though Anne’s isolation at



rather than merely express desire. At the White Hart Inn, Wentworth draws out his letter from underneath the paper on the desk, and “placed it before Anne with eyes of glowing entreaty fixed on her for a moment” (236). Even then, at the climax of her novel, Austen subtly reminds readers of the pervading Bath gaze. This meeting is not private, for Mrs. Musgrove remains in the room and prevents Wentworth from placing the letter in Anne’s hand or speaking to her. Anne must similarly respond to his written request that “a word, a look will be enough” (238); when Wentworth encounters her on Union Street, she is accompanied by Charles Musgrove. Unable to speak about the subject directly, Wentworth “said nothing—only looked. Anne could command herself enough to receive that look, and not repulsively” (239-40). The lovers have silently reunited.

In a novel where the “nobody” heroine gradually becomes a visible being, the eye is not necessarily the enemy. Ascending the steps of the Cobb in Lyme, Anne “was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion” (104). Anne is additionally rejuvenated by Mr. Elliot’s look of “earnest admiration” as she passes by, a gaze that alerts Wentworth, who in turn gives Anne a “momentary glance” (104). In *Mansfield Park*, the sexual gaze is implicit in rendering Fanny a panoptic subject, and causes her extreme discomfort. In *Persuasion*, the desiring gaze rejuvenates a heroine who has almost faded away after years of familial neglect, for Capt. Wentworth’s glance “seemed to say, ‘That man is struck with you,—and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again’ ” (104). One reason Lady Russell is happy that Sir Walter is moving to Bath is because she believes that “Anne had been too

Kellynch has made her “too passive and self-pitying” (133), it is this same isolation that “led to the cultivation of inwardness, and it is precisely this inwardness that makes her the heroine, that makes her morally superior to other characters” (133). This inwardness, and its implied inner life, is similar to one discussed by John Wiltshire, who calls *Persuasion* “a novel about the inner and outer life” (*MP, E, P* 76). Anne’s, argues Wiltshire, is a “solitary consciousness” (78), and the novel illustrates “the way Anne’s inner life gradually comes to correspond to, make contact with, and be declared through, the outer life that surrounds her” (79). What makes Anne’s inner life so special is its association with her body. Each time her emotions are upset by the presence of Capt. Wentworth, her body either betrays her by displaying telltale outward physical signs such as a blush, or fails her completely by rendering her literally sense-less. Espying Capt. Wentworth from a shop window, for example, Anne subsequently “saw nothing before her. It was all confusion” (175). Anne’s inner life is particularly deep when compared with that of her father. Sir Walter completely lacks any interior awareness. His is a superficial existence, one that exists solely on the surface. The image reflected back to him in his mirrors, his obsession with his appearance and fixation upon his status as a baronet, all point to a focus upon trimmings and trappings. Sir Walter is obsessed only with how his body looks, not how it can express or articulate deeper emotions.

For an inner life to exist, of course, an outer life must also be present. Anne’s outer life consists of the social and communal activities she participates in, which consequently expose her more frequently to the gazes of other individuals, as well as to the public gaze of places such as Bath. While she shrinks from such gazes at Uppercross,

Anne becomes gradually inured to being sociable in Bath, especially if the alternative is spending an evening “in the elegant stupidity of private parties, in which they [the Elliots] were getting more and more engaged” (180). To avoid the confined circle of poor company, Anne uncharacteristically yearns for a public outing, such as a concert. Even walking on the streets or riding in Lady Russell’s carriage places Anne in increasingly visible situations.

Additionally, Anne possesses an inner and outer vision that corresponds to her inner and outer lives. When Lady Russell tells Anne that she hopes to see Anne marry Mr. Elliot and become the future mistress of her beloved home, Anne is overwhelmed by the mental image of presiding over Kellynch Hall, like her mother had done many years earlier. As usual, her agitation manifests itself physically, and “Anne was obliged to turn away, to rise, to walk to a distant table, and, leaning there in pretended employment, try to subdue the feelings this picture excited. For a few minutes her imagination and her heart were bewitched” (160). After her revealing encounter with Capt. Wentworth in the octagon room, Anne enters the concert room too agitated to see anything. Instead, she is occupied by her analysis of Wentworth’s behaviour, and the conclusion that he must love her: “These were thoughts, with their attendant *visions*, which occupied and flurried her too much to leave her any power of observation; and she passed along the room without having a glimpse of him” (186, emphasis added). For Anne Elliot, an inner and outer self corresponds to the possession of an inner and outer vision. Her outer vision allows her to observe and analyse what is around her, while her inner vision brings these analyses to

life. Unlike Emma, who allows her inner vision to run rampant without being checked by what occurs around her, Anne controls and balances her exterior and interior worlds.

That Anne is able to maintain her inner self and inner vision while within the Bath gaze raises the question of how effective this gaze actually is. Like the Highbury gaze, the power of the Bath gaze relies upon making observations, both the action itself and the articulation of these observations in speech. This mechanism of acting and watching is further exposed in Bath because its inhabitants attempt to draw the gaze. One is reminded of the scopophilic Mrs. Elton, whose Bath habits make crass status-mongering second nature to her. Bath becomes a simultaneous play and Panopticon, for even though the Bath gaze controls the behaviour of its inhabitants, those within the gaze also consciously perform for their unseen, unknown audience. As exemplified by the flaneurs in the Circus, the performers and the audience are often the same people, making the Bath gaze self-perpetuating and self-consuming. The performers are also the watchers. Such dual participants include Sir Walter and Elizabeth, who are very much inscribed by the Bath gaze. They believe that their gazes confer social acceptability and that they can, as Murray describes it, “look ordinary people in social prominence” (“Gazing” 47). Encountering Capt. Wentworth in a shop, Anne is grieved that Elizabeth would not acknowledge him: “she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness” (176). Sir Walter and Elizabeth gradually reverse their opinion of Wentworth, paying him the small but significant gesture of bowing and curtseying to him in the octagon room (181), which is also “a confirmation of one’s acceptance by society” (Gadd 174). The most notable change occurs when Sir Walter and Elizabeth call on the

Musgroves at the White Hart Inn and Elizabeth “even addressed him once, and looked at him more than once” (226). What Elizabeth values in Wentworth is what the Bath gaze values: the body, and nothing more. Elizabeth invites Wentworth to her evening party only because she appreciates “the importance of a man of such an air and appearance as his” (226). All that matters is that “Captain Wentworth would move about well in her drawing-room” (226). This fixation upon the body continues as Sir Walter and Elizabeth attempt to draw the gazes of those around them. Sir Walter engineers the compliment that he “might have as good a figure as Colonel Wallis, and certainly was not sandy-haired” (142), and that he draws as many eyes as the colonel when walking down a street. The collected concert party enters the room to “be all the consequence in their power, draw as many eyes, excite as many whispers, and disturb as many people as they could” (185). This self-reliance upon perpetuating self-importance is efficient, but also erases any trace of an inner life that the novel prizes. Unlike Anne, Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot, and even Mary Musgrove, channel their obsession with rank and beauty into an appreciation for all that they can see, but no more. Theirs is solely an outward life.

By 1814, when *Persuasion* begins, Bath society was also losing its prestige in fashionable society. By the turn of the century, Bath had developed from the popular resort city of the mid-1700s to a place of retirement for people such as Sir Walter (Gadd 178). According to David Gadd, “Parsons, generals and admirals all brought their small pensions to Bath, and lived out their last years in modesty and an atmosphere of gentility” (178). Among Bath’s new residents were Admiral Nelson and Jane Austen’s own father, the Rev. George Austen, who retired to Bath in 1801 (178). Fashionable trend-setters

looked elsewhere to Cheltenham or sea bathing at Brighton and Weymouth (where Frank Churchill meets Jane Fairfax) for entertainment (Cunliffe 145). Ironically, when Bath decreased in social acceptability, it increased in its concern with class rigidity. In the mid eighteenth century, Master of Ceremonies Beau Nash consciously attempted “to break down the rigid barriers of rank and degree and force the different social classes to mix, whether they liked it or not” (Gadd 169). After Nash’s death in 1761 and a succession of ineffective Masters of Ceremonies, Bath became more rigid in class structure, with less class mixing. Additionally, the top ranks of society shunned the now outdated city, leaving it to the more insecure and class-conscious minor gentry, such as Sir Walter<sup>9</sup>.

The increasing class stratification also extends to the gentry and aristocrats with whom the Elliots socialize. Much is made of the aristocratic cousins Dalrymple, and how to renew the acquaintance properly and decorously. As a result, “all the comfort of No. —, Camden-place” (148) is swept away until Sir Walter is rewarded by “three lines of scrawl from the Dowager Viscountess” (149)<sup>10</sup>. Anne is ashamed of her family’s behaviour, and finds herself actually wishing that “they had more pride” than to glean so

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<sup>9</sup> Of Sir Walter in *Persuasion*, Gadd writes that “The very presence of large crowds of vulgar visitors lends him distinction by contrast and the absence of the top ranks of society gives him a position of eminence which he could not have held in London. Here he could be ‘important at comparatively little expense’, and his title, though a modest one, gave him the entrée to the best Bath society. [...] Here was a city of fine streets and good houses, first-class concerts and plays, a fashionable tradition and an active social life, with a constant supply of new faces, some of which at least were respectable. If only one avoided the vulgarities and jostlings of the public room, particularly in the season, life could be very pleasant. And it was, as Sir William [*sic*] Elliot had found, cheap.” (177) Though Sir Walter himself would be offended, Gadd’s misnaming of him as Sir William is a minor error that does not detract from his helpful analysis.

<sup>10</sup> The legitimacy of the Dalrymples themselves is questioned. Gillian Beer speculates that “There is probably a little joke about even the Dalrymple claim to the upper echelons of the aristocracy since Irish nobility was looked down on as having no written records of descent and relying on oral tradition for pedigree” (233).

much social worth from such distant relations (148). Sir Walter and Elizabeth similarly need a close acquaintance to treat them in the same ingratiating manner, a function which Mrs. Clay fulfils. When she leaves Bath to join Mr. Elliot in London, they are “shocked and mortified” (251): “they had their great cousins, to be sure, to resort to for comfort; but they must long feel that to flatter and follow others, without being flattered and followed in turn, is but a state of half enjoyment” (251).

The Bath society presented in *Persuasion* is a narrow one, however, and does not encompass all the watchers that participate in the Bath gaze, for even though all the performers are also watchers, not all the watchers are visible on the same stage that the Elliots or Dalrymples traverse. The community gaze consists of different classes, and the invisible watchers are also those who cursorily appear in the novel: the tenants of Kellynch, Nurse Rooke, the butler and foot-boy whose services the Elliots can afford (143), and the laundress and waiter supply Mrs. Smith with abundant details of the concert (193). Sir Walter labels even Mrs. Smith a social nothing: “A poor widow, barely able to live, between thirty and forty—a mere Mrs. Smith, an every day Mrs. Smith, of all people and all names in the world to be the chosen friend of Miss Anne Elliot” (158). Even Anne is complicit in this class-based blindness when she fails to notice that it is Nurse Rooke who opens the door for her, not “Mrs. Speed, as usual, or the maid” (197).

In this novel, however, to be an unnoticed social nobody is preferred rather than condemned. Additionally, even if the unseen lower classes of Bath gossip and pay attention to the lesser aristocrats and gentry, *what* they say is as important as the fact that they say it at all. The gaze of the lower class is often turned upon the upper class, and the

results are not flattering. Sir Walter is a neglectful landlord, leaving the “trying” task of “going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave” to Anne (39). Instead, his own leave-taking consists of being “prepared with condescending bows for all the afflicted tenantry and cottagers who might have had the hint to shew themselves” (36).

Anne romantically enthuses upon the revealing facets of human nature that Nurse Rooke has seen in her line of work, emphasizing the class difference that enables it:

Women of that class have great opportunities, and if they are intelligent may be well worth listening to. Such varieties of human nature as they are in the habit of witnessing! [...] What instances must pass before them of ardent, disinterested, self-denying attachment, of heroism, fortitude, patience, resignation—of all the conflicts and all the sacrifices that ennoble us most. (155-56)

Mrs. Smith, crippled and poor, gently corrects Anne’s glowing portrayal of human nature in the sick room:

I fear its lessons are not often in the elevated style you describe. Here and there, human nature may be great in times of trial, but generally speaking it is its weakness and not its strength that appears in a sick chamber; it is selfishness and impatience rather than generosity and fortitude, that one hears of. (156)

In this case, the gaze of a woman of the professional class exposes a selfish, indecorous aspect of character that Bath society would be loathe to acknowledge. The lower and professional classes also exhibit a lack of what Sir Walter would consider proper reverence for their social superiors. Mrs. Smith intends to capitalize on Nurse Rooke’s connections, using her as the mediating agent to sell the thread cases, pin cushions, card racks, and other paraphernalia that she knits. As she tells Anne, “I mean to make my profit of Mrs. Wallis” (156). Nurse Rooke’s sales methods are shrewd: “She always takes the right time for applying. Every body’s heart is open, you know, when they have recently escaped from severe pain, or recovering the blessing of health” (155).



The power of the lower classes within the Bath gaze is best demonstrated by Mrs. Smith's extensive knowledge of the Elliot household and Mr. Elliot's place within it. This knowledge is facilitated through gossip, a means which Anne decries but Mrs. Smith affirms. Anne protests that "facts and opinions which are to pass through the hands of so many, to be misconceived by folly in one, and ignorance in another, can hardly have much truth left" (205). Mrs. Smith, however, concedes that the line of information "takes a bend or two, but it is nothing of consequence. The stream is as good as at first; the little rubbish it collects in the turnings, is easily moved away" (205). In this instance, Mrs. Smith proves to be correct, for she accurately describes Mr. Elliot's dealings with the Elliots, as well as the situation of Mrs. Clay. This is the most intimate type of gossip, one that goes beyond Highbury's speculating about Emma and Mr. Elton. This is more akin to Emma and Frank Churchill sharing their suspicions about Jane and Mr. Dixon. As a result of their suspicions, Emma feels that she might have "transgressed the duty of woman by woman, in betraying her suspicions of Jane Fairfax's feelings to Frank Churchill. It was hardly right" (*E* 231). A similar series of transgressions also occurs in *Persuasion*. Mr. Elliot's telling his plans to his good friend Colonel Wallis is not a transgression, for they are his plans to divulge. Colonel Wallis, however, has a "very pretty silly wife, to whom he tells things which had better not" (205), and she tells Nurse Rooke, who informs Mrs. Smith who in turn reports everything to Anne. The chain of gossip amounts to the exposure of the Elliots' private lives, and becomes in essence an invasion of privacy. Ironically, the Bath gaze that the Elliots laboriously cultivate is also a gaze that invades their privacy and talks disparagingly of their private affairs.

Paradoxically, cultivating the Bath gaze also means being vulnerable to invasions of privacy by lower classes, the same classes whose attention is so gratifying.

In fact, *Persuasion* is built around a series of breaches and transgressions, not all of which are condemned. They are judged upon the criteria of contingency by which Anne judges Lady Russell's advice to break her engagement to Wentworth. Anne does not blame herself for being persuaded, but in a similar situation, she "never should, in any circumstance of tolerable similarity, give such advice" (246). In other words, Anne was not wrong to follow the advice of a trusted old friend, but Lady Russell was shown to be wrong in giving it, since Wentworth subsequently made his name and fortune in the Navy. It is, as Anne says, "one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides" (246). The ambiguous state of advice and privacy in the novel extends to the ambiguous treatments of transgression in *Persuasion*. On one hand, Anne reproaches herself for speculating about Mr. Elliot's marrying her sister when he has been widowed for less than seven months (147). On the other hand, the transgressions that lead to the revelation of Mr. Elliot's true character are not censured. Anne is so shocked by Mr. Elliot's letter that she is "*obliged* to recollect that her seeing the letter was a violation of the laws of honour, [...] that no private correspondence could bear the eye of others" (204, emphasis added). Rather than chastize Mrs. Smith for showing her the letter, Anne thanks her instead (204). Deborah J. Knuth points out the necessary breaches of decorum that must occur for Anne and Capt. Wentworth to reconcile, the significance of Mrs. Croft and Mrs. Musgrove's overheard discussion of long engagements, and most notably Wentworth's eavesdropping on Anne and Harville's debate about the constancy of men

and women (Knuth 154). Many of the transgressions in *Persuasion* are also ones that seek to correct previous transgressions. Anne's reading Mr. Elliot's letter, for example, is spurred by both the gossip chain that convinces Mrs. Smith that Anne is to marry him, and his making "highly disrespectful" comments about Sir Walter (204).

To a certain degree, transgressions are not only tolerated but become necessary for society to function. Despite the theme of gossip and information exchange that runs through the novel, Gillian Beer argues that "the plots of *Persuasion* are partly about the *obverse* of gossip—the *difficulty* of communicating information, either across social classes, across different interests, or even [...] between friends and lovers" (xxi). That Anne is the one who will ultimately overcome this difficulty of communication is suggested by her characteristic transience. Anne is the character who manages to transgress social boundaries the most, a transient in a novel partly set in a city built upon transience, where the key scene takes place in the room of an inn, the symbol of continuous change. Anne moves from one "social commonwealth" to another, speaks the discourse of the place she is staying, and learns to "clothe her imagination, her memory, and all her ideas in as much of Uppercross as possible" (43). She is a social chameleon who visits Mrs. Smith at the Westgate buildings and calls upon the tenants of Kellynch with as much ease as she socializes with Lady Dalrymple at Laura Place.

For Anne, the difficulty of communication occurs because she must express aspects of her inner, not her private, life. Her private family matters have been breached by the gossips of the Bath gaze, but her inner life, characterized by her isolation and her love for Wentworth, is unreachable. Even when she adapts to life at Uppercross, she

merely clothes herself in what Beer calls “Uppercrossese” (xv). In Bath, Anne exists within a gaze that focuses so much upon the body that it does not acknowledge that inner lives exist. Anne’s isolation is created by more than just the Bath gaze, for even Wentworth wishes that he could have “read your feelings, as I think you must have penetrated mine” (237). Anne has been so accustomed to being a nobody that she becomes the social question, the mystery at the centre of this network of looking and gazing. Observation fails Bath as much as it fails Wentworth, for Anne cannot be penetrated. The novel reaches a point where observation can no longer glean any new information from its heroine, although the most important information of all, her love for Wentworth, is still unexpressed. The onus falls on Anne to orchestrate her own breach and articulate her inner self into the public world. Looking has failed, so Anne resorts to speech, namely, her debate with Capt. Harville over the constancy of men and women. Anne is not accustomed to exposing her hitherto guarded inner life, and her communication is so risky that Wentworth cannot discern all her words. It is enough that he hears her tone: “You sink your voice, but I can distinguish the tones of that voice, when they would be lost on others” (237). Anne ironically fulfils Lady Russell’s wish for her to be better known by revealing her inner self to Wentworth.

Ultimately, Anne is a heroine who refuses to be affected by the gazes around her, trusting her own inner morality and inner gaze to direct her actions. She does not participate in nor attempt to draw the superficial Bath gaze that focuses purely upon appearance and social rank. When she breaches her own inner life by arguing for the constancy of women, for example, she does so not to increase her social status, but for

personal fulfilment. Unlike Fanny Price, Anne Elliot does not need to resist nor is she inscribed by the power principles of a gaze emanating from a single source. Unlike Emma Woodhouse, Anne does not set herself above or apart from the gaze of her community. Rather, Anne Elliot is a heroine who recognizes the limitations of the Bath gaze, and does not accord it more power than it deserves. She co-exists within and with it, often ignoring its rules and behaving according to her own social monitor. She hopes to see Capt. Wentworth at the concert and have the opportunity to speak to him and compensate for her sister and Lady Russell's ignorance of him: "she felt that she owed him attention" (180). Anne's actions sometimes coincide with what is expected under the Bath gaze. Though engaged in conversation with Capt. Wentworth, she must step forward and greet the Dalrymples when they enter the octagon room, since ignoring them would be on par with Elizabeth's ignoring Wentworth. When her values do not coincide with those of her family, Anne accepts the difference of opinion. Though Sir Walter is angry that Anne would keep an engagement with Mrs. Smith rather than spend an evening with the Dalrymples, "Anne kept her appointment; the others kept theirs" (158). Anne treats the Bath gaze with the same indifference as she treats her family's obsession with rank and appearance. She acknowledges its presence, but lives her life unaffected by the values it attempts to inscribe upon her. Granted, she is affected by its gossip about her attachment to Mr. Elliot, but her concern lies in how it will affect Captain Wentworth. At the White Hart, Anne "feared from his looks, that the same unfortunate persuasion, which had hastened him away from the concert room, still governed" (221). Moreover, even if

Capt. Wentworth persists in believing the report, Anne knows that “it would be in her power to send an intelligible sentence by Captain Harville” (239).

The coexistence of Anne’s inner gaze with the community gaze in Bath is best exemplified by her and Wentworth’s reconciliatory walk in the park. When Anne and Wentworth meet and are silently reconciled in the street, “there could be only a most proper alacrity, a most obliging compliance for public view; and smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture” (240). The outer life complies to public expectations, but the inner life is delicately and powerfully described as “spirits dancing in private rapture” (240). Anne and Wentworth then retreat to a “comparatively quiet and retired gravel walk” (240) where they engage in an intimate conversation in full public view, amidst but indifferent to the other people around them: “they slowly paced the gradual ascent, heedless of every group around them, seeing neither sauntering politicians, bustling house-keepers, flirting girls, nor nursery-maids and children” (241). Anne and Wentworth’s vision fails them, for they are “heedless” of the activity around them, charmed instead by inner visions of “their own future lives” (240).

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