

JANE AUSTEN'S BALLS:
THE DANCE OF MASCULINITY

MEAGHAN MALONE



Jane Austen's Balls: The Dance of Masculinity

by

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Abstract

While several scholars have recently offered analyses of male sexuality in Jane Austen's novels and others have examined the gender dynamics of her scenes of dance, there is no extensive study of masculinity as developed in Austen's ballrooms. Focusing specifically on Austen's scenes of dance, this thesis analyzes the ways in which masculinity and the male body are presented in each of her six major works. Reconciling conflicting late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century debates regarding masculinity, Austen creates heroes who are at once historically contingent and surprisingly modern. Her scenes of dance are at the narrative heart of each of her novels, and become opportunities for Austen to bring the body to the foreground. Her characters read each other through their bodies, and the male body is explicitly appraised in a society where sexuality is inextricably linked to visibility. Filtered through the eyes of Austen's female characters, the male body becomes an object of female scrutiny as Austen highlights the social and sexual power of the female gaze. Masculinity is consequently fully embodied in each of Austen's novels, and she presents dance as a man's means of self-fashioning. Moreover, the masculine ideal that Austen creates via the female gaze facilitates reciprocity between heroine and hero, and requires his response and adaptation to her expectations of what a man "ought to be."

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- SS* *Sense and Sensibility*. Ed. James Kinsley. 1811. Oxford: OUP, 2008. Print.

Introduction

How have Jane Austen's novels, immersed as they are in the idiosyncratic society of the nineteenth-century English upper-middle class, managed to capture scholarly and popular attention for over two hundred years? How do these six novels, seemingly so limited in scope, remain relevant to a modern readership? To suggest that there is a single answer to these questions obviously underestimates Austen's talent. Nonetheless, the commercial and scholarly endurance of her works undoubtedly stems not only from the glimpses they offer into the romanticized courtship practices of the past, but also their unexpectedly and refreshingly modern depictions of male and female sexuality. It is in her scenes of dance that this interplay between past and present is most explicitly enacted. Austen's ballrooms are at once intensely public and sexually intimate sites of social initiation, environments where the body is foregrounded through the network of gazes that dominates the space.

Austen's perceived chasteness hardly lends itself directly to a discussion of sexuality—especially *embodied* sexuality—in her novels. Indeed, the apparent elision of the body in Austen's corpus has been decried by her critics for the past two centuries. Perhaps most infamous is Charlotte Brontë's dismissal of what she perceived to be Austen's dispassion:

Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet; what sees deeply, speaks aptly, moves flexibly it suits her to study, but what throbs full and fast, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of Life and the

sentient target of death—*this* Miss Austen ignores. (qtd. in Wise and Symington 99)

For Brontë, Austen merely attends to superficial display over Romantic depth, and fails to account for the range of emotion the human body is capable of feeling.

More recently, in “Jane Austen Images of the Body: No Fingers, No Toes,” Carol Shields suggests that Austen’s characters are compelled by their thoughts and emotions rather than the needs and desires of their bodies: “The brain...presides over the rest of the corporeal body while it is treated with what? indifference? incuriosity? disregard? or perhaps a metaphorical shrug that all but erases” (n. pag.). Characterizing Austen as a “dramatic rather than a descriptive writer,” Shields contends that her characters are rarely grounded in the physical or concerned with the material. Those who most obviously are—such as *Emma*’s Frank Churchill or *Northanger Abbey*’s Mrs. Allen—are usually figures of scorn or derision. Shields acknowledges that the absence of the body in Austen’s novels partly indicates the conventions of her period and culture, and she reads Austen’s consistent exclusion of the body as a distinctive feature of her writing style. She provides an exhaustive list of body parts referenced by Austen:

There is, in Jane Austen’s collective works, one chin, ten ankles mostly sprained, and one liver...two bones (but neither one a human bone), seven elbows, five shoulders, just two noses, ten ears, only eleven legs, two wrists, six knees, two eyebrows, and four eyelashes. (n. pag.)

Shields argues that Austen presents the body as “worth notice only when it is tempered by reason and rationality.” The infrequency of bodily allusions in Austen’s works serves to

emphasize the moments when the body *is* mentioned, particularly those rare occasions when heroine and hero touch.

This physical intimacy is most readily available within the ballroom. While Jillian Heydt-Stevenson has argued that Austen uses humour to negotiate the ways in which, as a female author, she could address the body, I suggest that Austen exploits dancing to bring the body to the foreground. Not surprisingly, her scenes of dance are at the narrative heart of each of her novels: it is often in the ballroom that hero and heroine meet, that Austen highlights the traits that will come to define each of her characters, and that the visual culture of her world is showcased. While Brontë and Shields are right to note that Austen's characters are constrained by social expectations, Austen develops the sexuality and passion of her characters *within* these conventions, frequently using dance as a means for sexualized social interaction—governed by rules, but very much about the somatic body. The body is consequently a text that conveys the desires that must otherwise remain unarticulated, and characters read each other through their bodies. Filtered through the eyes of Austen's female characters, the male body becomes an object of female scrutiny as Austen highlights the social and sexual power of the female gaze. As I will suggest, masculinity and the male body are particularly appraised in a society where sexuality is inextricably linked to visibility.

By reading Austen's ballrooms as critical sites of gender performance and places where the gaze's social power is all-encompassing, this thesis offers an examination of masculinity in Austen's works. Using her scenes of dance as microcosmic representations of the sexual dynamics in the novels, my analysis is guided by several questions: How does the body—particularly the male body—function in each novel? How is it inhabited,

described, and addressed? How do Austen's men strike the correct balance between vigour, stamina, grace, and gentleness? Most importantly, how are masculinity and male sexuality expressed through the body? In analyzing how Austen presents the male body in the social sphere, I argue that not only is masculinity fully embodied in each of her novels, but that Austen presents dance as a man's means of self-fashioning. Though her scenes of dance are integral to the plots of each of her novels, Austen frequently (and characteristically) abstains from an excessively detailed account of their events: little attention, for example, is paid to Edmund Bertram in *Mansfield Park*'s scenes of dance, while the only described instance of dancing in *Persuasion* is summarized in its entirety in two paragraphs. The scope of my examinations is dictated by the amount of narrative attention Austen devotes to each scene, and I consequently do not offer equally detailed analyses of each novel's ballroom events. Nonetheless, these scenes of dance warrant critical attention because they all, to varying degrees, highlight Austen's renegotiation of gender roles generally and masculinity particularly.

Though academic discussions of sexuality in Austen's novels have become increasingly popular in recent years, explorations of masculinity are comparatively limited in Austen scholarship. Rarely examined as sexual subjects or as objects of female desire, Austen's male characters are generally read as facilitators of her heroines' psychological growth, a critical approach in keeping with Shields's and Brontë's readings of bodily detachment in Austen. Thomas Laqueur's well-known discussion of sex and the body suggests that this oversight stems from a systemic exclusion of the male body in history: "it is probably not possible to write a history of man's body and its pleasures,"

Laqueur argues, “because the historical record was created in a cultural tradition where no such history was necessary” (22). The male body’s ubiquity renders it invisible.

I focus on Austen’s men in order to demonstrate how she fuses “traditional” and “modern” definitions of masculinity. As such, I situate her portrayals of men within the debates about gender taking place in the intellectual circles of Romantic Britain. I draw from analyses of Romantic masculinity by scholars such as Tim Fulford and Michael Kramp and synthesize them with existing examinations of Austen’s male characters. My analyses extend these arguments by examining not only “masculinity” (itself an abstract idea) in Austen’s novels, but also how Austen’s men present their bodies to the world. Austen’s gentlemen are very much grounded in the physical, and, as I argue, her heroes successfully master and control their bodies while remaining virile sexual subjects.

While Fulford and Kramp have initiated discussions of Austen’s unique brand of masculinity, and though several scholars have analyzed Austen’s ballroom scenes, few have considered the relationship between dance and masculinity in Austen’s corpus. Palma Bjarnason, however, *has* investigated the interplay of gaze and female sexuality in Austen’s scenes of dance. Examining what she describes as the relatively “disempowered” (*viii*) status of women in the ballroom, she groups Austen’s heroines into three categories: those who watch, those who are watched, and those who consciously perform in the ballroom. Although she eloquently addresses women’s precarious relationship to the social sphere, Bjarnason overlooks men’s equally complicated and regulated position in the ballroom. Furthermore, she declines to address how the rules of the dance restrict the male body and its interactions with other bodies, both male and female. By expanding her examination to include men, I more thoroughly

explore the intricate gender dynamic that exists in Austen's ballrooms: not only do men gaze upon their fellow female dancers, the female gaze prescribes exactly how men should look and behave. Masculinity is thus dictated in the ballroom, and is guided primarily by women.

This thesis is organized into four chapters that offer comparative analyses of Austen's six major works. Because the male body is not equally featured in all six novels, my discussions inevitably privilege certain texts and characters over others. The novels are grouped thematically, according to the ways in which each male character interacts with his social sphere and the women who populate it. Though these social spaces range from private, casual gatherings to formal public assemblies, I use the word "ballroom" throughout this thesis to describe any space in which dancing takes place.

Chapter One provides an overview of the historical context in which to ground my readings of the novels. It introduces the nineteenth-century ballroom as the centre of the Regency social sphere, and discusses the strict rules and regulations that governed the bodies within it. I establish the connection between watching and performing that forms the foundation of my argument. I also summarize the ideological tensions regarding masculinity in Austen's own lifetime, situating Austen's characters within these intellectual debates, and extending these connections to twentieth-century theorizations of the gaze and performativity. These theorizations are embedded in discourses of power and patriarchy, but by depicting men and women who both gaze on and perform for each other, Austen envisions a progressive gender dynamic in which social and sexual power is not an exclusively male prerogative.

In Chapter Two, I examine how Austen depicts social renegotiations of masculinity in *Northanger Abbey*'s (completed 1803, published 1818) and *Mansfield Park*'s (1814) scenes of dance. Edmund Bertram is not prominently featured dancing in *Mansfield Park*; nonetheless, his fight to uphold tradition while adapting to rapid social change reflects the struggles faced by all of Austen's male characters. This chapter focuses on *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney as the prototypical Austen man, embodying of the tension between chivalry and rationality with which each of Austen's subsequent heroes wrestle.

Comparing *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1816), I argue in Chapter Three that Austen exploits the ballroom as a site where women can dictate the rules of masculinity. In the ballroom, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse appraise the bodies of their respective lovers, reading Darcy's and Knightley's refusal to dance as a failure to conduct themselves properly in the social sphere. I concentrate specifically on Emma's control of the ballroom, and explore the ideological tension between the fop and "man of sense" as embodied by Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley respectively. Never ostentatious in his chivalric endeavours both within and beyond the ballroom, Mr. Knightley not only encourages Emma to adopt a more rational and liberal worldview, but also challenges her preconceived notions of the gentleman.

Finally, Chapter Four explores how Austen reshapes masculinity through dance in *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Persuasion* (1818). Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot are the only Austen heroines who do not dance, and Austen instead grants them the opportunity to fetishize men's bodies while remaining unobserved. Drawing on Erin Smith's and Cheryl Wilson's examinations of *Persuasion*, I argue that dance becomes a

metaphor for social mobility in the novel. I analyze how Austen brings the language of dance beyond the ballroom in order to renegotiate masculinity in particular and gender roles in general in her final novel.

I thus explore the complexities of performing masculinity within the female-dominated social sphere by contextualizing Austen's men within eighteenth- and twentieth-century theorizations of gender and sexuality. In the ballroom, men simultaneously perform and observe. The worth of a man—his health, wealth, manners, and virility—is overwhelmingly decided by women, and is based on how he presents his body to the world. If dancing is a marker of the gentleman, he is by necessity connected to his physicality. Ultimately, Austen's heroes control but never deny their bodies, and their sexual and social identities hinge on their responses to and subsequent validation of female desire.

Chapter 1 – The Rules of the Assembly: Contextualizing the Ballroom

Dances, balls, and assemblies were at the heart of social life in Regency England, and offered opportunities not only for socialization and amusement, but also for flirtation and gossip. They were intensely social gatherings, and invitations, whether to a formal assembly or a private dance, were generally extended to an entire family rather than an individual (Lee-Riffe 105). Though public assemblies¹ were popular during Jane Austen's lifetime, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the growing popularity of private balls and parties (Thompson, "Rules" n. pag.). Austen's own letters suggest that she was an avid dancer: writing to her sister Cassandra in November 1800, she admits that she had likely drunk too much wine at the previous night's festivities, and had remained there until five o'clock in the morning (*Letters* 63). It was not uncommon for dancers to finally stumble home at such a late hour, and while private balls tended to start between eight and ten o'clock in the evening, they often lasted until at least three o'clock in the morning, with time designated for dancing, eating, and taking tea (Lee-Riffe 105). The endurance of the dancers was paramount to the success of the ball, and in this chapter, I explore the complex gender dynamic that develops in a space where bodily intimacy is at once expected and policed. I examine the performative nature of these spaces, focusing particularly on the often contradictory prescriptions for masculine conduct in the social

¹ In "The Rules of Assembly," Allison Thompson notes that public assemblies, such as those held in Bath, often became tourist attractions in and of themselves, with rooms (most notably the Upper Rooms, erected in 1771) built especially to house these occasions. Thompson reads this as the birth of the modern tourist resort, and notes that the Bath assembly rooms were the most popular outside of London, attracting approximately 16 000 people in 1805 alone.

sphere. By allowing her female characters to gaze on dancing male bodies, Austen emphasizes the visual culture of the gaze in a way that is distinct from numerous twentieth-century theories of sexuality.

Finding One's Feet

Understanding the conventions of the nineteenth-century ballroom is essential in order to discuss the dynamics within the space. Dancing in Austen's era was hardly the social and sexual melee it is today. A site of intimate and intricate social interaction, the ballroom was governed by strict rules that regulated and controlled the dancers it contained. The bodies that occupied the dancing space were openly displayed and highly codified, simultaneously observing and being observed. In Austen's novels, successful masculinity is in part determined by a man's literal ability to manoeuvre his body through the myriad social and sexual interactions presented at the ball.

Acknowledging the social and erotic intimacy enabled by the ballroom, Molly Engelhardt reads dance in the nineteenth-century novel as a cultural barometer, a reflection of social norms and mores (8). She notes that courtship practices in the ballroom evolved as dances themselves changed. For example, the polka, popularized in England in the 1840s, as well as the waltz, were quicker, more robust, and, in Engelhardt's words, more "threateningly disruptive" (3) than the cotillions and minuets of the eighteenth century. As dances became more physically demanding and allowed for more bodily contact between partners, these new styles challenged class demarcations and expectations for proper behaviour between the sexes (3). Dances such as the waltz and polka allowed middle- and upper-class women to "[romp] alongside their male partners,"

as Engelhardt notes, while “the disciplinary lines governing courtship practices had to relax to allow for the corporeal exertion necessary for executing those ‘popular’ dances correctly” (8). Although dancing was one of the few socially sanctioned mediums for courtship, to dance was potentially to challenge and even to subvert the social and sexual propriety valued in the nineteenth century.

The polka and the waltz, however, were Victorian innovations, and in Austen’s youth, the country dance dominated social gatherings. F.B. Pinion describes its formal intricacies:

Partners formed the set in two lines, the gentlemen opposite the ladies (contre-danse). Variety depended on the choice of “figure” or evolutions made for each dance. The leading lady [so termed because she was either a guest of high honour or of the highest social rank] “called” or selected both the tune and the figure. While she and her partner danced from the top to the bottom of the set, followed at a suitable interval by the next couple, the other pairs of dancers moved up, spending their time as enjoyably as they could in conversation; so the dance proceeded, each couple moving to the top in turn. When all had danced and the first couple regained their position at the top, the dance was over. The leading couple then moved to the bottom for the next dance. (48)

While critics such as Nancy Lee-Riffe are quick to note that a woman always required an invitation from a man in order to participate in such dancing, the image of the “leading lady” calling the dance is a charged one. Women set the scene for the dance, and the

leading lady's personal preferences dictated the movements of the bodies around her. She choreographed—quite literally—her social space.

Such fleeting social influence was only gained by working within the strict rules and regulations that dominated the ballroom. Framing the late eighteenth century as “the age of the public assembly, of social amiability, of seeing and being seen,” Allison Thompson explains that dances were highly formalized and stylized, governed by rigid expectations regarding the proper conduct of the dancers and the specific dances that could be performed within the space (“The Rules of the Assembly” n. pag.). Thomas Wilson's 1811 dance manual, for example, offers an exhaustive list of rules for ballroom etiquette, ranging from a warning against gentlemen “enter[ing] the Ball-room in whole or half boots, or with sticks or canes” (189) to a strict forbiddance that any person “hiss, clap, or make any other noise to disturb the company” (191). Because public assemblies (such as those at Bath in *Northanger Abbey* and the Meryton Ball in *Pride and Prejudice*) did not have a host to oversee his guests' behaviour, the “Rules of the Assembly” were posted for all to see. These rules laid out the order of events, established the evening's dress code, and limited attendance. Moreover, they offered crowd control, and kept dancers in line lest their passion and excitement (and, undoubtedly in some cases, their desperation for a partner) should overcome them. Thompson notes that women would sometimes draw names for partners, a practice that kept the men from “only picking the prettiest girls to dance,” while also preventing “the ladies from scrambling to be first in line” (“The Rules of the Assembly” n. pag.).

Dance manuals likewise enforced this bodily control. Though these manuals generally differed widely in their instructions for performance, they all described proper

ballroom behaviour, especially regarding interactions between the sexes (Wilson 26). The authors of these manuals, the vast majority of whom were men, particularly stressed the need for dancers to guard their body language closely: prolonged eye contact was to be avoided, and partners were not to be touched unnecessarily (26). Thomas Wilson explains that “It is a common error with the Gentlemen, instead of lightly touching the hands of the Ladies, to hold them so fast that they can scarcely disengage themselves; that is vulgar in the extreme, and destroys all appearance of ease in the performance” (187).

Manuals from much later in the century also emphasize the need to regulate dancers’ bodies. Describing the proper waltz formation in his *Dancing and its Relations to Education and Social Life* (1900), Allen Dodworth stresses the importance of maintaining the physical space between partners:

The right hand of the gentleman should rest very gently upon the lady’s back...so that air may pass between....Both persons should be slightly bent forward, from the hips upward, so that the shoulders may be only three or four inches apart, the distance increasing downward; this leaves both parties free in their limbs, so that any contact of persons or knees may be avoided, and should be so avoided as a most serious mistake. (qtd. in Wilson, *Literature and Dance* 28-9)

It was also considered improper to dance too often with the same partner (26), a rule that explains Elinor Dashwood’s exasperation and anxiety when she sees that her sister and Willoughby have been “partners for half the time” during an evening at the Middletons’ (SS 41). As outlined in *The Ball-Room Guide* (1866), “It is in the ball-room that society is on its very best behaviour. Everything there is regulated according to the strict code of

good-breeding, and...any departure from this code becomes a grave offence" (qtd. in Wilson 27). According to dance manuals, the body must be constantly and strictly regulated. To fail to do so, to express even the slightest sexual attraction to one's partner, would undoubtedly raise the eyebrows of onlookers.

The existence of such rules suggests that the authors of these manuals were well aware of the highly sexual atmosphere of the ballroom, and in *Literature and Dance*, Cheryl Wilson argues that the dance manual simultaneously "affirm[ed] the need to police physical bodies and promote[d] transgressive behaviour" (24). The manuals themselves foregrounded the bodies their authors were attempting to control and ultimately suppress. Analyzing descriptions of the waltz, which was introduced in England around 1812, Wilson argues that the dance was considered scandalous not only because of the physical closeness it required between partners, but also because it turned "individual parts—waist, fingers, shoulders, hips, elbows, and back—into public discourse" (29). To describe the waltzing body was to segment it into a set of disjointed, potentially eroticized parts. Men's and women's bodies—sweaty, flushed, and moving in dangerous proximity to each other—inevitably gave rise to erotic attraction, regardless of the rules' demands for propriety and decorum. Though controlled by rules and customs, the ballroom was a site of intimacy that was at once unifying and disruptive, allowing hands, in Lord Byron's poetic words, to "freely range in public sight / Where ne'er before" they had dared to wander ("The Waltz: An Apostrophic Hymn" 115-16).

The very structure of the country dance actually *encouraged* partners to be intimate with each other. With couples moving in "parallel or symmetrical patterns," the country dance required complete unison between partners, a synchronicity that at once

reflected formality and also produced intense intimacy (Lee-Riffe 107). Moreover, because an acceptance of a proposal to dance actually meant an acceptance of two simultaneous dances, a couple could spend upwards of an hour together, depending on the number of couples dancing the set (107). The success of the set was determined by the successful chemistry between partners, and Austen herself fully understood the importance of partnership, admitting to Cassandra in a letter from January 8, 1799: “One of my gayest actions was sitting down two Dances [at a ball at Kempshott] in preference to having Lord Bolton’s eldest son for my Partner, who danced too ill to be endured” (*Letters* 35).

As Alison Thompson describes in “The Felicities of Rapid Motion,” “dancing” actually involved a lot of standing still and watching other couples progress down the set (n. pag.). These stationary moments were ripe opportunities to talk and (as an obvious extension) to flirt with one’s partner, and Austen exploits these moments for physical and intellectual closeness in her scenes of dance. As they dance, performing under the watchful eye of their onlookers and within a socially sanctioned framework for discreet and chaste courtship, Elizabeth and Darcy, Emma and Knightley, and Catherine and Tilney exchange the witty banter and intellectual jabs that establish the sexual undertones of their developing relationships. Alice Chandler, one of the first critics to address sex and sexuality in Austen’s novels, argues that Austen’s ballroom scenes offer “dramatizations of the mating process that are seldom visible elsewhere” in her works (7), and Francis Hart suggests that “intimacy is achieved in crowds” for Austen’s romantic couples (332). The highly sought after *tête-à-tête* between lovers, which is so often

rendered impossible by Austen's interfering supporting characters, becomes possible in the ballroom, and dancing is one of the few ways of achieving this intimacy (320).

Hart's emphasis on "the crowd" in Austen's scenes of dance, however, highlights the social atmosphere of the ballroom. "To dance" also meant "to be watched" by one's partner, by fellow dancers, and by the all-seeing chorus of onlookers. Through dance, men and women were expected to perform to these spectators, to regulate their bodies according to social expectations expressed and enforced through these multiple gazes. In order to negotiate successfully the ballroom or assembly hall, one had to be fully educated in what Engelhardt terms "dance literacy," capable of not only performing the dance itself, but also of reading, interpreting, and critiquing others' performances (26). Dancing actually required a host of simultaneous actions, including dancing with one's partner while "listening to a nearby conversation; knowing when it is safe to look and when it is best to look away; noticing sighs, intakes of breath, coughs, accelerated fanning, and absences" (26). To dance well, then, was to be completely aware of one's surroundings while also being a master of the persona one wished to project to the world. Dance became a signifying process, a means of self-fashioning that exploited social prescriptions for "proper" behaviour.

Extending Engelhardt's analysis of "dance literacy," Palma Bjarnason examines the performative nature of Austen's ballrooms (2-4). She suggests, as I do, that the ballroom conflates not only dancing and courting, but also watching. This critical interplay between dance and surveillance naturally has a strong interpretive component: as dancers' bodies are rendered public texts, observing the dance becomes an opportunity to read the body and decipher its nuances, its embodied—but suppressed—desires and

motives. Bjarnason's analysis grows out of Jane C. Desmond's connection between surveillance and the dancing body in "Embodying Difference":

We can ask who dances, when and where, in what ways, with whom, and to what end? And just as importantly, who does *not* dance, in what ways, under what conditions and why? By looking at dance we can see enacted on a broad scale, and in codified fashion, socially constituted and historically specific attitudes toward the body in particular, and about the relationship among variously marked bodies. (32)

The dancing body speaks what remains unsoken: a blush becomes an indicator of hidden desire, a glance proof of romantic attachment, a prolonged touch the product of secret love.

Bjarnason contends that the ability of Austen's characters to negotiate the ballroom translates into a broader knowledge of society and proficiency with the rules of the public realm (4). Because dancing displays the body's strength, abilities, and stamina, she argues that the ability to dance was visible proof of the nineteenth-century woman's marriageability. Engelhardt echoes these claims, suggesting that the dancing body was seen as an indicator of eligibility (9): good female dancers were equal to the physical demands of marriage and motherhood. Such arguments offer a one-sided examination of the dynamics and complexities of the ballroom, however, because both critics assume that the dancing body (particularly in Austen's novels) is the *female* body. Consider, for example, Bjarnason's suggestion that the performances in the nineteenth-century ballroom were gender specific, that the women "must be 'sought' by men and therefore must encode their appearance accordingly" (ix). While it is a valid observation that the

ballroom was experienced differently by men and women, what can be said about the men who are doing the seeking within this space? How are their behaviours and bodies to be read? Without undermining Bjarnason's or Engelhardt's observations, my readings bring men to the forefront in Jane Austen's scenes of dance. Not only are men's bodies indicators of marriageability, they are also vehicles for desire, sites of political and ideological tensions, and emblems of modernity.

Acting Like a Man

Ballrooms are examples of what Michèle Cohen terms "social spaces" ("Manliness, Effeminacy, and the French"). Cohen argues that it is inaccurate to envision nineteenth-century society as rigidly divided into the mutually exclusive public and private spheres. Instead, Cohen stresses the need to re-imagine the public/private divide traditionally assumed by historians, since a "public sphere" in fact occupied the grey area between the two realms. Her work is obviously indebted to Jürgen Habermas's seminal *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). There were, to be sure, private and public poles of society and a differentiation between the home/family and the state. Habermas notes, however, that a middle ground between these seemingly disparate poles started to emerge in the seventeenth century, and the establishment of coffee houses, clubs, societies, and salons began to blur the distinction between the domestic and the public (30). This was the social sphere. As Cohen explains, this new space had an intricate makeup, "located in the *private* realm, made up of *private people* coming together to form a public through sociable discussion and rational-critical debate" (45, Cohen's emphasis).

Cohen departs from Habermas by examining the gender implications of this social sphere. Her analysis not only re-imagines the public/private dichotomy, but also re-thinks women's and men's relationship to it (44-46). If the public and domestic realms were intertwined, then women did not exist exclusively in the private domain, and Cohen argues that women's role in the public sphere was to improve men. Cohen contends that women's presence in the public realm served to make men polite by leading the example through refined conversation. In an era when politeness was a marker of the gentleman, women, by encouraging respect and civility, assisted men in becoming "*honnêtes hommes*" (44). Within the social sphere, women were not expected to be silent. On the contrary, they performed a real social function through the talent for conversation demanded of them in nineteenth-century England.

The men themselves are secondary to the women in this analysis, and Cohen acknowledges that the re-examination of the public/private divide has not led to a substantial reconsideration of men's relationships to the spheres. The ubiquity of the male body in history has rendered it self evident, and examinations of the body's history have, by extension, focussed primarily on women. Cohen suggests two reasons for this focus: since the advent of gender studies, "gender" has tended to be made synonymous with "women;" and re-examinations of the public sphere have needed to account for women's increasing "publicity" (45). Men's appearance in the public domain has not, by contrast, seemed to require explanation.

Cohen's "social spaces" (47) write men and the male body back into analyses of the nineteenth-century public sphere. Places where the sexes met and conversed, these spaces existed both inside and outside the home, and included coffee houses, pump

rooms, theatres, and, of course, ballrooms. Neither fully public nor private, they were liminal, female-dominated domains where men tempered their behaviour principally in response to the social cues put forward by women; in Cohen's words, "social spaces were spaces where women reigned" (57). These were sites of parade and spectacle, where social interaction facilitated the social power of the gaze. Nonetheless, the proper performance of masculinity was complex and often contradictory. Though the presence of women in the social sphere gave men the opportunity to perform and perfect their masculinity, these sites were also places where men's potency could potentially be "compromised" (47) by their proximity to authoritative women.

Could men, in Cohen's words, "be at once polite and manly" (47)? By the eighteenth century, politeness, a complex web of manners and conduct, was an integral characteristic of the gentleman (47). The presence of women in the social sphere was essential to a man's full achievement of politeness and, by extension, the status of gentleman. However, by arguing that the social spaces in which this politeness was displayed and perfected were the domains of women, Cohen suggests that the standards for proper masculine conversation and manners were ambiguous, dangerously related to effeminacy and, perhaps worse, foppery.

The foppish man who spent too much time in the company of women was a figure of scorn and ridicule, and a theoretical threat to English masculinity. Christopher Nagle analyzes the confusion of sex roles embodied by the eighteenth-century Man of Feeling, a man feminized by his "excessive propensities" (9). Such a man was ridiculed for his tendency to resort to traditional modes of female expression, which Nagle describes as "the language of feeling and discursive displays of excessive affect" (9). Cohen similarly

remarks upon the threat of effeminacy that accompanied the polite man. She explains that men were expected to walk a fine line between female sensibility and masculine prowess: “If ‘natural’ manliness was...rough and brutal, ungracious, rugged, then in fashioning themselves as polite, men became ‘other’—softer and more refined, but not necessarily more manly” (50). This “other” was a worrisome and arguably neuter category.

Following the prescriptions for masculinity could potentially un-man the manliest of men.

The fop was perhaps the most troublesome class of man, and in *Fashioning Masculinity* (26-53), Cohen argues that the figure embodied nineteenth-century anxieties regarding masculinity and national identity. Although the exact definition of the fop varied, ranging from a man with substantial culinary skills to one who took pride in his appearance, he was generally identified by his “Frenchified manners and language” (38) and his propensity to seek the company of women. Moreover, he was associated with an ability to charm women through the art of conversation, a talent that the stereotypically taciturn and stoic Englishman lacked (think only of the classically aloof Mr. Darcy). Cohen suggests that men became men by interacting with other men; they only became *gentlemen* (polite and polished) by interacting with women. Fops took this last point too far, and while politeness was undoubtedly ideologically gendered, it was also—ideally—rational. There was a clear distinction between what Cohen terms effeminate “servile French politeness” and the manly, liberal politeness of the Englishman (43): “Fops were a warning to Englishmen about what happened to men who spent all their time in the company of women—like French men did. In England, the concern was about men and the anxiety of effeminacy” (40). In other words, the fop challenged sex roles by blurring the distinction between ideal and appropriate male and female conduct.

In Austen's lifetime, however, as prevailing institutions of authority were challenged and overturned, and as England embarked on more than ten years of warfare with France, existing views met with new interpretations of what it meant to be a man. The "ideal" man was virile, but self-controlled; chivalric, but never effeminate; and always rational and intimately concerned with the affairs of the nation. Artistic depictions and intellectual discussions of men drew on these contentious and often conflicting expectations, and two of the most vocal commentators on the issue were Edmund Burke and Mary Wollstonecraft, whose prescriptions for masculinity pointed in two very different directions at the end of the eighteenth century. Discussing what he sees as the "crisis of gender" that marked the 1790s, Tim Fulford analyzes the era's political and philosophical debates regarding gender roles. English fears of revolution went hand-in-hand with fears of women's rejection of their proper roles. Marie Antoinette was proof of the trouble that would arise if—and when—women embraced the "sexual and political 'excess'" that they were constantly expected to resist (5). As Fulford articulates, critics interpreted this threat as proof of the need to safeguard women's traditional roles. Presumably, men's rejection of their traditional responsibilities was similarly detrimental to society, and Fulford highlights this fact, arguing that many commentators saw England's men (especially the aristocracy) as being "corrupted by the effeminizing values of commerce and fashion" (5). Such vices were, of course, believed to be epitomized by the French, and embodied by Marie Antoinette who was (tellingly) romanticized and valorized by Edmund Burke.

Burke advocated a conservative reaffirmation of chivalry. Despite the increasing contestations of the relevance of chivalry in society, the term forms the core of his

Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790). Lamenting that “the age of chivalry is gone...and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever” (74), Burke places chivalry at the centre of the modern nation. His brand of chivalry was unique, however, in essentially feminizing power and authority: in Fulford’s terms, Burke focussed on “making power attractive, making authority seem sublime and beautiful” (9). Modern masculinity, in Burke’s eyes, could be softened, beautified, and opened up to accommodate traditionally feminine emotions.

Burke’s defence of chivalry was inspired by the French Revolution, a decidedly un-chivalric event. The attack on Marie Antoinette is his case in point, and Steven Bruhm provides an insightful analysis of Burke’s reading of the storming of Versailles and the ensuing capture of the queen (Bruhm 64-66). In the same way that Austen’s novels focus on the process of viewing, the scene of Marie Antoinette’s arrest is, according to Bruhm, framed by Burke as theatrical spectacle. To condemn the type of violence that ensues when revolution takes the place of tradition, Burke dramatically describes the barbarous assault on the Queen’s bedroom by a “band of cruel ruffians and assassins” (Burke 69) who “pierced with a hundred strokes of bayonets and poniards the bed, from whence this persecuted woman had but just time to fly almost naked” to temporary safety (70). The scene reads like a piece of Gothic theatre, and by demanding that the ideal spectator “recliothe the naked body and soften the horror of the scene” (Bruhm 66), Burke attempts to elicit a traditionally chivalrous response from his readers as they visualize his theatrical rendering of the attack. The fact that Burke relegates Marie Antoinette to the level of visual object suggests that a man’s masculinity can be assessed by his response to her capture. Describing the visual horrors of the scene, Burke calls his readers’ attention to

the desecration of “the most splendid palace in the world,” “left swimming in blood, polluted by massacre, and strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses [*sic*]” (Burke 70). A “proper” British man could not possibly fail to respond chivalrously when faced with this scene of the Queen’s and the palace’s violation; the emotional response such abuse would elicit would force him to act—or at least feel inclined to act—heroically and save the helpless woman from her captors. Burke espouses the traditional view of masculinity in which women are subordinate to men through the visual culture of sensibility.

Throughout *Reflections*, Burke calls for a return to traditional values, advocating gallantry, “manly sentiment and heroic enterprise...[and] sensibility of principle” (74). For Burke, the power of the state lay in preserving and disseminating the conservative gender roles that the French revolutionaries had eschewed (Fulford 47). Fulford writes that the Revolution was “a specifically sexual monstrosity” for Burke because it toppled what he saw as a political ideal: a sublime masculine power “tempered by the feminine beautiful” (50). Though his political adversaries saw his man of sensibility as weak and effeminate, Burke firmly believed that men of power can and must be chivalric and sentimental (5). For Burke, the male body was the *feeling* body, and he insists that “We have not...lost the generosity and dignity of thinking of the fourteenth century...we have real hearts of flesh and blood beating in our bosoms” (83).

This emphasis on the human body was not refuted by Mary Wollstonecraft, who counted men’s physical strength, their “noble prerogative” (*Rights of Man* 135), amongst their greatest assets and the major distinguishing feature between the sexes. Establishing a clear dichotomy between sensibility and rationality, Wollstonecraft posits her demand for

virility and reason against Burke's ideals of aestheticism and emotion. Fulford's suggestion that Wollstonecraft attempted to refute her society's "association of masculinity with sublime power, femininity with beautiful weakness" (17) highlights her desire to subvert the social traditions that Burke so highly favoured. *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) directly responds to the ideas Burke put forth in *Reflections*, and in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), she further develops many of these arguments, blatantly mocking Burke's prescriptions for men and arguing that traditional demands for chivalry were merely the means of keeping women in a subordinate position to men while "insultingly supporting [men's] own superiority" (*Rights of Woman* 120).

Wollstonecraft suggests that Burke's manly chivalry was, ironically, little more than emasculating, and Fulford argues that the masculine alternatives advocated by writers such as William Godwin and Samuel Taylor Coleridge similarly highlighted the insincerity of Burke's man of sensibility. While their heroes' "manly tears" respond to social injustices, Burke's were tears of performance, "shed for fallen majesty when his eyes remained dry at the plight of the 'swinish multitude'" (10). Writing with Burke in mind, Wollstonecraft stresses that "sensibility is not reason," that enlightenment is a virtue toward which all rational individuals should strive, and that the ideal man would blend "happily reason and sensibility into one character" (*Rights of Woman* 135). As we will see, Jane Austen merges this fundamental opposition between sensibility and rationality in her male characters. Her leading men embody the fusion that Wollstonecraft applauds, and this thesis examines the ways in which her male characters negotiate and ultimately synthesize these conflicting models of masculinity.

Michael Kramp's assertion that Austen's men are "prototype[s] of modern masculinity" (*xii*) indicates the importance of examining these male characters within Austen's larger cultural and historic moment. As discussed, Austen's period was one of not only contentious masculinities, but also, as Kramp's analysis suggests, complex gender renegotiations (1-34). The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were periods when British soldiers were needed to fight in the Napoleonic wars, labourers were needed to contribute to their rapidly industrializing society, and charismatic political leaders were needed to replace an increasingly ineffectual aristocracy and monarchy. If the modern British nation state was born in this post-Revolutionary period, its creation had wide-ranging implications for various social structures and institutions, aiding in the modernization of the family as well as conceptions of class and gender in the face of civic and class instability. As sexuality and national security became increasingly interconnected, men's success in the public sphere was predicated on their ability to become "regulated social/sexual subjects" (Kramp 3). This thesis argues, however, that Austen significantly refashions masculinity by casting men as sexual *objects* as well.

Though Austen's male characters are diverse, Ivor Morris notes the intellectual similarities that link her leading men (*n. pag.*). Several of these characteristics are obvious: they are all steadfast and loyal to the women they love, while retaining an ability (though perhaps not in all cases a willingness) to acknowledge their own faults. They are mannerly, but not in a feminized Burkean sense; instead, they are rationally benevolent, and their mannerliness reflects their sincerity and a genuine desire to do right by people. Most importantly, they reject the farcical modes of gallantry that relegate women to a subordinate position in romantic relationships. Chivalric, polite, virile, and authoritative,

Austen's leading men accommodate conflicting eighteenth-century gender debates to forge a mode of masculinity that is surprisingly modern. Moreover, their sexual identities are predicated upon mutual respect between the sexes, and while Austen's society was undoubtedly patriarchal, she subtly reminds her readers of the brief moments of empowerment that women could wield within the social system.

Through dance, men simultaneously embody this progressive gender dynamic and regulate their bodies according to social expectations. The ballroom consequently becomes a site where men can perform, challenge, and even subvert the prescriptions for masculinity that dominated their modernizing society. Engelhardt's examination of nineteenth-century conduct literature and dance manuals suggests that etiquette experts were aware of the subversive potential of dance, and Michael Curtin's analysis of Regency etiquette books suggests that these authors often did not clearly delineate between appropriate male stoicism and sociability. Curtin explains that in contrast to courtesy books, which specifically aimed to cultivate manners, etiquette books expressed "a relative disregard for moral thought" by concentrating their attention on specifically interpersonal interactions (409). With little concern for the construction of the "ideal individual," such books were frequently directed at male readers who, unlike women, had a real need for instruction in proper behaviour in the public sphere. Noting that such instruction was deemed to be of interest only to ladies, Curtin suggests that the prescriptions for this masculine conduct were abstract at best. His observation that etiquette writers rarely examined how men should behave at the balls, dinners, and operas that comprised their society (418) suggests that men were given little guidance regarding

the manners that were so essential in establishing their social worth. Rather, they were left to learn proper masculinity from women.

Although etiquette writers were relatively unconcerned with men's *behaviour* in society, the male *body* was an object of focus. In the social sphere, men were certainly expected to look the part. As nineteenth-century dance critics increasingly began to applaud the delicacy and elegance of the female dancer's body, male dancers were frequently criticized for being effeminate (33). A tension between proper masculinity and acceptable dancing was thus emerging in England, and Engelhardt further suggests that while the fop was ridiculed for his exaggeration of "the rules of dancing," so too was the man who ignored these rules (39). Mr. Darcy, for example, who is introduced at a public assembly in *Pride and Prejudice*, is established as a questionable character because he refuses to dance despite an overabundance of ladies at the Meryton ball. His reluctance is read as proof of his arrogance and disrespect, and the inhabitants of the village feel fully justified in dismissing him as "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world" (PP 7).

While men studied and sexualized their female partners, their bodies were in turn assessed and eroticized. As discussed, the conduct books of Austen's period often encouraged women to watch men's bodies while guarding their own in order to "detect deceit and protect their hearts and bodies in the potentially dangerous field of courtship" (Engelhardt 26). As I will argue, Austen reveals the modernity of the ballroom by imbuing her heroines with the ability to read the male dancers, whose bodies become texts of desirable masculinity. Contending that Austen's scenes of dance comprise "a complete inversion of the feminization of spectacle" (26), Engelhardt anticipates one of the central arguments of this thesis: the dynamics of Austen's ballrooms not only re-write

nineteenth-century ideals of appropriate masculinity, but anticipate and allow for the expansion of twentieth-century theorizations of gender and the gaze.

Looking at Men

I have suggested that in Austen's novels, gender is performative, as heroes and heroines fashion and moderate their behaviour according to the visual cues of others. Sexuality is, by extension, inextricably linked to visuality, and Austen's emphasis on seeing and being seen highlights the social and sexual power of the gaze. Although critical examinations of the gaze have tended to focus on visual media, especially film, the language and terminology of such analyses can easily be applied to Austen's novels, and particularly to her scenes of dance. Because Austen's male characters are filtered through the eyes of her women, male sexuality is effectively *created* through female perspectives. By explicitly connecting looking and desiring, Austen's novels enact the culture of the gaze long before feminist and theoretical discussions begin to develop.

Scholars who analyze the gaze in Austen's works have tended to rely on feminist theories to explore the sexual dynamics between hero and heroine.² Such theories generally analyze the gaze solely as a vehicle for female subordination. Perhaps best known is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). In this foundational essay, Mulvey frames looking (and being looked at) as a source of pleasure, situating her argument within Freud's discussion of scopophilia. In his *Three Essays on the History of Sexuality* (1905), Freud defines scopophilia as a sexual instinct that exists

² See, for example, Bjarnason's "Dancing in the 'Eye of the World'" (1999) and Sarah Ailwood's dissertation "'What men ought to be': Masculinities in Jane Austen's Novels" (2008).

independent of the erotogenic zones. It is an active process by which a subject is sexually stimulated by looking at a desired object. Mulvey genders Freud's analysis, arguing that woman is always the object of the gaze, a blank screen onto which man projects his desires and fantasies. A woman merely "holds the look and plays to and signifies male desire" (Mulvey 60).

Mulvey's analysis is not explicitly literary. Rather, she addresses the visual economy of narrative film, examining the power imbalance that is created when a male spectator watches a woman onscreen: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance," Mulvey writes, "pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" (60). In patriarchal society, woman is "simultaneously looked at and displayed," defined solely by her "to-be-looked-at-ness" (60). Even in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'" (1981), in which Mulvey responds to her critics by writing women into the predominately male audience she theorizes, female passivity reigns. Mulvey argues that Anglo-American films generally centre on a hero (a convention Austen, with her female-centred narratives, clearly complicates) with whom the spectators, whether male or female, are aligned. The women depicted onscreen are passive, generally secondary, characters. For Mulvey, then, the active/masculine passive/feminine divide remains, and though a woman is capable of occupying the masculinized spectator role, she inevitably possesses a "masculine 'point of view'" (123). Woman can only be fetishized and gazed upon, reduced by men to her highly sexed parts. She can never possess her own explicitly female gaze.

In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger similarly theorizes female passivity in the dynamics of the gaze. Examining artistic depictions of women, Berger famously contends

that “*men act, and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47, Berger’s emphasis). He suggests that women are constantly aware that they are being surveyed by men, and though he accounts for a female gaze, Berger argues that woman is only capable of gazing on herself, never at men: “The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object...[offering] up her femininity as the surveyed” (47, 55).

Roger Copeland helpfully addresses the difficulty of applying Mulvey’s and Berger’s male-centered theories beyond the context of visual media in general, and to dance in particular:

these theories of the omnipresent, inescapable male gaze proceed on the assumption that it’s *always* the man who holds the camera (or the brush or the pen) and the woman who holds the pose...Indeed, in dance, the cinematic notion of the “male” gaze is less relevant and useful to the theoretician than a more generalized consideration of the gaze itself, whether male or female. (146, Copeland’s emphasis)

Mulvey’s and Berger’s analyses are also less than useful when examining the power relation that results when the man “holds the pose.” They oversimplify the complex gender dynamic that exists in Austen’s novels generally, and in her scenes of dance particularly. My readings of Austen’s works reconsider Mulvey’s and Berger’s theories by analyzing the gaze as both a male *and* female prerogative. Austen envisions a radical form of masculinity that grows out of women’s sexualization of men, and she develops a visual culture that does not threaten individual autonomy, as it does in Mulvey’s and Berger’s analyses. In the dynamics of the gaze, Austen’s heroes and heroines do not usurp

the position of all-powerful subject, nor are they reduced to passive objects of focus. Instead, the gaze facilitates an exchange of power, one that allows women to exist as sexual subjects in their own right, while also permitting men to be sexually objectified. Unlike Mulvey and Berger, I argue that the gaze allows men and women to be both subjects and objects of desire.

In Austen's novels, the gaze belongs not only to individual men and women, but also to society as a whole, to what Austen in *Northanger Abbey* terms "the eye of the world" (36). The power of the erotic gaze is equalled by the ubiquitous social gaze. In Austen's society, heroes and heroines perform to this omniscient, bodiless spectator, who threatens punishment whenever cracks begin to form in the social personas they are expected to project to the world. In *Persuasion*, for example, Sir Walter Elliot must moderate his spending habits while acknowledging that he constantly "has eyes upon him" (14), lest rumours of his financial destitution begin to circulate. Similarly, *Northanger Abbey*'s Henry Tilney characterizes England as "a neighbourhood of voluntary spies...where roads and newspapers lay every thing open" (145). The gaze is not only a medium of communication between lovers, but also a means of monitoring and even controlling others. When *Persuasion*'s Captain Wentworth is curt to Anne Elliot at the octagon room, for example, she wonders if he has been persuaded into reticence by the "unpleasant glances" (153) of her father or Lady Russell. The gaze is a medium for power, and subtle glances can dictate whether one succeeds or flounders in society. Looks can burrow into a person's deepest secrets, or can manipulate and coerce people into behaving in specific, socially acceptable ways.

Michel Foucault's analysis of power in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) departs from Mulvey's and Berger's gendered readings of the erotic gaze to examine this kind of social gaze. In his well-known consideration of Bentham's Panopticon, Foucault contends that it is the threat of being seen that keeps society's "performers" (whether they be prison inmates or, in Austen's case, dancers) in line. For Foucault, the gaze, a manifestation of omnipresent authority, is the defining characteristic of modern society, symbolized by the Panopticon. In the Panoptic dynamic, "Visibility is a trap" (200). The prisoner is seen, "but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). Like Mulvey, who emphasizes the power imbalance between the subject and object of the gaze, Foucault argues that the Panoptic gaze functions "to induce...a state of conscious and permanent visibility" (201) so that the "constant pressure acts even before the offences...have been committed" (206).

The power relations represented by the Panopticon are particularly body-centred, and Foucault contends that Panopticism organizes and distributes bodies "in relationship to one another, of hierarchical organization, of disposition of centres and channels of power" (205). This form of surveillance controls the social body by regulating and disciplining individual bodies, and the performer becomes so subsumed by his helplessness that his "permanent visibility...assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). Perpetually visible, the observed self-disciplines in response to the threat of being seen by an observer who remains anonymous and unknown. Aware of the social stigma and punishment that could result when the rules of society are flouted, performers self-fashion in accordance with societal norms.

The ubiquity of the social gaze per Foucault echoes the omnipresence of the “eye of society” in Austen’s novels. As their bodies are placed under the microcosmic scrutiny of those present at the dance, Austen’s heroes and heroines must closely moderate their behaviours and impulses. The threat of being seen enforces sexual moderation. To show too much favour for a member of the opposite sex could, at best, lead to impertinent remarks from onlookers or, at worst, compromise one’s reputation entirely. The social gaze encompasses an intricate web of looks and glances that can both elevate and destroy.

By framing the ballroom as a site of performance, Austen also anticipates Judith Butler’s theories of performativity. In her foundational *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler argues that the body contributes to social stability by learning and presenting as natural socially dictated gender acts. “The gendered body is performative” (2548), in Butler’s words, and while gender acts appear to be manifestations of some innate biological “essence,” they function merely as means of “public and social discourse” (2549). Stressing that gender is “a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real” (2541), Butler argues that “the body” is not a biological given. Rather, it has been produced, shaped, and dictated by social and political forces. The body is inscribed with cultural meaning. It is at once a cultural artefact and a living text. In Butler’s analysis, gender is little more than the product of “a personal/cultural history of received meanings” (2550), and the body a surface that receives, mirrors, and is permeated by social and political relations of power. According to Butler, “such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence of identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (2548, Butler’s emphasis).

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler extends her theory of performativity. It is through the performance of sex and gender, she contends, that sex is established, that the body is formed, and that its differences from other bodies are marked. "Performativity," then, is by definition, "repetition": it is "a reiteration of a norm or set of norms...[that] concedes or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (12). This repetitive function is itself a kind of choreography. The perpetuation of gender norms parallels the scripted, repeated rules of any given dance.

Acknowledging the contrived nature of the socially inscribed body, the masks it dons and the performances it enacts, Austen looks forward to Butler's thesis. By showing how perpetually conscious her characters must be of their bodies and their movements, Austen demonstrates the artificiality of bodily stability in her scenes of dance. If bodies are indeed socially constructed, then they are produced primarily through ritual. For Austen, the definitive ritual is dance, one of the most visual, visible, and sexually charged social customs of her period. Austen gives her characters bodies in her scenes of dance, and when they are dancing, her heroines and heroes are forced to be aware not only of their own bodies, but of the bodies of others. In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder articulates the bodily paradox of the social sphere: although the body is the "ground of experience," it "tends to recede by direct experience" (1). Dancing, however, is Austen's means of calling the body to the foreground. Her heroes are not solely associated with their intellectual capacities: they are also firmly grounded in the physical. Her male characters internalize Romantic expectations of masculinity and make these rules visible through their bodies. For Austen, successful masculinity is embodied masculinity.

Chapter 2 – The Demands of the Dance: Negotiating Masculinity in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park*

Spanning the formal assemblies of Bath and the private balls of the English countryside, *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* centre on their young heroines' efforts to make sense of the social world into which they have recently been thrust. Both novels offer worlds that can be productively read through the lens of Butler's theories of performativity and that complicate a discussion of Mulvey's and Berger's focus on a male-dominated gaze. This chapter analyzes the social prescriptions with which Henry Tilney and Edmund Bertram wrestle to establish themselves as rational and responsible members of society, as well as genuine and compassionate lovers. Focusing particularly on the relationship between Tilney, Catherine Morland, and the "eye of the world" that perpetually watches them in *Northanger Abbey*, this chapter examines the ways in which Austen exploits the female gaze to construct the masculine ideal that dominates the remainder of her novels.

For both Catherine Morland and *Mansfield Park*'s Fanny Price, the ballroom is a site of social initiation, and the assembly a means of introducing young women into proper society. The assemblies Catherine attends while at Bath are organized according to a complex social hierarchy that is foreign and alienating to a girl with limited exposure to the social sphere. Because her dances occur on a large, formal scale, Catherine's attempts to learn the rules of the dance become attempts to learn the rules of society. Comparing the social hierarchy of Bath to the "linear formation" of a country dance, Cheryl Wilson suggests that Catherine is forced to learn how to navigate both the ballroom and her world

(76). Austen uses her scenes of dance to connect Catherine and Tilney's romance to the broader social commentary of *Northanger Abbey*, and she exploits dance as both a metaphor for and means of courtship (78). With each assembly (and there are five over the course of the novel), Catherine becomes increasingly proficient at negotiating her social space and establishing her social presence (79). Introduced as a relatively unaccomplished and uncultivated "lady," Catherine romanticizes Bath as the site of her "entrée into life" (NA 10). Dancing is an integral step in her social and sexual maturation, and "At fifteen...she began to curl her hair and long for balls" (6).³ Her body and her desire for public dancing are synchronous indicators of her budding womanhood, and Austen suggests that the social world of Bath is characterized by the interplay between public display and desirable femininity.

Timothy Dow Adams notes that Catherine is a social outsider when she first enters Bath (58), and her alienation from the social world is emphasized during her first public assembly. Like *Pride and Prejudice*, *Northanger Abbey* effectively opens with a ballroom scene, but unlike the Meryton Ball, the Upper Rooms are cast as a physically threatening space, particularly for women. Left without a male chaperone, Mrs. Allen and Catherine are almost subsumed by the bodies of the dancers:

Mr. Allen...repaired directly to the card-room, and left them there to enjoy a mob by themselves. With more care for the safety of her new gown than for the comfort of her protégée, Mrs. Allen made her way through the throng of men....Catherine, however, kept close at her side, and linked her

³ Although Catherine does long to dance, Austen is perhaps talking euphemistically here. Her readers would have been well aware of the sexual connotations of the word "ball," which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, has been used as a synonym for "testicle" since the thirteenth century.

arm too firmly within her friend's to be torn asunder by any common effort of a struggling assembly. (*NA* 11)

The mob produces a sense of physical insecurity in Catherine and Mrs. Allen as they struggle to navigate the throng of bodies that surround them. Despite the number of people in the room, Catherine feels isolated and disconnected from her fellow dancers. Noting that the balls of *Northanger Abbey* are characterized by a sense of anonymity and isolation, Palma Bjarnason consequently suggests that the assembly hall is a curiously antisocial social space (34). Catherine and Mrs. Allen are outsiders within this social sphere.

The surveillance society of Bath and its assemblies is consistently highlighted in the novel, and the Upper Rooms are filled by a sea of unknown faces, with strangers' gazes serving merely to ostracize Catherine. She quickly becomes a visual consumer of the town, and day to day existence in Bath is structured around the desire to see and be seen. As the narrator describes, "Every morning now brought its regular duties;—shops were to be visited, some new part of the town to be looked at; and the Pump-room to be attended, where [Catherine and Mrs. Allen] paraded up and down for an hour, looking at everybody and speaking to no one" (*NA* 14). Mrs. Allen, Catherine, and later Isabella Thorpe project their gazes onto Bath's inhabitants while actively inviting others to look at them, and their awareness of this visual dynamic both solidifies their social savvy and establishes their social worth. In a town like Bath, one must not only appraise the bodies of others, but also fashion one's own body for the omnipresent social gaze. After taking in the sights at her first assembly, Catherine herself, "tired of being continually pressed against by people," wishes to be seen and "long[s] to dance" (11). Here, her physical

proximity to the dancers hinders not only her ability to survey the room, but also to showcase her body to its full advantage. Her opinion of the social space changes, however, once she realizes that she is the object of the male gaze, and when she overhears “two gentlemen pronounc[ing] her to be a pretty girl...she [goes] to her chair in good humour with every body, and perfectly satisfied with her share of public attention” (14).

In a society characterized by its network of “voluntary spies” (145), this public attention can be a source of intense anxiety when received at an inopportune moment. When Catherine finds herself partner-less one evening, her private embarrassment is exacerbated by the threat of the incident being made public. Though Catherine had previously congratulated herself on her success in attracting male attention, she hyperbolically registers the threat of being seen by society, of being subjected to the judgement and scorn of the world (insofar as it is contained within the walls of the Upper Rooms) as a source of shame: “She was sharing with the scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the discredit of wanting a partner. To be disgraced in the eye of the world...is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine’s life” (36). In *Northanger Abbey*, the power of the erotic gaze is generally overshadowed by the power of this social gaze, as the faceless, omnipresent, omniscient “eye of the world” constantly threatens to undermine characters’ social personas and subject them to public humiliation. The threat of being seen motivates characters to act according to social dictates of decorum. Indeed, “Catherine had fortitude too; she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips” (36).

For Fanny Price, as for Catherine, the ballroom is a threatening social space, and the scenes of dance in *Mansfield Park* frequently frame dancing women as objects to be

visually consumed. The exclusivity of the balls that Fanny attends at the Park ensures that she is the focus of attention. In fact, an entire night of dancing is devoted to her “coming out,” and “Miss Price, known only by name to half the people invited, was now to make her first appearance, and must be regarded as Queen of the evening” (*MP* 209). Like Catherine, Fanny, “young and inexperienced, with small means of choice and no confidence in her own taste” (199), has not been sufficiently trained for her entrance into the social world. Her introduction to the ballroom becomes a training exercise in developing her social persona. Unlike Catherine, however, who quickly becomes comfortable with “her share of public attention,” Fanny is overcome with fear at the thought of “doing wrong and being looked at” (209).

Being looked at is, of course, inevitable in Mansfield Park’s ballroom, and Austen establishes the visual and inevitably sexual nature of a space that mixes physical exertion with opportunities for courtship. Maria Bertram and Mr. Rushworth’s engagement, for instance, becomes a generally assumed fact once they have been seen dancing together at the “proper number of balls” (31). During an evening at Mansfield, Maria exploits dancing as a means of initiating an otherwise forbidden flirtation, positioning herself and Rushworth alongside the virile Henry Crawford in the set. Her face, with eyes “sparkling with pleasure” (93), becomes the focus of Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Grant, who observe from the sidelines. Mrs. Norris notices how different Maria’s face looks “from what it was the last two dances” (93), but misinterprets the difference. Contrary to Mrs. Norris’s interpretation, Maria is not at all excited by her current partner and future husband, regardless of what a “pretty match” they might make in the eyes of her observers (94). It is her physical proximity to Crawford, their being “all in a cluster together,” that inspires

her impassioned look (93). While Catherine Morland is overwhelmed and intimidated by the rush of bodies that meets her in the Upper Rooms, Maria relishes the blurring of personal boundaries occasioned by the set.

In the ballroom, the body becomes a social text, and one critic notes that *Mansfield Park* is particularly “rich in sex symbols, perhaps because it is more a hothouse than a refrigerator. It nurtures not only the blooming Bertram girls and the sexually dynamic Mary Crawford, but also the nubile Fanny Price” (Chandler 6). Fanny’s developing femininity is appraised during her coming-out ball, which conflates visibility with femininity and desirability. The purpose of the ball is not only to give Fanny an opportunity to dance, but also to give her (predominately male) acquaintances the opportunity to watch her dancing. Sir Thomas Bertram and Fanny’s brother, William, orchestrate the entire evening around their desire to showcase Fanny’s body and “see Fanny dance” (*MP* 197). “She was to lead the way and open the ball” (216), and Fanny, like Catherine, is not merely the object of one person’s gaze, but an object of public scrutiny and, it turns out, “general favour” (216). We can read Sir Thomas as a quasi-Pygmalion character, as Bjarnason does, aware not only of the spectacle Fanny provides, but proud to have cultivated such a polished lady: “Sir Thomas himself was watching her progress down the dance with much complacency; he was proud of his niece...he was pleased with himself for having supplied every thing;—education and manners she owed to him” (*MP* 217). As one critic puts it, Fanny becomes little more than “a fetishistic commodity, essentially bought and sold by members of her family” (Heydt-Stevenson 328). Taking these analyses one step further, we can read Sir Thomas as a metaphorical pimp who essentially forces Fanny to prostitute herself by displaying her virtues to the

men present at the ball. Her actions are directed both by and towards men, and her uncle not only controls her, but delights in her malleability. Noticing what he perceives to be fatigue in his niece, Sir Thomas advises Fanny

to go immediately to bed. ‘Advise’ was his word, but it was the advice of absolute power, and she had only to rise and...pass quickly away....In thus sending her away, Sir Thomas perhaps might not be thinking merely of her health...he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness. (*MP* 220)

The scene can be read as an indication of Fanny’s forced subservience, and Fanny arguably “becomes the quintessential displayed object, titillatingly offered and withdrawn at will” (Bjarnason 67). Like Catherine before her, Fanny must come to understand the ballroom as a performative space, a site where one’s social worth is determined by how one’s body is presented to the world. Unlike Catherine, Fanny’s performances are forever directed by men. Submission, whether to her uncle, her brother, Henry Crawford, or Edmund Bertram, is Fanny’s principal means of navigating her social world. Nonetheless, I argue that Edmund must master his own social persona. As we will see, he too must learn the nuances of performing in the British public sphere, a sphere increasingly characterized by effeminate extravagance and decreasing aristocratic authority.

Edmund Bertram: The Crisis of Manhood

The ballroom scenes in *Mansfield Park* and the Bath assemblies in *Northanger Abbey* are female centred. In fact, Edmund Bertram’s presence during the evenings at the Park is noticeably overlooked by Austen’s narrator, who merely informs us that he dances at least

one dance with Fanny during the novel's first ball, and that he dances with the desirable Mary Crawford during Fanny's coming-out ball, though the evening on the whole "affords [him] little pleasure" (*MP* 219). Edmund's dancing body is certainly not showcased, and therefore does not, for the purpose of this thesis, merit extended attention.

Nonetheless, within my larger examination of masculinity in Austen's novels, Edmund warrants examination. In both *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, Austen presents her heroes as mentors and guardians to her impressionable heroines. Both Edmund and Henry Tilney serve to facilitate Fanny's and Catherine's initiation into the public sphere. As moral educators, Edmund and Henry have received harsh criticism, and Henry in particular is often dismissed as little more than a condescending pedagogue.⁴ However, the two men are more complex and nuanced than such criticism would suggest, and each implicitly responds and adapts to social renegotiations of gender roles in general, and of masculinity in particular. Though the two novels are set approximately fifteen years apart, their heroes similarly wrestle with rapidly changing prescriptions for masculinity, and aim to reconcile traditional demands for chivalry with modern expectations of rationality in an era of war and national uncertainty.

Mansfield Park especially centres on questions of appropriate behaviour for gentlemen, and the Bertram household functions as a microcosmic representation of English masculinity in crisis. With a frequently absent patriarch and an heir with little sense of moral or financial responsibility, the patriarchal home lacks solid male leadership. Though Edmund frequently serves as the voice of reason for his family, he

⁴ See, for example, Alison Sulloway's *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1989) and Leroy Smith's *Jane Austen and the Drama of Woman* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1983).

does not stand to inherit the estate, and Mansfield Park's future is instead jeopardized by an heir remarkable in his "extravagance" (*MP* 18). As Sarah Ailwood suggests, the novel presents a cast of male characters who are "incapable of performing their socially prescribed masculine roles and who collectively fail to produce a model of desirable masculinity" (177).

Mansfield Park also presents a world in which English masculine ideals are under external attack. In an era of war and colonial expansion, the conspicuously Frenchified Henry Crawford, with his propensity for flirtation and French women, stands as an obvious foil to the stoic Edmund. Ultimately, Crawford's masculinity is, like Tom Bertram's, found deficient, his "attentions" dismissed by Fanny as uncouth and ungentlemanlike (247). Edmund alone stands as the viable alternative to the courtly ideal embodied by Crawford. Unlike Henry, who is associated with French customs and the French language, Edmund is concerned with the political and moral wellbeing of England (Ailwood 179). As such, Austen conflates the private and national spheres in *Mansfield Park*, and the masculine ideal presented in the novel is frequently connected to national and political concerns (178). Austen suggests that men are responsible for the nation state's political and spiritual welfare, and she appropriately makes Edmund a clergyman, responsible for the moral and religious education of his parish. It falls to him to instruct and guide future generations of English men and women, and Ailwood argues that this sense of masculine social purpose is crucial in Austen's novels generally. The Tom Bertrams, Mr. Woodhouses, and Sir Walter Elliots of the world are quickly losing their stronghold over English society, and they are being replaced by a generation of men who embody Wollstonecraft's call for purposeful masculinity. As Ailwood argues, work

“whether it takes the form of an occupation or profession, business, or estate management,” is a crucial component of Austen’s brand of masculinity (189).

Through Edmund, Austen highlights the difficulties of adapting Edmund Burke’s chivalric ideal of aristocratic masculinity to the modern world. If, as Ailwood suggests, the collapse of the Bertram family is a microcosmic representation of the decline of England’s nobility, then Edmund is directly responsible for the preservation of his family’s and the aristocracy’s “chivalric mores” (91). His marriage to Fanny establishes a sense of personal, familial, and social stability that is no longer offered by the Burkean man’s worship of the past. Situating *Mansfield Park* within its larger historical moment, Glenda Hudson argues that a “fear of subversion” pervades the novel, where “time-honoured ethical principles of stability, endurance, and *noblesse oblige* are abandoned and replaced by new, entrepreneurial ideas” (42). Henry and Mary Crawford “infect” (46) *Mansfield Park* with their sexual and social depravity, Tom’s financial irresponsibility costs Edmund his future living, and Maria ultimately abandons Rushworth to elope with Crawford. Though the quasi-incestuous marriage of Edmund and Fanny suggests a preservation of tradition, it also symbolizes, as Hudson contends, a response to an age of “moral transvaluations and radical change” (35). The marriage reinvigorates both the family and the estate, and by marrying Edmund and Fanny, Austen preserves the “sacredness of the home” (40). Though he is never explicitly depicted in motion, Edmund successfully manoeuvres through his rapidly altering social world, learning proper male behaviour beyond the confines of the ballroom.

Henry Tilney: Establishing the Prototype

The interplay between modernity and tradition is a thread that runs throughout *Mansfield Park*, and ostensibly comes to an end with the marriage of the cousin lovers. This tension between the past and present, and between conservative and liberal expectations for men's performance in the public sphere, constantly bubbles beneath the surface of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's first completed novel. Through Henry Tilney and Catherine Morland's relationship, Austen rethinks the gender roles that dominated the traditional courtship novel, and primarily presents this renegotiation in her scenes of dance. Public sites of ostentatious self-display, the ballrooms of *Northanger Abbey* are progressive spaces compared to their more traditional counterparts in *Mansfield Park*, and Austen provides Tilney and Catherine with the opportunity not only to flirt and court, but also to experiment with codes of conduct in the public sphere.

Several critics have examined Tilney as the quintessential Austen man and the model upon whom her successive heroes are (to varying extents) based. Michael Kramp, who analyzes Austen's male characters as prototypes of modern masculinity, suggests that Austen's early works "offer examples of insecure young men and portray a nation nervous about its future male social/sexual subjects" (36). Austen's heroes exist in a period of transition, and Kramp is consequently astute in his assertion that they "struggle to become proper male figures [as] the very standards for appropriate masculinity are shifting" (43). The men of her juvenilia are self-aware, but are generally unsure how to modify and improve their existence as men. Though Tilney is self-conscious, he embodies a successful masculinity because he is intensely rational, and Kramp suggests that Tilney's rationality is his means of controlling his anxieties regarding proper

masculine conduct. Though he can be chivalric, his “male performances” are always regulated and tempered by his own reason (43, 36).

Comparing Tilney to the eighteenth-century archetype of the “philosophical advisor,” Kramp argues that he is often reasonable to the point of obsession (43). Tilney frequently frames himself as a proponent of extremely conservative values, and in one of *Northanger Abbey*’s most frequently cited scenes, Tilney, pausing during a dance with Catherine, equates dancing with the bonds of marriage:

We have entered into a contract of mutual agreeableness for the space of an evening, and all our agreeableness belongs solely to each other for that time....I consider a country-dance as an emblem of marriage. Fidelity and complaisance are the principle duties of both...in both, man has the advantage of choice, women only the power of refusal; that in both, it is an engagement between man and woman, formed for the advantage of each; and that when once entered into, they belong exclusively to each other till the moment of its dissolution. (*NA* 54)

Tilney (with tongue firmly planted in cheek) suggests that dancing, one of the few readily available opportunities for flirtation, is hardly the pleasantly diverting pastime that Catherine has hitherto believed it to be. While Austen’s other novels associate dancing with the flirtations of courtship, Tilney establishes it as a contract made for the mutual satisfaction of both partners and as binding and sacred as an official engagement. While Maria Bertram uses the country dance as an opportunity to exchange—both literally and metaphorically—one partner for another, Tilney views it as a couple’s opportunity to acknowledge publically their interest and investment in each other. Kramp consequently

reads Tilney's assertions as echoes of Burke's conservatism, arguing that Tilney's emphasis on the fidelity of dance partners suggests his insistence that "men and women must honour the 'contracts' of a time past" (47). Moreover, Tilney advocates an extremely rigid gender hierarchy, one that allows men to choose from a host of potential desired partners while allowing women the comparatively inconsequential "power of refusal."

That is, of course, until the women fully assume this power. As Tilney and Catherine progress down the set, they extend his analysis of the relationship between dance partners, discussing the roles men and women play in the dance. Tilney suddenly tempers his earlier suggestion of the unbending power divide between the male dancer and his female partner:

In marriage, the man is supposed to provide for the support of the woman; the woman to make the home agreeable to the man; he is to purvey, and she is to smile. But in dancing their duties are exactly changed; the agreeableness, the compliance are expected from him, while she furnishes the fan and the lavender water. (*NA* 55)

While Tilney hardly suggests that men are feminized in the social sphere, he does note the distinctive power dynamic of the ballroom. Here, women lead, and the "power of refusal" that Tilney initially appears to dismiss has real effects on the action of the dance.

Discussing Isabella Thorpe's mistreatment of James Morland during a night at the Rooms, for example, Tilney admits to Catherine that "No man is offended by another man's admiration of the woman he loves; it is the woman only who can make it a torment" (109). The ballroom is a site where female desire can potentially take

precedence over male behaviour and social decorum, and Catherine encourages Tilney's flirtation by declaring that she "does not *want* to talk to any body" but him (55). It is in these erotically charged moments, when dancers' eyes are constantly tempted to wander "towards the perfections of their neighbours" (55), that their courtship begins, and Catherine is hardly a passive recipient of Tilney's attentions. Rather, she enthusiastically invites them.

The majority of Catherine's actions in the ballroom are male-oriented, aimed to inspire Tilney's interest while avoiding the boorish John Thorpe's. Bjarnason argues that these performances for the male gaze merely highlight Catherine's virtual powerlessness in the ballroom, and she reads Catherine's behaviours primarily as endeavours to remain unseen (38). Particularly after her unsuccessful "jig" with Thorpe, during which he discusses nothing but "horses and dogs" (*NA* 37), for example, Catherine is "chiefly anxious to avoid his sight, lest he should engage her again" (52). Navigating the room, she must "[hide] herself, [mask] her intentions, and [stifle] her own power of seeing" (Bjarnason 38). On the surface, Catherine's situation appears to reflect the limits of female power in the ballroom.

Catherine, however, is a watcher of men, and though she falls victim to Thorpe's penetrating gaze, her ability to evaluate men, to gaze upon Tilney and actively seek his eyes, demands a nuanced reading of her character and their relationship. Catherine finds Tilney "irresistible" (*NA* 95) and refuses to allow her "passion" (102) for him to be stifled by social demands for prudence. At the theatre, she seeks Tilney out, looking "with an inquiring eye for [him] in every box" (21). Her "eloquence was only in her eyes" (88), and she does not wait passively for Tilney to bestow upon her his attentions. Ailwood

correctly notes that although Catherine's thoughts are "consumed by men," *Northanger Abbey* hinges on "a validation of female desire" (80) Catherine's appraisal of the masculinity of young men.

In the social spheres of Bath, men are creatures for visual consumption, anatomized and sexualized by young women like Catherine and Isabella, who search the town for potential suitors. For Catherine and Isabella, the abstract notion of an ideal man is inextricable from the male bodies they encounter, as the girls view outward appearance as the chief indicator of eligibility and virility. In one of the most direct discussions of the male body in Austen's works, Isabella questions Catherine about her preferences for the male form: "What is your favourite complexion in a man? Do you like them dark or fair?...I have not forgot your description of Mr. Tilney;—'a brown skin, with dark eyes, and rather dark hair'" (*NA* 27). Tilney's body is offered up for female scrutiny. They agree that he is "A good figure of a man" (54) and a worthy suitor because he *looks* the part. The first time Catherine speaks to his sister Eleanor, she praises his body: "'How well your brother dances!' was an artless exclamation of Catherine's....'Henry!' [Miss Tilney] replied with a smile. 'Yes, he does dance very well'" (51). Tilney's command of his body clearly leaves a lasting impression on Catherine.

By contrast, John Thorpe, "a stout young man of middling height...with a plain face and ungraceful form" (29), is almost immediately dismissed by Catherine and the narrator as physically and morally defective. Although Catherine declares herself too inexperienced to know "what men ought to be," she immediately sees that Thorpe is less than a gentleman, and begins "to distrust his powers of giving universal pleasure" (47). Established as an overbearing and inept dancer, Thorpe later proves to be a careless rider,

and these physical incompetencies suggest not only his lack of gentility, but also his volatility. Catherine is consistently expected to submit to him, and he forcefully takes control of her body at several points in the novel, first during their dance at the Rooms when his previous request for Catherine's hand overrides Tilney's invitation, and later during their failed expedition to Blaize Castle. When Catherine asks Thorpe to stop the carriage and allow her to exit it, "Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, made odd noises, and drove on, and Catherine...was obliged to give up the point and submit" (62). No Austen hero would force the heroine to relinquish her autonomy in this way, and the scene is later contrasted with a ride in Henry Tilney's carriage:

Henry drove so well...without parading to her or swearing at the horses; so different from the only gentleman-coachman whom it was in her power to compare him with!—And then his hat sat so well, and the innumerable capes of his great coat looked so becomingly important!—To be driven by him, next to being dancing with him, was certainly the greatest happiness in the world. (113-14)

Moving from a discussion of Tilney's driving to a meditation on his body, Catherine associates him with a masculine perfection that Thorpe will never achieve, and the pleasure inspired by the vision of his dancing body clearly contrasts her aversion to Thorpe's "ungraceful form." In control of his mind and body, Tilney is both fetishized and idolized by the young Catherine.

Her active pursuit of the man she desires subverts the gender dynamic of the traditional courtship novel. Though Tilney is an inherently rational creature, he is not established as a "demonstrative lover" (Ailwood 90) since Catherine is the pursuer

throughout their courtship. “Anxious, agitated, happy [and] feverish” (*NA* 179), Catherine’s desire for him manifests itself physically, and Tilney’s behaviour affirms this female desire. His progressive views of women set him in stark contrast to the chauvinistic Thorpe, and though Ailwood may be right to describe as “obnoxious” (30) his assertion that “no one can think more highly of women than I do” (*NA* 83), his claim does demonstrate his forward thinking on the status of women: for him, they are fundamentally rational. Moreover, by depicting her heroine “in quest of pastry, millinery, or even...young men” (*NA* 28), Austen challenges the conventions of the courtship novel by portraying women who pursue men chiefly for the purpose of flirtation and consumption, not necessarily marriage. Ailwood similarly reads the novel as a parody of conduct literature and its instructions regarding courtship, arguing that “it quickly becomes clear that with regard to Henry Tilney, Catherine has no intention of following traditional courtship practices” (83). Though she always acts within the bounds of propriety, Catherine’s desire for Tilney is based on intense emotional and physical attraction.

The untraditional heroine ultimately finds her match in an equally unconventional hero, and Tilney is introduced as an unlikely suitor for the heroine of a novel. His body is thoroughly dissected by Austen’s narrator as he and Catherine dance during their first encounter at the Rooms, and Tilney’s “pleasing countenance” and “intelligent and lively eye” do not override the fact that he is “not quite handsome” (*NA* 14). Later described by Catherine as “almost...strange” (17), Tilney is established as an atypical hero, largely because he calls into question how men should behave in public. Actively mocking social conventions, Tilney contrasts the “delicate flattery” (69) offered by figures such as

Thorpe and Henry Crawford by persistently highlighting the asininity of courtship norms. As he and Catherine dance, it becomes increasingly clear that he invests little importance in the contrived language of courtship:

I have hitherto been very remiss, madam, in the proper attentions of a partner here; I have not yet asked you how long you have been in Bath, whether you were ever here before; whether you have been to the Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert; and how you like the place altogether.
(14)

Tilney flirts with Catherine through this dismissal of traditional chivalric attentions, assuming the role of enamoured suitor by “affectedly softening his voice” and speaking with a “simpering air” (14). When Catherine finishes answering his litany of superficial questions, he reverts to his “natural tone,” relieved that he and Catherine may “be rational again” (15). His ability to switch between these social personas demonstrates how artificial these practices are, and Catherine is completely thrown by someone who so explicitly acknowledges the theatricality of her world. Like Catherine, Tilney is well aware of how he should behave within the public sphere, and his scepticism regarding appropriate courtship practices ironically takes place during a ball, one of the most contrived social gatherings of his public life. Subjected to Mrs. Allen’s mindless small talk, for example, “Mr. Tilney was polite enough to seem interested in what she said” (17). Though he is hyper critical of social conventions, he can still function—if ironically—according to their dictates. Tilney is sensitive to the limits of his disregard for decorum, and like the Austen heroes who follow him, he understands the importance of acting within social prescriptions of propriety and gentility.

Tilney consequently fuses traditional expectations of chivalry with modern virtues of rationality. Like many of Austen's other heroes (including Edmund Bertram, Edward Ferrars, and Captain Wentworth), Tilney works both financially and physically, his labour manifested in his parsonage at Woodston, "commodious, well-proportioned, and handsomely fitted up" (157). Moreover, he adheres to chivalric tenets simply because compliance is expected of him, not because he fundamentally believes in them. Refusing to acknowledge Catherine as his lover by acquiescing or condescending to her, Tilney instead treats her as he does his sister, "forever finding fault with [her]" (78). As Ailwood proposes, Tilney views chivalry as an "archaic ideal of male sexuality," and consequently blends it with reason in order "to provide security and social harmony" (Ailwood 47). Like Edmund Bertram, Tilney is, in part, a man of tradition, and his appeals to Catherine's sense of reason are invested with the authority of national and religious rhetoric and tradition. In response to Catherine's suspicions of his father's cruelty, Tilney questions her logic: "What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you" (NA 145). As Ailwood notes, Tilney here "uphold[s] a chivalric conception of the nation as a...secure land" (47), but while he espouses traditional values, he also dispels Burkean sensibility. Following his reprimand, he sees that Catherine's "visions of romance were over....Catherine had never wanted comfort more, and he looked as if he was well aware of it" (NA 146). Tilney is never rational to the point of alienation, nor romantic to the point of sentimentality. Instead, he views the world and his fellow man (and woman) as logical and rational, and, as Ailwood argues, "while he can

mimic the traditional behaviour and discourse of a man of feeling, his sensitive performances are always regulated by reason” (49).

His proposal to Catherine, which should be his most sensitive performance, is perhaps his most subdued moment. Acknowledging that his “affection originated in nothing better than...a persuasion of her partiality for him,” Tilney merely “assure[s] Catherine] of his affection; and [her] heart in turn was solicited” (*NA* 180). Ailwood dismisses the proposal as “both predictable and dramatically disappointing” (52), but Austen’s acknowledgement that it presents “a new circumstance in romance...dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity” (*NA* 180) is worth noting. Tilney’s proposal validates and emphasizes the power of female sexual desire as his courtship with Catherine is initiated by her romantic interest in him; he follows her lead. Moreover, this “new direction” suggests that romance does not, in fact, necessitate the ostentatious demonstration of desire suggested in the romantic novels Catherine reads. Love and romance can instead involve the union of two rational individuals, and marriage can be a relationship between intellectual and sexual equals. Fusing tradition, chivalry, morality, reason, and physical virility, Henry Tilney establishes the masculine prototype that will be praised throughout Austen’s works, and that will manifest itself in the stoic Mr. Darcy and pragmatic Mr. Knightley.

Chapter 3 – Pleasing Worthy Women: Dictating Masculinity in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*

For Tilney, the ballroom becomes the ideal site to play with and mock traditional courtship norms; as the previous chapter argues, his ironic social performance not only reflects the self-awareness of a young man recently of age, but also the frivolity of the polite behaviour expected of him. I have suggested that Bath's assembly halls offer him a space in which to experiment with and forge a stable masculine identity. These ballrooms, however, are experienced quite differently by the women of his life, and the ballrooms that Catherine—and also Fanny—encounter are largely places of alienation and intimidation, sites that are hostile to women who do not find themselves under the guardianship of a man. In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, Austen reconsiders this social dynamic, and writes ballrooms that are not only accessible to women, but that tend to be directed by them. I suggest that in Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, Austen creates two of her most socially empowered heroines, women who not only command their own bodies, but who also compare, appraise, and direct the bodies of the men that surround them. Focusing on Mr. Darcy and Mr. Knightley, this chapter analyzes how masculinity is essentially a female construct in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. As I argue, these heroes actively respond to their heroines' ideas of "what men ought to be."

Elizabeth's body is an object of focus throughout *Pride and Prejudice*, and her physical vitality presents a challenge to any characterization of her as a conventional nineteenth-century heroine. Elizabeth is in full control of her body and is eccentric in her willingness to use it to its full capacity. In one of her most extravagant displays of the

body in motion, Austen describes how Elizabeth walks three miles to visit the sick Jane at Netherfield, “jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles [*sic*], dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise” (*PP* 24). This is not Marianne Dashwood wandering the fields and waiting to be rescued, nor is it Caroline Bingley taking a “turn about the room” merely to capture Darcy’s gaze (41). In fact, Miss Bingley, with her perpetual “witticisms on fine eyes” (34), is threatened not by Elizabeth’s accomplishments or her likeable personality, but by her vivacious body and the obvious sexual interest it inspires in Mr. Darcy.

Just as Catherine Morland is attracted to Tilney’s ironic dismissal of social niceties, Darcy is drawn to Elizabeth because she is different from the other women of his social circle. When Miss Bingley mocks Elizabeth for arriving at Netherfield with her hair “so blowsy” and “her petticoat six inches deep in mud” (26), Darcy can only admire “the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion” (24). For him, Elizabeth’s appeal stems not simply from her lively manners, but also from her body, and during an evening at the Lucases’, he admits to Caroline Bingley that he is “agreeably engaged” in “meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow” (19). Pondering the scopophilic gratification induced by watching Elizabeth, Darcy makes clear the sexual nature of his feelings for her. He is attracted to her because of her lack of regard for the conventions of flirtation; in Ivor Morris’s words, she “dispels the enrapturing notion of his own consequence” (n. pag.). While Miss Bingley can do little more than “mend pens” (*PP* 35), Elizabeth offers a “liveliness of mind” (291) that complements her beauty. She challenges Darcy’s preconceived notions

of femininity: as a result, she forces him to rethink his definitions for—and thus modify his performance of—aristocratic masculinity.

The Netherfield Ball highlights Elizabeth's command over her social sphere. As she scans the room for George Wickham, Austen's narrator describes the conscious process by which she prepares herself for his gaze, divulging that "she had dressed with more than usual care, and prepared in the highest spirits for the conquest of...his heart, trusting that it was not more than might be won in the course of the evening" (67). Employing the language of competition—or, perhaps more suggestively, of warfare—Elizabeth perceives herself as being in control of her surroundings and the men who inhabit it. Her hope to make a "conquest" of Wickham is echoed later in the evening when Darcy approaches "to claim her hand" for a dance (69), and as they progress down the set, Elizabeth satirizes the conventionally vapid flirtation in which they are expected to engage:

"It is *your* turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy—I talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples."

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said. (69, Austen's emphasis)

While echoes of Henry Tilney are found in Elizabeth's glib disregard for courtship conventions, the difference between their genders is important. As a man, Tilney operates from a position of relative power and independence. As a woman, Elizabeth does not. She challenges gender norms not only by dismissing her society's demands for female passivity in the realm of courtship, but also by directing her conversations herself.

Moreover, while Catherine Morland tries to match Tilney's witty repartee, Darcy willingly submits to Elizabeth's authority. His smile, so rare outside Elizabeth's company, suggests his amusement with her unconventionality.

Elizabeth may call into question the traditional parameters of desirable femininity, but Emma Woodhouse subverts them further. "[H]andsome, clever, and rich" (E 5), Emma is Austen's only heroine to enjoy the luxury of wealth and prestige, and after her mother's death, she finds herself "mistress" of her father's house (5). The Woodhouses "were first in consequence" in their village of Highbury, and "all looked up to them" (7), but her father, the silly "valetudinarian" Mr. Woodhouse, hardly stands as an emblem of patriarchal authority at Hartfield (6). Mr. Woodhouse presides over his home from a position of defunct authority and with a body emasculated by years of leisure. In the absence of strong, patriarchal leadership, Emma rules the home, and her total control over her domestic surroundings has received much critical attention. Claudia Johnson, for example, reads Emma as an "unsexed" or even masculine character, and several critics have implicitly suggested that Emma's lack of "heterosexual feeling" can be read as an indication of her asexuality or even her lesbianism (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 193).⁵ Johnson herself argues that Emma is a notably unconventional romantic heroine in terms of her "shockingly little reverence for dramas of heterosexual love" (195). Even Harriet Smith is amazed to learn of the lack of interest Emma has in marriage:

⁵ See, for example, Edmund Wilson's "A Long Talk About Jane Austen" (1944), T. F. Potter's "'A Low but Very Feeling Tone': The Lesbian Continuum and Power Relations in Jane Austen's *Emma*" (1994), and Susan Korba's "'Improper and Dangerous Distinctions': Female Relationships and Erotic Domination in *Emma*" (1997).

“I must see some body very superior to any one I have seen yet, to be tempted....If I were to marry, I must expect to repent it.”

“Dear me!—it is so odd to hear a woman talk so!”

“I have none of the usual inducements to marry.... Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house, as I am of Hartfield.” (*E* 68)

In Johnson’s words, Emma’s “energies and desires are *not* fully constrained within the grid imposed by the courtship plot” (195), and Ailwood similarly argues that Emma’s femininity is “incompatible” with discourses of chivalry and domesticity (225). Emma, “who could do anything in Highbury” (*E* 155), wields as much social influence as any man, and her financial and emotional independence would, in fact, be threatened by marriage (Ailwood 255). While Catherine Morland challenges the conventions of the traditional courtship novel by directing her developing romance with Tilney, Emma disregards them entirely; indeed, she is Austen’s only heroine whose lot would not be improved by the acquisition of a husband, and who consequently refuses to organize her life around her pursuit of men.

Emma commands the ballroom in a way that Austen’s other heroines do not. Nora Stovel consequently argues that Emma is “a more modern heroine than her Austen sisters” because she not only has the power to deny dancing, but also to initiate it (n. pag.). Emma not only acknowledges the relationship between dancing and watching, but also exploits it. She is the performer who is constantly aware of her performance: her aim is not merely to capture the attention of a single man, but of the entire assembly. During

the ball at the Westons', for example, Emma is constantly aware of how physically appealing she and Frank Churchill are, congratulating herself on finding a partner with whom she is so "well matched" (*E* 181). She simultaneously observes the bodies and behaviours of her fellow dancers. She literally leads the dance, and Emma's is the approval that all present aim to secure. Expounding on Jane Fairfax's beauty, for example, Miss Bates "[eyed] Emma most complacently....'Miss Woodhouse...how do you like Jane's hair?—You are a judge'" (253). Following Knightley's dance with Harriet, with which he saves her from the Eltons' censure, Emma's "eyes invited him irresistibly to come to her and be thanked" (259). She is styled, both by herself and by others, as the mistress of the evening. In Johnson's words, she both "possesses and enjoys" power (125).

In light of Emma's social influence, the setting of the novel's first ball, at the Westons' home at Randalls, is significant. The dance takes place in a home that signifies a changing social order in Highbury, as Mr. Weston, though "born of a respectable family," had only for "the last two or three generations...been rising into gentility and property" (*E* 12). The inclusion of nouveau-riche guests such as Mrs. Elton and the Coles means that Highbury's "eye of the world" encompasses several social classes. Emma's ability to navigate and control this social space signifies her ability to manage and maintain precedence in this changing world, a world where the likes of Mrs. Elton, a woman with "no name," "no blood," and "no alliance" (144), can replace Emma as the leading lady of the set. Like Elizabeth, who must overcome her own social prejudices, Emma must respond to the rapidly changing order of her society, an adaptability that also characterizes the heroes of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.

Fitzwilliam Darcy: The Savagery of the Dance

“Every savage can dance” (PP 18), scoffs Fitzwilliam Darcy at Sir William Lucas’s request to see him dance with Elizabeth Bennet. If Henry Tilney conforms to ballroom etiquette with what Molly Engelhardt describes as a “parodic flourish” (46), then *Pride and Prejudice*’s Mr. Darcy refuses to conform at all. Like Tilney, Darcy is introduced at a ball, but while his friend Charles Bingley is immediately lauded by the Meryton crowd as the “goodlooking and gentlemanlike” new inhabitant of Netherfield Park, Darcy remains unnamed and unknown, merely “another young man” in Bingley’s party (PP 6). He immediately becomes the focal point of the room, however, because his anonymity is intriguing, and Austen colours her readers’ perceptions of her hero by filtering him through the eyes of his fellow dancers. Attracting “the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, [and] noble mien” (6), Darcy’s physical presence establishes him as one of the most eligible bachelors at the ball. That is, of course, until he refuses to dance, standing up once with each of Bingley’s sisters only to spend the rest of the night “declin[ing] being introduced to any other young lady” (7). Like *Emma*’s George Knightley, as we will see, Darcy refuses to display or parade his body by dancing. Unlike Knightley, however, Darcy has not yet secured the respect of his neighbourhood, and fails to use the ball as an opportunity to demonstrate his good breeding and establish his social worth. He instead provokes the powerful first impression that he is “the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world” (7). Though Darcy visually enraptures the room, his refusal to act the part of the gentleman by neglecting to dance sullies him in the eyes of his watchers.

“Obliged, by the scarcity of gentlemen, to sit down for two dances” (7), Elizabeth later describes Darcy’s abominable behaviour to his cousin Colonel Fitzwilliam. Elizabeth reads Darcy’s refusal to dance as a deficiency in his manners, asking the Colonel—only partially in jest—how “a man of sense and education, and who has lived in the world” can find himself so ill-equipped to negotiate the social realm (135). Though Elizabeth slyly uses the Colonel to question Darcy implicitly, Darcy’s answer is characteristically direct, and he explains, “I certainly have not the talent which some people possess...of conversing easily with those I have never seen before. I cannot...appear interested in their concerns, as I often see done” (135). Darcy beats her at her own game, drawing attention to the kind of artificiality she just displayed. While Henry Tilney can listen to the inane prattle of Mrs. Allen with the appearance that he is “interested in what she said” (NA 17), Darcy is incapable of adhering to empty social conventions in an attempt to act the part of the gentleman. He has not yet mastered the public performance of genteel masculinity.

His masculine shortcomings are only highlighted in comparison to Bingley’s successful performance, and the pronounced contrast between the two friends deflates Darcy’s character before Elizabeth even meets him. In addition to being handsome and conveniently rich, Bingley is established as cheerfulness personified: “he was lively and unreserved, danced every dance, was angry that the ball closed so early, and talked of giving one himself at Netherfield” (PP 6-7). Bingley’s willingness to dance is proof to all present not only of his amiability, but also of his eligibility, and after watching him all night, Jane Bennet declares him to be “just what a young man ought to be” (9). Moreover, Bingley uses the ball as an opportunity to survey the marriage market in his new

neighbourhood, announcing to Darcy as he inspects the room that he “never met with so many pleasant girls in [his] life” (7). Responding with characteristic aloofness, Darcy informs Bingley, who has danced several dances with the beautiful Jane, that he has passed the evening “with the only handsome girl in the room” (7).

Darcy has obviously taken the time to survey and appraise the bodies of the Hertfordshire girls, and he has clearly taken notice of one young lady in particular. One of the first times he speaks is to comment on Elizabeth’s body, and with the caustic observation that she is “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt [him]” (7), Darcy firmly establishes the importance of physicality and sexual attraction in their developing relationship. Darcy is hardly unaware of the sexual power of dancing. His acerbic remark that “every savage can dance” speaks to the basic desires that dancing potentially allows individuals to vent (18). Darcy associates the dancing body with visceral passions, and it is only after he realizes his sexual and romantic interest in Elizabeth that he will dance with her. Darcy recognizes the sexual closeness dancing offers, and his later inquiry into whether Elizabeth ever feels “a great inclination...[to dance] a reel” (38) is similarly sexually loaded. As Chandler explains, “the word *reel* did have a sexual connotation in Jane Austen’s time. The phrases ‘the reels o’Bogie,’ ‘the reels of Stumpie,’ and ‘dance the miller’s reel’ are all slang terms for sexual intercourse” (18). Darcy’s request for the reel not only alludes to his sexual attraction to Elizabeth, but also suggests his (theoretical) willingness to yield to these Byronic desires.

Though he initially gazes on Elizabeth with the analytical scrutiny of a critic, “detecting...more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form” (*PP* 16), Darcy quickly assumes a voyeuristic position as his gaze shifts from a scrutinizing to a

sexualizing force. He believes himself safe from Elizabeth's sexual powers until he takes note of her "fine eyes," an observation he makes during an evening of dancing (19). At the Lucases', Austen provides her most detailed account of Elizabeth's body, and filters the description through Darcy:

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...he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (16)

Through free indirect discourse, Austen allows unmediated access to her hero's inner thoughts, providing a view of the world as it appears through his eyes. Darcy's interiority is fully developed through this focalization, which not only provides a clear contrast between his and Elizabeth's perceptions of events, but also insight into his feelings for her. The reader watches Darcy watching Elizabeth, and discovers his physical attraction to her long before she does. As will be seen, with the exception of *Persuasion's* Captain Wentworth, Austen does not grant any of her other heroes this level of interiority.

Initially, however, Darcy perceives Elizabeth's unconventional femininity as strange and alien, and he views her as a potential threat to his masculine stoicism. Once he fully appreciates the level to which he would have to condescend in courting her, he begins to "feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention" (44). "She attracted him more than he liked" (44), and Darcy is effectively torn between his sexual desire for Elizabeth, the rational views of sexuality imposed on him by his education, and the

pressure on him to marry according to familial and social expectations (Ailwood 152).

His fear of being “bewitched” by Elizabeth and of the “danger” that she embodies is very real, and he subsequently “determine[s] not to fix his eyes on her” (*PP* 55).

Elizabeth pledges no similar vow, and her relationship with Darcy is characterized by her awareness of his gaze (or lack thereof) and her attempts to return it. The visual dynamic of their first meeting at the Meryton Ball sets the tone for their entire relationship, as “turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own” (7). Ailwood reads this moment as a dramatization of male power, arguing that “Darcy wants Elizabeth to know that she has been assessed and rejected by him” (155). However, in light of Darcy’s anxieties regarding Elizabeth’s eyes, regardless of how “fine” they might be, Bjarnason’s analysis of the scene is more nuanced. She suggests that Darcy is unnerved by the fact that Elizabeth returns his gaze, as her gazing topples the power balance of voyeurism and negates the watcher’s authority over the watched (50). Foucault’s Panoptic schema hinges on the uncontested authority of the invisible surveyor, but by returning Darcy’s gaze, Elizabeth shifts this balance of power, meeting his masculine eye with an equally potent, equally sexual female gaze. Elizabeth’s gaze bewilders Darcy, who had come to the ball “solely to survey” (*PP* 51). She challenges both his detachment and his perceived masculine superiority.

Elizabeth also brings Darcy’s body to the foreground, and her gaze frequently renders his body a text. As I suggest, Austen subsequently uses the female gaze to emphasize the masculine physical presence in her novels, and this physicality challenges Austen scholarship that has traditionally overlooked her exploration of both masculinity and the body. Kathryn Sutherland, for example, has argued that the male body is only

emphasized in film adaptations of Austen's works. She contends that while the films endow their male protagonists with both "physical and emotional expressiveness," their literary counterparts are marked instead by "emotional and physical restraint" (348). The film versions do cast the heroes in a way that absolutely emphasizes their physicality and sex appeal—they are almost always physically imposing and classically handsome men. Nonetheless, although Darcy is expected to temper his emotions according to a very strict social code, he is more than capable of acting "with more feeling than politeness" (*PP* 209), and his body is conspicuously emphasized during the scene of his infamous first proposal. As Elizabeth dramatically and unequivocally scoffs at his declaration of love, Darcy's complexion goes from being "pale with anger" (146) to flushed with "heightened colour" (147), as he struggles "for the appearance of composure" despite the fact that "the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature" (146). As his body registers the embarrassment and hurt that he never adequately expresses, Elizabeth is forced to read the nuances and respond to the insinuations of his face.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen no longer presents the asexual "eye of the world" introduced in *Northanger Abbey*, but instead showcases a specifically female gaze. Watching, scrutinizing, and sexualizing men is a preferred female pastime, and offers one of the few mediums for female influence in the social sphere. The novel famously opens with a suggestion of female power: while it may be "a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife" (1), that single man has found himself the focal point of a community dominated by women. Austen's note that such a man is invariably "considered as the rightful property of some one or other of [his neighbours'] daughters" is of course ironic given the reality of

primogeniture at the time, but also implicitly suggests the level of female authority in the marriage market (10). Interactions in the social sphere allow women to see and appraise the bodies of potential suitors, for to see a man—and particularly to see him interacting with his peers—is to know his eligibility. Screened from view, for example, the Bennet girls watch “from an upper window” (6) as Bingley arrives at the Meryton Ball. They have full view of his body and become voyeurs while Bingley remains the oblivious object of their gaze. Mr. Wickham is similarly oversexed by the women of his social circle. With his “beauty” and “fine countenance” (54), he is “the happy man toward whom almost every female eye was turned” during an evening at the Phillips’ (57). Presenting men who are objects of a specifically female gaze, Austen’s works complicate arguments by theorists such as E. Ann Kaplan and Laura Mulvey by demonstrating that the female gaze carries all the “power of action and possession” of the male (Kaplan 121). Austen’s women choreograph the world of courtship. Not simply aware of the male gaze, they are more than capable of sexualizing men in return.

Perhaps the most refreshingly modern aspect of Darcy and Elizabeth’s relationship is this validation of female sexuality. *Pride and Prejudice* not only explores the importance of female desire in informing social expectations of masculinity, but also presents a hero who consciously changes in response to his lover’s desires and demands (Ailwood 142). After Darcy’s humiliating first proposal, Elizabeth notes that all his wealth, education, and social influence have not equipped him with the ability to behave in a “gentle-man like manner” (*PP* 14). The “power of refusal” that Henry Tilney devalues has very real implications for Darcy, as it forces him to re-evaluate himself as a man. Elizabeth’s questioning of his masculinity haunts him even more than her rejection

of his affections, and he fully credits her with the transformation he undergoes by novel's end: "What do I not owe you! You taught me a lesson, hard at first, but most advantageous. By you, I was properly humbled.... You showed me how insufficient were all my pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased" (282). Darcy's "change" reflects both a social and an emotional maturation: through Elizabeth, he learns to express feelings and desire, and as Austen's narrator relates, "by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved" (*PP* 237). The masculinity that Darcy ultimately embraces is the one that she defines, and the one that fully satisfies her.

George Knightley: The Hesitancies of Rapid Motion

"When the felicities of rapid motion have once been felt," Austen's narrator declares in *Emma*, "it must be a very heavy set that does not ask for more" (*E* 193), and like Elizabeth Bennet before her, Emma Woodhouse derives great joy from the exuberant atmosphere of the ballroom. Emma is constantly aware of the men who surround her, and, as in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Northanger Abbey*, the men of *Emma* are frequently reduced to physical specimens to be compared, contrasted, and appraised by women. While Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe parade along the streets of Bath primarily to showcase their own bodies, Emma's walks—particularly those with Harriet Smith—are generally opportunities to survey and discuss the men of their lives, men who are, more often than not, reduced to two things: their bodies and their breeding. Emma's dismissal of Harriet's suitor Robert Martin, for example, is based largely on her distaste for his body; his masculinity is appraised solely on a visual account of his physical form. Dissecting his individual parts, Emma determines that "his appearance was very

neat...but his person had no other advantage” (*E* 26), and later lays bare for Harriet her potential suitor’s shortcomings:

At Hartfield you have had very good *specimens* of well educated, well bred men. I should be surprized if, after seeing them, you could be in company with Mr. Martin again without perceiving him to be a very inferior *creature*....I am sure you must have been struck by his awkward look...and the uncouthness of [his] voice. (26, my emphasis)

Employing the language of the natural sciences, Emma establishes herself as a taxonomist of the male form, and takes it upon herself to judge Martin’s worth as a potential mate. The science of appraising men is framed as a special social skill, one that Emma determines to teach Harriet.

Immediately following this exchange, Mr. George Knightley is introduced as Emma’s pinnacle of masculine perfection. “A sensible man of about seven or eight-and-thirty” (8), Knightley is Austen’s oldest hero. An “intimate friend of the family” (8), he has been a fixture in Emma’s life since her birth, and the discrepancy between both their ages and levels of maturity elicits his paternal interest in Emma’s wellbeing. He is, for Emma, the definition of “what a man should be,” and his “upright integrity,” “strict adherence to truth and principle,” and “disdain of trick and littleness” (312) ensures that he is “a man that every body looks up to” (61) and the man against whom all other men are compared. His body is rendered a text of desirable masculinity, and Emma explains to Harriet that she “might not see one in a hundred, with *gentleman* so plainly written as in Mr. Knightley” (27, Austen’s emphasis).

What defines Knightley is his unyielding rationality. His sensibleness immediately contrasts him not only to the foppish and perpetually ridiculous Mr. Woodhouse, but also the “unnecessarily gallant” Mr. Elton (107). Elton conspicuously performs for women, and modifies his behaviour on the basis of the sex of his company, an artificiality that Knightley disdains. Knightley sees through Elton’s performance, exclaiming to Emma, “I never in my life saw a man more intent on being agreeable than Mr. Elton.... With men, he can be rational and unaffected, but when he has ladies to please every feature works” (89). Triviality, condescension, and artificiality are loathsome to Knightley, who instead prizes reason and directness. In a community of surprisingly defunct masculinity, rises above the other men of his acquaintance.

He meets his nemesis in the handsome, cosmopolitan, and flirtatious Frank Churchill. Frank is everything that Knightley is not, and Knightley delineates their ideological opposition before Frank himself is directly introduced. He associates Frank with a hedonistic self-obsession that he finds inexcusable, determining that Frank, “proud, luxurious, and selfish,” cares “very little for any thing but his own pleasure” (115-16). When Frank fails to honour his promise to visit his father in Highbury, Knightley reads his behaviour as proof of his failure as a man. “There is only one thing, Emma, which a man can always do, if he chuses [*sic*], and that is, his duty,” Knightley explains, “not by manoeuvring and finessing, but by vigour and resolution. It is Frank Churchill’s duty to pay this attention to his father.... [I]f he wished to do it, it might be done” (115). It is this failure to adhere to duty that sullies Frank in Knightley’s eyes and speaks to his masculine immaturity, and Knightley repeatedly emphasizes this distinction between himself as a “man of sense” (116) and the boyish Frank, who at “three-and-twenty” is

under the misguided understanding that he is “the king of his company—the great man” (118).

Moreover, his dislike of Frank is imbued with a nationalistic overtone, as Frank, like Henry Crawford, is associated with the easy morals of the French fop. As Knightley explains to Emma, “your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English...he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people” (118). Frank is suspect in Knightley’s eyes because of his lack of not only filial but also patriotic duty, and while Knightley stands as an emblem of English manhood, with an estate that encompasses “English verdure, English culture, English comfort” (283), Frank shirks his national allegiances, claiming that he is “sick of England” (287), and wishing for nothing but to leave it. Joseph Kestner’s reading of this nationalistic dichotomy is particularly literal: “Frank Churchill embodies French masculinity, as his Christian name suggests, just as Knightley embodies the masculinity of England and its St. George” (149). Nonetheless, names can be misleading, and while “Frank” theoretically contrasts Knightley’s suggested elegance and chivalry, he is hardly as sincere and straightforward as his eponym would suggest. Knightley is not opposed to Frank’s sensibility, but to his insincerity, and for him, Frank represents the threat that unrestrained and uncontrolled masculinity has for the modern British nation (Kramp 116). For Knightley, Frank’s immaturity is his greatest deficiency, one that prevents him from becoming an accountable and industrious community leader (117). Between Frank and Knightley, Austen develops her most pronounced enactment of male sexual rivalry. The two men effectively make real the ideological tensions of the post-Revolutionary period, positing English stoicism and national allegiance alongside Continental indulgence and vanity.

Frank Churchill's body becomes a symbol of this extravagance. Austen dedicates the first volume of *Emma* to building the general anticipation of Frank's arrival, and his body is imagined by Emma, who looks forward to "the pleasure of looking at some body new," as a source of novelty and visual amusement (*E* 114). His reputation precedes him into Highbury society, and his "handsome" letters to his father and stepmother quickly become public property, interpreted by all as "irresistible proof of his great good sense" and signs of his attractiveness (15). Emma is not disappointed when she first meets him, as "the Frank Churchill so long talked of...was a *very* good looking young man; height, air, address, all were unexceptionable...he looked quick and sensitive. She felt immediately that she should like him" (149).

Not surprisingly, it is Frank's body that solidifies Emma's interest in him, and he is second only to *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot in his obsession with his own physical form. During an evening of dancing at Randalls, he confides in Emma that he has "no pleasure in seeing [his] friends, unless [he] can believe [him]self fit to be seen" (174), and he later ridicules Jane Fairfax's choice of hairstyle, declaring "I cannot keep my eyes from her. I never saw any thing so *outrée*" (174). Frank is associated with a commercialization of the body and a superfluous consumption of bodily decorations. In a burst of "*amor patriae*," for example, he proves himself a "true citizen" (157) of Highbury by purchasing a pair of gloves at Ford's, and later travels the sixteen miles to London "merely to have his hair cut" (161). As Adela Pinch observes in her notes to the Oxford edition of the novel, short hair was the height of fashion for young men by the 1810s (397), but even Emma reads in Frank's actions "an air of foppery and nonsense...which she could not approve" (*E* 161). His quasi-effeminate concern with

style and the appearance of his own body is as superficial as Mr. Woodhouse's psychosomatic complaints, and demeans him in the eyes of others.

Significantly, it is Frank Churchill, the most overtly sexualized character in the novel, who is most often associated with dancing, and who first suggests throwing a ball in Highbury. In *Emma*, dancing is established as a pastime of the young, not only because it is a strenuous physical activity, but also because of its associations with sexual prowess. The libidinous desire for the "felicities of rapid motion" is nowhere more pronounced than in Frank, who, having "danced once at Highbury...longed to dance again" (193). For Frank, the joy of dancing stems largely from the opportunities it affords to flirt and display his own virility.

The sexual nature of dancing does not go unnoticed by *Emma*'s characters, and Mr. Woodhouse's concern that the open windows at Randalls will let in "cold air upon heated bodies" (197) is a tellingly erotic image. Again, the most sexual allusion comes from Frank: "Mrs. Weston, capital in her country-dances, was seated, and beginning an *irresistible waltz*; and Frank Churchill, coming up with most becoming gallantry to Emma, had secured her hand, and led her up to the top" (180, my emphasis). Like Darcy's request for a reel, this allusion to the waltz is fleeting, but significant. As Erin Smith explains, the waltz, introduced to England in the early 1810s, was still considered a scandalous dance at the time of *Emma*'s publication (n. pag.). Allegedly brought to England by soldiers and sailors returning from the Napoleonic wars, the waltz became a symbol of modernity, and revolutionized British ballrooms and assembly halls. It shifted the focus of dancing from an entire group of dancers to a single dancer and his/her partner, and a *London Times* review from July 1816 criticized the "voluptuous

intertwining of the limbs and close compressure on the bodies” that the dance involved. While Frank’s leading Emma to the “top” of the set suggests that they are dancing in country dance formation, Austen’s association of him with the sexually scandalous waltz emphasizes not only his eroticism, but also his attempts to become physically close with Emma. As he remarks at the end of their set, Jane Fairfax’s “languid dancing would not have agreed” with him after Emma’s passionate performance (*E* 181).

In this sexually charged atmosphere of entwined limbs and heated bodies, Emma Woodhouse reigns supreme, and she exploits these moments of performance to make public her social influence and her eligibility. While her relationship with Mr. Knightley develops privately into a romantic connection, her “courtship” with Frank transpires almost exclusively in the public sphere, and the two use dancing as a means to declare publically their compatibility. Emma spends her evening at Randalls “fancying what the observations of all those might be, who were now seeing them together for the first time...They were a couple worth looking at” (167-81). She quickly notes in Frank a “cheerful eagerness which marked her as his peculiar object” (168), and she delights in his attentions, desiring to make them equally obvious to others: she “divined what every body present must be thinking. She was his object, and every body must perceive it” (173). Emma and Frank seem like the perfect pair. However, as Timothy Adams notes, she spends their dance spying on Knightley, attempting to interpret his refusal to dance and closely watching his interactions with other women. This surveillance, coupled with Frank’s “impetuosity in securing Emma’s hand so quickly...suggests that they are both posing, using each other to produce ‘a couple worthy of looking at’” (Adams 60). Both

are acting a part, simultaneously performing for each other and the all-seeing eyes of Highbury.

Knightsley is initially characterized as a “wallflower” in these scenes of dance, though his physical inaction does not bother Emma until the novel’s second ball, which takes place at The Crown (Adams 61). After watching him dance with the hapless Harriet, Emma begins to see Knightsley in a new light, envisioning him in the same romantic way she had viewed Frank (61). “Like butterflies caught in a mating dance,” in Adams’s whimsical phrase (62), Emma directs Knightsley’s invitation to dance:

“Whom are you going to dance with?” asked Mr. Knightsley.

She hesitated a moment, and then replied, “With you, if you will ask me.”

“Will you?” said he, offering his hand.

“Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance, and you know we are not really so much brother and sister as to make it all improper.”

“Brother and sister! no, indeed.” (*E* 260)

Like Darcy, Knightsley transforms from observer of to participant in the dance, and Emma asks him for *his* hand only after evaluating his masculine performance and finding it acceptable. As Bjarnason argues, the direct and forward nature of Emma’s request “suggests that Austen did intend her portrayal to be one of female power—power that is not ‘feminine,’ since Emma comes closer to usurping the male role of forthright ‘solicitor’ than conforming to coy female delicacy” (47). Even Elizabeth Bennet, for all her forthrightness, waits for Darcy’s invitation to dance, and the balance of power between Emma and Knightsley in this scene anticipates the balance of power in their

developing relationship. Emma ultimately dictates their marriage in much the same way that she dictates their dance, resolving after learning of Harriet's love for Knightley that he "must marry no one but herself" (*E* 320). Never a passive observer, Emma directs the performers in her life, always maintaining her own sovereign independence.

Like Darcy, Knightley's character is partly developed through his initial refusal to act the part of the eligible bachelor, and while Frank Churchill assumes the role of "hero of the evening" (201), Knightley is marked by his "provoking indifference" to dancing: "Pleasure in seeing dancing!" he retorts to Emma, "not I, indeed—I never look at it" (202). Emma is ashamed to see him standing "among the standers-by, where he ought not to be; he ought to be dancing...so young as he looked" (255). Under the pretence of apathy, he separates himself from the dance in order to survey the ballroom, and in Adams's words, he "actively participates in the dance from the sidelines" (46). Like *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot, he must watch from a distance as the object of his desire becomes the object of others' gazes, and he explains to Emma that "Fine dancing...must be its own reward. Those who are standing by are usually thinking of something very different" (*E* 202). Relegated to the position of bystander, Knightley interprets Frank's behaviours, motivated by a chivalric desire to protect Emma from his intentions.

The novel's balls offer opportunities not only for Emma to appraise Knightley's masculine conduct, but also for him to challenge her preconceived notions of the constitution of a gentleman. A gentlemanly appearance is, for Emma, as important as gentlemanly manners, and the title of gentleman is a performance that is tied not to inner worth, but to the outward display of wealth, breeding, and style. When Knightley arrives at Randalls in his carriage, Emma praises him for arriving "like a gentleman....*Now I*

shall really be very happy to walk into the same room with you" (167). The irony of the situation is that Knightley only arrives to the ball with his "gentlemanly" accoutrements in order to convey comfortably Jane Fairfax and Miss Bates, two women of a significantly lower social order. Knightley views genteel behaviour as a choice that is linked not to social class, but to a clear sense of duty and the adherence to principles. For him, personal wealth has little to do with gentility. Rather, it is a subtly chivalric concern for others' well being that defines the gentleman, and while Frank Churchill later assumes his chivalric duties under the melodramatic circumstance of saving Harriet from a band of gypsies, Knightley instead saves her from Mr. Elton's mortifying snub by requesting her hand for a dance. The effect of his actions on Emma is palpable: "Her heart was in a glow, and she feared her face might be as hot...her countenance said much, as soon as she could catch his eye again" (257).

Emma takes this opportunity to survey Knightley's body, a body with so "gentlemanlike a manner" that she assumes he must dance with "natural grace...would he but take the trouble" (256). Watching as he leads Harriet down the set, Emma resolves that "His dancing proved just what she had believed it, extremely good" (257). For Emma, Knightley's is an unequivocally genteel body, looking, moving, and interacting with others just as it should. Knightley is a man in control of his body, and his ability to dance demonstrates his proficiency with navigating his social sphere. Unlike Frank and Mr. Elton, who "saunter" about the ballroom "as if to show [their] liberty" (256), Knightley, like Darcy, refuses to display his physical form. Rather, he proves his masculine worth through his controlled and subtle bodily movements, exploiting the

social conventions of the dance to initiate his romantic relationship with Emma. With their dance, their time as “brother and sister” ends.

His self-command encompasses both body and mind, and Knightley—pragmatic, methodical, and deliberate—successfully responds to the changing makeup of his modernizing society. Unlike Edmund Bertram, who overtly prizes tradition over progress, Knightley is able to value traditional social structures while also embracing the nation’s “new developments”: in Michael Kramp’s words, “Knightley is in no hurry to precipitate modernity, but he is also not frightened by progress” (114). While he respects traditional English prescriptions for maleness, tacitly acknowledging Burke’s chivalric ideals, he is also mindful of Wollstonecraft’s demands for masculine rationality. Knightley consequently navigates a modernizing British nation poised between a decaying aristocratic society and an emerging bourgeois culture. He embraces this change, acknowledging and even encouraging class mobility, and suggesting that Emma “mix more” with her increasingly diverse neighbourhood (*E* 244). *Emma* lauds this new style of manliness, one of plainness, humaneness, and progressive thinking. Knightley is not a Burkean knight in shining armour. Rather, he is a *gentleman* of “energy, vigour, and decision” (Johnson 201).

In *Emma*, Claudia Johnson contends, Austen “succeeds at Wollstonecraft’s grand aim better than Wollstonecraft did: diminishing the authority of male sentimentality, and reimmasculating men and women alike with a high sense of national purpose” (191). Ailwood echoes Johnson’s arguments, and suggests that Austen associates Knightley with “a *natural*—rather than cultivated or fashionable—grace and manner” (22, Ailwood’s emphasis). He is neither the foppish Frank Churchill, nor the boorish Robert Martin.

Rather, as Ailwood argues, Austen uses Knightley to “critique the model of gallant conversation targeted by Wollstonecraft” (244). Knightley is answerable only to his conscience, not to social dictates, and his attempts to teach and improve Emma aspire toward a moral, gender-neutral—not explicitly feminine—ideal (244). Knightley associates “manliness” with a very specific set of virtues, and views “becoming rational” (*E* 117) as an integral rite of passage in becoming a man. He is not a chivalric flatterer, and there is an openness between him and Emma that reflects not only his affection for her, but also his view of her as a potential intellectual equal: as he explains to Mr. Woodhouse, “we always say what we like to one another” (9). Knightley, who has had none of Emma’s “charm thrown over [his] senses” (30), is the only person in her inner circle who makes no excuses for her shortcomings and who sees her for who she truly is. The language he employs during his proposal is, like Tilney’s, not the flowery language of a courtly lover, but simple and direct, delivered in “plain, unaffected, gentlemanlike English” (352). Kramp reads Knightley’s proposal as proof of his “mechanical sexuality,” arguing that his “truncated attempt to express his sentiments is...a manifestation of his disciplined sexuality that cannot risk the destabilizing powers of love” (122). Alternatively, the scene can be read as indicative of a new style of romance, one that develops from Catherine and Tilney and will be continued by Anne Elliot and Wentworth. Knightley and Emma’s relationship is not predicated on empty, chivalric profusions of love, and while he recognizes that he “cannot make speeches,” he knows that Emma “understands” him completely (338). There is an intellectual reciprocity between these lovers and a language that goes beyond words. Moreover, their marriage

ultimately allows Emma to retain her individuality; notably, she remains “Miss Woodhouse” to the last (*E* 381).

Chapter 4 – “Spirits Dancing in Private Rapture”: Reshaping Masculinity in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion*

As we have seen, the visual dynamic of Austen’s scenes of dance develops over the course of her writing career. Though capable of gazing on the men of their acquaintance, the innocent and naïve Fanny Price and Catherine Morland find themselves the visual objects of the men that surround them. The progressive gender dynamic that Austen begins to explore in *Northanger Abbey*, however, forms the basis of the romantic relationships developed in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are more than capable of meeting Darcy’s and Knightley’s eyes with equally sexual, powerful gazes. The masculine ideal presented in both novels consequently responds to this visual articulation of female desire. Nonetheless, while Elizabeth and Emma survey the bodies of their fellow dancers, focusing specifically on their potential lovers, they themselves are also the object of social and sexual scrutiny. While the ballroom provides them with a site to survey Darcy and Knightley, these heroines find themselves, in turn, the object of the male gaze.

In previous chapters, I have argued that Austen’s narrative voice in her scenes of dance is generally presented through the dancers’ points of view as they move and interact with each other. As I will suggest in this chapter, the dancers in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen’s first published work, are reduced to mute bodies, watched and described by onlookers and rarely speaking for themselves. Austen revisits this dynamic in *Persuasion*, her last completed novel, and I suggest that her focus in each novel moves from the romantic attraction between dance partners to the perceptions of the bystanders

who observe them. This shift largely stems from the positions—both literal and metaphorical—of the novels’ female protagonists, and although the ballrooms of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Persuasion* are, as in Austen’s other novels, female centred, Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot find themselves observers of the dance. Physically removed from their lovers, they are never given the opportunity to engage in the courtship practices afforded within the ballroom. I consequently argue that in each novel, the dancing body becomes a text to be read exclusively by those on the sidelines. Although Elinor and Marianne attend two balls over the course of the novel, Elinor is never depicted dancing, while Marianne is rendered a silent performer, observed by all as she dances with the dashing John Willoughby. This one-sided surveillance is particularly emphasized in *Persuasion*, the novel with the fewest scenes of dance. Opportunities to dance generally take the form of small, after-supper pastimes, rather than formal gatherings; described entirely through Anne’s point of view, they provide her with the opportunity to read the bodies of her companions while remaining herself unseen. Separated from others both within and without the ballroom, Elinor and Anne remove themselves from the gazes of others in order to read those around them. They decipher the bodies that surround them, thereby occupying the conventional masculine position of the voyeur, while Brandon and Wentworth become the traditionally female objects of focus. Moreover, particularly in *Persuasion*, Austen brings the language and physical intimacy of dance beyond the walls of the ballroom. In this chapter, I explore how she consequently modernizes the relationship between hero and heroine by consistently highlighting their bodies and the sexually charged proximity between them.

In *Sense and Sensibility* in particular, the setting of the ballroom—and, by extension, the social gaze that pervades it—is more important than the actual act of dancing. Elinor is quickly established as an omniscient spectator of the balls that she and Marianne attend. A private ball at Barton Park, for example, is filtered exclusively through Elinor, who conjectures with Colonel Brandon about Marianne's romantic attachment to Willoughby while watching the two dance. Marianne's own voice is negated, and Austen instead forces Elinor to decipher Marianne's attraction to her partner through her bodily cues. The dancing couple is not the focus here, as it is in Austen's other works. Instead, the opinions of the spectators are brought to the foreground. Inverting the dynamic that characterizes her other ballroom scenes, Austen allows the dancers to move to the background, granting voices to their otherwise silent observers.

Marianne frequently finds herself under the microscopic scrutiny of society, and her body—whether it is flushed with fever or improperly exhibiting itself during a night of dancing with Willoughby—is a constant cause for concern. Her brother, for instance, fears for her marriage prospects after a brief but serious illness robs his delicate sister of her all-important bloom: “At her time of life, any thing of an illness destroys the bloom forever....She was as handsome a girl last September, as any I ever saw; and as likely to attract the men....I question whether Marianne *now* will marry a man worth more than five or six hundred a-year” (SS 171). Marianne is the perpetually observed object, and she frequently finds herself the focus of this judgemental, scornful gaze because of her insistence on making her body conspicuous. Though she is well aware of how she should act and appear in society, noting after her first meeting with Willoughby that she had “been open and sincere where [she] ought to have been reserved, spiritless, dull, and

deceitful" (27), she shuns conventional feminine passivity, an ironic stance for a girl who frequently assumes the role of damsel in distress in her relationship with Willoughby. Marianne, who frequently lays herself "open to all the world" (141), constantly—and perhaps consciously—makes a spectacle of herself, rendering her body a text of her emotions. "It was impossible for her to say what she did not feel" (92), and Willoughby's equally open nature and tendency "of saying too much of what he thought on every occasion" (37) make the two a likely but inevitably doomed pair. Indeed, Willoughby ultimately fails as a hero because of his inability to perform proper masculine restraint.

Painfully aware of the world's perceptions of her and her sister, Elinor is, by contrast, a master of her social persona, the proverbial sense to Marianne's sensibility. While Marianne embodies her passion, making her emotions legible in her face and mannerisms, Elinor's body conceals her true feelings, "telling lies when politeness required it" (92). While Marianne responds to Willoughby's snub with evenings spent in "indulgence of feeling" and "violence of affliction" (63), Elinor chooses to "regulate her behaviour" to the equally deceitful Edward Ferrars by "[avoiding] every appearance of resentment or displeasure, and [treating] him as she thought he ought to be treated" (68). Fully cognizant of social duty, Elinor spends the vast majority of the novel masking the hurt and betrayal she actually feels.

Because she is never subsumed by bodily passion, Elinor maintains an uncompromised awareness of her surroundings, and Austen exploits her perceptiveness to develop characters who rarely speak for themselves. While her gaze is often moralistic, and while she constantly begs Marianne not to "betray what [she] feel[s] to every body" (131), Elinor frequently observes the romantic relationships that develop around her,

appraising Marianne's potential lovers by watching their bodies and their behaviours. Colonel Brandon's love for Marianne unfolds through Elinor's eyes, and while Marianne herself remains ignorant of his affection, Elinor becomes a voyeur of his subtle, unobtrusive courtship. Although Marianne's friends and family cast Willoughby as her potential lover, "Colonel Brandon's partiality for Marianne...became perceptible to Elinor...she *saw* it with concern, for what could a silent man of five and thirty hope, when opposed by a very lively one of five and twenty" (30, my emphasis). Elinor alone perceives Brandon's romantic potential; "she watched his eyes...[and] could discover in them the quick feelings and needless alarm of a lover" (231). The love triangle between Marianne, Brandon, and Willoughby unfolds through a network of glances interpreted by Elinor. While Marianne is watched by Willoughby and Brandon, and while Willoughby is watched by Marianne, Elinor watches all three, herself remaining unseen. Brandon's static, never-moving body becomes an object of female conjecture in the novel, and is presented solely through the eyes of the Dashwood women. His masculine worth is not only appraised by, but presented through, them.

While *Persuasion's* Anne Elliot similarly studies and sexualizes her lover, she remains, like Elinor, the perpetually silent and unseen observer. Her invisible observation is particularly apparent in *Persuasion's* scenes of dance. As Bjarnason notes, Anne excludes herself from the world of courtship "by removing herself from the game of gazes endemic to even the most casual of dances" (25). By offering herself as musician to the others' dancing, Anne is both employed and unobserved. She is also able to watch the others, and her desire to remain unseen stems not only from a desire to avoid being watched, "but to avoid being watched watching" (25). In observing Frederick Wentworth,

Anne foregrounds the disparity between their social situations, for while she is invisible, he is the centre of attention, and she “felt that he had everything to elevate him, which general attention and deference, and especially the attention of all the young women could do” (*P* 62). Like Colonel Brandon, Anne is forced to watch as the object of her desire dances with others.

Although it is a sexualizing force, Anne’s gaze is always discreet, never flirtatious. After their eight-year separation, Anne reacquaints herself with Wentworth by gazing on his body, not through verbal communication; for the majority of the novel, Anne and Wentworth barely speak to each other. She spends much of the novel actively attempting to shield herself from Wentworth’s gaze: during an evening at the Musgroves’, she “desired nothing but to be unobserved” (62), and when she spots Wentworth during a walk in Bath with Lady Russell, she positions herself so as to remain unseen while having “him in view the greater part of the street” (159).

The “loneliest of Jane Austen’s heroines,” Anne is, in Tony Tanner’s analysis, the consummate liminal figure, “no longer a child and not yet a wife...a speaker who is unheard...a body who is ‘nobody’” (208-9). *Persuasion* is consistently punctuated by this tension between “somebodies” and “nobodies,” and both Anne and Wentworth are described as nobodies at various points in the novel. With his twenty thousand pounds, Wentworth finds himself at novel’s end “no longer nobody” (*P* 199), while Anne is fully aware of her own “nothingness” (39), regarded synecdochally, in Tanner’s words, “as nothing herself, a permanently available pair of hands or ears” (235). In the novel’s scenes of dance, Anne’s body is reduced to its musical function—she never takes part in the dancing itself, instead sitting on the sidelines, observing and interpreting the action

before her. While Marianne Dashwood frequently performs in front of a receptive audience, Anne's piano playing is mere background noise for the evening's entertainment, "little thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others, as she was well aware" (*P* 42). She is virtually body-less, and when her body *is* described, it is a compromised body, insubstantial and penetrable. She is of little consequence either physically or emotionally: "her word had no weight; her convenience was only to give way;—she was only Anne" (11).

It is through the invisible Anne, however, that the reader first sees Wentworth. After their first meeting, Anne realizes that she finds Wentworth as sexually attractive as she had eight years earlier, noting that "the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth" (53).⁶ Anne renders Wentworth's body a text of his inner thoughts, and frequently finds herself wondering how his "sentiments [were] to be read" (53). Watching him converse with Mrs. Musgrove one evening, Anne finds herself gazing on his face, studying "his bright eye, and curl of his handsome mouth" (58). Through his subtle bodily cues, Anne reads his boredom with Mrs. Musgrove's conversation, and later deciphers his bodily cues as proof of his

⁶ In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft retaliates against such double standards for beauty, claiming that it is governed by "male prejudice, which deems beauty to be the perfection of women—mere beauty of features and complexion... while male beauty is allowed to have some connection with the mind" (150). For this reason, women are "made ridiculous and useless when the short-lived bloom of beauty is over" (9). Austen, however, exploits society's double standards regarding beauty in order to demonstrate a highly progressive gender dynamic. By novel's end, it is clear that Wentworth finds Anne as physically attractive as she finds him. In finally and happily uniting Anne and Wentworth, Austen challenges her society's standards of beauty. Anne Elliot is neither young (in her society's opinion), nor traditionally beautiful; nonetheless, she is able to find happiness in a marriage of equals. As Wollstonecraft would undoubtedly applaud, Austen allows Anne to be celebrated by her lover for her "strength of body and mind," not necessarily for her "bewitching beauty" (Wollstonecraft 395).

irritation with her sister, Mary: “[Mary] received no other answer, than an artificial, assenting smile, followed by a contemptuous glance... which Anne perfectly knew the meaning of” (73). Having trained herself as a translator of Wentworth’s body language, Anne appropriately first learns of his love for her through his physical cues, realizing suddenly that “his half averted eyes, and more than half expressive glance,—all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at last” (150). Like Mr. Darcy, Wentworth speaks through his body, and like Elinor Dashwood, it is Anne who frames the hero as a fully sexual being, more than capable of inspiring desire in women.

Colonel Brandon: Gazing on the Gazer

Unlike Darcy, who continues to infuriate and enrapture readers nearly two hundred years after his inception, the men of *Sense and Sensibility* have notoriously fallen short of critics’ expectations for Austen’s heroes. Peter Knox-Shaw argues that because the novel centres on the relationship between the Dashwood sisters, “its heroes are drawn, for once, short of full length” (147). Laura Mooneyham White similarly contends that “Colonel Brandon and Edward Ferrars are heroes only because they marry heroines. They are little seen and rarely heard...[and] fail to engage more than nominal interest and sympathy” (31). To be sure, *Sense and Sensibility*’s cast of male characters is hardly as immediately appealing as the irresistibly aloof Darcy or the daringly flirtatious Wentworth. Notably, Colonel Brandon is never even given a first name. Nonetheless, in Brandon, Austen successfully rethinks earlier literary types. Stoic, subdued, and conscientious, he looks forward to what Ailwood describes as the “more complex and frequently flawed” (109) heroes of Austen’s later works.

Brandon becomes enamoured of the young, beautiful Marianne Dashwood almost immediately after his introduction into the novel, and his surveillance is more pervasive than any of Austen's other characters'. While he watches Marianne incessantly, she remains perpetually unaware of his gaze. His infatuation becomes apparent to Elinor during an evening of dancing at Barton Park; as the two sit together, removed from the dancers and other bystanders, Elinor's suspicion of his affection is confirmed by the fact that "His eyes were fixed on Marianne" (SS 42). Though Marianne's body language announces that she is Willoughby's partner, Brandon watches her as a desirable object, and the ballroom offers him a venue in which his surveillance is legitimate (Bjarnason 18). For the majority of the novel, their relationship is based on this one-sided observation rather than direct communication; the two never converse over the course of the novel, and the visual dynamic between them involves the kind of gaze and performative behaviour theorized by Laura Mulvey and John Berger. While Brandon generally frequents social gatherings to "talk to Elinor," he uses them as opportunities "to look at Marianne" (SS 125). She is thus defined by the men of her life almost exclusively by her "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 60). When she is not dancing, she is literally performing on the pianoforte, and Brandon's "pleasure in music" (SS 27) derives more specifically from his pleasure in watching her perform. Marianne appears to be the passive visual object Mulvey theorizes.

Austen complicates this active/male, passive/female divide not only by matching Brandon's gaze with Elinor's perceptiveness, but also by subjecting his body to Marianne's own scrutiny. Just as Marianne's body—in sickness and in health—constantly comes under the eye of the world, Brandon's body is at once appraised by Marianne and

found to be pitifully wanting. At the “advanced” age of thirty five (28), Brandon is well beyond the prime of his youth, and Marianne dismisses his body as asexual and long past the ability to experience passion:

He is old enough to be *my* father; and if he were ever animated enough to be in love, must have long outlived every sensation of the kind...Did you not hear him complain of the rheumatism? and is not that the commonest infirmity of declining life?...he talked of flannel waistcoats, and with me a flannel waistcoat is invariably connected with...every species of ailment that can afflict the old and the feeble. (29-30)

Though Marianne’s dismissal is characteristically hyperbolic, it distinguishes Brandon from the other “mentor lovers”⁷ of Austen’s canon, such as Mr. Knightley. There is no sense that Brandon’s age affords him paternalistic benevolence toward Marianne, as Knightley’s initially does over Emma. Instead, he is explicitly sexually intrigued by her, while she rejects him as physically defective, and is barely able to conceive of him in human, let alone sexual, terms. For Marianne, the ideal man is passionate and energetic, willing to disregard social norms in order to experience powerful feeling (Kramp 56). Although Brandon is immediately established as a sensitive man, and though Marianne appreciates his sophistication and refinement, she sees him as incapable of feeling erotic love. Using language that supports my earlier discussion of late eighteenth-century debates about masculinity, Kramp argues that “the colonel refrains from the destabilizing behaviour of a male lover, and he is too old and rheumatic to perform the virile masculine

⁷ For a discussion of the trope of the “mentor lover” in nineteenth-century women’s fiction, see Patricia Menon’s *Austen, Eliot, Charlotte Brontë and the Mentor-Lover* (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

behaviour requested by Wollstonecraft" (58). Brandon instead "reverts to the safety of Burke's model of chivalric masculinity" (58).

John Willoughby is, of course, Brandon's foil, and the physical intensity of his first meeting with Marianne contrasts with the lack of attachment she feels to Brandon. Having sprained her ankle during a walk, Marianne has little to do but lie in the grass, waiting to be saved. The physical closeness entailed by her rescue mirrors the physical intimacy of a dance, and once Willoughby picks her up, he "quitted not his hold till he had seated her in a chair in the parlour" (SS 32). Not surprisingly, Willoughby is the only principal male character in the novel who partakes in dancing. He is introduced as a particularly adept dancer by Sir John, who remembers that "last Christmas, at a little hop at the park, [Willoughby] danced from eight o'clock till four, without once sitting down" (35). His love of dancing not only suggests a love of fun, but also demonstrates his physical stamina. Nonetheless, his disregard for the rules of the dance highlights his potential instability, for, as Austen notes, "if dancing formed the amusement of the night, [Willoughby and Marianne] were partners for half the time; and when obliged to separate for a couple of dances, were careful to stand together and scarcely spoke a word to any body else" (41). Willoughby lacks discipline, and his passions are uncontrolled (Kramp 59). A "connoisseur of pleasure," he is both sexually and socially unstable, shortcomings that are only emphasized in comparison to Brandon's stoicism and chivalric adherence to duty (62).

While Marianne and Willoughby complement each other's romantic sensibilities, Austen immediately frames their relationship as potentially destructive. Their first encounter is founded on her powerlessness, with him cast as the "preserver" (SS 35) to

her proverbial damsel in distress. The fact that Willoughby carries a—conspicuously phallic—gun (albeit for hunting purposes) casts an ominous shadow over the scene, and foreshadows the pain he will ultimately cause Marianne. Moreover, her gaze, frequently emphasized in her developing relationship with Brandon, is suppressed by Willoughby: she “had seen less of his person than [her mother and sisters] for the confusion which crimsoned over her face, on his lifting her up, had robbed her of the power of regarding him” (33). In her helpless state, Marianne is deprived of her gaze, and her autonomy is similarly threatened later in their courtship when Willoughby cuts a lock of her hair as a keepsake. By cutting her hair, he literally takes possession of a piece of her body, marking it as his own. Her independence is compromised.

Brandon, by contrast, maintains a sense of duty that inspires him to protect the honour of the women in his life. The ideological tension embodied by the two men manifests itself in a literal battle; in an allusion to violence uncharacteristic in Austen’s writing, Brandon references his off-stage duel with Willoughby, fought in the name of Brandon’s ward whom Willoughby had seduced and left pregnant: “We met by appointment, he to defend, I to punish his conduct. We returned unwounded, and the meeting, therefore, never got abroad” (158). The duel is an antiquated assertion of masculine virtue and strength, but it is also Brandon’s means of using his body to protect a woman, a chivalric action echoed during Marianne’s illness when he offers “himself as the messenger who should fetch Mrs. Dashwood” (235). Like Knightley, Brandon is humble in his moral integrity, and aims to make himself physically useful in moments of crisis. He is certainly not the decrepit “old bachelor” Marianne dismisses him as being (28); indeed, Brandon is a man who has “seen a great deal of the world” (39), and who

has also, like Frederick Wentworth, excelled in a career founded on male strength and potency.

Nonetheless, the marriage of Brandon and Marianne has long been criticized, read as Austen's attempt to stifle—and perhaps punish—her heroine's spiritedness. Tanner, for example, argues that Marianne is “disposed of” by being married off to Brandon (100), and the novel does in fact end with a suggestion that Marianne remains an object to him, marrying out of familial and social duty and attempting to atone for her past disregard for social norms by becoming his wife:

Marianne, by general consent, was to be the reward of all. With such a confederacy against her...what could she do?...She found herself at nineteen, submitting to new attachments, entering on new duties, placed in a new home, a wife, the mistress of a family, and the patroness of a village. (SS 287-88)

There is reciprocity here though, as the marriage facilitates the development of both partners. While Marianne learns how to execute her new social roles, she also inspires a transformation in Brandon, restoring “his mind to animation, and his spirits to cheerfulness” (288). The two grow through each other, and Ailwood's reading supports my suggestion of marital equality: as she argues, Brandon offers Marianne “the possibility of simultaneously living in her society while retaining her personal and moral integrity” (127). Reiterating my previous discussions of Austen's modern gender dynamics, Ailwood suggests that by marrying Marianne to Colonel Brandon, Austen confronts her readers' assumptions regarding “literary masculinity,” questioning and reforming traditional ideals of desirable masculinity (126). Matching his passion for

Marianne with his own moderation of feeling, Brandon, unlike Willoughby, allows her to maintain her intellectual and physical independence and integrity. In Anita G. Gorman's words, her body "remain[s] hers to give, finally, to the appropriate hero" (109).

Frederick Wentworth: The Modern Man of Feeling

Brandon's body is a constant source of tension in *Sense and Sensibility*, but nowhere in Austen's *oeuvre* does the male body come under closer scrutiny than in *Persuasion*. While the body is a site of general unease in the novel, intense anxieties surrounding the male body are particularly pronounced. Sir Walter Elliot, for example, praises himself for having kept his in near perfect condition, and decorates his chambers with "such a number of looking glasses...[that] there was no getting away from oneself" (P 111). Anne's highly feminized father is easily the most foppish of any of Austen's male characters, and the bodies described in *Persuasion* are frequently filtered through his eyes. Narrating a walk through the streets of Bath, Austen conflates his consumption of commercial goods with his voracious visual consumption of the bodies that surround him, and he laments that "The worst of Bath was, the number of its plain women...and as for the men! They were infinitely worse. Such scarecrows as the streets were full of!" (115). "Caught in Sir Walter's gaze," as Robyn Warhol puts it, "Austen's characters take on a more vivid physicality than her narrators ordinarily give them" (10).

The male body is taken as proof of masculine worth, and Sir Walter renders suspect any man who does not conform to his ideal of male beauty. Framing himself as the pinnacle of masculine physical perfection, he fears both the aging and worn male body, and the body of a man who oversteps his social station. The figure of the sailor

unites both of these horrendous characteristics, and Sir Walter accordingly dismisses the navy for merely bringing “persons of obscure birth into undue distinction,” while also ensuring that the “sailor [grows] old sooner than any other man” (*P* 16). Sir Walter, who prizes himself on being a connoisseur of the male form, despises sailors for having faces “the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree, all lines and wrinkles” (16). Ironically, the masculine beauty that Sir Walter esteems is quasi-effeminate. The body of a working man challenges and upsets the social hierarchy in a society that values leisure, as the beaten and maimed sailor (such as the lame Captain Harville) symbolizes a life of utility. For Sir Walter, sailors are loathsome because their utility has hastened their physical deterioration.

Any temptation to accept Sir Walter’s disparagement of sailors is destroyed once Captain Frederick Wentworth is introduced. Wentworth is easily Austen’s most charismatic and instantly attractive male character, and, as discussed, he is inextricably linked to his body in Anne’s memories and perceptions of him. It is his “glowing, manly, open look” (53) that reignites the passion she had felt for him eight years earlier, and Anne finds herself amazed that “eight or nine years should have passed over him, and in foreign climes and in active service too, without robbing him of one personal grace” (145). During a scene in Pulteney Street, he is particularly sexualized. As she walks with Lady Russell, Anne spies Wentworth on the opposite side of the street. “She looked instinctively at Lady Russell” (145), and discerns that she, too, is examining Wentworth. As they continue their walk, Anne believes it inevitable that their conversation should turn to Anne’s former lover. Lady Russell’s reply is unexpected:

You will wonder...what has been fixing my eye so long; but I was looking after some window-curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs. Frankland were telling me of last night. They described [them]...as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath. (145)

The juxtaposition of Wentworth's sexualized body and the "best hung" curtains is both provocative and perverted. In her reading of the scene, Jillian Heydt-Stevenson suggests that the curtains "metonymically evoke Wentworth's body," noting that the term "hung" has been used in relation to male genitalia since the fifteenth century ("Slipping" 332). The overtly sexual reference certainly would not have been lost on Austen's readers, and Austen repeats the explicitly phallic allusion elsewhere in the novel, drawing a clear distinction between Anne's virile former lover, and her flaccid potential suitor, the notably "under-hung" Mr. Elliot (*P* 114).

Anne's eroticization and glorification of Wentworth is significant given the cultural climate in which *Persuasion* is set. Anne and Wentworth's society is one of shifting morals and values, and the novel's cast of returning naval officers symbolizes these changes. In a society where "a *Mr.*" has traditionally "always need[ed] a note of explanation" (26), the definition of the gentleman is becoming increasingly ambiguous. The untitled and unlanded Wentworth must work to earn his fortune, and his early trouble securing a career in the navy supports Kramp's suggestion that "fabulously romantic men like Darcy are no longer viable" in Anne and Wentworth's world (127). The naval officers of *Persuasion* re-imagine men's roles both within society and within the home, and are able to forge masculine identities that are not founded on female subordination or suppression (Ailwood 232). Sophia Croft, for example, accompanies her husband on

many of his voyages, while Captain Harville's injury keeps him homebound and engrossed in domestic duties. Austen's depiction of him fashioning "new netting-needles and pins," for example, has him engaged in the traditional female pastime of embroidery and handiwork (*P* 83). This is a world in which the masculine ideal is changing to accommodate and applaud virtues of usefulness and self-improvement. The days of genteel inaction are rapidly fading away as the financial and social power of a man such as Sir Walter, the "novel's extant practitioner of...archaic male sexuality" (Kramp 126), is rapidly eclipsed by the entrepreneurial Wentworth.

Though thoroughly modern in his sensibilities, Wentworth wrestles with traditional expectations of him as a man. On the one hand, he espouses Enlightenment dictates of self-improvement and Wollstonecraft's call for firmness of mind. On the other, he reprimands Anne late in the novel for allowing herself to be persuaded against him, declaring that his future wife should possess Burkean "female delicacy": "A little beauty, and a few smiles, and a few compliments to the navy, and I am a lost man...a strong mind, with a sweetness of manner...This is the woman I want" (*P* 54). Nonetheless, Wentworth evokes figures such as Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington, heroes who re-defined English masculinity as courageous, dutiful, and authoritative (Fulford, "Romanticizing" 165). Joseph Kestner supports this argument, suggesting that in Wentworth, Austen appropriates the masculine paradigm symbolized by Wellington and Nelson, "democratiz[ing] it" and "instantiat[ing] it into domestic and quotidian contexts" (145).

This tension between tradition and modernity is particularly emphasized by the discord between Anne's expectations of Wentworth and his own attempts to embody the

chivalric ideal. The fact that he frequently assumes the role of chivalric protector early in the novel, especially in the presence of Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove, supports Kramps's claim that his "charming early behaviour at Uppercross more closely resembles Burke's portrait of an effete military man whom Wollstonecraft rebukes than the virile man idolized by the feminist thinker" (129). Wentworth changes, however, when he realizes that his actions have no impact on Anne. Though his chivalry charms the Musgrove girls, he finds that Anne "deprive[s] his manners of their usual composure" (*P* 69). Such inconsistencies in his behaviour clearly show that it is artificial, and that he bases his social performance on what he believes is expected of him. Such cracks in his façade not only demonstrate Wentworth's capability of feeling intense emotion, but also suggest the potential for these emotions to compromise his composure: they are analogous to Mr. Darcy's smiles and blushes. Anne, who reads his chivalry as mere "studied politeness" (62), inspires his adoption of moderation. In order for him to marry Anne, he must remove himself from the sexual inequality perpetuated by chivalric discourse (Ailwood 261). This reformed masculinity develops in response to Anne's desire.

Nevertheless, Anne Elliot is undoubtedly Austen's most sexually frustrated heroine. Numerous critics have argued that the novel's plot hinges on Anne's sexual desire for and physical separation from Wentworth; in Erin Smith's words, Wentworth "reawakens within her a latent passion that seems to hum throughout the novel" (n. pag.). It is perhaps not surprising, then, that this heroine who cannot find an appropriate outlet for her sexual desire is never depicted dancing. Her dance celibacy is entirely self-willed, and she consciously separates herself from the intimacy and amusement dancing offers by

volunteering her services as piano player. When Wentworth asks his dance partner “whether Miss Elliot never danced,” the answer is definitive: “Oh! no, never; she has quite given up dancing” (*P* 62). Cheryl Wilson broadens my suggestion that Anne’s refusal to dance symbolizes her separation from both society and courtship, contending that the use of dance in *Persuasion* highlights the novel’s aforementioned pervasive tensions surrounding the body: “In social dancing,” she writes, “bodies are spectacularized; they are put on display in the middle of a room to be viewed by others” (“Dance, Physicality, and Social Mobility” n. pag.). By avoiding dancing, Anne removes herself from the web of gazes that dominates the ballroom, thereby hiding her own body while seizing the opportunity to watch Wentworth’s.

Anne frequently envisions her body as a mausoleum of their past romance. She notes that the “early loss of [her] bloom and spirits” had had “their lasting effect” (*P* 28), and as she watches Wentworth dance with the Musgrove sisters, she laments her virtual invisibility:

Once she felt that he was looking at herself—observing her altered features, perhaps trying to trace in them the ruins of the face which had once charmed him....Anne did not wish for more of such looks and speeches. His cold politeness, his ceremonious grace, were worse than anything. (62, Austen’s emphasis)

Anne renders her face a reliquary of their past love, the source of former happiness and charm. In the eight years since Wentworth’s departure, she has remained completely stagnant, and she casts the effects of his leaving as a kind of bodily haunting. In Anne’s mind, her body remains a visible memorial to their past.

Though Anne is reduced by her family and friends to a virtually invisible spinster, Wentworth essentially grants her the body that she has been denied for the last eight years. Their courtship is predicated on their desire for physical proximity, and can arguably be read as “a long, drawn out dance” (Smith n. pag.). Anne and Wentworth’s bodies are emphasized in each of their meetings, and their developing attachment is conveyed primarily through Anne’s physical response to the sight of her lover. The thought of his physical closeness produces a visceral, bodily reaction in her, and through him she is granted a body that is hardly decrepit and past its bloom. After nearly a decade-long separation, they first see each other during a brief encounter at Uppercross Cottage:

A thousand feelings rushed on Anne, of which this was the most consoling, that it would soon be over...Her eye half met Captain Wentworth’s; a bow, a curtsy passed; she heard his voice—he talked to Mary, said all that was right...the room seemed full—full of persons and voices—but a few minutes ended it...their visitor had bowed and was gone. (*P* 52)

In this scene, brief though it is, Wentworth is introduced into the story through Anne’s sporadic perceptions of his body and its movements around the room. As the novel progresses, she becomes almost obsessed with watching him, and is constantly in disbelief that their bodies are occupying the same space. During an evening at Uppercross, Anne is amazed that “they were actually on the same sofa...divided only by Mrs. Musgrove,” and is infinitely relieved that “the agitations of [her] slender form, and pensive face, may be considered as very completely screened” from his view (59). While

she internalizes her feelings for him, she translates his proximity into a physical response. When she encounters him in Milsom Street, despite the fact that she had seen him approaching and had thus had several moments to compose herself, “she [still] had enough to feel! It was agitation, pain, pleasure, a something between delight and misery” (142). Rarely as stoic as Elinor Dashwood, Anne constantly struggles to keep her physical composure in the face of her love.

By allowing Anne and Wentworth to interact physically in the novel, Austen infuses their relationship with a bodily intimacy that is available to her other heroines and heroes only within the confines of the ballroom. Considering the extent of Anne’s physical responses to Wentworth, we can read her body as an “emblem of Sensibility,” as Nagle does, emphasizing how their relationship is characterized not only by their physical proximity to each other, but also by the barriers that separate them (105). The scene in which Anne tends her sick nephew, for instance, becomes a moment of charged eroticism between the two. As Wentworth removes the troublesome boy from his perch on his aunt’s back, the moment is recounted as an instance of intense bodily pleasure for Anne: “someone was taking him from her, though he had bent down her head so much, that his little sturdy hands were unfastened from around her neck, and he was resolutely borne away, before she knew that Captain Wentworth had done it” (*P* 68-9). This is one of the few times that Austen emphasizes physical over visual intimacy, for while Anne and Wentworth are incapable of making eye contact in this moment, they are instead provided with the opportunity to touch one another. The space between Wentworth and Anne seems “claustrophobically electric” (Nagle 105), and Anne’s broken description of the

scene makes it clear how overwhelmed she is by finding Wentworth's body so close to her own:

Her sensations on the discovery made her perfectly speechless. She could not even thank him...His kindness in stepping forward to her relief—the manner—the silence in which it had passed—the little particulars of the circumstance—with the conviction...that he meant to avoid hearing her thanks...produced such a confusion of varying, but very painful agitation, as she could not recover from. (*P* 69)

Wentworth's touch—for he inevitably grazes the bare skin of her neck as he removes her nephew from her back—produces such a wave of almost orgasmic pleasure in Anne, that she is robbed of her usual eloquence. Throughout *Persuasion*, both Anne and Wentworth attempt to control their bodies in order to mask their true feelings for each other, and so this scene is especially striking. Here, the two are allowed more intense—albeit subtle—physical intimacy than perhaps any of Austen's dancing couples.

Later, Anne and Wentworth share another moment of intimacy when he lifts her into his sister's carriage. Admiral and Mrs. Croft happen on the group returning from a visit to Winthrop, and offer space in their carriage to whichever young lady “might be particularly tired” (76). While Anne repeatedly declines their offer, Wentworth reads her body language as proof of her fatigue, taking it upon himself to ensure her physical comfort, and “without saying a word, turn[ing] to her, and quietly oblig[ing] her to be assisted into the 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 rest” (77). Nagle argues that the

scene “boosts the novel’s libidinal energy” (108), and Wentworth, presumably with hands firmly grasping Anne’s waist, manoeuvres her body in a way similar to that of a man leading his partner in a waltz. Bringing the intimacy of dancing beyond the ballroom, Austen infuses this scene of otherwise mundane interaction with a sexual energy distinct from her other novels.

The tension surrounding Anne and Wentworth’s touching bodies reaches its climax in the novel’s famous letter scene. Eavesdropping as Anne and Captain Harville discuss the strength of male and female constancy, Wentworth composes and delivers the letter in which he finally declares his love for her. Here, as elsewhere, Anne and Wentworth communicate solely through their eyes and bodies rather than their words, and Anne realizes the importance of his letter when she sees the “eyes of glowing entreaty” with which he presses it into her hand (*P* 190). Reading it in his absence, she must sexualize him *through* his letter, and when he finally succeeds in seducing her, *she* is the one in the subject role. Her “eyes devoured” his words as Wentworth admits to her that she has been successful in “penetrat[ing] his inner feelings” (191). The letter explicitly suggests both characters’ sexual appetites and is arguably “the most open disclosure of amorous emotion” by any of Austen’s heroes (Kramp 137). In it, Wentworth presents himself as a vulnerable lover, and as he cites Anne as the motivation for all his actions, he offers full access to his inner thoughts: “You pierce my soul,” he announces, “I am half agony, half hope....Dare not say that man forgets sooner than woman....I have loved none but you” (*P* 193).

As in her previous moments of intimacy with Wentworth, Anne registers her attraction to him in bodily terms, noting that “such a letter was not to be soon recovered

from....Every moment rather brought fresh agitation. It was an overpowering happiness” (191). While the letter offers an indirect closeness between a couple that Austen allows to touch more than any other in her canon, critics have noted that the scene is particularly significant, as, for the first time, Anne and Wentworth are permitted to occupy the same physical space. No longer separated on a sofa by the buxom Mrs. Musgrove, Anne reads his letter by “sinking into the chair which he had occupied, succeeding to the very spot where he had leaned and written” (191). Reading his letter, Anne takes Wentworth’s seat, “likely still warm from his presence” (Nagle 112). It is he who is “penetrated” by her (112). The scene establishes both characters as readers in both a literal and metaphoric sense: she reads his letter, which relates his reading of her emotions. Anne, who has spent the entire novel misreading Wentworth’s looks, finally and literally reads of his undying love for her.

Their subsequent reunion on the aptly named Union Street arguably parallels Austen’s conventional ballroom scenes, and Wentworth’s letter has aptly been read as his “invitation to dance,” since Anne feels compelled to move after she has read it (Smith n. pag.). As Anne proceeds down Union Street, Wentworth “walked by her side,” and the synchronicity with which they walk, talk, and mutually “decide their direction toward [a] comparatively quiet and retired gravel walk” suggests a clear equality between them (*P* 193). Wilson argues that the setting of the scene is significant because it takes places in the public realm, much as a ball or assembly would (“Dance, Physicality, and Social Mobility” n. pag.). She contends that Anne’s exchange of partners also implies her social mobility, as she is depicted “passing from Charles Musgrove, who is part of the landed gentry’s circle, to Wentworth, who represents the new circle she will enter” (n. pag.). By

moving onto the “retired gravel walk,” however, Anne and Wentworth consciously remove themselves from public view, a fact that supports Bjarnason’s reading of the moment as an “ideal dance,” one that takes place solely between a man and a woman, and away from the prying eyes of the world (29). While Austen’s other heroines and heroes must perform their courtship within the public sphere, Anne and Wentworth are granted privacy. Rather than make public their love, they “internalize their dance” (30).

Ultimately, “a look” must determine whether or not Wentworth’s letter has successfully convinced Anne of his love for her (*P* 191). It is Anne, then, who decides whether or not their relationship recommences. Hearing the familiar footsteps of Wentworth behind her on Union Street, Anne has “only two moments’ preparation for the sight of [him]” (193). Austen’s diction here is—perhaps deliberately—ambiguous: it is not clear if Anne is preparing herself to gaze upon Wentworth, or to be the object of his gaze. This ambiguity carries with it a connotation of equality between the lovers, and when Wentworth finally arrives on the scene, he “only look[s],” while “Anne could command herself enough to receive that look” (193). Rather than blush and avert her eyes, Anne actively participates in and reciprocates his looking, and it is ultimately *her* gaze that encourages him in his endeavours to woo her. The description that follows depicts a private declaration of love within the public sphere: “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” (193). It is again their looks that communicate their inner pleasure, while their bodies maintain their public façades.

The scene’s emphasis on motion reflects the new social life Anne enters upon her marriage to Wentworth. His declaration that he “hardly know[s]” where he is going when

he meets Anne on Union Street is demonstrative of his own “undirected movement,” and suggests that his life with Anne will comprise a kind of nomadic existence, not fettered or dictated by “a decaying social system” (Ailwood 137). Anne’s choice to marry Wentworth can similarly be read in light of Henry Tilney’s disparaging dismissal of women’s “power of refusal”: Anne chooses not simply to participate in the dance of courtship, but also to become socially mobile, and *Persuasion* is filled with women such as Anne and Sophia Croft whose mobility challenges the connection between “masculinity and place” embodied by men such as Sir Walter (Wilson, “Dance, Physicality, and Social Mobility” n. pag.). Unlike Austen’s other heroes, Wentworth is not fixed; he is the only hero who is not in possession of a family estate, and his life as a sailor offers him the freedom to “resist the lure of social security in favour of the mobility of the sea” (Kramp 140). Though they are denied the opportunity to dance throughout their courtship, their marriage is ultimately predicated on their ability to move synchronously—their “spirits dancing in private rapture”—through an untraditional life set during ambiguous peace and threatened by the “dread of a future war” (*P* 203).

Conclusion

“To be fond of dancing was a certain step toward falling in love” (*PP* 5). So rejoices Mrs. Bennet at the prospect of the Meryton Ball, an event that will finally place her daughters directly in the path of the eligible Mr. Bingley. “Nothing could be more delightful” than seeing one of her daughters dancing with—and, as a completely logical extension, marrying—the desirable newcomer, “and very lively hopes of Mr. Bingley’s heart were entertained” (5).

Dancing in Austen’s novels may be, and indeed often is, the first step toward marriage. However, this thesis departs from traditional analyses of dancing as a mere courtship practice by considering the bodies that are doing this dancing. While dancing may breed love, it also breeds lust, and it not only allows social intercourse, but also openly displays the body—it is an intensely visceral, physical interaction, and one of the few socially acceptable means of sexualized contact in Austen’s novels. In the eyes of the Bennet women, the purpose of the Meryton Ball is to view men, and they attend with the specific intention of visually savouring and physically interacting with the body of the “quite young, wonderfully handsome” Charles Bingley (5).

I have consequently challenged Charlotte Brontë’s and Carol Shields’s criticisms of Austen’s bodily dispassion, introduced in the opening chapters of this thesis. The brevity of Shields’s list of bodily references in Austen’s works is telling, and compared to the unadulterated passions experienced by Brontë’s characters, Austen does appear remarkably chaste. Nonetheless, this thesis is founded on the argument that while the

bodies of Austen's characters are highly codified and strictly regulated, bodily sensation constantly bubbles beneath the surface of each of her novels. One of her greatest accomplishments as a writer is her ability to develop her characters' passion and sexuality within the social conventions that appear to constrain them. As I have argued, her scenes of dance therefore warrant critical examination as sites where bodies are not only foregrounded, but where characters exploit the rules of society to enjoy moments of sexual expression.

Mr. Bingley is the focus of the Bennet women's curiosity and desire. He is objectified and sexualized, and the pursuit of Bingley becomes one of the major plot motivations in *Pride and Prejudice*. But what of these men, whose bodies inspire such a pursuit? How can they be read? This thesis has expanded current Austen scholarship by emphasizing the male characters of her works, men who are too often reduced to secondary characters in critical analyses of her novels. While Michael Kramp, Sarah Ailwood, and Palma Bjarnason have initiated astute discussions of both masculinity and the scenes of dance in Austen's major works, my readings expand on their arguments to provide an innovative reading of masculinity generally and the male body specifically in Austen's ballrooms. I have therefore departed from the critical tendency to analyze "masculinity" in exclusively abstract terms, and I instead consider the ways in which Austen's men physically navigate their social realm. This thesis is consequently unique in its examination of Austen's model of *embodied* masculinity.

The greatest scholarly contribution of this thesis is its consideration of Austen's ballrooms as critical sites of gender performance. By marrying eighteenth- and twentieth-century debates regarding gender and sexuality, I have not only brought men to the

foreground in Austen's works, but have also investigated the ways in which they use their bodies to accommodate (frequently conflicting) masculine ideals. I have thus addressed the ways in which masculinity is expressed *through* the body in Austen's major works.

What is perhaps most refreshing for Jane Austen's modern readership is not only this subtly sexual (and sometimes humorously perverted) awareness of male physicality, but the opportunities she grants her female characters to gaze on and desire these bodies. Moreover, her heroes generally adapt to the masculine ideal demanded by these women, and her plots frequently centre on this validation of female desire. This is not to overlook the power imbalance endemic in Austen's rigidly patriarchal world, which is eloquently summarized by Claudia Johnson in *Women, Politics, and the Novel*:

In Austen's novels...women simply do not have 'the advantage of choice'....They can only wait for proposals. They can scrutinize their suitors' gestures, review their every word, differentiate acts of chivalry from acts of particular affection, and form all manner of conjectures about the likelihood of receiving proposals. But finally they can only wait. As bold as they are in every other respect, even Emma and Elizabeth Bennet can only wait. And of course, waiting is practically all that Fanny Price and Anne Elliot ever do. (59)

Johnson is, of course, right to observe the limits of the "power" enjoyed by Austen's heroines, but I have endeavoured to suggest that the ballroom is a site where gender reciprocity, if not necessarily equality, exists. In the ballroom, Elizabeth Bennet can actively guide her conversations with Darcy, Emma Woodhouse can solicit an invitation to dance from Knightley, and Anne Elliot's spirits can metaphorically join Wentworth's

in “dancing in private rapture.” As Johnson rightly notes, Austen’s heroines must indeed wait for an invitation to dance; however, as I have suggested, their power of refusal yields real influence over the men they encounter in the ballroom. The very structure of the country dance facilitates the equal distribution of power between partners, as man and woman must synchronously navigate the set. In the instances when they are dancing together, touching and gazing on each other’s bodies, and performing for both each other and the eye of the world, Austen’s men and women finally—if only momentarily—find themselves on an equal footing.

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