

**LOOKING FOR COMFORT: HEROINES, READERS, AND
JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS**

A Dissertation

by

AMANDA E. HIMES

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2006

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee, Mary Ann O'Farrell

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December 2006

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ABSTRACT

Looking for Comfort: Heroines, Readers, and Jane Austen's Novels. (December 2006)

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Comfort—with its various connotations of physical ease, wealth, independence, and service—is an important concept to Jane Austen, who uses comfort in her novels to both affirm and challenge accepted women's roles and status in her culture. In the late eighteenth century, new ideas of physical comfort emerged out of luxury along with a growing middle class, to become something both English people and foreigners identified with English culture. The perceived ability of the English to comfort well gave them a reason for national pride during a time of great anxieties about France's cultural and military might, and Austen participates in her culture's struggle to define itself against France. Austen's "comfort" is the term she frequently associates with women, home, and Englishness in her works.

Austen's depiction of female protagonists engaged in the work of comforting solaces modern readers, who often long for the comfort, good manners, and leisure presented in the novels. Surveys of two sample groups, 139 members of the Jane Austen Society of North America and 40 members of the online Republic of Pemberley, elicit data confirming how current readers of Austen turn to her works for comfort during times of stress or depression. Although some readers describe using Austen's novels as a

form of escapism, others view their reading as instructive for dealing with human failings, for gaining perspective on personal difficulties, and for stimulating their intellects. Austen's fiction grapples with disturbing possibilities, such as the liminal position of powerless single women at the mercy of the marriage market and fickle family wishes, as much as it provides comforting answers. Comforts (decent housing, love in marriage, social interaction) are such a powerful draw in Austen's works because women's discomfort is so visible, and for many, so likely. Thus, Austen's comfort challenges as much as it reassures her audience.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

There will be little rubs and disappointments every where, and we are all apt to expect too much; but then, if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another; if the first calculation is wrong, we make a second better; we find comfort somewhere. —Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, 1814

I read Pride and Prejudice at age 12 and fell in love with her novels. [. . .] When I became a psychologist, I discovered what a great psychologist she [Austen] was, understanding cognitive processes, interpersonal relations, and personality development.
—anonymous response, Jane Austen Society Survey, 2005

Comfort is an important and variegated concept for Austen, and as the second quotation above indicates, readers have responded positively to the novelist’s careful working out of personal impulses. Perusing any of Austen’s six major works reveals a frequent use of the word “comfort” applied to diverse novelistic situations: in London the Dashwood sisters are given a “very comfortable apartment” with a “good fire,” something the author also enjoys (S&S 160; 8-9 Nov. 1800); Lydia congratulates her sister Elizabeth on her marriage, writing that it is “a great comfort to have you so rich, and when you have nothing else to do, I hope you will think of us” (P&P 386); Emma looks out toward the Abbey-Mill Farm, a view “sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive” (E 360). In the first instance, material “comfort” is signified in a cozy, warm room at Mrs. Jennings’s house; in the second example, “comfort” involves the fantasy of

This dissertation follows the style of the MLA Handbook.

great wealth and Lydia's selfish desire of profiting from her sister's elevation; and in the third illustration, the mild weather and pretty landscape serve as a psychological "comfort" to the heroine's patriotic, nationalistic sensibility. In the Mansfield Park reference above, the speaker is Mrs. Grant, the wife of a demanding, gluttonous minister. Despite the difficulties of dealing with her husband, she nevertheless manages to be cheerful and hospitable, locating comfort for herself in serving and comforting others (MP 215). Each of these examples indicates a way that Austen thought about comfort, with its various connotations of physical ease, wealth, independence, and service. My dissertation examines not only how Austen uses comfort in her writings, but why it came to play such an important role in her fiction and in British culture; my study considers as well what current readers of Austen are looking for—and what they uncover—when they repeatedly turn to her novels.

Investigating Austen in terms of comfort seems a logical step, given the amount of attention the novelist devotes to ideas of comfort. The dearth of previous full-length studies on Austen's comfort is another impetus for my project. For Austen, comfort is connected, if subtly, both to domestic pursuits and to women. To discover the link between them, I give serious consideration to Austen's "comfort," the term she frequently associates with women and home in her works. First, my study traces the historical development of the notions of comfort as opposed to luxury; next I analyze Austen's novels' positive association of comfort with women and the middle class; and finally I turn to her works' comfort for modern readers: all of these factors have influenced the texts themselves.

Austen participates in a larger cultural movement that valorizes and re-classifies comfort as particularly English, and this kind of comfort, like the middle class, emerged during a particular historical moment. References to spiritual comfort have a long history in western thought, but material, physical comfort as an English skill, particular to English lives, is of more recent invention, arising in conjunction with the middle class not long after the novel's popularization in the 1740s and 1750s. The OED ties the new definition of comfort to 1814, the year Austen's Mansfield Park was published, but ideas of comfort as the "state of physical and material well-being, with freedom from pain and trouble, and satisfaction of bodily needs" are actually present even earlier by the late eighteenth century, with foreign visitors and English people both viewing comfortableness as a specifically English characteristic. Domestic comfort's firm establishment by 1814 partly came about through Austen's (and other writers') popularization of new uses for the term. Throughout Austen's novels, Englishness and comfort are engaged in (re)defining one another, and in the process they define Austen as well: Austen as an entity perceived through her works, as an image in the cultural imagination. Focused on female protagonists, Austen's novels reveal the way that physical and psychological comforts support (English) women's mental and emotional health, even as the women themselves comfort their families and guests, sometimes neglecting their own well-being.

In organizing this dissertation, I have divided Austen's six complete works of fiction into two categories, the "cold comfort" and the "warm comfort" novels; each novel's classification depends on how its heroine is treated by those around her. I use the

phrase “cold comfort” to designate the position of those Austen protagonists who give real comfort without their efforts being appreciated or recognized most of the time (the comfort is “cold” for the providers).¹ Comforting can give back to the provider, since solacing others means fewer empty hours and less threat of succumbing to the boredom many (gentle)men experience. With the phrase “warm comfort,” I indicate the situation of those Austen heroines whose habit of providing comfort is fully appreciated but is not connected to their marital status. For Austen, comfort is nearly always a positive value. The work of comforting in her novels goes far beyond a description of cozy domestic spaces and soft beds to elucidate the way that these material objects and the people who use them can ease mental distress, equally for characters in the novels as for readers of Austen who find in her works “great comfort, especially when family members are ill,” or “a comfort that I can return to in difficult times” (JASNA survey; RoP survey).

In contextualizing Austen within her cultural milieu, my project discloses not the usual portrait of an author isolated from her society’s paradigm shifts, but a writer at the forefront of the late eighteenth-century conversation about the evolving meaning of comfort, as well as comfort’s new implications for English nationalism and domesticity. Though Austen scholars in the past have often been puzzled, even disappointed by the differences between her ground-breaking novels and her seemingly trivial letters, I view them together through the lens of comfort as a means of understanding the writer’s concerns in the context of late eighteenth-century England. Thus, the Austen oeuvre makes a coherent statement, as novels and letters together affirm Austen’s belief in the importance of material and psychological comforts, which English women of the middle

classes afford to those around them. Comfort is essential for Austen because it is the condition necessary to leading a worthwhile life, one that includes time for reflection, laughter, and social intercourse, without worry over basic needs.

By studying Austen in terms of comfort (and discomfort), I elucidate the link between material goods and psychological ease for her characters. Instead of pursuing a perceived life of leisure, Austen's protagonists work at providing comfort for relatives, guests, and neighbors through unending tasks that can be stressful or satisfying, by turns. Although their labor is unpaid, the heroines' comfort-giving is taken seriously by the novels' narrator, and those who fail to comfort others (Lady Bertram, Mary Musgrove, Isabella Thorpe) are disparaged, while those who excel at comforting (Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse, Anne Elliot) are acclaimed. Austen's marriage plot novels frequently link two characters, minor or major, together, and by examining Austen's character pairs in terms of comfort, I see the author critiquing—even as she generally accepts—the idea of women achieving happiness through comfortable situations.² (By comfortable situations, I mean decent homes and respect from spouses, as well as not fretting over the food budget.)

My study of Austen and comfort would be incomplete without accounting for the effect the novels have on Austen's modern audience, whose purchases of her books and enthusiasm for film adaptations signal that Austen is still very relevant for the twenty-first century. After my initial discussion with a Texas chapter of the Jane Austen Society in 2001 disclosed that several readers found comfort in Austen's novels, and because Austen attends so widely to comforts and comforting in her works, I decided to pursue

the idea that many readers would be drawn to the novels—especially on rereading—in part because they gain a comfort from Austen’s works that they do not receive from reading other novels. Thus, Austen’s works become comforts to readers; the novels participate in the act of comforting to the same extent that her heroines do. Conversely, Austen has been accused of comforting her readers too much, a criticism that assumes her novels / plot lines offer bad comfort, the kind that leads to moral complacency and naïve acceptance of the status quo.³ Instead, I see Austen as comforting in a way that does not evade social problems or provide merely light entertainment, but confirms through her humor and controlled style that “the world might make sense” (JASNA survey). Certain Austen novels, like their protagonists, offer better comfort than others (i.e., Persuasion and Emma versus Northanger Abbey), and people tend to reread most the Austen novels that comfort the most. For readers of Austen’s novels, gaining comfort from her works is an on-going enterprise. Ongoing comfort means reading one Austen novel after another for some readers; others read an Austen novel each year, or periodically scan their favorites, like Pride and Prejudice, for the highlights.

1.1 Theoretical Methodology

My investigation of Austen has benefited from diverse approaches to the novelist, even as its examination of comfort uncovers a side of Austen—her interest, even obsession with comfort—that has not received much critical attention. My project’s dual focus on comfort, both as it appears in Austen’s works and as it affects Austen’s audience (who gain comfort from reading about comfort), thematically links two

otherwise disparate literary and ethnographic approaches. In historicizing the emergence of domestic comforts through Austen's fiction while also determining its current significance, I establish that the eighteenth-century novelist most attentive to the work of comforting continues to provide comfort for modern readers of her texts.

In my study of comfort and its roles within Austen's writings, a variety of theoretical methodologies—new historicism, psychology, reader response criticism, and ethnography—have informed my approach. New historicism has enabled me to elucidate the developing role of comfort in English society and the importance of that comfort to Austen. Descriptions of the literary antagonism between England and France in the nineteenth century, as well as historical accounts of luxury, the tea trade, and comfort in architecture, have aided my formulation of a narrative concerning comfort's rise to prominence. Psychology is useful to my project because it allows me to consider the compulsions, fantasies, and anxieties of Austen's characters, and also the part comfort / discomfort plays in alleviating or generating such feelings and behaviors, particularly within the context of marital and family relationships as related in Austen's personal letters in addition to her fiction. For example, Austen's beloved sibling Cassandra's status as comfort-giver in their family precludes the novelist from that role: Cassandra comforted while her sister wrote about comforting in novels featuring women's often vexed situations in the family.⁴ Reader response criticism is helpful to my ethnographic study of Austen's modern audience, as it foregrounds the reader as well as the author's text; meaning emerges from the collaboration between the two. My work has also benefited from theories of rereading since many Austen fans say that they read her

novels repeatedly, even continuously, an experience that makes the texts simultaneously old and new. Finally, ethnography / cultural studies has aided my project through its refusal to see texts as isolated from social life, along with an emphasis on studying the customs, ideas, and practices of a certain community, and focusing not on imputing, but discovering the meanings that arise from Austen's readership, both professional and fan-based. While readers of Harlequin romances and some readers of Austen share a love of novel reading as a form of therapy, Austen fans also seek intellectual stimulation from her fiction. Investigating the comfort modern day readers are seeking when they turn to Austen's works, I find that audiences gain satisfaction from reading about protagonists' tensions and problems that are resolved sensibly, though not without major efforts on the part of the heroines themselves.

1.2 Chapter Descriptions

Marshalling evidence for the close association among English womanhood, comfort, and domesticity, Chapter II, "The History of Comfort in English Lives, 1750-1850," constructs a broad historical depiction of comfort's arrival and various expressions of it in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Europe, contrasted with the very particular meanings and expressions of comfort in England, where comfort is understood to be best practiced in the home. The chapter details with the importance of luxury as a pre-cursor to comfort, with certain luxuries such as tea becoming affordable, along with other middle class comforts, by the end of the eighteenth century. The ongoing battle between England and France for identity and territory has direct

implications for Austen's views on comforting as an English cultural practice. The chapter also highlights specific moments of Austen's personal history relevant to an examination of comfort and comforting. Intellectual activity, leisure, and a lessening of poverty are only some of the social benefits that comfort brings, once attaining comfort becomes a prominent goal for middle-class English women and men. In establishing the origins of comfort and comforting, this chapter argues that Austen's cultural milieu— anxieties about France, women's roles, the growing middle class— informs her novels, as she responds to external societal pressures with her own positive version of how and why comforting and comforts are necessary to existence.

Chapter III, "Jane Austen's 'Cold Comfort' Novels: Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion" attends to the many instances of discomfort in these three Austen works, whose heroines—Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood, Anne Elliot—are typically situated between socio-economic levels of society. In the "cold comfort" novels, the aesthetic category of comfort usually operates in terms of a negative: it is the missing value that everyone desires. Comfort-giving is also the ability upon which Jane Austen hinges the marriageability of her "cold comfort" heroines. This chapter also examines the circumstances of Austen's life and their implications for the "cold" and "warm comfort" novels, the latter of which are dealt with in the following chapter.

Each "cold comfort" novel sets up its own terms for discussing comfort or its lack. I argue that in situating the middle class act of comforting as an integral part of true womanhood, Austen sides against the leisure class's slothful habits to vindicate a culture of active womanhood. In this interpretation, comfort-giving Fanny Price becomes a

suitable Austen heroine, rather than an anomaly. A precarious social standing is another conduit for acute discomfort, whereas comfort is manifest in Austen's presentation of respectable middle class figures, such as the Crofts.

Chapter IV, "Jane Austen's 'Warm Comfort' Novels: Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Northanger Abbey," like Chapter III, explores Austen's heroines' investment in the search for comfort, the root of the marriage plot and of familial relations within the novels. As in Austen's "cold comfort" novels, comfort is deeply valued in her "warm comfort" works, as the (fairly comfortable) protagonists excel at comforting, thus gaining the right to a satisfying existence. For the "warm comfort" protagonists, comforting is not about readiness for marriage but is a matter of personality and habit, long a part of their established role within the family circle, itself often a difficult sphere to inhabit despite the appreciation that accompanies residence therein.

The "warm comfort" heroines are valued from the outset for their efforts, their personalities, and their standing in the community. If characters with high status tend to overlook Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot, a very different response awaits Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and even Catherine Morland. Austen's doubling of an inept secondary character for every "warm comfort" protagonist reveals the author's engagement with alternate responses to each set of fictional circumstances. Psychology speaks to the ways both heroines and minor characters in the "warm comfort" novels accept or avoid—through fantasy, repetition, and wish-fulfillment—society's expectations for comfort-giving and receiving, burdens that occasionally are too much to endure. In this chapter I argue that Austen's approach to each main

character and her double reveals the novelist's understanding of comforting as a positive, active choice for women, not an essentialized, automatic role.

Chapter V, "Fans of Jane Austen: Reading the Novelist in the Twenty-first Century," moves the dissertation from an examination of the internal evidence for comfort in the novels to the interpretive acts performed by readers, who often return to Austen's novels in their search for comfort, as well as for pleasure and new insights. One hundred thirty-nine members of the Jane Austen Society of North America and forty citizens of the online Republic of Pemberley filled out a survey (see Appendix A) describing their jobs, hobbies, favorite Austen novels, and opinions on nineteenth-century British culture and recent film adaptations. Following Clifford Geertz, whose "thick description" of culture requires an "emphasis on context and on detail" in order to assign meaning to people's actions (140), I give pride of place to the Janeites and Pemberleans' own statements, preferences, and hobbies. Without mentioning the word "comfort," the questionnaire asks Austen readers about their returns to her novels at various stages of life, which are related to a search for comfort in many cases. My study also asks what types of people are fans of Jane Austen and which Austen novels are read most, as academics and popular audiences alike continue a lifelong interaction with these texts. The results of the surveys indicate that reading Austen brings the comfort of familiarity, relief from stress, the enjoyment of fantasy, and physical and emotional healing to modern audiences, who are mostly middle-class Caucasian women. In this chapter I argue that academic and personal interpretations of Austen novels should not be mutually exclusive: openness to both approaches can elicit a greater understanding of

the novelist. As Austen well knew, people will “find comfort somewhere” (MP 46), and that they discover it in reading her novels is hardly coincidental. Rather, readers in search of comfort turn to Austen, writing about comfort, in a purposive move that underscores how the relationship between text and readers is predicated on need, in addition to enjoyment.

In studying Austen’s comfort, I have discovered that it means much more than simply a crackling fire or cozy cottage: comfort refers to material wealth and peace of mind, as well as a sense of safety and family appreciation. Historically, comfort is a middle-class phenomenon born out of luxury, and during Austen’s lifetime comfort came to be characterized as particularly English. Austen presents comforting positively as women’s work, though it also encompasses the struggle for material and psychological comforts which Austen’s protagonists endure, sometimes easily and at times through suffering. Therefore, comfort in the Austen novels serves as *the* measure of a character’s quality of life. Looking for comfort, Austen’s readers derive it from engaging with her works. A signifier for many things, comfort, as Austen portrays it, becomes connected to Austen as conceived in the minds of her audience, forming a bridge between past and present, fictional creations and readers, whose interactions reinforce the picture of Austen as an artist interested in comfort’s modus operandi and the implications of comfort in the lives of her characters. Some measure of comfort for Austen’s heroines enables and insures peaceful existence, right thinking, and community bonding in the world of her novels, as well as in the world of her readers.

Notes

¹ The cliché “cold comfort” typically indicates something that is no comfort at all, and I occasionally use the phrase with this meaning in mind: for example, Fanny Price, in love with Edmund Bertram and hearing from him that she is one of the “two dearest objects” he “has on earth” finds little comfort in that sentiment because the other person, Mary Crawford, is the woman Edmund hopes to marry (MP 264).

² Austen’s even-handed treatment of Charlotte Lucas’s marriage of convenience to Mr. Collins in Pride and Prejudice is a prime example of her acknowledgement of the unfortunate necessity for such matches. Marianne Dashwood’s unlikely union with staid Colonel Brandon in Sense and Sensibility, after having loved Willoughby, is another instance: “Marianne found her own happiness in forming” her husband’s (S&S 379).

³ Harriet Margolis’s “Janeite Culture: What Does the Name ‘Jane Austen’ Authorize?” (Jane Austen on Screen, ed. Gina MacDonald and Andrew Macdonald, New York: Cambridge UP, 2003: 22-43) suggests that the success of Austen adaptations stems from her stories’ ability to “comfortingly” answer expectations (39), and Miranda Burgess’s British Fiction and the Production of the Social Order, 1740-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) deems Austen’s works “predictable commodit[ies]” purchased for their “conventionality” and thus made social and harmless, like the novels which Henry Tilney (of Northanger Abbey) “makes safe” (172-73).

⁴ Helena Michie’s Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) cites Toni McNaron on sisters’ assuming different roles in the family (19).

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF COMFORT IN ENGLISH LIVES, 1750-1850

2.1 Beginnings: Austen, Burney, and Comfort in the Eighteenth Century

Jane Austen's works discover the way that physical and psychological comforts sustain (English) women's mental and emotional well-being, even as the women themselves comfort others.¹ The comforting and comforts in Austen help to define Englishness in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as both foreigners and the English themselves connect comfort explicitly with England.² This chapter considers why it became so important in eighteenth-century English minds for their country to be associated with comfort, before the next chapters focus on Austen's own working out of comfort's implications for women. Austen provides a particularly useful lens for reading comfort and its changing meanings for her society, as she obsesses about various kinds of comfort in her novels, mentioning the word over 100 times in some texts.

As this chapter will show by examining contemporary works from the mid-eighteenth century through the Victorian period, comfort (with its positive and negative connotations) was born out of a new version of luxury; comfort arose to prominence with the middle classes; comfort enabled the English to feel superior to their rivals the French; and comfort is women's work, performed in the home. Establishing the origins of comfort and comforting prepares for the rest of the dissertation by showing Austen's cultural milieu, which included anxieties about France, women's roles, and the growing middle class. This milieu informs her novels, as she responds to external societal

pressures with her own positive version of how and why comforting and comforts are necessary to existence. The high level of interest Austen shows in the different kinds of comfort—closely associated with the middling orders—is profound and is one measure that classifies her as a proto-Victorian (Litvak 14; Sanders 104; Schor 234; Roberts 11). Other scholars see Austen in dialogue with the eighteenth century (Lewis 34; Butler, War 3; Watt 296; C. Johnson, Politics xxi). By collapsing the discrete categories of eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, Austen can be described as taking part in both time periods.³

In Austen’s marriage plot novels, diverse uses of the term “comfort” appear in nearly every chapter, sometimes several times per page. Including variations of the word “comfort” (“comforts,” “comforted,” “comfortable”), Austen’s Mansfield Park (1814) contains 132 instances of the word, the most of any of her novels.⁴ “Comfort” is used 110 times in Emma (1816), followed by Sense and Sensibility (1811) with 80 references to “comfort,” Pride and Prejudice (1813) is next with 48 instances, while Northanger Abbey (1818) and Persuasion (1818) have the least number of “comfort” references, 42 and 40 respectively. For comparison, Maria Edgeworth’s Castle Rackrent (1800) includes a total of only 4 instances of the word “comfort,” while Charlotte Lennox’s The Female Quixote (1752) refers to comfort only 14 times in two volumes.⁵

The comforts mentioned in these eighteenth-century novels compares well with comfort’s permeation of texts in the following century, yet no eighteenth- or nineteenth-century author that I have examined discusses comfort more often than Austen. Two of Charlotte Brontë’s heroines, Jane Eyre and Lucy Snowe, yearn to enjoy the “selfish calm

and sensual comfort of civilized affluence” while remaining unsatisfied with friendship’s “calm comfort and modest hope” (Jane Eyre 436; Villette 216). Jane Eyre (1847) contains ten instances of the word “comfort,” while Villette (1853) names comfort or its variations sixteen times. Elizabeth Gaskell’s Molly Gibson of Wives and Daughters (1866) offers the Austenesque sentiment that “it is such a comfort to know that I may be as rude as I like” when speaking with her beloved father, and George Eliot’s 1870s townsfolk in Middlemarch count on taking in the new medical doctor Lydgate and “assimilating him very comfortably” (Gaskell 28; Eliot 140). Gaskell’s novel features twenty-three mentions of “comfort,” and Eliot’s work, the only one to approach Austen’s in frequency of “comfort” citations, contains forty-six variations of “comfort,” including modern uses of the term, as in Celia Brooke’s thoughts about Dorothea: “stifled in the depths of [Celia’s] heart was the feeling that her sister was too religious for family comfort” (16). Comfort here indicates the very opposite of a religious impulse: Celia continues her reflection that “scruples were like spilt needles, making one afraid of treading, or sitting down, or even eating” (16). Comfort for Celia (and thus for Eliot) involves walking, reclining, and eating, all at a leisurely, worry-free pace. Perhaps the Victorian novelist’s carrying on of the Great Tradition where Austen leaves off can be understood as Eliot’s attention to her predecessor’s interest in comfort and comforting.⁶

While nineteenth-century women novelists paid increasing attention to comfort, at least one other eighteenth-century writer besides Austen makes comfort a central issue in her works. My argument will not extend quite as far as Witold Rybczynski’s laudatory

claim that Austen “single-handedly invented and brought to perfection, [. . .] the domestic genre of novel-writing” (112), since Frances Burney, one of Austen’s favorite novelists, attends to comfort in some of the same ways that Austen does, and nearly as often.⁷ Burney shares some of Austen’s concerns with women’s dependent situations on men and their domestic lives. Evelina (1778), Burney’s novel about her heroine’s attempt to find her proper place in society, contains a total of twenty-two instances of “comfort” and its variations, while her 2,338 page Camilla (1796), whose hapless title character falls into debt and nearly dies, refers to comfort and its forms thirty-nine times in total. Burney is closest to Austen in terms of attention paid to comfort, but its importance in her works is more diffused throughout the text.

Burney’s protagonists are ever seeking “a home” and “safety,” as well as “domestic bliss and security” (Epstein 191), and finding lasting comfort is a touchstone for Austen’s novels. Camilla’s mentor Mrs. Arlbery attempts to make the heroine acknowledge that the “same sordid thing called money, does manage to produce such abundance of little comforts and pretty amusements, that one is apt . . . to half suspect . . . it may really not much add to any matrimonial aversion” (456). However, in a much later scene in Camilla, the heroine believes she is dying at a public inn, and though Burney paints Camilla’s distress in lofty terms for many pages, comfort / discomfort is not mentioned until the innkeeper’s wife offers to bring in a clergyman to read the service “for those of whom there is but small hope of recovery,” if doing so will “give her any comfort.” Camilla responds, “O, great and infinite comfort!”—using one of the term’s older definitions, “the feeling of consolation or mental relief, the state of being

consoled” (Burney, Camilla 876; OED online).

Burney’s final novel, The Wanderer or Female Difficulties (1814), concerns a young woman in perpetual discomfort, forced to leave France during the Revolution and live incognita in England, without money or friends, for an extended period. At one point, the wanderer accompanies the unappreciative Mrs. Ireton when their carriage breaks down: “Having now no other resource, [Mrs. Ireton] hung for comfort, as well as for assistance, upon her fellow-traveller” (42), so that the heroine becomes “a support, a source of strength” to her companion, in a now obsolete definition of comfort (OED online). However, in a comic scene featuring the absent-minded Giles Arbe’s visit to the heroine’s apartment, the old gentleman looks through her bills, only to “beg your pardon a thousand times! I don’t well know how this happened; but the chimney-piece looks so like my own,—and the fire was so comfortable,—that I suppose I thought I was at home, and took that parcel for one that the servant had put there for me” (280). In this instance, Burney’s description of a comfortable domestic scene fits the newest definition of comfort as a “state of physical and material well-being, with freedom from pain and trouble, and satisfaction of bodily needs.” To illustrate this meaning, the OED refers to Wordsworth’s Excursion I, published in 1814, the same year in which The Wanderer and Austen’s Mansfield Park appear.

Austen probably caught some of her concern for comfort from Burney, though several of their novels were published coterminously. The most plausible influence on Austen is more broadly cultural: late eighteenth and nineteenth-century English society prized comfort and its connection with women, living circumscribed if valuable lives,

though their cultural value was not on par with men's. Marjorie Morgan in National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain explains how male British tourists felt "unable to generate the cheerful comfort of domesticity without the aid of women" (182-3).

Attuned to an important cultural shift, Austen pays a great deal of attention to comfort and to the pursuit of it, often through the means of marriage but occasionally in other ways, as in Mrs. Dashwood's difficult search for a new living arrangement "that at once answered her notions of comfort and ease" after her husband's death (S&S 14).⁸

To discover lasting comfort is an arduous, Herculean task for Austen's female characters, stuck as many of them are between classes of society. For instance, beautiful and accomplished Jane Fairfax of Emma has been raised among wealthy people, but her own status as poor orphan means she is bound for the governess life unless a propertied man will marry her (E 164-65). Another example of a character caught between social classes but not fitting in either one is Fanny Price of Mansfield Park, related to and even living with the wealthy Bertram family, but treated with contempt as a poor relation (MP 20). The Henry Dashwood family of Sense and Sensibility inherits vast Norland Park after the death of its elderly owner, who in Sir Hugh Tyrold fashion is attended with "every degree of solid comfort which his age could receive" (Camilla 3).⁹ Upon their father's early death, the Dashwood sisters are left in a precarious financial state. Ignoring their discomfort, the Dashwoods' wealthy half-brother chooses not to alleviate their embarrassed circumstances (S&S 12). Each of these heroine's situations proves what Claire Tomalin would see as Austen's taking "social discomfort as one of her main themes" (135). As her novels attest, Austen is highly attuned to issues of comfort and

discomfort in her society, but the question of where new definitions and ideas about comfort came from in the late eighteenth century, must be addressed in order to better understand Austen's project.

2.2 Luxury: A Prelude to Comfort

The ways that luxury was thought and written about in the seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century are significant in understanding comfort's eventual importance to the English nation. In Austen's parents' generation, comfort in England was not yet deemed an essential, national value, and luxury instead reigned as the preeminent objective, if an unattainable one for many people. Dena Goodman explains that prior to the eighteenth-century, the division between "luxury" and "necessity" adequately accounted for a class system in which a privileged few held status and purchasing power while the rest "made do with the simple objects" they needed (74). Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger's introduction to Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods (2003), finds luxury identified with foreignness, something afforded by those with "wealth, status and power" (9). The rise of the "middling sort" and the spread of "small domestic luxuries" among them eventually did away with the have / have not dichotomy to make way for a middle class able to purchase some luxury items (Styles 107; Goodman 74).

What did people in the late eighteenth century mean by "luxury" items? The proposed Triple Assessment Bill of 1797-98 provided for "a scaled increase (ranging from 25 per cent to 500 per cent) in the assessed taxes, which were taxes on purported

luxuries”: these included “house windows, male servants, horses and carriages, dogs, etc.” (Wahrman 110). Agreeing with Dror Wahrman, Carolyn Steedman’s findings on eighteenth-century tax reports show that post 1778, man servants were “taxed as a ‘luxury’ item, female servants between 1785 and 1792” only (128-9). What John Brewer and Roy Porter call the “decencies” of eighteenth-century life, including book-buying and attendance at concerts and plays, are items that could be classified as luxuries since they give pleasure but are not vital to existence (Pleasures xxvii; Introduction 5). Thus, most people could more easily give up art than the wearing of clothes.

For Austen, comforts are accessible because they are part of everyday experience and because they are obtained independently, without obligating oneself to others—confiding in her sister Cassandra, drinking cups of tea, enjoying a warm fire—while luxuries (her own carriage, a private bedroom) are beyond her daily experience, something available, if at all, only on visits to wealthy relatives. The author does not always fully indulge in luxuries even then, though she manages to enjoy a “pleasant Dinner” while situated “at the lower end of the Table” during a visit to her rich brother Edward’s Godmersham estate (22 June 1808).

Until the last decades of the eighteenth century, luxury without much comfort was to be expected, even among the wealthy. Fernand Braudel’s The Structures of Everyday Life points out the falseness to ideas of luxury in furnishings in the eighteenth century—Chinese vases, silk wall hangings, mirrors, and chandeliers—since they were “not always accompanied by what we would call comfort” (I: 310). Problems with the emptying of water closets (invented in 1596) still bothered the Paris Academy of

Sciences as late as 1788, and the continual dumping of chamber pots out windows meant “the streets were sewers.” London and Paris were both overrun with “fleas, lice and bugs” in rich homes as well as poor, and gas lighting did not replace oil lamps and candles until 1808 (I: 310).

Despite these inconveniences or perhaps because of them, by the 1770s mainstream social commentators condemned luxury and lauded “superfluities, comfort [. . .] and novelty” as signifiers of what they understood to be “modern civilization” (76). For instance, the anonymous, middle-class, French author of Etat et description de la ville de Montpellier fait en 1768 devalued industry and wrote that the “production of textiles and fine liqueurs” is “purely superfluous, often harmful to one’s health, and at most susceptible of maintaining a luxurious way of life” (qtd. Darnton 127). For this French writer, luxury is suspect, capable of doing damage to mind and body.

Experiencing economic change, France witnessed an increasing variety of products available in Paris, situated in a new commercial discourse where “fashion, taste, utility and comfort” and not “wealth, status or power” were the keys to significance (Goodman 75). The Lamothe family of Christine Adams’s A Taste for Comfort and Status: A Bourgeois Family in Eighteenth Century France, a lawyer father and sons and their non-working mother and sisters, were careful with money, but their consumption patterns show that they wished to lead that middle-class ideal, a “comfortable and sometimes elegant life” (20). Adams finds that for the Lamothes, “emotional needs and material interests” always intersect within the family context (55).

She concludes then, that the creation of a specific “bourgeois mentality” began among urban professionals in mid-eighteenth century France, and not later (259).

Like France, England in the eighteenth century saw a movement toward “remoralising” luxury, in order to “defend the role of comfort and pleasure” as the indicators of social progress, with women playing an important role as buyers and fashion leaders (Eger 191).¹⁰ For Eger, women give a vital measurement for the “relative health or degeneracy of the nation,” a more significant role than that of superficial “arbiters of taste” (191; Browne 126). Thus, women’s freedom to choose “comforts” for themselves was seen as a good sign for this emergent capitalist economy, as women’s admission into the marketplace meant an increase in trade.

Understanding luxury as deperiment, Charles Moore’s Full Inquiry into the Subject of Suicide (1790) warns that satisfying the lust for “unbounded luxury” leads to “the most pernicious and fatal effects” (10). He and Sir James Steuart agree that over-indulging in luxury will inevitably result in corruption, even death for the individual, whereas a moderate intake may extend life, in Steuart’s estimation (qtd. Berg and Eger 11). For Steuart and later thinkers, luxury was about “social behaviour,” not just goods (13). The notion of the “decent, well-bred citizen” had a tinge of the bourgeois by 1768, and Darnton includes “good manners, tolerance, reasonableness, restraint, clear thinking, fair dealing, and a healthy self-respect” as characteristics of this “new urbanity” (139). This second version of eighteenth-century luxury—moderate gratification—was to become the nineteenth century’s comfort, as the practice of denying oneself gave way to an acceptance of indulging in minor comforts.

With physical comfort's emergence out of a re-configuration of luxury, one of the most prominent non-essentials the middle and lower classes began purchasing was tea imported from China.¹¹ Tea is thus a prime example of the way that a foreign luxury, at first an indulgence only for the rich, came gradually to have a place at every English table, and even in the poorest of homes. James H. Bunn finds tea so “iconistically English” that reminding oneself of its very recent “import[ation] and assimilat[ion] by a syncretic culture” is necessary to disabuse the idea that tea has always signified the “very soul of Englishness” (305). William H. Ukers's classic work, All About Tea, gives 1615 as the date of the word “tea”'s first documented arrival in Britain, appearing in a letter from English East India Company agent R.L. Wickham (II:501).¹² For most classes of English people, tea was affordable and enjoyable and did not carry the repercussions that accompanied drinking alcoholic beverages.¹³ An exception to the rule of tea's acceptance is Jonas Hanway's Essay on Tea (1757): “I have long considered *tea*, not only as a prejudiced article of commerce; but also of a most pernicious tendency with regard to domestic industry and labour; and very injurious to health” (II: 2). Hanway's dislike of tea stems in part because “the *laborer* and *mechanic* will *ape* the *lord*” in drinking it, thus wasting time that should be used for work (II: 272).

Fears about the amount of money spent importing this foreign commodity are also contributing factors in Hanway's assertion that he should be able to find “herbs in our own country, more healthy in quality [. . .] than the choicest tea” (II: 223). More than half a century later, William Spence in Tracts on Political Economy (1822) agrees with Hanway, questioning the “worth of tea” as an effeminate “weed” which fails to do

man's work by not "enabl[ing] us to fight better—to work harder; it does not feed us, or clothe us"; worse yet, by imbibing tea the women of England have become "a race of invalids" (qtd. Winborn 119). As Colin Winborn observes in The Literary Economy of Jane Austen and George Crabbe, Spence foresees more than just an economic problem: because of tea-drinking, other countries' habits have crept into "the national constitution" (qtd. 119). Importing tea "carries with it the risk of infection," and the masculine British national character will be injected with "over-carefulness, effeminacy and a general debility of constitution" (qtd. 120).

Despite Hanway and Spence's warnings, tea and sugar, along with coffee, tobacco, and chocolate, went from being luxury items to products meant for general consumption by 1800 (Sussman 29). Tea is served regularly in Austen's Mansfield Park, at the wealthy Bertram estate and also in the humble home of Fanny Price's nearly indigent family in Portsmouth (MP 180, 439). Through the importation of tea in such large quantities, and its subsequent distribution through the various classes of British society, the drink lost its tinges of foreignness and luxury to become a staple of every British home and tea-drinking an emblem of Englishness itself, if a problematic one, as tea-drinking in England "increased four hundredfold" between 1693 and 1793 (Lane 28).

John E. Wills provides a comprehensive account of the tea trade, as he calculates that between 1720-1795, the total amount of imported tea doubled in weight three times (144). The East India Company traded for tea in China, and by the 1720s, Bohea (a standard black tea) had dropped in price, leading to tea's popularization in Scotland and England. Throughout much of the eighteenth century, Wills asserts that up to half of the

tea drunk in Great Britain was “illegally imported” and often of higher quality than its over-priced, legal counterpart (142).¹⁴ Conversely, Kim Wilson finds that tea shipped illegally to England was loaded into enormous “oilskin bags” which gave the tea a bad flavor, and she speculates that the “off taste” was one reason people such as the Austens preferred to pay the extra tax, sometimes more than one hundred percent, on legal tea (27-28).

While the British tea habit conjures up images of imperialism in the minds of most scholars, Wills’s findings support a view of the tea trade as a fair exchange between Chinese and European merchants, at least until 1800, when the creation of a British state in India brought together the “strands of power and production” (146). Imperialism was clearly a part of the tea racket by the mid-nineteenth century, but to blame the British tea habit for hegemony in India and war in China would be to miss the nuances of the situation. In her recent work, National Identities and Travel, Morgan rightly points out the limitations to this kind of thinking (blaming tea), although she too considers comfort-inducing tea a colonized and colonizing ware. Empire does not explain everything for Morgan: though it might explain the circumstances under which the British came to be “avid tea drinkers,” it falls short of interpreting why they identified so closely with that specific imperial good, as opposed to cocoa, tobacco, textiles from India, or coffee from Turkey and Yemen (Morgan 199; Wills 136). A second problem with the tea to colonialism equation is the fact that all tea came to England from China in the 1700s according to Lane since the plant was not yet “cultivated in India” (28). Samuel Johnson’s 1755 Dictionary of the English Language

substantiates Lane's view, since he defines tea as "A Chinese plant, of which the infusion has lately been much drunk in Europe" (1196). Ukers claims January 10, 1839, as the first date on which tea from India "was sold at auction in London," following years of worry in Britain over the perilous nature of the China tea trade (II: 130).

Where importing tea is concerned in a changing England, opinions run the gamut of emotions, some in favor of the trade and others opposed to tea trading. Sidney Mintz complicates the issue of colonialism in a recent explanation of food's changing roles in his "Study of Consumption." By the mid-eighteenth century, Mintz writes, the most important drink in Britain was "being brewed from what was referred to angrily by some as an 'oriental vegetable', imported from China, drunk hot and heavily sweetened with British West Indian sugar" (264). The Twinings English Breakfast tea packet available today states that it contains a "blend of Ceylon, Kenyan and Indian teas, producing a full-bodied English brew." How these colonized countries' tea leaves magically give rise to a processed "English" tea underscores the fact that the work of imperialism in the commodity market is often performed invisibly. The tea leaves come from the former British provinces of Ceylon, Kenya, and India, but the finished product is English.

Foreign and precious because it is one of the few items to be "purchased from outside," tea is nonetheless consumed frequently, even incessantly, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Lane 2). The writer Austen most admired, Samuel Johnson, claimed sometimes to imbibe fifteen cups of tea at a time (Wilson 64). Austen estimates that at one of her brother Edward's estates, Godmersham, twelve pounds of "China tea" per quarter are drunk, although her niece Fanny Austen (later Knight) counters that they

use only twelve pounds in a full year (31 May 1811). Both numbers reveal that while an “anxiety about consumption” of expensive colonial products is present in the Austen-Knight family, the gain of these goods through harsh means fails to disturb these English consumers.¹⁵

Tea may have been free of the taint of imperialistic connections in the eighteenth century (though not in the nineteenth or twentieth), but its accompaniment sugar was not. Although not specified in Austen’s Mansfield Park, Edward Said explains that Sir Thomas’s Antigua property undoubtedly would have been a “sugar plantation maintained by slave labor,” for Austen a “historical reality” (89). Tea and sugar were so closely related in British minds that a 1744 pamphlet estimated the amount of tea drunk in England based on the amount of sugar consumed (Sussman 29). A product of slave labor, sugar may have retained its associations with luxury longer in comparison with tea since it was taken from a single source, sugar cane, until 1830 (Mintz 265). However, Charlotte Sussman argues for the deep connection of tea with sugar in eighteenth-century English minds, and the two colonial “luxury objects” were some of the first products anti-slavery societies and individuals boycotted as immoral (18).

Domestic enjoyment is at the center of the tea table ritual, as Wills cites tea drinking and preparation among “the pleasures of domesticity and respectable family life” in early eighteenth-century London (142). Tea’s connection with women in particular has a long history, as economist Arthur Young (1741-1820) reveals. Together with Hanway and Spence, Young sees the effects of tea-drinking on the nation proper as very bad and is bothered by the new custom of “men making tea an article of their food,

almost as much as women” (qtd. Ukers I: 47). In Young’s view, tea-drinking is an effeminate activity that men should avoid. However, the sad consequences resulting when men spurn the feminine tea table are offered in William Makepeace Thackeray’s Pendennis (1849-50). Thackeray’s character Mrs. Shandon brews herself a cup of tea as consolation in prison when her husband goes off to get drunk at the prison bar instead of staying with her. Although clearly sympathizing with his lower class female character—“Nature meant very gently by women when she made that tea-plant. With a little thought what a series of pictures and groups the fancy may conjure up and assemble round the teapot and cup” (I: 332)—Thackeray’s essentialism (dis)places the onus on nature for women’s evident belonging to the everyday tableau of a tea ritual. Lonely Mrs. Shandon “cares for nothing else but [tea], when her husband is away,” so that tea becomes a material comfort for her, even substituting for her negligent spouse (I: 333). What comforted the proto-Victorians was the reassuring sameness of the everyday, but the same objects that bring this comfort are also limited in their powers to help. For example, the wealthy inmates in an early 1780s asylum obtain “the greatest privacy, the best advice, the most tender treatment, and every comfort that can be afforded them in their unhappy situation,” which remains ominous despite being made restful (Smith 17).

At Mansfield Park, Fanny Price also discovers a refuge in tea time: her unwanted suitor, Henry Crawford, offends her sensibilities with his over-familiarity, calling her his “dearest, sweetest Fanny—”, until “the solemn procession [. . .] of tea-board, urn, and cake-bearers” frees the heroine from “a grievous imprisonment of body and mind,” as it gives her something to do (MP 344). While tea serves as a substitute for Mrs. Shandon’s

husband in Pendennis, the tea ceremony affords Fanny protection, almost as her absent brother William would do were he present. In contrast, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues that the respectability inherent in the ritual of the tea table comes at a high price, as it is the site where an upper class woman's body is "disciplined" to join in a vain show of "availability" (12). The tea ritual, which Fanny believes to offer her safety from Henry's advances, in this interpretation only succeeds in advertising her status as eligible wife.

The stakes surrounding the tea ritual are not always so high, or fraught with dangerous consequences. Tea in the all-female Austen household at Chawton is the specific responsibility of the author of England's best-known domestic novels (Lane 142). Accountable for keeping up the supplies of coffee, tea, and sugar, all of which were kept locked in a cupboard in the dining room, Jane Austen's few domestic duties included making the breakfast tea and toast each day, thus allowing her time for writing (Lane 17; Wilson 4; Tomalin 211). Austen consoles her sister about missing their departing relatives with the idea that the "comfort of getting back into your own room will be great!—& then, the Tea & Sugar!" (24 May 1813).¹⁶

Apparently the connections with slavery did not occur to Austen or if they did, were not sufficiently disturbing to mention in writing to Cassandra. Austen's own apparent unconcern with the plight of slaves contrasts strongly with her prayer for enlightenment, as she asks to "understand the sinfulness of our own hearts, and [to have brought] to our knowledge every fault of temper and every evil habit in which we have indulged to the discomfort of our fellow-creatures, and the danger of our own souls"

(“Prayers” 453). Austen’s request exemplifies a larger problem within the Christian church, in that “matters of comfort and self-interest” sometimes take precedence over “value and principle” in a toleration of injustice (Glock, et.al. 6). Said notes the paradox contained in the utter cruelty of every aspect of slave-holding in the West Indies, while admitting that “everything we know about Austen and her values is at odds with the cruelty of slavery” (96). Austen’s enjoyment of “tea & sugar” may have lulled her normally critical mind into a state of comfortable indulgence and oversight regarding the enslaved producers of those goods, or she may have regarded sugar and tea separately from the labor required to produce them, a failure of understanding, even as she succeeded in depicting the limits of food for comforting adequately in difficult situations.¹⁷

In Austen’s lifetime, tea was one important signifier for comfort, as this initially foreign substance came to be identified with the essence of the English way of life, maintaining a comfortable existence.¹⁸ As John Halperin notes in The Life of Jane Austen, she “attacks materialism and snobbishness” in her works but maintains a sense of the benefits of “wealth, comfort, good society, and peace” (83). The ritual of tea-drinking is one of the central acts of inducing comfort through which British people learn to soothe themselves. Tea has other, more practical uses as well: Amanda Vickery’s findings reveal that ladies in Georgian England offered tea for easing business exchanges at home (208). Whether as a lubricant for business transactions, then, or as a tranquilizer after the conclusion of the day’s activities, tea functions in important ways to guarantee the productivity and stability of British women’s, and sometimes men’s,

interests in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The comparative lack of tea on the continent contributes so much to English travelers' sense of displacement that many experienced tourists bring their own tea with them (M. Morgan 122). Morgan's study of travel journals reveals that although the occasional Scottish tourist did, "no English traveller ever admitted to abandoning tea willingly or gladly" (123). As much a staple as bread, tea has become the staff of comfortable life in England, particularly for the middle class.

2.3 Middle-Class Comfort

Comfort came out of a re-definition of luxury in the late eighteenth century, but the rise of the middle classes was equally important to comfort's ascendance. A cursory look at several standard works published during this period of change shows how the definition of comfort evolved with regard to spiritual meaning. A publication typical of the seventeenth century is Joseph Hall's "The free prisoner, or, The comfort of restraint" (1658), which details his imprisonment in the Tower of London during an anti-Catholic riot. Hall enjoins his readers to pity those who can only see the scourges and other "engins [sic] of torture" and recommends that they "Bless [. . .] the God of all comfort, who having stood by thee, & made thee faithfull [sic] to the death, hath now given thee a Crown of life and immortality" (174). Hall's imprisonment in the Tower constitutes a domestic reversal, as his puritanical "wife and holy God" have been the instruments of locking him up (147). Comfort, for Hall, means solace under persecution and reassurance of God's sustaining grace through present difficulties.

The connotations of “comfort” began to change in the eighteenth century, with the emphasis moving to the physical, but continuing to include the spiritual dimension, as evidenced in Joseph Seccomb’s published sermon, “Business and diversion inoffensive to God, and necessary for the comfort and support of human Society. A Discourse utter’d in part at Ammauskeeg-Falls, in the Fishing-Season” (1739).¹⁹ Seccombe’s treatise reveals a concern for the pleasure fishermen might receive from their favorite hobby, as it seeks to ease consciences that might otherwise be pricked at indulging in a non-ecclesiastical pastime (6). As the eighteenth century gave way to the nineteenth, not only ministers but also social commentators such as John Claudius Loudon in his 1833 Encyclopeadia of Cottage, Farm and Villa Architecture and Furniture would be concerned with the negative effects the “philosophy of comfort” might have on their patrons (Gloag 34).

Comfort could be construed as both virtue and vice, because along with its positive denomination as “support” and “assistance,” it also came to connote an easing of moral consciousness, a lazy acceptance of the status quo, and a hesitation to act, even for a right cause.²⁰ The danger of active comforting lies in the passivity of the recipient (allowing oneself to be comforted when one needs to be vigilant, for example), sometimes establishing a false sense of security. Austen’s slothful Lady Bertram is so intent on seeing to her “own evening’s comfort” that she “never thought of being useful to any body” and would practically keep her long-suffering niece Fanny as a prisoner at Mansfield Park without the intervention of Fanny’s uncle and cousin (MP 217-19). For Lady Bertram, comfort is about exchange and sometimes the exploitation of other

people. This example reveals how comfort, though usually a positive value for Austen, can be negatively deployed in her works, particularly if an inclination for comfort prevents one's usefulness to others.

In spite of certain negative associations, then, comfort becomes an increasingly important consideration on both spiritual and physical levels, in that British people sought to reposition their bodies, houses, and even souls on a more comfortable plain. Evangelical and Anglican preachers alike continued to warn against a too comfortable existence, as Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall mention William Wilberforce's criticism of "nominal Christianity" (83). In 1797 Wilberforce warns, "the middling classes are daily growing in wealth and consequence," but along with the positive benefits of "comforts and refinements, the vices also of the higher orders are continually descending," a class-based fear (qtd. Wahrman 398).

For Austen, aristocrats' erratic behavior in her neighborhood may have only strengthened comfort's connection to the middling classes, such as her own relatively happy family.²¹ That Austen's family, with an annual income of just under £600 fits a contemporary definition of "middle class" is made evident from remarks given in a 1797 letter against the Triple Assessment Bill in the Morning Herald: "Our grand palladium against it [the Bill] lies in the content and comforts enjoyed by the middle class; in which class I include from the substantial Tradesman up to the Country Gentleman of 1,500£ a year" (Halperin 24; qtd. Wahrman 124). Further, Leigh Hunt's Examiner defined "middle class" in its 1 May 1808 issue this way: "By the middling, I mean generally that respectable class which fills up the space between the larger portion of the

people who are manually employed, and the smaller who possess independent or other wealth” (qtd. 163).²² The middle classes and their preferences for comfort were coming into their own.

Working on a multitude of levels, new definitions of comfort entered Britain’s national consciousness alongside the rising middle class, especially in the political arena. Wahrman’s Imagining the Middle Class traces the emergence of “middle class language,” though for him the people who gathered under its banner were not drawn together by a similar social position but by a “circumstance-specific political outlook”: Wahrman finds that the middle class does not emerge prior to this language use, but is itself realized in the wording of “the heated battle of politics” (144).²³ While this dissertation disagrees with Wahrman’s denial of a rising middle class, his understanding that “middle class” comes into being with the spoken word is useful in its indications for comfort’s emergence as a value in English culture.

However, comfort was not always thought about in terms of physical ease or moral influence, especially prior to the rise of the middle classes. Terry Eagleton gives the accepted historical account that during Austen’s lifetime, the landed gentry was “about to confront a formidable rival in the form of the urban middle class, which [was] being ushered over the historical horizon by the industrial revolution [. . .] still largely in the future” (115). English politician James Mackintosh noted in 1815 how the advent of industrialization had turned small towns into cities and created factories out of mountains: “ease, comfort and leisure, have introduced, among the middling classes of society, their natural companions, curiosity, intelligence, boldness, and activity of mind”

(qtd. Wahrman 247). Comfort by Mackintosh's account enables the pursuit of intellectual activity in England rather than abetting the spread of laziness.

Usually a synonym for ease, comfort, according to John Wiltshire, "evolved its domestic meaning in the later eighteenth century in tandem with the development of a more leisured society" so that it is clearly a middle-class idea, as it relies on "a material substrate, a steady income, for the security, placidity, and ease it evolved to denote" ("Health" 174). However, advice literature in the nineteenth century declares comfort to be far more than "ease": it is a specifically "middle-class state of mind that elites with aristocratic tendencies and consumers enslaved to novelties [. . .] could not begin to understand" (Grier viii). Thus comfort signifies more than mere cosiness as it becomes a way of establishing middle-class identity and political affiliation.

That the family-centered middle class and the novel aided each other's development is generally accepted. David Lodge reminds us that the novel is "an inherently middle-class form," so it should not be surprising to find it dealing with comfort, an inherently middle-class preoccupation (Art 106).²⁴ Paula Marantz Cohen claims that the novel genre "evolved in tandem with the nuclear family and, inspired by and contributing to the same ideology, was subject to many of the same laws" (126). She explains how a closure ideology in the nineteenth-century was important to the "development and elaboration of the form that defined families and novels," as families were "retreats from a hostile external world" (127). Ian Watt's classic work, The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding connects the novel's appearance with the advent of the ordinary middle class, and while Michael McKeon critiques Watt,

the former agrees that the middle class helped bring the novel into being (Novel 22).²⁵ Eagleton explains in The English Novel: An Introduction that the novel's association with the middle class has to do with the "ideology of that class" which is founded on a "dream of total freedom from restraint" (2). At the heart of middle-class ideology, however, is the dream of comfort in mind and body.

2.4 Comfort and English Nationalism

Moving away from a class-based understanding of the novel, Said connects the "steady, almost reassuring work done by the novel" with England, declaring that it must be considered as an "important cultural affiliation domestically" (72). For Said, pre-imperialistic novels such as Austen's lead the way for Britain's later territorial gains (95). Examining Austen's Mansfield Park, Said concludes that the heroine Fanny Price is considered as "'comfort' and 'acquisition'" in spite of herself; she is a tool in a larger system, as well as a fully developed novel character (85). Said views Austen's narrative as trying to match Fanny's actions at home to the "more openly colonial movements [in Antigua] of Sir Thomas, her mentor, the man whose estate she inherits"—two actions that are intertwined (89).

In her critique of Said's treatment of Mansfield Park, Susan Fraiman opines, "For though his book takes on European culture generally and does in fact range widely among genres, nations, and eras, its argument nevertheless implies a kind of synecdoche in which this culture [of colonization] is best represented by the novel, the novel by the English novel, and the English novel by Austen" (218). Fraiman here observes the

problematized status Said accords Austen, who is representative of the way culture gets to be connected, “often aggressively, with the nation or state” (Fraiman 218; Said xiii). Said thinks that this xenophobic association purposefully distinguishes “us from them” (xiii). Austen is central to Englishness, then, but not in a neutral way, as her works at best produce “positive ideas of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behavior, moral values,” and at worst go further by not resisting horrible imperialist activities (Said 81).²⁶ Mary Favret agrees that along with Shakespeare, Austen is “the most English writer” in the minds of the English populace (“Free” 166).

Like Said, Moretti also recognizes Austen’s dubious centrality to an English / British cultural narrative (Atlas 15). Said and Moretti share common ground in finding Austen’s “geo-narrative system” to be an enormously “successful version of this opaque overlap of England and Britain,” where England forms a part of the United Kingdom, but a “dominant part, that claims the right to stand in for the whole” and “devalues other worlds” at the same time (Atlas 15; Said 81). This dominant part exerts its influence on the rest of the kingdom, and thus cultural hegemony in part explains why comfort, important at first for only a relative few in central England, becomes widespread. As Nancy Armstrong explains in Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel, moral hegemony was successful in nineteenth-century England because of consent, not force, in the leisure reading of novels (19). For Armstrong, the domestic woman exercises a type of power, a conclusion Said would probably agree with, insofar as Austen is concerned. For Mansfield Park’s characters, Antigua means riches according to Said, and Austen sees wealth as turned into “propriety, order, and, at the

end of the novel, comfort, an added good” (91). Said is not really exploring comfort, however; he goes on to say it is “added” at the end because the novel has destabilized the lives of its characters, and now the deserving can enjoy being “properly at home, and at rest” (qtd. Said 91).

If comfort is the endgame of Said’s Mansfield Park critique, it serves as the starting point for Moretti in his discussion of Austen’s Pride and Prejudice. Moretti defines *bildungsroman* historically as the “comfort of civilization,” in which one’s growth as an individual appears to occur seamlessly with one’s “social integration as a simple *part of a whole*” (World 16; “Comfort” 116). He claims that in the classic *bildungsroman*, unconcerned with the extraordinary person or “universal aims,” one learns to direct the plot of one’s life and to strengthen ties to a community, which is why this novel form always ends with marriage, as its purpose is to produce “full and happy men” (“Comfort” 118). Tellingly, women’s happiness is not accounted for in the *bildungsroman*. It is the community and not the family that is at stake in Moretti’s view—though Julia Prewitt Brown reminds us that in Austen’s culture, the two were much the same, as marriage and family took up a far more “public and central position” regarding “social government and economic arrangements” than they would in the mid-nineteenth century (59). Moretti perceives the marital tie to be actually a “pact” between the (culturally imagined male) individual and the universe (World 22); women in the gentry are not powerless, however, and they are part of the agreement also (Prewitt Brown 58). For Austen, reaching this agreement acts as a conduit for giving comfort (via a satisfying ending, at least on the surface) to her characters and readers.

Austen responds to English cultural anxieties with her own description of comfort's roles, so the nineteenth-century's strict attention to mental and physical comfort may be due in part to Austen. In her novels, comfort and Englishness work to (re)define each other, and in the process define Austen as well. While Chapters III and IV explore Austen's (heroines') own investment in the search for comfort, the heart of the marriage plot device and of familial relations in the novels, this section of the history chapter takes as its work the construction of a broad historical depiction of comfort's arrival and various expressions in Europe, contrasted with the very particular meanings and delineations of comfort in England. The larger cultural interest in and dependence on comfort influenced Austen's handling of it in her works. Himani Bannerji cautions that "the writing of history" is not "a transparent affair, but it is not innocent either" because it contains an ideological-political aspect (290).²⁷ "Theoretical impulses from Foucault and Foucauldians have been influential in introducing new spaces through breaks and ruptures," Bannerji explains (293). Some of these breaks and fissures allow comfort as a matter of national identity and even pride to be seen, as I demonstrate in this section.

An author Austen probably read, Mary Wollstonecraft, argues in An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (1794) that the French lack an idea of "that independent, comfortable situation, in which contentment is sought rather than happiness; because the slaves of pleasure or power" are only moved by high emotion.²⁸ Wollstonecraft proceeds to explain that the French do not have a word for comfort, that "state of existence, in which reason renders serene and useful the

days, which passion would only cheat with flying dreams of happiness” (231).

Wollstonecraft was not alone in her views about comfort: her contemporaries noticed that the word comfort “had to be exported into German and re-exported into French in the course of the eighteenth century” (Langford 117). In a footnote to Wollstonecraft’s explanation, editors Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler note that the French word “confort” was defined as “assistance” until the “modern English meaning was adopted at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (231). I assume that these editors’ modern meaning coincides with the OED’s definition of comfort in the “ordinary current sense” as generally “to soothe in grief or trouble; to relieve of mental distress; to console, solace.” A further entry in the OED notes that the rendering of comfort as “to bring into a comfortable state (of body and feelings), allay physical discomfort, make comfortable” applies only to modern use, so that quotations from before 1755 merely lead towards this usage, yet modern comfort is associated with England prior to the turn of the nineteenth century.

Though insightful from a cultural perspective, Wollstonecraft’s translation of French probably cannot be trusted, as Todd, author of Mary Wollstonecraft: A Revolutionary Life notes, “the later trouble Mary had with French indicates little progress with the language as a child” (12).²⁹ Even so, Wollstonecraft’s misreading of comfort indicates its primary association with England in the minds of many British citizens and may point to the lack of comfort Wollstonecraft herself endured while outside of her native country’s borders, an experience common to the British traveler abroad (M. Morgan 143).

Almost sixty years after Wollstonecraft denigrated French pleasure contrasted with solid Anglo comfort, Caroline M. Kirkland's A Book for the Home Circle (1853) expresses similar thoughts about this misunderstood concept:

'Comfort' is one of those significant and precious words that are apt to be much abused. [. . .] It is so good a word, in its true character, that none but honest and true people can use it with propriety. [. . .] The French, who are lovers of *pleasure*, have been obliged to transplant our word *comfort* bodily into their language, as they had before naturalized a correlative word—*home*, after they had adopted the idea. Strange that we, proud as we are of our right to it, should ever misuse it. (197-98)

As did Wollstonecraft before her, Kirkland connects pleasure with French culture but comfort with the English language, in a move reminiscent of Robert Southey's description of comfort in his Letters from England (1807). In Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930, Katherine Grier accurately views Kirkland's intimating comfort as the "stable, modest, and true result of self-knowledge," but Grier's suggestion that "the very concept of comfort was also Anglo-American" reveals the limitations inherent in the scope of her work (107). As indicated by Wollstonecraft's comments on what French culture lacks, modern comfort is associated with England prior to the turn of the nineteenth century (231). Possibly English people of the middle class are afraid to claim "pleasure," seeing it as dubious in moral quality and French in origin.

The idea that the French also adopted "home" from the English is not original to Kirkland; Archibald Alison explains in Travels in France, during the Years 1814-1815 the lack of a dividing line between public and private: "The first thing that strikes a stranger is, that a Frenchman has no home: He lives in the middle of the public" (qtd.

Langford 107). A passion for the private, “fireside environment” of home, then, is something uniquely English, a preference that has remained a constant of English culture since the eighteenth-century (M. Morgan 142).

Unlike the middle classes, the upper classes in England choose not to connect themselves with comfort. The Duke of Wellington ascribes his English troops’ propensity for desertion (though not in battle) to their love of comfort: “they liked being dry and under cover. And then, that extraordinary caprice which always pervades the English Character!” (qtd. Langford 132). Unlike Wellington’s troops, the Dandies and the Romantics elevate pleasure over comfort, revealing their supposed superiority to the middle classes (Campbell 52-53). While George Crabb, author of English Synonymes, praises comfort as within the reach of even poor people, leaving pleasure for the indolently wealthy, he overlooks the devaluation for comfort among these upper class groups of the eighteenth century (357). Perhaps the emerging middle classes’ new-found buying power produces a desire in the upper classes to look for new or to reassert old ways of expressing their superior taste. The Dandies and Romantics’ “manifested preferences” for pleasure over comfort are thus what Pierre Bourdieu calls the practical affirmation of “inevitable differences,” allowing the gentry to hang on to their cultural capital, even in the face of a changing market (56). The upper classes’ reaction has to do with the increasing availability of comfort (in the shape of warm clothes, pictures, china, and music) to the non-wealthy. Certainly by the mid-nineteenth century, the spread of comfort and the middle classes had merged to the point that in his Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830-1900, John Gloag concludes with this somewhat

bland epitaph for the Victorians: “*They were Confident, Comfortable, and Good*” (234).

Comfort as a means of national self-expression had become an integral part of what it meant to be English. By the nineteenth century’s arrival, comfort designated the material ease, health and “convenience” of the modern age (Crowley, Invention x). John Crowley believes that reforming impulses and social theorists such as Thomas Malthus led to comfort’s new associations with leisure, redress of poverty, and expression of “elegant taste” in the different levels of society, and Langford notes that the concept of “Englishness” is fairly new, with dictionaries citing its first appearance in 1805 (“Luxury” 147; Langford 1). “National character” was a concept foreigners in England identified, interested as they were in scrutinizing Britain as a “new prodigy among nations” (7, 4). Meanwhile, British commentators did their best to bolster opinions about the English, attempting to portray certain unwanted elements as foreign [read “French”], but they were not (Pleasures 122). For example, the Morning Chronicle in 1815 boasts, “it is to the cultivation of moral qualities that England is indebted for her power and influence, from the want of them France may be mischievous but she never will be great” (qtd. Quinlan 253). England is morally superior to vacuous France, then, and this advantage will lead to other triumphs, presumably cultural and military in nature. My next section directly implicates the warfare between the two countries for promoting English dislike of the French and for creating English identity in contradistinction to their rivals.

That a particularly English structure of consciousness would operate in ways different from another culture’s is an idea confirmed in Morgan’s National Identities.³⁰

She compares numerous English travelers' accounts of continental experiences in the nineteenth century to discover the "centrality of the concept of comfort for Englishness" (120). While to the English mind, comfort is paramount, English visitors to other countries discover that their cherished ideas of comfort are not universally held. An Englishman visiting Australia in the early nineteenth century noted happily that residence in Sydney provided "the English idea of comfort to the stranger who has long been absent from the only land (perhaps) in which genuine comfort can be found as the pervading *genius loci*" (qtd. Langford 121). From Portugal, Lord Byron writes in 1809 that "comfort must not be expected by folks that go a pleasuring," as "the word comfort could not be applied to anything I ever saw out of England" (qtd. Marchand 24, 69). For Byron, adventuring in foreign regions meant giving up the palpable enjoyment of Anglicized living. The three most frequently mentioned "comforts" identified by journal writers as both English and absent in other countries are of the domestic variety: carpets, fires, and lots of hot water for washing. Other particularly English comforts also include: drapes, blankets, well-aired rooms, "spring-cushioned" couches, hotel room soaps, and drains, which were important because of their relation to cleanliness, a major factor in comfort for the English mind and body (M. Morgan 143).

Although Morgan does not say so, the English longing for curtains when away from home demonstrates the British desire for privacy and might have also served as another way of protecting the sanctity of the (moveable) domestic sphere from foreign intrusion, via the gaze of non-English eyes. Braudel argues that "privacy was an eighteenth-century innovation" (I: 309), and Lorna Weatherill also notices the link

between window curtains in private residences and “a desire for domestic comfort, decoration, warmth and privacy.” Weatherill adds that in the first half of the eighteenth century, curtains were rare in most places (212). Morgan cites M.F. Tupper’s Paterfamilias: Diary of Everybody’s Tour (1856), in which, after viewing marble, lacquer, and polish in German homes, Tupper was obliged to note that “comfort is not the word for continental houses, but magnificence” (qtd. 147). Morgan interprets Tupper’s comment as revelatory regarding perceived cultural differences between the English regard for “comfort and practicality” and the Continental love of “splendour and ornament” (148).³¹ Though some English people might be able to admire certain things about foreign cultures, frequent wars with France and constant anxieties created an atmosphere of competition and distrust between the two countries.

2.5 England versus France

The previous section outlines the English sense of their own superior culture, and this portion of the chapter follows a related query: the English versus French antagonism. In the eighteenth century the English as a nation often felt, or fought against, a sense of inferiority to the French, who were spoken of derisively in an English attempt at deflecting attention away from their rival’s many outstanding attributes. Colley proposes that “imagining the French as their vile opposites [. . .] became a way for Britons—particularly the poorer and less privileged—to contrive for themselves a converse and flattering identity” (368). It was not only the lower classes that imagined the French negatively, however. Kelvin Everest claims that throughout the war, “life in

England evolved a defensive cultural insularity that severely hampered every kind of French influence, including the translation of books” (qtd. Winborn 129). Langford suggests that during the period of “recurrent Anglo-French warfare” in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, xenophobia in England is actually Francophobia (222). For example, in 1779, arguments surfaced in England to let English diplomats “use their own tongue rather than French” because that language “was culturally contaminating.” It was not until 1819, however, that Foreign Secretaries actively encouraged English-speaking during conversation at non-English courts (Langford 90).

All the English ambivalence about French modes of conduct surfaced in Austen’s own family circle. For Austen personally, an introduction to French ways of thinking occurred during the 1786 Christmas holiday, when her twenty-five year-old cousin Eliza (néé Hancock) de Feuillide returned from France after a nine-year absence. Biographer Jon Spence writes that the eleven-year-old Austen was startled to find herself “entranced” with her rich French cousin, whom she had assumed she “would never like”; Tomalin and Warren Roberts concur that the two became fond of each other (Spence 36; Tomalin 11; Roberts 32).

Twenty years later, Austen would recast Eliza de Feuillide and her French ways in the character of Mary Crawford of Mansfield Park, in Spence’s opinion, to give vent to the “unsettling experience” of relating to her cousin, who cast aspersions on Henry Austen’s half-hearted designs for the church, even as they fell in love with each other (Halperin 48; Spence 192; Roberts 147). Edmund Bertram, second son of Sir Thomas in Mansfield Park is self-destined for the clergy, and while he early on comes to love Mary

Crawford, her averred distaste for the church prevents him from proposing. Edmund tells his cousin Fanny Price that Mary “does not think evil, but she speaks it—speaks it in playfulness,” and it is Mary’s clever, frolicsome ways that are attractive to Edmund, Fanny, and Austen herself (MP 269). However, Robert Polhemus contends that an advanced sense of humor in Mansfield Park goes with “frivolity and immorality” (25). One of the characteristics of Mary’s speech is the use of French words, especially to describe social or moral faux pas: her own flawed morals are thus revealed, as in her support for her friend Janet’s “desirable match” to a wealthy man; the only drawback is that he “turns out ill-tempered and *exigeant*” (MP 361). In warning Fanny against listening to the rumor of Henry Crawford’s adultery with Fanny’s married cousin Maria, Mary reiterates that her brother “is blameless, and in spite of a moment’s *etourderie* thinks of nobody but you” (437).³² Mary’s want of principle regarding what Edmund terms the “dreadful crime committed by her brother and my sister” leads him to give Mary up forever, though not without some regret for her high spirits and their friendship (457-58). Austen might have seen her cousin Eliza as sharing Mary’s modern views on sexual liaisons since “lively, light-hearted” Eliza carried on an open flirtation with Austen’s brother Henry while her own unfaithful husband was detained in France. Roberts writes that the Comte de Feuillide’s own mistress testified against him at his Paris trial; both Eliza and Austen knew about his “romantic escapades” (21).³³

With the death of the Comte de Feuillide in 1794, the moneyed Eliza and the portionless Henry Austen were married three years later (Spence 107), an alliance not unlike Burney’s to impoverished General D’Arbly. The Eliza-Henry marriage turned

out well enough, and Austen's mistrust of her cousin's intentions subsided into relief, although she continued to associate France with dissipation and pleasure, writing to Caroline Austen upon her brother Edward's return from Paris that he views "the French as one could wish, disappointed in every thing" (9 Sept. 1816). A happy marriage between Henry and Eliza taught their sister and cousin something about passion and patience, especially when united by the comfort of "a good fortune on one side," at least (NA 124).

Without examining gender and culture through a critical lens, as Austen does, Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins's 1811 novel, The Countess and Gertrude; or Modes of Discipline, takes an active role in the general system of blame-shifting, contrasting as it does upright English behavior with sly French ways. The flaws of flirtatious Lady Elma are laid at the door of her "French education," coupled with "a little vanity" (IV: 383). Once Lady Elma turns the attentions of Lord Luxmore from the heroine Gertrude Aubrey to herself, their wise friend Mr. Mudd admits, "I love that dear woman as I do my eyes; but I can see her faults, her French faults" (IV: 414). Mudd further expostulates that while he "could forgive [Lady Elma] for loving that gallant fellow Sydenham; such a man is worthy any woman's love; but even then, she could not forbear her coquettish French tricks" (IV: 415). While Lady Elma's conduct comes out all right in the end, the underhanded part of it is credited to her wily French upbringing.³⁴

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thus saw two on-going contests between Britain and France: for territory abroad and for a "triumphant nationality" at

home; both fights in Said's view "contrast 'Englishness' with 'the French'," identities considered as already firmly established, not just in process (83).³⁵ Polarizing literary France and England, Maurice Quinlan notes that "most Englishmen [. . .] distrusted the French and believed them to be rascals" (103-04). James Boswell felt that way; he also records the following conversation between francophobic Samuel Johnson and Dr. Adams on the former's sanguine hopes of completing his massive Dictionary in a short span of time:

Johnson: Sir, I have no doubt that I can do it in three years.

Adams: But the French Academy, which consists of forty members, took forty years to compile their Dictionary.

Johnson: Sir, thus it is. This is the proportion. Let me see; Forty times forty is sixteen hundred. As three to sixteen hundred, so is the proportion of an Englishman to a Frenchman. (Life 108)

In actuality, Johnson took more than eight years to finish his project. Rüdiger Schreyer affirms Johnson's awareness of his Dictionary's status as "rival of the French dictionary, a matter of national pride and jealous comparison" (69). The boast of "Dictionary" Johnson was immortalized in an epigram composed by his old pupil and friend, the stage actor David Garrick, upon the Dictionary's publication:

"On Johnson's Dictionary"

Talk of war with a Briton, he'll boldly advance,
That one English soldier will beat ten of France;
Would we alter the boast from the sword to the pen,
Our odds are still greater, still greater our men;
[.]
And Johnson, well-arm'd like a hero of yore,
Has beat forty French, and will beat forty more! (qtd. Life 180)

Beneath Johnson and Garrick's boast that one English dictionary compiler is more than equal to forty members of the French Academy perhaps lies a fear that the

reverse may be true, on a one-to-one ratio.³⁶ Boswell admits, for instance, that though he urged Johnson to communicate with Voltaire as a worthy opponent, “He said, he perhaps might; but he never did” (Life 302). Boswell records Johnson as praising the English for “cultivat[ing] both their soil and their reason better than any other people; but [he] admitted that the French, though not the highest perhaps, in any department of literature, yet in every department were very high” (Life 379). Johnson is here fairer to England’s rival nation than his earlier boast about beating forty Frenchmen would indicate, although he still cannot admit to French superiority in literature, an opinion at variance with Brewer’s evidence for the heavy (though unconfessed) English reliance on French writings and translations (Pleasures 84). In 1764, Boswell himself barely escaped dueling with a French captain over what editor Frank Brady describes as “some insulting remarks he had made about the French.” One year later Boswell recalled this event in his diary as an “exposure” of his own “absurd prejudices against the French” (Grand Tour 102). Boswell may have been able to see his prejudices as ridiculous from a later vantage point, but they were opinions with a long history in British culture. As Margaret Doody explains in her well-known biography of Burney, “anxieties about imminent invasion, or imminent fiscal collapse, made a number of English people uneasy, and the national nervousness in the depth of the war years had an effect on personal lives” (277). The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, the loss of their American colonies, and the French Revolution, all provoked fears in England.³⁷

On a literary level, France was also problematic for English writers.³⁸ Moretti plots out the origin / destination for many nineteenth-century novels’ most heinous

villains and “major narrative disasters”: his map reveals France as the epicenter of wrong-doing in novel plots (Atlas 30).³⁹ France as locus for villains in the English imagination is not a nineteenth-century convention only: in Burney’s first novel, Evelina (1778), the title character’s biological father has been duped about her identity because the heroine’s former nurse took her own baby to France and passed it off on Sir John Belmont as his child. That France signals immorality while England represents virtue in literature is indicated, perhaps unintentionally, in The Heroine’s Text, where Miller writes, “if the feminocentric eighteenth-century novel can be shown to end at some chronological and literarily historical point, it ends in France with Sade, and in England with Jane Austen” (151). For both writers, woman’s place is a domestic one, but the difference lies in woman as object or as subject, her place in the bedroom (Sade) vs. the drawing room (Austen), another indication of France’s cultural alignment with pleasure and England’s connection to comfort.

2.6 Comfort Associated with Women and the Home

This section of the history chapter marshalls evidence for the close association among English womanhood, comfort, and domesticity, connections important to a better understanding of Austen’s rendering of comfort’s purposes. Comfort in Austen’s novels has a lot to do with the marriage market. Said describes her marriage endings as an “accession to stability” for the characters (71), and Austen comforts her readers with solid, happy marriages at novel’s end while doing without marriage’s stability in her own life, perhaps because it did not promise comfort for her.⁴⁰ Marriage, though

ultimately not the path Austen chose, was not always already out of her reach, especially not given the range of her imagination.⁴¹ Less than three years before her death, Austen could write convincingly about the sort of life partner best suited to herself and to Fanny Knight, even vicariously enjoying her niece's titillating venture to a man's bedroom (18-20 Nov. 1814).

The category of comfort for Austen apparently includes comfort sex. Virginia Blum finds Austen's readers—contemporaries as well as recent ones—understanding that the “marriage plot” represents “the marriage bed” (174). Although it has been acknowledged by more recent critics than Charlotte Brontë that there is no sex in Jane Austen because of her “healthy ignorance” of the world, her 20 November 1814 letter to Fanny Knight proves otherwise (Hubbard 329; Steeves 333; S. Morgan 39). Austen enjoys hearing about Fanny's effort to rekindle her affection for John Plumtre, as she attempted “to excite [her] own feelings by a visit to his room.” “Feelings” may be a euphemism for the body in this instance, a logical slippage for Austen who achieves what Mary Ann O'Farrell calls a “remarkable negotiation between the pressures of erotics and manners” (9). Apparently the frolic ended on a humorous, rather than an amorous note, as Plumtre's “dirty Shaving Rag” provided much amusement for both niece and voyeur aunt.⁴²

For its part, the Protestant church gradually started viewing “mutual comfort” as the main reason for sex in marriage, instead of an instinctual propagation of the species, once Puritanism began to lose its grip on English society at the end of the seventeenth century, as Lawrence Stone has explained in The Family, Sex and Marriage in England,

1500-1800 (176). In Disciplines of Virtue: Girls' Culture in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, Lynne Vallone also notices that the roles chaste girls are taught to aspire to, of wife- and motherhood, are sexualized ones (24). While Austen was unimpressed by the unrelenting number of childbirths and its dangers for the married women in her family and among her acquaintance, her writings testify to an ideal in marriage apart from its reproductive tendencies.⁴³

In her 20 November 1814 letter to Fanny Knight, Austen discusses her ideal marriage partner: “There *are* such beings in the World perhaps, one in a Thousand, as the Creature You & I should think perfection, where Grace & Spirit are united to Worth, where the Manners are equal to the Heart & Understanding.” Austen then acknowledges the unlikelihood of discovering this paragon: “but such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a Man of Fortune, the Brother of your particular friend, & belonging to your own County.” Speaking with tongue-in-cheek, Austen nevertheless specifies her requirements for an ideal partner: an inheritance, real knowledge of the person’s character as the sibling of a dear friend, and a home in close proximity to her own family, in addition to all the graces of person, warm feelings, and sound mind that go almost without saying. Austen’s recurrent use of the guardian / lover in her fiction suggests that for her, the ideal relationship is a “marriage founded on both moral equality and mutual sexual love” (Menon 77). The comforts of a soft marriage bed and a good income are connected in Austen’s novels and letters, as she writes about home and communal bonds, comforts that Elmo Howell terms the “old standbys of the English novel” (35).

As this chapter has demonstrated, the English believed that their society possessed the only true notion of comfort and denied that comfort was to be found elsewhere, either geographically or psychologically. Historians have found evidence from contemporary sources claiming that “comfort in England is not merely a fireside companion on a winter evening,” (though it is that) “but ‘*a presence*’ in which we feel ourselves every day and every where” (qtd. Langford 121). Grier’s research leads her to designate comfort as a “position” entailing “a highly self-conscious domestic ideal assert[ing] that middle class family life lay outside the shallow world of purchasing an identity” (viii). While comfort may be viewed as a state of consciousness, that perspective is informed by the physical realities of home.

In The Family Monitor, or a Help to Domestic Happiness (1828), Reverend James believes that only within the confines of the family establishment can a son learn true citizenship, as “it is by the fire side and upon the family hearth, that loyalty and patriotism, and every public virtue grows” (3), an idea reminiscent of the ancient Roman model of the patrician mother teaching her son to be upright. Offering a sentiment that had been gathering strength in England since the late eighteenth century, James remarks that “comfort and order, as well as money, are domestic wealth,” while he questions whether these can be “rationally expected in the absence of female arrangement?” (33). James returns repeatedly to comfort as the foundation for every other virtue arising within the home, and providing comfort of all kinds is designated specifically as women’s business.

Crabb’s 1845 English Synonymes [sic] calls comfort that genuine English word,

describ[ing] what England only affords: we may find *pleasure* in every country; but *comfort* is to be found in our own country only: the grand feature in *comfort* is substantiality; in that of *pleasure* is warmth. [. . . Comfort] is the most durable sort of pleasure. *Comfort* must be sought for at home; *pleasure* is pursued abroad: *comfort* depends upon a thousand nameless trifles which daily arise; it is the relief of a pain, the heightening of a gratification, the supply of a want, or the removal of an inconvenience. (357)⁴⁴

Not only does Crabb position comfort in England, but like most of his contemporaries, he locates it in the domestic arena (“*comfort* must be sought for at home”), where an unnamed but undoubtedly female member of the household alleviates suffering, supplies needs, and smoothes over the annoyances of daily life (357).⁴⁵ Supplying comfort, then, turns out to be woman’s work, an unspecified duty that nevertheless has national implications, as it makes England at once “home” and homey.

To protect and to control wives and children, the middle class determined to turn their homes into comfort havens (Davidoff and Hall 23). While aristocratic leadership was long based on “lavish display and consumption,” the middle class emphasized “domestic moderation,” argue Davidoff and Hall (21). Divorced from its “private economic function,” the household in McKeon’s view eventually took on the “(private) status of the modern family, also valued for its negative liberty from public control.” For McKeon, “family behavior takes over not only domestic financial management, but also the tasks of primary socialization—of moral governance, spiritual pedagogy, and personal authentication—once performed by public institutions of state and church but now defined and valued in opposition” to what are seen as bad “‘public’ values” (“Secret” 180).

Woman's connection with the home is not automatic or universal, but derives in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from a "Teutonic model," showcasing the "English home[']s . . .] association with the domestic virtues of women," according to Langford's Englishness Identified (105). Under the pen name of Don Manuel Alvarez Espreilla, Southey writes about the importance of home and comfort to the English in the early nineteenth century:

There are two words in their language on which these people pride themselves, and which they say cannot be translated. *Home* is the one, by which an Englishman means his house. [. . .] The other word is *comfort*; it means all the enjoyments and privileges of *home*; and here I must confess that these proud islanders have reason for their pride. In their social intercourse and their modes of life they have enjoyments which we never dream of. (I: 180, 182)

Privileging comfort, the English people Southey observes define their (and his) culture as a superior one by their attention to domestic matters. The writer also points out several faults in the English character and habit in other passages. Austen read this work aloud, criticizing Southey to her sister for being "horribly anti-english. He deserves to be the foreigner he assumes" (Doody, "Reading" 352; 2 Oct. 1808).

"Home life and comfort" came to be more valued on the British side of the Channel, it was argued, since the long British winters forced people to "seek refuge indoors" (M. Morgan 50). A Portuguese visitor to England in 1896, Oliveira Martins, also finds the "English preoccupation with home, and their science of domestic comfort" resulting from the nasty climate (qtd. Hardyment 18). By contrast, given the milder climates of France and Italy people "relax[ed] outdoors in public by sipping, sitting, conversing, knitting, reading," practices which discomfited English observers, who viewed these activities as strictly in-door ones (M. Morgan 140). On the continent

comfort is located in divergent places—in al fresco dining, for instance—than in England, where comfort is bound up in the private family circle: the fireside, soft beds, hot tea, and curtains in windows are all locations for comfort.

These material niceties are only one kind of marker for comfort's expression in England, however: ideas of comforting thoughts, easiness in one's mind and in one's position in life, are equally important, even related, as material comforts have the power to bring about psychological ease. In the late eighteenth century, pursuing comfort seems increasingly reasonable as Austen's Pride and Prejudice demonstrates: though not a love match, Charlotte Lucas's marriage to foolish Mr. Collins renders her "perfectly happy," as everything in their home appears "neat and comfortable," even to her friend Elizabeth's critical eye (178, 156).⁴⁶ In the nineteenth century, comforts and comforting become sentimentalized, not surprising given their relation to the woman as angel in the house, evidenced in the Reverend John Angell James's 1828 description of his favorite domestic scene: that of a loving daughter caring for a terminally ill parent for years (132). That this situation might prove draining to the care-giver or have any negative consequences apparently escapes him, though Nancy Chodorow maintains that "nursing the sick—a woman's responsibility—often plays a role in the genesis of hysteria: the nurse's fatigue combines with the need to suppress all emotion" (Femininities 13). In a prolonged and strained situation, mental distress usually is the outcome. In Austen's Persuasion, Captain Wentworth worries about the effects of the "horror and distress" Anne Elliot has been "involved in—the stretch of mind, the wear of spirits!" after their friend Louisa's fall and subsequent coma, though Anne reassures him that she

experienced “anxiety and distress during the last two hours” only of their visit to Lyme (183-184). A capable nurse, Anne also rationalizes that once “pain is over, the remembrance of it often becomes a pleasure” (184). Care-giving with a definite end is both comfort and pleasure.

Conversely, English depression may also stem from the abundant time for leisure available to most people above the working classes. Patricia Meyer Spacks finds that boredom was not recognized in the eighteenth century because people believed in personal responsibility, and writers such as Samuel Johnson, James Boswell, and Thomas Gray saw in boredom moral failure and helplessness (11). For Spacks, ennui implies a judgment on the universe from people who are “superior to their environment,” while boredom responds to the immediate (12). Women’s comforting of often male others is the domestic relation prioritized: the very comfort women provide for others may have staved off their own tedium while abetting that of the men already suffering from an inactivity that dares not speak its name. Meyer Spacks further reveals that many eighteenth-century women viewed boredom as a man’s luxury, a connection that makes sense given women’s link to allocating comfort for those in the domestic sphere, an unending task that might provide the “focused action” needed to forestall boredom and the melancholy thoughts accompanying it (Boredom 97, 44).⁴⁷ Bored at home, Boswell was always eager for the excitement of London, leaving his peaceful family estate in Scotland behind. His journal entry for 30 July 1763 records Boswell’s feeling “warm comfort at being again in London” (Journals 330). Comforts for Boswell involve constant activities and stimulating conversation.

Meanwhile, the English countryside offered other kinds of comforts. In nature and the country, various ways of life and a plethora of values were thought to be represented: though cherished simultaneously in the eighteenth century, these varying versions of England / Britishness were often at odds with one another. According to Brewer, the countryside could be restful, even indolent, or it could be a place of “social harmony and virtuous self-sufficient work,” a “site of aesthetic pleasure,” or a place to gain knowledge of oneself in “nature” (Pleasures 619). Butler explains that Austen, like every eighteenth-century moralizer of whatever stripe, “prefer[red] the country to the town”: for the novelist, the country is linked with community, where individuals have specific responsibilities to the group (War 224).⁴⁸ Eagleton ascribes a “traditionalist attachment to the local” to Walter Scott and to Austen, who is “suspicious of metropolitan mobility” (101). Austen’s own comfort in the country is well-known, as is her dislike of Bath.

In art as well as life, what Moretti calls the “introverted [central], rural England” was seen as safest and the point of origin for numerous heroines, while London, Bath, and seaside resorts served as the locus for “marriage market [. . .] transactions” such as “scandals, slanders, seductions, elopements—disgrace” (Atlas 18). In Pride and Prejudice, Mrs. Bennet’s knowing pronouncement reveals her fear of society’s misconception of the country as a scandal-free land of unchanging quietude, as she assures an astonished Darcy that “there is quite as much of *that* going on in the country as in town” (P&P 43). Her daughter Lydia’s later escapades in Brighton demonstrate, however, that town offers more temptations than the safe countryside, where all

Austen's heroines are brought up. Whether on comfortable landed estates in Surry (Emma Woodhouse), Sussex (the Dashwood sisters), Northampton (Fanny Price), and Somersetshire (Anne Elliot), most eventually remove to discomfoting London (the Dashwoods, Jane Bennet, Harriet Smith) or Bath (Anne Elliot, Catherine Morland) in order to meet eligible young men who are in short supply at home (NA 16-17). A journey to town also serves to test the self-understanding each heroine has gleaned while growing up in the country.

While in Bath, country-bred Catherine Morland learns about landscapes and the picturesque from her mentor Henry Tilney, who believes her to possess "a great deal of natural taste" (NA 111). Henry's lecture demonstrates James Buzard's argument: the picturesque "retained the assumptions of gender given to it by its founders, who imagined a male art of seeing that could correct and complete what a feminized landscape held forth" (16). The imagined viewer is masculine, then, imposing his gaze on the feminine rural setting.

The landscapes of Austen contemporary John Constable (1776-1837) depict the ways in which comfort constitutes a woman's work. Stephen Daniels examines the ways in which the works of this English painter are used to "promote the virtues of nature and of nation" (9). Daniels argues that Constable's display of Willy Lott's home in The Haywain is catering to "two versions of domestic pastoral" (13). The sound, neatly-kept up farm house is in one view as "plain and durable as the farmer who inhabited it." Alternately, Daniels thinks the painting can be seen "more prettily," with the "creeping foliage, puff of hearth smoke, and the woman washing or drawing water from the

stream” (14). Both representations fall under Crabb’s extended definition of (English) comfort as either “substantial,” similar to the English yeoman farmer, or alternately involving the taking care of “a thousand nameless trifles,” here represented by the woman who both beautifies the scene and by her labor makes it possible (Crabb 357).

The theory supporting Constable’s painterly practice is elucidated in Totality and Infinity, where Emmanuel Levinas links the home specifically to woman, that “other whose presence is discreetly an absence, with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy [. . .]. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation” (155).⁴⁹

Kowaleski-Wallace adds, “Often depicted in relation to a domesticated fire—fireplace or hearth,” women have for a long time been connected with the “civilizing processes” (74). For Levinas, woman functions as memory and as the inside of the home, as she unobtrusively works to welcome and to care for—in other words, to comfort.

Situated at home, eighteenth-century English women reported more satisfaction with the birth of girls: as homemaker Anne Robbins expresses, “girls have more the power of being *home comforts* than boys” since they need not go off to school (qtd. Vickery 289), a sentiment Austen’s Emma Woodhouse shares in reflecting on her happiness over the birth of a girl to her former governess Mrs. Weston and her husband, who already have a grown (step)son, and for whom a daughter “would be a great comfort” (E 461). That the home arranges “meaningful existence” (particularly for girls) is one of the points Vallone raises (85). Girls’ staying power was evidenced in the home of the Rev. George and Cassandra Austen: of their eight children, only one sickly (and

deaf-mute) son, George, and the two daughters, Cassandra and Jane, remained unmarried. Of the three, only the girls stayed at home: George was boarded elsewhere in the neighborhood for the entirety of his seventy-two years (Le Faye, Letters 486-87), a remove signifying that home comfort for the Austens (and for their society as a whole) meant not having to care for a child with disabilities. Only the daughters of the family are deemed capable of keeping their parents company at home.

Thus, the rise of the middle class, English womanhood, domesticity, English nationalism, and Jane Austen's novels are connected at the level of comfort. Although comfort can signify either virtue or vice, for Austen, actual comfort is always a good, in a way that it is not for libertines, who reject comfort for pleasure, or for evangelicals, who deny physical comfort in preparation for the hereafter. As a member of the Anglican Church, itself taking a middle-of-the-road position between denial and indulgence of self, Austen's attitude toward the comforts of home amidst trying circumstances is evidenced in her "cold comfort" novels, Mansfield Park, Sense and Sensibility, and Persuasion, the trio Inger Sigrun Thomsen calls Austen's "darker and quieter" works (97), the novels that address women's lives where comfort is absent, and which make the work of comforting a litmus test for marriage. In the "cold comfort" works, the protagonists comfort others, but their help is not appreciated for much of the novel. Comfort's historical role in English society, defining the middle classes and determining women's labors at home, is significant to this dissertation's reading of Austen's cold (and warm) comfort novels, as it describes the conditions of home comfort that Austen both observed and wrote about in her works.

2.7 Postscript

The British Library's Austen collection includes a curious specimen: a 1686 letter from Lady Chandos in Constantinople, where her husband was ambassador, to her eldest daughter Mary Brydges in England (Chandos). While Austen-Leigh's Memoir includes a facsimile of this "very old letter" (46-49), he does not mention a statement signed by Jane Austen's sister, Cassandra, which accompanies the letter and explains that Mary three years "afterwards married Theophilus [sic] Leigh Esq. of Addlestrop and was the grandmother of my mother." The letter documents the tough-minded response of the Austen sisters' great-great grandmother to her daughter—Jane Austen's youthful great-grandmother—Mary's request for an increase in allowance, specifically the sum of forty pounds per annum. Tomalin notes that Mary Brydges was the sister of the first Duke of Chandos and that Cassandra Austen's unusual name came about because their great-uncle the Duke married a Cassandra Willoughby, "and a ducal connection was something to be celebrated and signalled" [sic] (Tomalin 13). However, the name Cassandra was not the only inheritance handed down through the generations of Leigh women.

Lady Chandos begins her letter to "My dear Pall" by chiding her daughter for complaining about her allowance and stating that it is right for a young lady "to show herself housewifely & frugall [sic]."⁵⁰ Mary's mother reminds her that with so many brothers and sisters, she should not expect "from your father's condition as to fancy he is able to allow every one of you forty pounds a year." Lady Chandos claims to be

speaking in “plain downright English to you” because “I would not have you doubt but yet I love you as hartily [sic], as any child I have, & if you serve God and take good Courses, I promise you my kindness to you” [signed] Eliza. Chandos. The firm tone of this letter reminds Mary of her duty to family and to her gender, even as it promises her mother’s love, conditional on her daughter’s good behavior.

That this letter was preserved down through the generations and kept by Austen’s sister suggests that the novelist presumably was familiar with its contents. Austen’s mother’s own emotional distance from her younger daughter is here given a precedent in the Leigh family annals, as this letter may perhaps have served as a kind of in-house family conduct manual. Next to Elizabeth Chandos’s signature is the year 1686, with the year 1737 directly underneath it, underlined, and the number 51 beneath that. Possibly Austen’s maternal grandmother, Jane Walker Leigh, calculated the passage of time in the margins; Austen’s mother Cassandra was born in 1739 (Tomalin 14), too late to have done the math.

Other evidence for Austen’s familiarity with her Leigh ancestors’ history is brought forth in Spence’s biography. He writes that during the summer of 1794, Austen and her sister went to Addlestrop Park, Gloucestershire, the estate of the Leigh family, where Austen may have read Mary Leigh’s family history and been inspired by the events of one hundred years before: Theophilus Leigh’s five daughters would each get £3000 if they married a man chosen by their uncle, the Duke of Chandos—some did, some did not (87). Spence thinks the history “clarified for Jane Austen the common denominator all her heroines would share: good sense and right feeling in making

judgments, and enough money to prevent their fearing destitution” (90). For her “cold comfort” heroines especially, the lack of money—and thus comfort—is an overriding concern. “Comfort” for these protagonists represents a necessary threshold for a satisfactory existence, and financial independence allows many additional comforts: independence, time with family and friends, and habitation.

Notes

¹ The one-hundred year time span includes the publication dates of Samuel Johnson’s A Dictionary of the English Language (1755) and George Crabb’s English Synonymes (1845). This time frame also encompasses what historians Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson, P.K. O’Brien, and R. Quinault accept as the drawn-out period of industrial revolution in England (Dror Wahrman, Imagining the Middle Class: The Political Representation of Class in Britain, c. 1780-1840, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995: 3 n.4).

² Psychology is occasionally useful to my discussion of Austen and her novels. John Wiltshire accepts the practice of “psychologizing” characters as real people because even real people are “real” only to the “degree they become real in our thoughts and imaginations” (Recreating Jane Austen, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001: 103). According to J. E. Austen-Leigh’s account of his aunt in his Memoir (London: Folio Society, 1989), Austen did not see her own characters as merely words on the printed page, but “took a kind of parental interest” in them “and did not dismiss them from her thoughts when she had finished her last chapter” (139). Representing her characters as real people, Austen felt “personal affection” for Darcy and Elizabeth, and she told her nieces and nephews the details of her characters’ future lives: Mr. Woodhouse living for two years after Emma and Knightley’s marriage, Kitty Bennet marrying a clergyman in Pemberley’s vicinity (140), and in giving her characters a future, a past is implied as well.

³ That a collapse of the categories of eighteenth century and Victorian era can occur is discussed in Hilary M. Schor’s “Sorting, Morphing, and Mourning: A.S. Byatt Ghostwrites Victorian Fiction,” (Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century, ed. John Kucich and Dianne Sadoff, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000: 234-251). Schor describes the way in which Victorian fiction’s unmentioned rules “promise moral unity and historical veracity and generate adaptations” that indulge the present’s patronage of the past, so that we see Austen and Thomas Hardy as

contemporaries in this “new periodization” (234). In addition, Quinlan presents Austen and her contemporaries as an early part of the Victorian shift in thinking, thanks to the growth of what Leslie Stephen calls the “great comfortable middle-class” by the eighteenth-century’s end (qtd. Quinlan 59). Nicholas Mason finds that while Austen can be considered the “last great satirist of the Enlightenment, the archetypal Romantic-era woman, or the first great Victorian novelist,” she appears to have eluded the “clutches of chronology” (“Austen’s Emma and the Gendering of Enlightenment Satire,” Persuasions 25 (2003): 213-219).

⁴ In Joy Alexander’s “Anything Goes? Reading Mansfield Park” (in The Use of English 52.3 (2001): 239-251), she determines that “some form of the root-word ‘comfort’ occurs at least 129 times in Mansfield Park, which is a rate of practically once every three pages.” Alexander also admits that her figures for the variations on “comfort” “may not be completely accurate” (244).

The word “comforting” does not appear in Mansfield Park or any of Austen’s other novels except once in Northanger Abbey: “Catherine walked on to her chamber [. . .] comforting herself under the unpleasant impression [Captain Tilney’s] conduct had given her” (222). The heroine’s belief that she is about to meet Henry’s flirtatious brother at the abbey is incorrect; instead, the General has returned home in order to oust Catherine, upon discovering her to be less wealthy than he at first thought (NA 244).

⁵ For male-authored works such as Henry Fielding’s The History of Tom Jones (1749), “comfort” appears comparatively few times—thirty references in over 900 pages of text—always in its traditional, religious sense, as in Squire Allworthy’s invocation to Tom to “comfort [him]self” since the lot of a “condemned prisoner” has not befallen him after all. Tom has repented of his errors before permanent harm occurred (854). Although Laurence Sterne’s farcical The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (1759) contains chapters on everything from hobby horses to long noses to an accidental window sash castration, only fifteen instances of comfort occur, as in the narrator’s grudging admission that though he “triumph’d over” Eugenius, he did so “like a fool.—’Tis my comfort however, I am not an obstinate one” (179). Tobias Smollett’s The Expedition of Humphry Clinker (1771) also contains only a smattering of references (twenty-four) to comfort: an old man attempts to “make his old age easy and comfortable” (251), and Squire Bramble wishes to see his sister married and settled “comfortably in our own neighborhood” (273).

⁶ The classic argument for a “Great Tradition” is made in F.R. Leavis’s The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad (New York: New York UP, 1964), “in which Jane Austen serves as a sort of mother,” according to Janet Todd (The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800, New York: Columbia UP, 1989: 160). Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977) explains that “Greatness” for women writers often means only Austen, the Brontës, Eliot, and Woolf, so her critical work attempts to expand the canon (9).

⁷ David Lodge reveals another aspect of Burney's work that Austen makes use of. In Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002), arguing that Austen "discovered free indirect style" between the epistolary Elinor and Marianne and its recasting as Sense and Sensibility. He assumes that Austen found FIS in the works of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth, as it appears spottily, in fragments there (46).

⁸ I follow the standard abbreviations for Austen's novels in this as in my other dissertation chapters: E for Emma, NA for Northanger Abbey, MP for Mansfield Park, P&P for Pride and Prejudice, S&S for Sense and Sensibility, and P for Persuasion.

⁹ For the exposition of S&S's plot and the easy way in which an inheritance can be bandied about, Austen is indebted to Burney's Camilla, where old Sir Hugh moves into the Tyrold family's neighborhood, falls in love with his niece Camilla's "playful countenance" and "sportive sounds," the "genuine glee of childhood's fearless happiness" (15). In a month's time Sir Hugh makes Camilla his heir, only to disinherit her later out of guilt when her sister Eugenia catches the smallpox and is scarred for life (15, 29). In S&S, the "old Gentleman" bequeaths the estate directly from himself to Henry Dashwood, then to Henry's son John Dashwood, and finally to John's four-year-old son, whose antics on visits to Norland Park have impressed his great-uncle: "an imperfect articulation, an earnest desire of having his own way, many cunning tricks, and a great deal of noise, as to outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, [the old Gentleman] had received from his niece and her daughters," Elinor and Marianne (4).

¹⁰ However, comfort and pleasure could be (and often were) split apart into virtue and its counterpart vice, as in George Crabb's English Synonymes.

¹¹ John E. Wills disagrees, thinking that especially where tea is concerned, "exoticism never was very important" (134). His well-researched but necessarily narrow focus on British trading may have caused him to overlook the luxury debates affecting English perception of their daily activities, tea-drinking included, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

¹² See Ukers, All About Tea, 2 vols. (New York: Tea and Coffee Trade Journal, 1935), for a complete etymological account of the word "tea," originally taken from Chinese (I: 492-95).

¹³ Ukers claims that tea came into vogue with English women when Catherine of Braganza, a Portuguese princess and tea aficionada, married Charles II in 1662 and brought her tea-drinking habit to court (I: 43). In Tea with Jane Austen (Madison, WI: Jones, 2004), Kim Wilson credits Queen Anne in the early eighteenth century, rather

than Charles II's consort Catherine of Braganza in the late seventeenth century, with introducing tea as an alternative to alcohol for breakfast (8).

¹⁴ Wills reviews the "Asian networks of commerce," specifically China, where he notes that instead of taking advantage of Chinese merchants, European traders arrived in ports where they were not allowed to "exclude or distort the competition" since a successful network of "intra-Asian trade" was already being carried on (134). Wills argues that England did not immediately gain control of tea exports from China: imported tea was taxed at 80-100% of the London auction sale price, leading to increases in smuggled tea (142).

¹⁵ The phrase "anxiety about consumption" comes from Charlotte Sussman's Consuming Anxieties: Consumer Protest, Gender, and British Slavery, 1713-1833 (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2000): 14. At the time of Austen's letter (31 May 1811), tea in England still originated in China, although the British government in India was in place and preparations were underway for tea production there (Wills 146). Sugar available in England at this time was the product of slave labor (Sussman 29; Mintz 265).

¹⁶ According to a recent article in the Washington Post, a scientific foundation has been established for stress-induced eating. Food containing plenty of fat, sugar, and calories "appears literally to calm down the body's response to chronic stress." Researchers admit that stress and eating are not linked in a simple linear pattern, given other complicating emotional, social, and physiological factors, but comfort food is clearly more than just an "old wives' tale," argues neuroendocrinology professor Bruce S. McEwen (qtd. 34). For the full story, see Rob Stein, "Why We Need Comfort Food," The Washington Post 6-12 Oct. 2003, national weekly ed.: 34.

¹⁷ Alternately, Emily Auerbach argues that readers who scratch the surface of Mansfield Park find Austen's anti-slavery principles in evidence: Fanny Price's brief allusion—"Ye fallen avenues! Once more I mourn / Your fate unmerited."—can be traced to William Cowper's poem, "The Task," containing a "ringing indictment of clerical abuses" and an "attack on the immorality of slavery" (193), while Park Honan notes that "Lord Chief Justice the first Earl of Mansfield had struck at the roots of the African slave trade" (qtd. Auerbach, Searching for Jane Austen, Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 2004: 200).

¹⁸ Other scholars have found comfort signified in different things. In The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain and Early America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001), John Crowley points to the "cottage as a metonym" for comfort in the domestic arena (xi), and John Gloag notes in Victorian Comfort: A Social History of Design from 1830-1900 (New York: St. Martin's, 1973), that a 600-year-old tradition links comfort with "the sight of a fire" (99). In his English House (1904), Herman Muthesius agrees that "all ideas of domestic comfort, of family

happiness, of inward-looking personal life, of spiritual well-being centre around the fireplace” (qtd. Hardyment 155), exemplifying the way a material comfort can result in soulful ease. Whether one takes tea, cottage, or fireplace as the best metaphor for comfort, all are indicative of the domestic scene. However, Hardyment cautions that the numerous fire-fighting equipment still displayed on many of England’s National Trust properties is a sobering reminder of “the greatest threat of all to domestic comfort” (160)—fire, the comfort that so easily becomes a terror. Another undomesticated comfort is listed in G.K. Chesterton’s Charles Dickens (London, Methuen & Co., 1906: 157), as the hansom cab is symbolic for Chesterton of the “reckless comfort” that is “English” (qtd. Gloag 130). Individual definitions of comfort vary widely: for Austen’s Mr. Palmer in Sense and Sensibility, comfort is a billiard room. In a bad mood because of rain, Mr. Palmer deprecates his friend’s hospitality: “What the devil does Sir John mean by not having a billiard room in his house? How few people know what comfort is! Sir John is as stupid as the weather” (111).

¹⁹ I have modernized this quotation, as well as the previous one from Joseph Hall, changing the eighteenth-century long “f” to a regular “s”.

²⁰ Samuel Johnson defines the act of comforting as “to strengthen; to enliven; to invigorate” (223).

²¹ Educated for a short time within the Austen family, the third earl of Portsmouth grew up to be an eccentric and cruel man. After his wife’s death in 1813, his shrewd lawyer had him quickly married off to one of the lawyer’s own daughters, Mary-Ann Hanson. She began her own “reign of terror” at Hurstbourne Park near Steventon Rectory, inhabited by this time by Austen’s eldest brother James and his family. The new Lady Portsmouth hired a colleague of her father’s to “torture and beat [Lord Portsmouth] into total submission,” violent occurrences Tomalin finds it hard to believe would have escaped the neighbors’ attention (87-89).

²² Halperin’s assertion that Austen was born into the “hereditary ruling class of England” is countered by Eagleton’s more exact relation that though Austen had relatives in the upper class, “she hailed, then, from a subaltern section of the gentry, one which identified strongly with that class’s values and traditions but found itself exposed and insecure” (16; 107).

²³ Wahrman reveals that Anglican pastor Vicesimus Knox and the moderate journal The Oeconomist use the following terms interchangeably but do not closely define them: ‘middle class,’ ‘middle rank,’ ‘middle order,’ ‘middle station’ (47). “In terms of social signification the language of ‘middle class’ was *inherently vague*,” Wahrman writes (55).

²⁴ Eagleton disagrees with Lodge's assessment of the novel as a middle-class institution, arguing that the novel "must embrace the language of the common people as well as that of the elite" (102).

²⁵ "Patriarchal literary history" is Todd's description of Watt's text (Sign 2). Although Todd admits that The Rise of the Novel is "immensely influential," she acknowledges its gendered limits which "demand the compensatory activity" of recent work on the woman novelist (288).

²⁶ Along with place, race is another way of distinguishing, as Ian Baucom's Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999) explains. For non-Anglo subjects of the Empire, Britishness is obtainable, but not Englishness, when a racial measuring stick is used (14). In critiquing Conservative MP Enoch Powell's 1968 "Rivers of Blood" address, which highlights an elderly English woman's neighborhood becoming the locality of black immigrants, Baucom discovers that Englishness in this sense is figured as "whiteness, a command of the English language, and a certain kind of [quiet] domestic space" (15). Powell was subsequently fired from Edward Heath's Shadow Cabinet for his "racialist" remarks ("BBC History" 1).

Aside from a racial characterization of Englishness, another version, propagated by Ford Maddox Ford, institutes Englishness as a matter of place, not necessarily the birthplace but contact with the products of culture: "English traditions, English schools, and an English cricket field," in the case of Ford's West African teammate Stuart (qtd. Baucom 17-18). Acculturation, in this case, will allow the acquisition of Englishness, but it is a transient quality that may also be lost (20).

²⁷ However, Armstrong writes that Foucault's productive hypothesis is in play, so that the material body is not bogged down by political history because the (sexualized) body in question is female (95). Comforting is work performed by the female body, which as Armstrong points out is overlooked in Foucault's analysis (15). For Armstrong, domestic relations become politicized, as the principle of domestic duty extended beyond the middle-class home to make a basis for widespread social policy by the early nineteenth century (90).

Miranda J. Burgess's British Fiction and the Production of the Social Order, 1740-1830 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) describes Austen's "prescriptions for British national character": her romance gets its power over Britain's "future national history" from "domestic privacy," with its ability to "absorb and redeploy ideological contradictions" (185). Thus, the home in Austen's fiction serves as a "corrective" to Britain's larger economic and social decline (180-81).

²⁸ In The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel, Geoffrey Sill finds that Sense and Sensibility can be viewed as a "commentary on Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman" (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001: 190).

²⁹ In another of Todd and Butler's own footnotes to Wollstonecraft's Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution, they explain that when she defines "egotism" as used in French, Wollstonecraft "is confused" and gets it wrong (VI: 230).

³⁰ M. Morgan uses "Britain" to designate England, Scotland, and Wales, but not Ireland, a country her study excludes. Langford writes that in the eighteenth century, both foreigners and even the English themselves "used the terms 'British' and 'English' indiscriminately and confusingly," the latter in spite of their country's "long history and [. . .] sense of its own apartness" (12-13).

³¹ The English version of comfort as a private, domestic essential (including cleanliness of doorsteps and floors but not building exteriors) is an ideal English travelers found lacking on the continent, as well as in Scotland and Wales (Morgan 145). For their part, visitors to England were repulsed by the grimy, soot-stained aspect of public buildings and private residences in London, so different from the "whitewashed building exteriors" abroad (146).

³² According to The Harper Dictionary of Foreign Terms (Ed. Eugene Ehrlich, New York: Harper & Row, 1987), *exigeant* is defined as "exacting; unreasonable; hard to please," while *etourderie* is defined as "thoughtless act; heedlessness; thoughtlessness."

³³ According to Tomalin, Eliza's husband Jean Capot de Feuillide was tried and executed during the Terror for attempting to bribe a secretary on the Committee for Public Safety, in an ill-fated effort to save an "elderly marquise imprisoned for allegedly conspiring against the Republic" (82).

³⁴ See Chapter IV for my discussion of Austen's participation in Emma, of the derision of French behavior as opposed to preferred English conduct. In contrast, Dussinger's In the Pride of the Moment: Encounters in Jane Austen's World (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1990) perceives Emma as "probably the most Gallic novel in English, imbued with the acuity of La Rochefoucauld, Diderot, and Laclos," yet he further asserts that "it is not Austen's particular attitudes toward French culture that matter" (50-51). In his footnotes, Dussinger allows that "a certain xenophobia against the French hegemony over the English body persisted throughout the period and is still evident in Dickens's caricature of old Mr. Turveydrop's Department" (190); however, Dussinger does not see Austen also reacting in xenophobic ways.

³⁵ Set during the French Revolution, Burney's final novel The Wanderer shows her understanding of the importance of protecting the English personality for many of her countrymen and women. A kind British Admiral allows the heroine, Juliet / Ellis, to board a small boat fleeing France during the Terror. After landing safely in England, the sailor expostulates against any "man who could bring himself to be ashamed of being an

Englishman.” The Admiral clarifies his position by explaining that he does not laud the English “to affront [Juliet / Ellis] as a foreigner”; he only praises his countrymen “as a matter of fact” (23). Beyond the realm of mere opinion, the virtues of the English are stated fact, in their own eyes.

³⁶ Despite Johnson’s fears, his Dictionary has gained “an assured place” in English language history and is commonly considered the “most important linguistic event of the eighteenth century” and the “greatest achievement” prior to The New English Dictionary, now the Oxford English Dictionary (Schreyer 59).

³⁷ Brewer lists these crises in The Pleasures of the Imagination (82).

³⁸ However, France and England share some bonds in the patterns of their novels. Philip Stewart, discussing the eighteenth-century novel in France, explains: “The typical narrator begins his real story, not at birth, but at the time he became a socially functioning individual [. . .] Usually the main narrative begins around age sixteen or, in exceptionally precocious cases, in early adolescence” (qtd. N. Miller 159). In The Heroine’s Text Readings in the French and English Novel, 1722-1782 (New York: Columbia UP, 1980), Nancy K. Miller affirms that the English novel basically follows this pattern (159). Jane Austen’s works in particular adhere to it, with the exception of Mansfield Park, which details Fanny Price’s childhood.

³⁹ Moretti’s map includes the following major nineteenth-century novels (in addition to lesser known fictional works not included here) that use France symbolically for evil: Belinda, Bleak House, David Copperfield, Dombey and Son, Great Expectations, Jane Eyre, Little Dorrit, Middlemarch, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, Pendennis, A Tale of Two Cities, Waverley (Atlas 30). The preponderance of works by Charles Dickens indicates that he in particular had a loathing for (or felt threatened by) Britain’s age-old enemy, the antonym for Dickens’s beloved domestic space. For Moretti, this area is the suburbs, the place Dickens’s middle class characters can escape to in order to keep their “moral illusions” intact (Atlas 120).

⁴⁰ Spinsterhood was not atypical in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: 20-27% of women in Georgian England never married, compared to 5% nowadays (Staves, Married 217). Stone cites similar statistics: 20-25% unmarried upper class women in the eighteenth century (a result of increases in dowry costs and decreases in the marriage rates of younger sons) compares to less than 5% spinsters in the sixteenth century (243).

⁴¹ D.A. Miller views the “Austen Style” as constantly talking “*about itself*,” making style its “most extensive and obsessive theme, equal to marriage” (41). For Miller, Austen Style knows what it talks about (marriage), but also “sp[eaks] without any apparent experiential implication” in its knowingness. Austen’s narrator has attributes of “divine omniscience” as well as “the paradox of divine melancholy,” dwelling always on

the marriageable heroine, the “Person that is its own absolutely foregone possibility” (56). The irony here is the spinster author’s confident description of her heroine’s entrance into marriage. Impressive as Miller’s reading is, my dissertation does not share his view of Austen as so entirely absent from her own works.

⁴² See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s “Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl” in Tendencies, Ed. Michele Aina Barale, Jonathan Goldberg, Michael Moon, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1993): 109-129, an essay unabashedly critical of “Austen criticism [. . .] its timidity and banality” as well as its “unresting exaction of the spectacle of a Girl Being Taught a Lesson” (125).

⁴³ In a letter dated 13 March 1817, Austen reminds her niece Fanny of the advantages in waiting to marry: remaining “young in Constitution, spirits, figure & countenance” by delaying “the business of Mothering,” involving “confinements & nursing.” Austen’s observations of her brothers’ wives and daughters left her with little envy over the married state. Hearing of her niece Anna’s third pregnancy which ended in a miscarriage, Austen comments on 25 March 1817, “Poor Animal, she will be worn out before she is thirty.—I am very sorry for her.” In the same letter, Austen remarks that “Mrs. Clement too is in that way again. I am quite tired of so many Children” (Le Faye, Letters 463).

Writing to Cassandra on 9 September 1816, Austen observes that their sister-in-law, Mrs. Frank Austen, “seldom either looks or appears quite well. —Little embryo is troublesome I suppose.” This is the kind of unabashed remark that later editors such as Lord Braeburne left out as un-ladylike, and the exclusion of comments like these has wrongfully led to the vision of gentle aunt Jane, as Auerbach discloses (24).

⁴⁴ Although published in 1845, in many ways Crabb’s work is a direct product of the eighteenth century, as he explains in the Preface to the first edition what texts he has relied on to elucidate meaning in each entry: “the appropriateness of the examples; the classick [sic] purity of the author; the justness of the sentiment; and, last of all, the variety of the writers: but I am persuaded that the reader will not be dissatisfied to find that I have shown a decided preference to such authors as Addison, Johnson, Dryden, Pope, Milton, &c.” (v).

⁴⁵ Davidoff and Hall explain that during this time frame, daughters were seen as permanent, personal dependents unless / until they married (219). Upon a wife’s death, the daughter took over house-keeping for her father, in what was often a very close relationship. Davidoff and Hall note that literature from the 1840s on, often presents the family with an absent wife, as evidenced in Dickens’ novels (348). Brother-sister ties were also frequently close, even erotic (351). For more on familial intimacy, see Valerie Sanders’s The Brother-Sister Culture in Nineteenth-Century Literature: From Austen to Woolf (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

⁴⁶ While Pride and Prejudice was not published until 1813, R.W. Chapman cites a note written by Cassandra Austen, dating the initial draft of First Impressions as between October 1796 and August 1797. The manuscript was submitted to Cadell for “publication, at the author’s expense or otherwise” but was refused until Egerton accepted it years later (Chapman xi; Jones xxxi).

⁴⁷ Melanie Hawthorne’s essay, “Women’s Movements: The Gendered Subtext of Anomie,” considers Emile Durkheim’s view that self-murders arise not from misery but from anomie and that women’s leaving the domestic sphere leads to social instability and alienation (160-161), the opposite of comfort. The American Heritage Dictionary online defines “Anomie” as “1. Social instability caused by erosion of standards and values. 2. Alienation and purposelessness experienced by a person or a class as a result of a lack of standards, values, or ideals.”

⁴⁸ In contrast, the most celebrated moralist of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, preferred living in London to the country. Boswell records Johnson as remarking that “no man, fond of letters, leaves London without regret” (Life 384).

⁴⁹ Marian Eide’s insightful book, Ethical Joyce (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), brought to my attention Levinas’s relation of the home to femaleness. Eide explains that in situating human beings inside the home, Levinas was working from the “literal meaning of ethics as habitation” (16). In his “Time and the Other,” Levinas’s use of the term “ethics” really designates a masculine ethics, which women can hold (in like manner to Lacan’s phallus) but never really have (49). Thus, women are the ground or the habitat against which Levinas’s ethics occur, even as the pregnant mother is Levinas’s Exemplar of ethics, caring for the other. His essentialism here has given feminists much to repudiate—for example, see Diana Fuss, Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference (New York: Routledge, 1989): 12.

⁵⁰ I have modernized the quotations from Lady Chandos’s letter, changing the “f” to “s”.

CHAPTER III

JANE AUSTEN'S "COLD COMFORT" NOVELS: SENSE AND SENSIBILITY, MANSFIELD PARK, and PERSUASION

3.1 "Cold Comfort" in Austen's Life and Works

This chapter builds upon the history chapter's argument that comforting is middle-class work done in the home: in Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion, comforting classifies and proves the "cold comfort" heroines' readiness for marriage. "Cold comfort" usually indicates something that is not a comfort at all, and I occasionally use the phrase in its generally understood meaning, for a situation that brings no comfort. However, I mostly use "cold comfort" to designate the position of those Austen protagonists who supply real comfort without their efforts being appreciated or recognized (the comfort is "cold" for the providers); conversely, the "warm comfort" heroines are valued immediately for their efforts and for who they are.

The protagonists of these three Jane Austen novels are associated with "cold comforts," by which I mean they provide real comfort to others that goes unacknowledged and unappreciated, while "warm comfort" is so precisely because the comforter receives affirmation, gratitude, and fulfillment from the act of comforting others. For Austen, the experience of (female) human beings traveling through "time and space" is one of discomfort (Lodge 10), figuring in half of her novels as the protagonists attempt to escape discomfort if possible, endure it if necessary. The "cold comfort" heroines experience great emotional and at times, physical discomfort in their bleak

situations, while the only satisfaction they have is the small comfort of acting rightly (by comforting), until the finale of each novel. In MP, S&S, and P, the aesthetic category of comfort usually functions in terms of a negative: it is the absent value that everyone desires. The female protagonists may be comforts to others, but in a like manner to Lacan's phallus, comfort is something they can *be* but not have or hold (B. Johnson 225).

It is the lot of the heroines of these novels to receive "cold comforts" as virtually the only kind offered them in the arenas of courtship and family ties. The clichéd phrase "cold comfort" usually designates the consolation that is too little, too late.¹ Links to both the outside world and the inner one of home are fraught with problems, ever on the verge of breaking completely. The world of society—including the more immediate local neighborhood, what Robert Polhemus terms Austen's "confining, familiar space" (117)—is unconcerned with the protagonists' struggles, and frequently the families of these heroines deliberately add to their uncomfortable situations, contributing to their senses of financial worry and responsibility for the family's well-being on even a psychological level.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have argued that in Austen's novels one of the ways that plot operates is in providing a cover story (155), but Austen's cover stories "never adequately cover," specifically in that her narratives are tested by an outpouring of minutiae (Galperin 97), also present in her letters. While the epistles Cassandra destroyed will always haunt Austen scholarship—what *did* she say in them that was a secret to be kept forever?—scholars must accept that in the remaining letters, full of

minutiae as they are, we have the real Austen, “untamed, unabashed” (P&P 315). Deirdre Le Faye puts forth her suspicion that Cassandra’s “suppression” has not “materially affected the impression” we would otherwise have gleaned from the lost letters (ix). Le Faye also forgoes any attempt at apology, seeing in Austen’s remaining letters an interesting depiction of “manners, but also persons” (x).

While Austen’s last letters are important, in the main critics have been surprised and somewhat disappointed, as Le Faye notices in her introduction to the first edition of Jane Austen’s Letters, finding that Austen’s epistles give continuous attention to minor events and trivia regarding her immediate family circle and acquaintances, without speaking of the “great events that were shaking Europe” (ix).² Austen follows this pattern in her fiction, so that D. A. Miller notices the level of representation Austen chooses is beneath the “threshold of world history” and “above the threshold of primary biological functions and of work” (Narrative 4), a situation typical, even definitive of, a female-authored novel of manners. However, if Miller’s definition of “work” were expanded to include the unpaid labor of comforting which Austen’s female protagonists take part in, then her novels and letters can be seen to focus on an important if often unacknowledged kind of employment.³

In letters, Austen reveals her “foolishly minute” attention to comfort for herself and others in the houses where she lived and visited, one of the main themes of her life and works.⁴ Austen informs her sister that she has “had the comfort of finding out the other evening who all the fat girls with short noses were that disturbed me at the 1st H. ball” (21 Nov. 1800). She is happy to hear of brother Edward’s wealth, “as glad as I can

be at anybody's being rich besides You & me" (8 Jan. 1799), and reports that the dining room of a house in Bath that their uncle might lease is "of a comfortable size, just as large as you like to fancy it, the second room about 14 ft. square" (6 May 1801). These statements reveal the world of comforts and comforting others—especially each other—that she and Cassandra shared. On the other hand, Tomalin cites a 1797 letter from Mrs. Austen to Mary Lloyd, her son James's new wife, in which Austen's mother "look[s] forward to [Mary] as a real comfort to me in my old age, when Cassandra is gone into Shropshire," her fiancé's residence, and "Jane—the Lord knows where." Tomalin reads this statement as indicative of Mrs. Austen's doubt "as to whether Jane was likely to make either a comfortable wife or a comfort for her mother's old age" (qtd. 141).

Austen probably did not enjoy a close relationship with her mother, though she and her sister were best friends. Their great-niece Fanny Caroline Lefroy described the sisters' relationship as one of "exclusiveness in their love such as only exists between husband and wife" (qtd. Fergus 70). Fergus adds that this was especially the case after 1797, the year Cassandra's fiancé Tom Fowle died (70). "Wedded" and "exclusiveness in their love" are conventional phrases for an idealized marriage relationship, yet here these expressions are used in an unconventional context to describe what must have been a very remarkable sibling relationship, signified by a closeness rarely observed today.⁵ Ruth Perry concurs in her estimation that Austen's sister Cassandra was the author's "first, last, and most constant love," but that "such partnerships" as their all-female household (composed of the Austen sisters, their mother, and friend Martha Lloyd after 1805) "were not unusual in eighteenth-century England" (111-112). Jane and Cassandra

shared the same somewhat precarious circumstances, dependent on their male relatives for housing, food and clothing allowances. Michie warns, however, that “permanence is both the promise and the nightmare of sisterhood; to be absorbed into the family is to know no escape from its idiom, its pleasures, and its punishments” as well as its comforts (18). For better or worse, for richer or poorer, what Jane and Cassandra Austen had together was permanent.

That the Austen sisters knew the meaning of “cold comfort” in other arenas besides courtship is clear from Jane’s bitter reflection that “the whole World is in a conspiracy to enrich one part of our family [James, Edward] at the expence of another [herself and Cassandra],” a commentary deriving from the Austen parents’ and sisters’ removal to Bath to make way for James’s growing family in the parsonage, a change that Austen gradually accepted, even welcomed (21 May 1801; 5 Jan. 1801; Tomalin 190). The “cold comfort” Austen biography clearly belongs to Halperin, whose Life of Jane Austen presents most of Austen’s circumstances as having the worst effect on her already crabby personality (74). Halperin’s negative prognostications are seconded regarding the circumstances of her final illness: many scholars believe that Austen’s death was hastened by the bad news she received in March 1817 upon her Uncle Leigh Perrot’s death: his will astonished the Austens, as he left his sister Mrs. Austen nothing and each of her children £1000 only if they outlived Aunt Leigh Perrot, something neither Austen nor her eldest brother James (d. Dec. 1919) were to accomplish (Fergus 169; Spence 241; Tomalin 272, 276).

Until Jane Austen’s final illness at the age of 41, she and her sister never

confronted the separation Elinor Dashwood fears from her sibling, though Austen dealt with other situations familiar to her characters in Sense and Sensibility, such as the constrained family finances discussed in the history chapter of this dissertation. Austen has usually been treated as if she wrote in complete isolation from the larger society around her since she rarely visited London and did not mix with other novelists or the avant-garde. That Austen actually shunned conversing with other writers when the opportunity afforded itself is apparent from her refusal to meet the “literary lion” Madame de Staël in London and her anger, expressed in a letter to Frank Austen, over what she took to be her brother Henry’s (well-meant) betrayal in revealing her identity as the author of Pride and Prejudice and Sense and Sensibility (Fergus 137; 25 Sept. 1813). The novelist preferred her situation of relative obscurity, living without the notoriety that membership in a bluestocking circle would have brought.⁶ The villages of Steventon and Chawton were not in the main intellectual repositories, as John Brewer argues for provincial Lichfield, the home of Maria and Richard Edgeworth, poet Anna Seward, Erasmus Darwin, Sir Brooke Boothby, and Thomas Day, all hearty Whigs interested in educational issues (597-98). In addition to its other luminaries, Lichfield was the boyhood home of Samuel Johnson (Boswell 13-19), whose writings Austen esteemed her whole life. Some who knew Austen believed that intimacy in more elevated company would have enhanced her powers, as her own social circle was not intellectually stimulating: Austen’s niece Fanny Knight calls these neighbors distinctly “*mediocre*” and “not at all high bred” while Austen’s own family were thought “superior in *mental powers*” to those around them, at least according to their own relatives (qtd.

Fergus 49).

Situated at home, Austen's clever and close family members were her first audience and critics. The energized family theatricals she staged with her siblings and their collective appreciation for her early stories helped formulate Austen's mastery of the novel, rather than formal intellectual gatherings or the advantages of much high society (Tomalin 62-63; Fergus 28). Austen absorbed at least one important concern from the larger world, however: its growing obsession with comfort, especially the ease arising from a life away from the margins of gentility, where critics locate the Austen family (Fergus 50).

Steven Bank and Michael Kahn, family psychologists, write that "in most families there is only one person who can occupy a certain psychological space . . . at one time" (qtd. Michie 20). In the Austen family, Cassandra's status as comfort-giver precludes her sister from that role. Helena Michie's Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture quotes Toni McNaron on sisters' taking on different roles in the family: "complementarity becomes the pattern within which they both act out their adult lives." Sisters thus have roles related to each other's position, but unfortunately it may mean that neither woman "need develop all her potential" (qtd. Michie 19). Michie argues that it seems plausible, in light of Nancy Chodorow's research into girls' and women's weak views of self / other, that "sister pairs would engage especially acutely in these specular and spectacular choreographies of self" (19). Cassandra and Jane Austen's relationships with everyone else in their community were likely predicated on their primary relation with each other, and that Jane Austen became

a novelist may be due, more than any other single factor, to Cassandra's ability to do the work of comforting for both of them, a positive outcome. Cassandra comforted while her sister wrote about comforting in novels concerning women's often vexed situations in the family household, with giving comfort the very skill upon which Jane Austen hinges the marriageability of her heroines.

An alternate critical viewpoint notices Austen's privileging of the sibling bond over the marriage yoke. In the relationship between Fanny and William Price, "children of the same family, the same blood, with the same first associations and habits," the brother and sister possess "some means of enjoyment in their power, which no subsequent connections can supply," as "even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal" (MP 234-35). This perspective endears Austen to those postmodern readers whose conception of marriage renders it at best an antiquated institution, at worst, a form of oppression (Sedgwick 32; Irigaray 192).⁷ In Mary Ann O'Farrell's words, the "marriage plot sometimes allows itself to see other types of relationships, especially sisterhood" (Lecture 10/24/01). Sarah Stickney Ellis explains that while a sister may cherish a "romantic attachment" for her brother, the relationship will be irrevocably altered upon either sibling's marriage (222-223). However, the sororal bond is a "deep well-spring of [. . .] love," as Ellis imagines a sister searching "in vain, through all the high and noble attributes of man, for that which is to be found alone in the true heart of woman" (224, 223). Austen's "dearest sister Cassandra" appears to have lived up to the highest expectations of sisterhood, and her comfort-giving during Austen's final illness left the author without "words [. . .] to describe what a Nurse she has been to me" (27 April

1817; 22 May 1817).

While comforting is a primary function in Austen's life and in her works, an active imagination also plays an important role. Ellis's proscriptive Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits (1838) treats the "domestic woman," a description that might lend itself to one version of Austen:

moving in a comparatively limited circle, [she] is not necessarily confined to a limited number of ideas, but can often expatiate upon subjects of mere local interest with a vigour of intellect, a freshness of feeling, and a liveliness of fancy, which create in the mind of the uninitiated stranger, a perfect longing to be admitted into the home associations from whence are derived such a world of amusement, and so unfailing a relief from the severer duties of life.⁸ (Ellis 31)

Such is the woman and / or writer who charms her visitors with homespun yet novel renderings of everyday life, the very act of which make her irresistible, though ordinary. This version is akin to O'Farrell's Austen, the "author-friend" whose "peals of laughter through the door" beckon to those eavesdroppers (i.e., Marianne Knight and contemporary readers) on the other side ("Friendship" 46, qtd. 45). For some Austen enthusiasts, the novelist is great because she combines a "lively imagination with a sound judgment," for Ellis an eminent trait in general of the eighteenth-century "women of England" (31-32), and good judgment is an important quality for the heroines of S&S, MP, and P.

Certain biographical circumstances may account for the differences between Austen's "warm comfort" novels and the "cold comfort" works. Austen's "warm comfort" heroines are caring and cared for, while her "cold comfort" heroines are neglected, situations that mirror the varying circumstances of Austen's own life. Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice were written when her supportive father was

still living and the family maintained their residence at Steventon, where the author grew up. Emma was penned during the author's residence at Chawton, where she was settled and happy, and letters dated during that time depict her in close contact with nieces Fanny Knight and Anna Austen (Tomalin 242), relationships that strengthened Austen's own commitment to fiction writing. In contrast, though England was at war for most of Austen's adult life, her sister's fiancé was involved as a chaplain on the front in 1795, the year Austen wrote Elinor and Marianne (Tomalin 106); Mansfield Park and Persuasion were written after Austen's father died, the latter work penned while Austen herself was sick and in some pain (Tomalin 254-255). Her thinking about comfort changed as a result: comfortable Emma, Elizabeth, and Catherine enjoy and give comfort as a natural extension of their positions in life, while Elinor and Marianne, Fanny, and Anne's comfort-giving is almost unnoticed, yet becomes a test for the heroines' marriageability.

Unfortunately, none of the protagonists in Austen's "cold comfort" novels enjoy the respect of their own families. The Dashwood sisters have a loving mother, but she is powerless to stop the machinations of their selfish half-brother and his wife, who deprive their kin of an inheritance and then snub them for lacking financial resources. Fanny Price, taken from her lower class Portsmouth home at the age of ten to live with her wealthy relations, can only imagine that "it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to any body!—*Here* [at Mansfield], I know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well" (27). The narrator adds that Fanny is "totally unused to have her pleasure consulted, or to have any thing take place at all in the way she could desire" (MP 280).⁹

In a similar vein, Persuasion's Anne Elliot, whose beloved mother died when the girl was fourteen, "was nobody with either father or sister: her word had no weight; her convenience was always to give way;—she was only Anne" (P 5). Fanny and Anne are alike in sharing a nearly servile position at home, responsible for many thankless tasks of drudgery, without even the comfort of knowing themselves to be needed.¹⁰ Even servants could expect better treatment, given the conduct book advice early Victorian John Angell James dispenses to masters regarding their relationship to household servants—to "manifest an unvarying regard for their comfort" and to let the servants know that the masters "wish to see them happy" (170)—a far cry from the line of conduct Anne and Fanny's relations take regarding the young women's well-being. Only in journeying away from Kellynch Hall and Mansfield Park, respectively, can these protagonists have their true worth realized by their relatives in crisis (Maria Rushworth runs away with her lover; Louisa Musgrove launches herself into a coma).

While most family relations in Sense and Sensibility, Persuasion, and Mansfield Park lack much to be desired, the heroines' courtship experiences are hardly better. In Mansfield Park, Fanny Price has the dubious honor of being one of her cousin Edmund's "two dearest" loves, second only to the enigmatic Mary Crawford (264); Lady Russell angrily glories with "pleased contempt" in that Captain Wentworth, who could value her high-minded friend Anne Elliot eight years before, now contents himself with the literally down-to-earth Louisa Musgrove (P 125); most trying of all, Elinor Dashwood experiences the sad certainty that Edward's "affection [is] all her own," although his secret engagement to Lucy Steele prevents him from proposing to Elinor (S&S 139).

Each novel presents different emblems of (dis)comfort as Austen investigates what it means for each protagonist to comfort others while remaining deeply uncomfortable herself.

3.2 Sense and Sensibility: The “Cold Comfort” of a Broken Heart

Family relationships, courtship, and food each provide an avenue for Austen to consider the ways that comfort works or fails to suffice in this novel. The dual heroines of Sense and Sensibility, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, are fortunate in sharing the love of their widowed mother as well as each other’s company, though theirs is the only family relationship to elicit comfort in the novel.¹¹ Sense & Sensibility tends to favor Elinor’s perspective against Marianne’s overly romantic views but is wholly unsympathetic toward the Dashwoods’ selfish half-brother John and his wife, who are spectacular failures at providing material comfort. John and Fanny arrive immediately after the elder Mr. Dashwood’s funeral to take possession of Norwood, “shewing them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she [Fanny Dashwood] could act when occasion required it” (S&S 6). Discomforting her bereaved in-laws, Mrs. John Dashwood’s rudeness reveals her view of care and comfort as confined to a narrow definition of family—those with money—a perspective similar to that of Mrs. Norris in Mansfield Park, whose treatment of her rich relations is noticeably better than her behavior to her poor relatives. Charity begins and ends at home in the John Dashwood residence, as his wife Fanny decries benevolence as an inconvenience that “takes away one’s independence” (S&S 11). In finally deciding to give nothing to his deceased

father's daughters and widow, this despite the son's "promise to do everything in his power to make them comfortable" at his parent's deathbed (5), John Dashwood reverses charity's inconvenience and removes the chance of independence from his sisters that he and his wife value for themselves. His wife counsels logically that "when the money is once parted with, it can never return. Your sisters will marry, and it will be gone forever" (S&S 9). While she nominally terms the Dashwood girls his sisters, John Dashwood's wife repeatedly emphasizes that they are "only half blood!", as if to suggest their lineage along another race entirely (S&S 8-9). Fanny is invested, in every sense of the word, in setting up her husband's relatives as other, reducing the claims due to family connections and erasing the meaning of the promise her husband made to assist his dying father's "widow and daughters" (9). Without a supplement to the sisters' £500 a year, their chances of marrying are unlikely. Money, a type of comfort, signifies far more than cash for purchasing goods, as each character in this novel is aware: it means a chance for independent, meaningful existence, for choices in traveling, freedom from want, everything.

As intent on showing her superiority to her relatives as Mary Musgrove of Persuasion regarding her in-laws, Fanny Dashwood slights her sisters-in-law as much as possible later in London, and the narrator mocks her forced behavior of "appearing to treat them with attention" as an "unpleasantness" to be endured (S&S 248). The obligations—social or financial—that Fanny owes her husband's family become translated into terms of inconvenience and dislike, of duty to be shirked. Fanny is the opposite of a conduct book heroine, and her considerable powers of persuasion are more

than just “strong babble” (Doody xi). By complimenting her husband on his “generous spirit!,” Fanny manages to keep every penny of the £3,000 that he once contemplated consigning to his half-sisters, in her husband’s bank account (S&S 9-12). Fanny herself is guilty of ingratitude regarding the estate left her husband, whose father, she argues, “if he could, [. . .] would have left almost everything in the world to *them*,” thus releasing Fanny and John Dashwood from any “particular gratitude to him” for their inheritance (S&S 13). As Margaret Anne Doody discovers, Fanny is victorious in her effort to “have Norland treated as if it were a traditional entailed estate (although it is not)” (Introduction xi). Fanny’s knowledge that the late Mr. Dashwood wished to leave his entire estate and wealth to his wife and daughters gives the lie to her statement that “your father had no idea of your giving them any money at all” but must have envisioned his son’s helping them find a “comfortable small house” and “sending them presents of fish and game” instead (12).

The passages in Sense and Sensibility where Fanny reasons her husband out of doing his duty to his father’s family are logically complex: urging John one moment to disregard his legal inheritance and consider only the late Mr. Dashwood’s unfulfilled intentions towards his second family (which if fulfilled would have divided his estate more equally between all his children, to Fanny’s horror), in the next moment Fanny denies that his wishes for his daughters could extend to any expectation of monetary assistance at all. In this way Fanny sophistically substitutes the father’s wishes for the son’s actual aid and allows John to feel as if nothing more need be done for his half-blood relations. That he is yet conscious of guilt is manifested in his concern that

everyone else who knows the Dashwood sisters would promote their interest, and on hearing from Elinor that Colonel Brandon's estate brings in £2000 yearly, John "work[s] himself up to a pitch of enthusiastic generosity" to wish "with all my heart, it were *twice* as much, for your sake" (S&S 223). John Dashwood never outgrows his wife's deceitful practice of substituting wishes for actually doing something, and he convinces himself that the Dashwoods' neighbor, Mrs. Jennings, will probably leave Elinor and Marianne her fortune, rather than bequeath it to her own daughters (227). As Mrs. Jennings has invited the elder Dashwood sisters to stay with her in London for three months, a courtesy their own brother fails to extend (252-253), that she might also leave them money where he neglected to do so is at least of greater likelihood than any material assistance coming from John and Fanny.

The realm of courtship also brings "cold comfort" for the Dashwood sisters. Unfortunate enough to have her mutual affection for Fanny's brother Edward discovered by her rival, Lucy Steele, Elinor endures much emotional pain in Lucy's confession of her secret engagement. However, Elinor refuses to "deny herself the comfort of endeavouring to convince Lucy that her heart was unwounded" (S&S 142)—this mild deception is "cold comfort" at its chilliest, as Elinor's sole satisfaction comes from giving the lie to a truth her rival already knows. During their second conversation about the long-standing engagement between Edward and Lucy, the latter thanks Elinor for "breaking the ice" and reopening the subject, while Lucy's "little sharp eyes full of meaning" interrogate her nemesis for signs of weakness, as Lucy accuses Elinor of "coldness and displeasure in your manner" during their prior conversation (146). Lucy

Steele's villainy consists in tormenting Elinor repeatedly throughout their relationship. At a family dinner party they both meet Edward's selfish mother for the first time, who snubs Elinor while favoring Lucy, unknowing of the attachment between the latter and her son. Lucy purposefully lacerates Elinor's feelings in bringing up the contrast in Mrs. Ferrars's treatment of the rivals, but she injures after insulting Elinor by pretending to "be so sorry to have *you* ill; you, that have been the greatest comfort to me in the world!" (S&S 239-240).

The only "comfort" Elinor can have for Lucy is the knowledge that Miss Dashwood's honor will forbid her from breaking up the engagement between Edward and Lucy, the only plausible explanation for Miss Steele's taking Elinor into her confidence at all (142). Elinor's knowledge of the secret engagement is in some way its own comfort: as Jonathan Lear reports, through contemplation we find out that the "lives we have been living are not *completely* happy," but while this realization is far from most people's idea of happiness, we are reaching its "highest conception" (38). Elinor believes that she is "stronger alone" and when once she is "at liberty to think and be wretched" (S&S 141, 135), she is achieving Aristotle's highest ideal of "happiness" as an ethical life (Lear 48). Intent on proving to Elinor the degree of affection between herself and her intended, Lucy enumerates the comforts of "writing to each other," carrying Edward's portrait in miniature, and his possessing "a lock of my hair set in a ring" (S&S 135). Lucy's comforts have the reverse effect on Elinor, as she had supposed it was her own hair in Edward's ring (98), and his "coldness and reserve" on meeting her again at Barton Cottage are clearly the result of his prior relationship with Lucy Steele

(89).¹²

The “cold comfort” of courtship in Sense and Sensibility is further exemplified in the broken relationship between Willoughby and Marianne. Johnson feels disgust for Willoughby, who relishes his importance at Marianne’s imagined death (Jane Austen 67), a fantasy that he tells Elinor serves as “a kind of comfort to me” (S&S 327). Unable to envision any other possible outcome for Marianne than death, Willoughby selfishly looks to his own peace of mind, already marred by his recent marriage of convenience to the wealthy Miss Grey. Willoughby’s last hope, it seems, rests in the satisfaction of knowing that if he cannot possess Marianne, no other man will either, a hope bankrupted by novel’s end, with the marriage uniting Marianne and Colonel Brandon (S&S 378-79). In the dénouement, Willoughby, though crestfallen by his former sweetheart’s marriage to another, nevertheless reaps the rewards of good fortune, achieving “no inconsiderable degree of domestic felicity” in a fairly comfortable house with an occasionally good-humored spouse, meanwhile enjoying the forgiveness of Mrs. Smith, his cousin and benefactor (379). These are fitting rewards for an anti-hero who has single-mindedly pursued his own pleasure, without risk to his personal comfort, marrying an heiress at once when threatened with disinheritance for seducing Eliza, the daughter of Colonel Brandon’s ward (S&S 209).

Miss Dashwood’s estrangement from Edward is another “cold comfort” relationship in the novel. The narrator ironically highlights the utter discomfort to Elinor in the prospect of Lucy’s living at Delaford, as the language of comfort is used to depict the situation Elinor most dreads yet thinks highly probable (292). Described as the most

money-conscious of all Austen's novels (Auerbach, Searching 117; Halperin 86), in Sense and Sensibility mercenary attachments are frequent, though Colonel Brandon's offer of a living on his estate to newly disinherited Edward Ferrars is a benevolent one. Johnson holds that Brandon offers this bequest purely on Edward's merit in "behaving honorably in defiance of family interests" since Edward is a man to whom Brandon is unrelated "at the time, at least" (Jane Austen 69). While Elinor denies influencing Brandon's decision she cannot contradict the idea that the colonel's regard for the female members of her family gave him "still greater pleasure in bestowing it" (S&S 289-90). While Brandon's gesture lands him among the ranks of Austen's male comforters (Mr. Knightley of E, Captain Harville of P), his action brings great mental discomfort to Elinor, who believes that the Delaford living will likely enable Edward to marry his fiancée, the nefarious Lucy Steele. The most uncomfortable vision in the novel is presented during Mrs. Jennings's visit to congratulate Lucy, who exultingly agrees with her cousin "in her expectation of their being all comfortably together in Delaford Parsonage before Michaelmas," a sentiment doubtless relayed to the Dashwoods (293). For Elinor, unable to marry Edward Ferrars herself, nothing could be worse than to experience the daily misery of seeing Lucy settled nearby, flaunting her happy marriage. Upon Lucy's unexpected marriage to Edward's conceited younger brother Robert, the elder is free to marry long-suffering Elinor, giving Colonel Brandon "fresh reason to rejoice" over the living he offered to Edward, as "eventually it promoted the interest of Elinor" (370).

Doody interprets Elinor's treatment of Edward throughout the novel as that of a "mother defending and praising her child"; Edward's own mother is cold and loveless, so that Elinor provides the "mother-love" absent from his life (xxi). Chodorow finds that the portions of men's love that stems from their "relationship to their mothers are more likely than women's to be subjectively gendered: that is, to be intertwined for a man with his sense of (cultural and personal) masculinity" (Femininities 83). She quotes Michael Balint on placing the "primary feeling of self in terms of the sense of fit or lack of fit with the primary caretaker" (Chodorow, Feminism 157). It is not surprising, then, that Edward is something of a weakling, given his mother's emasculating behavior toward him.¹³ Marylea Meyersohn views Edward as unattractive in castigating women for his own difficulties: "first his mother, for not providing him with a career, and then Lucy, for bewitching him when he was at loose ends" ("Garrulous" 39). Meyersohn also notices that Austen blames society: "an inadequate education, a vain and extravagant world, the wearing down of the spirits of the weak," when the author wants to dismiss individual defects (38), thus Edward's problems are not his fault. Elinor's adeptness at bestowing matriarchal comfort, Doody thinks, is the reason the heroine and not Lucy Steele will marry Edward (Introduction xxi).

While that vision of the novel is unromantic and perhaps unjust, given the novel's interest in first attachments, it does highlight comfort's centrality to Sense and Sensibility, especially its place as an important criterion for marriage, even as it is rendered a particularly maternal characteristic. The narrator describes the eldest Dashwood sister as "the comforter of others in her own distresses, no less than in theirs,"

and her distraught sister Marianne admits Elinor has been her “only comfort” since Willoughby’s defection (261, 264). Near the novel’s conclusion, Elinor Dashwood and her fiancé Edward Ferrars are said not to be “quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year would supply them with the comforts of life,” though they marry immediately and settle at “old-fashioned” Delaford, “full of comforts and conveniences,” once Mrs. Ferrars assures her son his inheritance of ten thousand pounds, giving a yearly interest of five hundred pounds (S&S 369, 196, 374).¹⁴ Two years after the novel’s beginning Brandon and Marianne wed, completing the dual connection of sisters and spouses. As he had hoped, Colonel Brandon thus proves adept at being “a means of giving comfort” to both Dashwoods, sisters in straitened circumstances (204).

In addition to family and yearly income, food is another arena for the debate over comfort / discomfort in the novel. Marianne Dashwood’s symptomatic refusal to eat as a means of sustaining her emotional turmoil over Willoughby’s desertion points to Austen’s comprehension of the ability of food and drink to calm the nerves and order the mind, even more than to please the palate. For Austen, “food itself is morally neutral” although provisioning others is laudatory (Lane 101). Often a source of real comfort in the world outside of fiction, food in Sense and Sensibility is seen to falter in its assigned role of providing assurance in stressful situations, as Marianne can neither “eat nor speak” after Willoughby leaves her (82). Marianne already gone to bed, Elinor drinks the old Constantia wine Mrs. Jennings kindly brings and reflects that “its healing powers on a disappointed heart might be as reasonably tried on herself as on her sister” (S&S 198). In her abstention from nourishment—an act of passive resistance—Marianne is preceded

by numerous sentimental novels' heroines familiar to Austen.¹⁵ In The Cure of the Passions and the Origins of the English Novel, Geoffrey Sill reads S&S as a "commentary on Wollstonecraft's Rights of Woman," with Marianne's behavior indicating "aberrations of passion" that must be cured (190, 187). Sill's understanding of Marianne's behavior is opposed by Maggie Lane, who reads the heroine's action as a real response to her world ordered by men "for their own benefit" and thus not wholly a mockery on Austen's part (84).

In defending womankind, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that men follow their appetites more than women do in the areas of lust and gluttony (Vindication 149), but her connection of the two categories frequently conflated in her society reveals a further reason women's hearty eating was excoriated. A healthy appetite for food was thought to indicate a strong inclination toward sexual license, even as the discipline of fasting was perceived in Methodist circles, to "wean [one's human nature] . . . from all indulgence of inferior appetites," as stated by John Wesley (qtd. Gillespie 104). While stuffing oneself may be a human impulse when anxious, bored, or stressed, eighteenth-century social commentators and pastors disapproved, viewing gluttony as a "hurtful passion" as had others before them (Gordon 192).¹⁶ Therefore, overeating is under-represented among eighteenth-century novels, however likely to occur in real life.¹⁷ For example, philanthropist and women's rights activist Frances Power Cobbe (1822-1904) at the age of seven ate a whole box of Shrewsbury cakes during a lengthy coach ride; she admitted in her autobiography that greediness was a "besetting sin" all her life (qtd. Sanders Records 188). John Dussinger reports that Austen's gluttons are "mainly ciphers in a

pattern of frantic acquisitiveness” (i.e., General Tilney of NA, Dr. Grant of MP) (69-70).

However, in portraying overweight Mrs. Jennings of Sense and Sensibility, Austen begins with highlighting her character’s vulgarity but ends with focusing on her comforting friendship. Dussinger cites Mrs. Jennings as a “useful indicator for confronting the text”; her love of match-making reflects the audience’s “own prying into the narrative and into the characters’ cryptic messages” (120). Mrs. Jennings exemplifies the “maternal power” that is “characterized by reliability, nurturance, and the capacity for comfort” (qtd. Chodorow, Femininities 59). Like Mrs. Bennet of Pride and Prejudice whose “solace” in life is “visiting and news” (P&P 5), Mrs. Jennings finds comfort in “the gossip of her maid” and in paying “visit[s] of comfort and inquiry” (S&S 341, 271). A confirmed gossip, Mrs. Jennings is, however, unaware of giving pain to her acquaintance because she takes such delight in spreading around good and bad news, imagining that doing so comforts others. Meyersohn argues that though Mrs. Jennings erroneously reports on the ousting of Lucy Steele from the John Dashwood household, the older woman’s “compassion and lack of avarice mark her for the future as a reliable moral witness” (“Garrulous” 39). The transformation of this “good-humoured, merry, fat, elderly woman, who talked a great deal, seemed very happy, and rather vulgar” is not a result of a dynamic change in her personality, but rather of the Dashwood sisters’ growing appreciation for their neighbor (S&S 34). Initially Mrs. Jennings discomforts the sisters with her free remarks: “quick in the discovery of attachments,” she teases Elinor about Edward Ferrars and Marianne about Colonel Brandon, then Willoughby (36, 61, 67). The narrator admits that the jokes of Sir John and Mrs. Jennings “added

pain to many a painful hour” (85), though Dussinger thinks it is “misleading” that kindly Mrs. Jennings is initially described as “full of jokes and laughter” (qtd. 116). The widow’s forthright conversation often reverts to topics that embarrass her more refined friends: her daughter’s pregnancy and Colonel Brandon’s (supposed) illegitimate child are frequently canvassed by her as news worth talking of publicly (S&S 163, 66). Despite her sometimes trivial conversation, Mrs. Jennings is not boring, according to Meyersohn (“Garrulous” 39).

However, once Willoughby severs his relationship with Marianne, Mrs. Jennings’s sympathy is called forth. As a caregiver she cuts a humorous figure, prescribing “a variety of sweetmeats and olives, and a good fire” to cure heartbreak (S&S 193).¹⁸ Mrs. Jennings is not mean-spirited, as she only offers what she believes would do a melancholy person good, though her remedies fail to alleviate Marianne’s emotional pain. The Dashwood sisters’ reluctance to receive Mrs. Jennings’s “effort to comfort them” suggests to Dussinger that it is “as if someone who talks too much is irredeemable under any circumstances” (119). The succeeding events of the narrative prove otherwise: after weeks of indisposition in London, Marianne catches an infectious fever and nearly dies at the Palmers’ residence in Somersetshire, which gives the widow the opportunity to prove her worth. Mrs. Jennings is the first to sense Marianne’s real danger, and she urges Elinor to call in the local apothecary to tend her sister (S&S 307). Mrs. Jennings’s nursing Marianne is proof that “cosiness, snacks, and gossip” are *not* the “only stores in her magazine of comfort,” as Doody implies (Introduction xxiv-xxv). Fearing for their baby, the Palmers leave their own home, but Mrs. Jennings remains,

“endeavoring, by her own attentive care, to supply to [Marianne] the place of the mother she had taken her from; and Elinor found her on every occasion a most willing and active helpmate, [. . .] and often by her better experience in nursing, of material use” (308). For Dussinger, Mrs. Jennings is a rarity in Austen’s novels: the “maternal figure” who provides “support [. . .] against the status quo” (117). At the worst moment, Mrs. Jennings tries “to speak comfort to Elinor” though her belief in Marianne’s likely death “would not allow her to offer the comfort of hope” (S&S 313). A firm friend, Mrs. Jennings is also too honest to give Elinor false assurance, instead attempting to prepare her for the worst, though once the doctor proclaims Marianne’s improvement, their chaperone joyfully foresees her charge’s full recovery (315).

Comfort is not restored to the Dashwood sisters until the crisis of Marianne’s serious illness and her eventual recovery place their negligent treatment from relatives and suitors in perspective: Marianne comes home to Barton Cottage anticipating “the dear family party which would then be restored [upon sister Margaret’s return], of their mutual pursuits and cheerful society as the only happiness worth a wish” (S&S 343). For critics Edmund Wilson and Johnson, the most poignant part of the novel is the older sisters’ “involvement with one another” (Wilson 203), deeper than their bonds in marriage to Edward Ferrars and Colonel Brandon will ever be (“Divine” 43). The Austen sisters’ partnership, as reconfigured in Sense and Sensibility, lends happiness to the final outcome that might otherwise seem tragic. Marianne’s disappointment in Willoughby refocuses her attention from outward pursuits in the world—Doody calls her a “mistaken revolutionary” (Introduction xvii)—to the inward comforts of home. As

usual in Austen's world, the sororal bond trumps the conjugal one, with feelings of "con amore fraternal" ruling the day (MP 282).

On the other hand, Elinor's seemingly impossible marriage to Edward is fortuitous, almost a *deus ex machina*. One tenet of psychoanalysis is that "human life is lived under conditions of tension" (Lear 134), and the lives of Austen's female protagonists in Sense and Sensibility are unusually tense. No other Austen heroine besides Elinor faces the likely death of a beloved sister, and so Elinor's luck in marrying another woman's fiancé turns out to be reasonable given the risks she has already incurred on the domestic front: nearly losing Marianne results in gaining Edward. For Marianne and Elinor, relatives, lovers, and snacks bring mainly discomfort into their lives; those nearest them are morally culpable for the protagonists' emotional disasters and Marianne's near death. The sisters comfort each other, if not always successfully, yet the novel's end reveals that their relationship is the only comfort that ultimately matters.

3.3 Mansfield Park and the "Cold Comfort" of an Empty Grate

Conflating women with the comforts of home is a recurring element in Austen's fiction, and it provides the central crux of Mansfield Park. Poverty is an attribute of Austen's least privileged heroine Fanny Price, whose parents are an ex-Lieutenant of Marines "without education, fortune, or connections" and the youngest sister to Lady Bertram, like her in her "easy and indolent" manner but not a very respectable "mother of nine children" (MP 3, 390). Brought up away from her lower class Portsmouth home

and seldom treated as the Bertrams' equal, Fanny Price of Mansfield Park attends very closely to the needs of others, and her ability to give comfort is an index of her marriagability since Austen's good wives are those who, like Mrs. Grant, "find comfort somewhere"—in setting a hospitable table or in patiently tending their families (MP 46, 215, 213). Although the term "comfort" does not surface as frequently in Austen's warmer, lighter novels—Pride and Prejudice, Northanger Abbey, and Emma—as it does in her darker works—Mansfield Park, Persuasion, and Sense and Sensibility—the heroine's ability to bring comfort is nevertheless a crucial testimony to her readiness for marriage and subsequent wife- and motherhood.¹⁹ By the same token, unsuccessful wives in Austen are the ones who fail to comfort, or worse, discomfort their families, a result of their own self-centeredness.

A novel-cum-conduct manual, The Countess and Gertrude; or Modes of Discipline (1811) by Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, strongly criticizes those women and men who seek pleasure outside of the home, while upholding those who content themselves with "domestic management" (IV: 359). Hawkins agrees with her fellow moralist Hannah More, who writes in 1799 that the domestic circle is woman's "appropriate sphere" (II: 149). After many struggles, growing up in a wealthy household yet deprived of any exercise in free will, much like Mansfield Park's Fanny Price, the heroine Gertrude Aubrey is solicited in marriage by the man who helped raise her, Lord Luxmore, his name indicative of his luxurious tastes. In contemplating a union with the earl, Gertrude resists the idea of matrimony not only because she is in love with another man but also because marriage to a peer of the realm would take her into the public view

and away from her provincial domestic circle. Gertrude fears becoming what Armstrong describes, a woman turned into public spectacle when out of her own home, consequently losing her value as subject (whose emotions and ideas are taken seriously) when she is objectified in the male gaze, and only her body is considered (77). As the heroine tells one of her advisors, “I cannot, in so short a time, make up my mind to the sacrifice of all my quiet comfort—but I will endeavor” (IV: 391). Gertrude’s “quiet comfort” includes a regular round of visits from kindly neighbors, charitable gifts for the poor, frequent tutorials with a friend’s daughter, and a few weeks’ visit to London each year (IV: 362-63). In a parallel situation, the man who is right for Gertrude has been pursued by wealthy, capricious Lady Elma. In responding to her forward overtures, Colonel Sydenham cautions,

I must speak for myself, and tell you what I perceive that may endanger your comfort.—I have certainly an habitual silence, and you seem to me to delight in conversation: in this then, I fear, we shall not agree. I am shut up in my room, when I have one, three or four hours at a time; and I do not like the intrusion even of my servant. (IV: 367)

Serious-minded Colonel Sydenham worries that his preference for silence and solitude will discomfort extroverted Lady Elma, causing potential strife in their marriage. Sydenham evokes and may have inspired Austen’s creation of Edmund Bertram in Mansfield Park, even as the Colonel’s love interest, Lady Elma, is talkative, wealthy, and associated with French culture, as is Austen’s Mary Crawford, whose “laughs of playfulness” add to every social visit but whose temperament is ill-suited to a quiet life at her brother-in-law’s parsonage (MP 284-85). Sydenham lists a number of significant differences between himself and Lady Elma, not the least of which is her inherited

fortune versus his earned income as a soldier. Just as Edmund Bertram realizes Mary's unsuitability and his cousin Fanny's "superiority" (MP 471), so Sydenham eventually renounces Lady Elma's claim on him. The proper man for Gertrude because his domestic tastes agree with hers, Sydenham and Gertrude are free to wed after their wealthy, would-be spouses find consolation in each other's exalted company (IV: 422-23).

In the final pages of the four-volume novel, Hawkins delivers her last moral lesson through a minor character, who, in a letter, congratulates Gertrude and her intended on their ability to "stand in a centre, and see the world dance round" them, apparently without making matrimony the goal of existence, viewing it instead "as the expansion of a new prospect in [their] journey through life" (IV: 424-25). Hawkins here attempts to guide her readers' responses to the text, encouraging in her audience the desire to live well-regulated lives (a form of comfort), as the main characters do, instead of irresponsibly looking forward to the excitement of a romantic attachment, the detailing of which ironically has livened the 1,631 pages of The Countess and Gertrude.²⁰ Hawkins's quest for patriarchal approval leads to a certain amount of hypocrisy in her presentation of marriage as the ultimate goal—something Austen has been accused of doing—while denying romance's excitement or existence. However, her view accords once again with that of More, who sees marriage as often "tolerable" or capable of giving lots of comfort to those not looking for "constant transport" (II: 122). Hawkins's critique of the materialism rampant in the world of Gertrude's foster family is hardly the thrust of her novel, and it would take Austen's Mansfield Park to deliver an

unapologetic, confident interrogation of the upper class's tendencies and vices.

By situating the (middle class) act of comforting as central to true womanhood, Austen can be shown to side against the leisure class's slothful ways to vindicate a culture of active womanhood that matters, even though doing nothing remains a possibility. In Pride and Prejudice, for example, Elizabeth honestly tells Lady Catherine de Bourgh that in educational matters, the Bennet daughters "compared with some families" were "neglected" (Lady Catherine's term), "but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. [. . .] Those who chose to be idle, certainly might" (165). Austen's novels hint at a new linguistic community, not the gentry or nobility but a leisure class: what Armstrong calls the "middle-class aristocracy" (160). Alice Browne's The Eighteenth-Century Feminist Mind finds innate contradictions in traditions such as the one that saw vapours as inherent to womanliness and as the end result of laziness in upper class women (19), such as Lady Bertram.

Neither a member of the middle class nor adept at comforting, Lady Bertram surpasses every other idle Austen character. The Mansfield Park narrator explains that because of "a little ill-health, and a great deal of indolence," Lady Bertram quits her habit of spending each spring in London for staying year round in the country, while Sir Thomas continues on as a member of parliament, "with whatever increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence" (20). In my delineation of Sir Thomas's wife I differ from Joy Alexander, who writes, "there is more to Lady Bertram than indolence," as that is the Crawfords' term for her. Alexander maintains that "modern readers misjudge Lady Bertram because we admire activity rather than inactivity" (242).The

narrator hints that were Lady Bertram more active in her role as wife to Sir Thomas, her absence might truly be missed. She does almost nothing when present—for example, when Fanny is asked to dine with the Grants, Lady Bertram’s first thought is, “Can I do without her, Sir Thomas? . . . She always makes tea, you know, when my sister is not here” (219).²¹ Were the reasons behind Lady Bertram’s laziness less concrete, her refusal to perform the tea ceremony might be read as resistance to patriarchy.

Instead, Lady Bertram merely passes on to Fanny or Mrs. Norris her own share of the (symbolic) work of womanhood, and by absenting herself from London provides her husband with unalloyed comfort in the form of fewer losses at cards and fewer inane questions than he would receive were she in attendance (MP 239). Lady Bertram ultimately complies with patriarchy, as Johnson finds that Mansfield Park runs well only when feminine dissent is assumed to be non-existent, showing the “dependence of certain kinds of masculine discourse on feminine silence” (Jane Austen 112). Radicals and conservatives both agree, Johnson argues, that “amiable weakness and loveliness in women guarantee the continuance of patriarchy itself” (152). Certainly, Lady Bertram’s penchant for napping on the sofa insures that whatever ideology holds sway at Mansfield, it will not be one of her making (MP 71).

Perhaps in recognition of Lady Bertram’s powerless position, the Mansfield Park narrator does not blame the mother for her son’s and daughters’ errors—reckless spending and drunkenness on Tom’s part, improvident marriages and spoilt dispositions on the parts of Maria and Julia (23, 426, 462-64)—although Sir Thomas and Aunt Norris both come in for their share of reprehension (461, 466). Susan Morgan’s reading differs

somewhat from mine, as she writes that Mansfield Park discusses “social oppression” in taking to task all four parents in the Price and Bertram families, who have allowed “material issues and personal comfort [to] take priority over their [parental] responsibilities” (46). As a mother, Lady Bertram has had little influence of any kind on her children. While Amanda Vickery describes the widely-held eighteenth-century belief in the softening influence of women (promoting gentler behavior in men), a source of pride to females (86), Lady Bertram has gone soft and wields little influence of any kind. Even Sir Thomas acts with less authority than readers might expect from the patriarch of Mansfield Park. Upon his return from Antigua, Sir Thomas interviews his eldest daughter, Maria, concerning her engagement to Mr. Rushworth. The problems with the father-daughter interaction are apparent when certain psychological principles are applied to Austen’s fictional situation.²² Following the Russian psychologist Vygotsky’s thinking, David Smail finds that “the rules which govern our talking to ourselves” are precisely “the same as the rules which govern our talking to others (and they to us)” (179). Smail contends that lying is needful to avoid oppression, and if someone cannot lie, they need to learn how. A person should be able to lie to their parents, according to Smail, while telling him- or herself the truth (183). Essentially, Maria’s problem is that she cannot lie to the outside world (her father) without lying to herself as well, with disastrous emotional consequences. Sir Thomas, astute enough to observe Maria’s disregard for her intended, relishes the forthcoming connection too much to inquire deeply and chooses rather to believe his ears than his eyes. Sir Thomas remains content to hope for the best: Maria’s “feelings probably were not acute; he had never supposed

them to be so; but her comforts might not be less on that account” (MP 201). “Comforts” are here measured against the ardent emotions a bride is presumed to have for her fiancé, but Maria’s lack of feeling, in Sir Thomas’s mind, will not impinge on her enjoyment of material and emotional comfort. For Eagleton, “nothing could be more ominous, then, than a governing class which is plagued by moral misrule” (118).

This is not the first time in Sir Thomas’s experience that a woman weds without love: once Miss Maria Ward’s excellent marriage to the baronet himself takes place, it is accompanied by the expectation shared by the community at large that her two sisters will be “benefited by her elevation” (MP 3). Without any other prospects, however, Lady Bertram’s older sister “found herself obliged to be attached to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law,” and it is an attachment from which she wrangles multiple benefits for the remainder of the novel. This arrangement reveals the high priority a comfortable situation has for the not atypical Mrs. Norris and sets up Sir Thomas to expect similar behavior from his daughter Maria, a point on which he is mistaken.

Maria’s intention after the man she loves abandons her is an example of free indirect discourse (FID), revealing how Austen connects one version of comfort in Mansfield Park with evil:

Her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could give. Henry Crawford had destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he had done it; he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity too. He should not have to think of her as pining in the retirement of Mansfield for *him*, rejecting Sotherton [Rushworth’s estate] and London, independence and splendour for *his* sake. (MP 202)

Maria’s comfort resides in her public reputation and is not connected with her personal feelings or desires.²³ In fact, Austen here defines “comfort,” for this character at least, as

“her credit, her appearance, her prosperity,” including even the freedom and “splendour” of a public display of self at England’s epicenter, London. Maria and Fanny possess conflicting notions of comfort, then, as what one longs for would make the other shudder. Edward Said goes so far as to make Fanny a “‘comfort’ and ‘acquisition’ despite herself”; though she is a tool in a larger system, Said also views her as a fully developed novel character, more so in fact than her wealthier relations (85). As Johnson has stated, Maria and Fanny’s conferences with Sir Thomas about female choice “mirror each other” (Jane Austen 105). If Fanny is shy and dull, according to Terry Eagleton, the irony in the heroine’s possession of these characteristics is the “price which virtue [. . .] has to pay in a predatory social order” (113). Unprotected by Sir Thomas, Fanny speaks and acts seriously in a situation calling for that response.

Knowing Fanny less well than he knows his own daughter, Sir Thomas therefore proposes a ball for his niece and nephew after Maria’s marriage, although this honor is not *for* Fanny as much as it is *about* her. Making the same mistake as Sir Thomas (not knowing Fanny well), Marvin Mudrick writes that readers “never take the author’s word for Fanny”: beneath the heroine’s timidity and consistent moral perspective is “something persistently unpleasant” so that we “remember what she thinks, not what she is, and we begin to wonder whether she exists at all among the bright presences of Jane Austen’s work” (161). Holding Fanny up to a pre-ordained standard for an Austen heroine results in Mudrick’s miscalculation of Mansfield Park’s protagonist and leads to his negative assessment of the novel (180).

Even more than Austen’s other heroines, Fanny herself is comfortable (one could

say “at home”) with the kinds of domestic pursuits depicted in amateur artist John Harden’s sketches of family groups. Harden’s 1805 picture, Reading and Sewing, presents a gentleman turned towards the fireplace, book in hand, while three ladies in line on a couch sew by the light of the fire and by the glow of two candles on a tiny table in front of them (Cornforth 133). As Mansfield Park’s narrator explains, “what was tranquillity [sic] and comfort to Fanny was tediousness and vexation to Mary,” the Bertrams’ vivacious neighbor at the parsonage, who ill bears confinement “within doors by a series of rain and snow” during her suitor Edmund Bertram’s absence (285-86). Fanny, on the other hand, contentedly plays a card game with her aunt while her uncle reads silently, an evening of “languor, and all but solitude” (283). People at the end of the eighteenth century read to handle or escape from family life, demonstrating that Sir Thomas’s views on the quiet evening at home may better parallel Mary Crawford’s sense of vexation. Another Harden painting, his Family Group, Charles Lloyd Reading (1804) again depicts a father, mother, and two grown daughters, this time seated at a larger table in front of the fireplace. The man appears to be reading aloud to the women, two of whom are clearly sewing, while the third’s back is turned to the viewer (Cornforth 134). Terry Lovell explains that reading, even communal as in this painting, symbolizes the woman at home’s remove from the scene of labor, as reading situates her in the role of consumer, not producer (qtd. Sussman 133). Like the women depicted in Harden’s paintings, Fanny may seem passive in her family relationships, but the work of comforting at home is on-going.

Harden’s drawings seem complementary to scenes depicted from Austen’s

pessimistic novels: Edward Ferrars's reading Cowper rather listlessly to Elinor, Marianne, and Mrs. Dashwood (S&S 14), or Willoughby's reading with spirit to the same family group (41). Another of Austen's villains, Henry Crawford, gives a "truly dramatic" reading of Shakespeare's King Henry VIII, to even Fanny's satisfaction (MP 278-279). For Miller, Henry Crawford has been a vacillating signifier but by novel's end, the "status of his narratability" is known—that is, he will not "amount to anything" (Narrative 26). Austen dangles Henry in front of readers as a workable match for Fanny: "Would he [Henry] have persevered, and uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward—and a reward very voluntarily bestowed" (MP 467), only to jerk that possibility away after his affair with Maria, an irretrievable narrative step.

A more stationary signifier than Henry Crawford is the chimney fireplace, which retains consistently positive implications for Austen; she clearly views a good fire as a "luxurious sensation" rather than Crowley's minimal comfort (9 Nov. 1800). Fanny's cousin Edmund and would-be lover, Henry, discourse on the topic of reading aloud to Fanny's "great entertainment," as they stand "by the fire" at opulent Mansfield Park (MP 280). In his introduction to Jane Eyre, Michael Mason remarks that "the meaning of fire for humankind is broad: it is an agent of sheer survival, of comfort, and of manufacture" (xxi). His phrase "domestic well-being" connects fire to "having enough to eat, through comfort, to furnishings and décor" (Mason xxii). Kowaleski-Wallace points out women's frequent comparison "to a domesticated fire—fireplace or hearth" because of their proximity to the "civilizing processes" arising out of the "development of indoor space" (74). In what Witold Rybczynski calls the "feminization of the home," women

were now identified with that structure (72), where previously they had occupied no specific place. Paul Langford notes that an English home was said to possess “two essentials, a wife and a fire,” both associated with comfort (115). While comfort may be viewed currently more as a state of consciousness, that perspective is informed by the physical realities of the eighteenth-century home, especially a home under female supervision.

Opposed to her niece’s ever marrying into the Mansfield circle, Mrs. Norris enforces Fanny’s servant status by denying her a fire in her bedchamber. Mrs. Norris is acting in accordance with an entire power-restricting system, viewing Fanny as an enemy so that the girl’s gains are her aunt’s losses (Bilger 150, 184). In The Madwoman in the Attic’s chapter on Austen, Susan Gubar explains Aunt Norris’s unrelenting dislike of Fanny as a result of rivalry for “Sir Thomas’ protection” (170). In keeping Fanny from enjoying a fire, Aunt Norris is flaunting a six-hundred year-old tradition linking comfort with “the sight of a fire” (Gloag 99; Langford 190). Crowley also clearly connects the chimney fireplace with privacy and warmth, so Fanny’s being refused the latter means doing without the former as well. Forbidden by her aunt to heat her room, Fanny cannot comfort herself or her guests, and Fanny’s cold fireplace may thus symbolize Mrs. Norris’s attempt at keeping her niece from advancing into womanhood, a condition that might otherwise threaten the platonic relationship between Fanny and her two male cousins and lead to Sir Thomas’s fear of “cousins in love, &c.” being realized (MP 6).²⁴

Mrs. Norris originally places Fanny “in the little white attic, near the old nurseries”—a situation not calculated to promote progress toward maturity, physical or otherwise, for although it may be appropriate for ten-year-old Fanny, it is much less so for the eighteen-year-old (MP 9). Colin Winborn observes that Fanny’s place at Mansfield Park gradually shifts from the attic to the East Room (74), once Maria Bertram celebrates her sixteenth birthday and moves to a “superior [. . .] apartment” (MP 151). While Fanny now occupies two rooms, neither of them signify importance or adulthood. Meyersohn suggests that Fanny is “the child in the attic whose wicked stepmother (Aunt Norris) allows her no fire to keep her warm” (“Quiet” 226). When Mary Crawford first comes into Fanny’s cold attic, with its “school-room chairs [. . .] much more fitted for little girls” (MP 169), Edmund’s cousin looks “at the bright bars of her empty grate with concern” (168). That Fanny is barred entrance into womanhood is demonstrated by the absence of a fire in her room and the presence of chairs too small for adults, hindrances to her own comfort but also limits on her provision of comfort for visitors.

Mary does not consciously register that Fanny could threaten Mary’s burgeoning relationship to Edmund—her first feeling of jealousy arises out of Edmund’s visiting a friend who has sisters (MP 286-87). During Mary’s visit to Fanny’s attic, Mary reiterates her embarrassment over reading certain provocative lines from Lover’s Vows to Edmund’s face, then asks Fanny if *she* would have the fortitude to say such remarks to Edmund. Fanny’s answer is apparently unimportant, as Mary recollects, “But then he is your cousin, which makes all the difference” (168). What difference is made because of

her biological relationship to Edmund becomes insignificant later—although more than one character is employed in reminding Fanny of her cousinship, and therefore inadmissible love relationship, for as Johnson notices, Fanny’s love for Edmund is not totally legitimate (Jane Austen 117)—but only after Fanny is brought out into the adult world.

In Mansfield Park, Mrs. Grant is initially the character most adept at providing comfort. Tending to her husband, a gluttonous clergyman fifteen years her senior, who thinks himself ill if the meat is imperfectly cooked, keeps the young wife from social engagements (171). Dussinger observes that Dr. Grant’s overeating appears “to have displaced his sex drive” (71): depending on her attraction to her husband, this circumstance may be either a comfort or a discomfort for Mrs. Grant, who is stoical about her less-than-ideal marriage. She explains to her siblings, Mary and Henry Crawford, that “there will be little rubs and disappointments every where,” although “if one scheme of happiness fails, human nature turns to another; if the first calculation is wrong, we make a second better; we find comfort somewhere” (MP 46). True to her word, Mrs. Grant finds comfort in providing comfort for others by setting a hospitable table at the parsonage and in aiding the Crawfords and Bertrams in rehearsing Lover’s Vows (215, 159). Mary commends her older sister for her ability to “be plagued very often and never lose your temper” (213). Mansfield Park’s narrator also praises Mrs. Grant’s temperament, her tendency “to love and be loved”: though she leaves Mansfield after her brother’s disgraceful affair with Maria Bertram Rushworth, her “happiness of disposition” will inevitably “secure her a great deal to enjoy” (469).²⁵ Mrs. Grant

excellently fulfills her duty as parson's wife, modeling a role Fanny Price will inherit after the Grants quit Mansfield permanently, and Fanny marries Edmund.

Like Mrs. Grant, Fanny excels at comforting those around her, but the comfort that Mrs. Grant derives from comforting others is denied to the heroine herself for much of the novel, thanks to Aunt Norris's propensity for depriving Fanny of comfort. Taken from her lower class Portsmouth home at the age of ten to live with her wealthy relations, Fanny can only imagine how wonderful it would be "to feel myself of consequence to any body!—*Here* [at Mansfield], I know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well" (27). Paula Marantz Cohen finds that daughters have the least power in the family and are the most likely persons to be given the role of "carrying the family's emotional stress" (129). Fanny is a surrogate daughter for the Bertrams, and her job of comforting includes bearing their emotional stress, even when she is away from Mansfield and hears the terrible rumors about her cousins, Tom's broken health, and Maria's affair with Henry Crawford (MP 432-33, 437). The narrator adds that Fanny "rated her own claims to comfort as low even as Mrs. Norris could," yet Fanny's ability to comfort is far greater than her aunt's, signaling the heroine's candidacy for marriage (221).

Fanny Price stands at a crossroads in Mansfield Park, with two models before her of women's comfort-giving. Both Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Grant have occupied the parsonage, and both childless women appear to be completely devoted to the service of their families. If Mrs. Grant is one emblem of comfort-giving, then Mrs. Norris is the opposite, masking her true mercenary motives with the appearance of goodness. The

juxtaposition of Mrs. Grant's actions against Mrs. Norris's activities, while aligning Mrs. Grant with a heroine whose acts, for much of the novel, are parried by Aunt Norris, reveals Austen's sense of comfort-giving as the work of married or marriageable women that is both endlessly necessary and commendable, unless done for personal gain.

With her own best interests in view, Mrs. Norris incessantly pursues creature comforts. The four "pheasant's eggs, and a cream cheese" she acquires from the Rushworths' housekeeper during a family outing to Sotherton, hold more importance for her than her nieces' physical comfort during the carriage ride home (MP 104). Once Maria complains, however, about a parcel's "knocking my elbow unmercifully," her aunt rectifies the situation by forcing Fanny to hold the cream cheese, increasing Fanny's discomfort for the remainder of their ten mile journey (104-105). That the various presents surpass Fanny in her aunt's opinion is clear from Mrs. Norris's recounting of the Sotherton housekeeper's gift: "she said it must be such an amusement to me, as she understood I lived quite alone, to have a few living creatures of that sort [the pheasants]." Mrs. Norris envisions the "great delight" it will be "in my lonely hours to attend to them" (106). The delight the pheasants will bring derives from their monetary worth rather than their function as companions, as Mrs. Norris's "lonely hours" are her own choice. Having previously asked Lady Bertram to "consider my unhappy state, how can [Fanny] be any comfort to me?", Mrs. Norris pleads her poverty as sufficient reason for not taking in the child, even though her widow's portion amounts to £600 per year, £100 more than Sense and Sensibility's Mrs. Dashwood and her three daughters have between them (MP 29; S&S 12). Despite her sufficient income, Mrs.

Norris attends her wealthy sister daily, in part to run errands and partly to save money by eating the Bertrams' food and inflating her ego by associating with them (MP 38-39).

Unfortunately, any comfort Mrs. Norris provides for the Bertrams—and Sir Thomas notices on his return from Antigua that his sister-in-law has “still the same anxiety for every body's comfort” (180)—Fanny often pays for it in slights and discomforts dealt by her unkind aunt. John Wiltshire finds that the real “heart of darkness” in Austen is in the “psychological violence of woman against woman” exemplified in Mrs. Norris's treatment of Fanny (Recreating 138). During one sweltering summer day, her “unreasonable aunts” order Fanny to trim the roses in the Bertrams' garden, followed by two walks across the park to deliver the flowers to Mrs. Norris's cottage (MP 74, 72). The long hours and tiring walks in the heat give Fanny a headache, but Mrs. Norris remains oblivious to her niece's plight and chides her for “idling away all the evening upon a sofa” (71). What Edmund terms a “very ill-managed business” is sadly typical of Mrs. Norris's comfort-giving: it is a mere blind to satisfy her own greed, while her punishment of Fanny reveals the widow's sense of comfort as an upper-class privilege, discomfort being the lot of servants (73). While Aunt Norris reminds Fanny of her servant-like status at every opportunity, Edmund's bringing his cousin a “glass of Madeira” for her headache reaffirms her rightful place as one of the family (74). Cohen views Fanny's weak constitution as a “delicate homeostatic mechanism” for the Bertrams—when she breaks down, it signals the need for “immediate compensatory action” by the men of family, Edmund and Sir Thomas (133).

Unlike Aunt Norris, Mrs. Grant comes to Mansfield Park only when asked, and

her kind, comforting ways are what Fanny will imitate, even as the role Mrs. Grant was to perform in Lover's Vows is consigned to Fanny; without either woman, "the comfort of the whole evening [is] destroyed" (MP 171). When tragedy visits Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas and his wife recall Fanny from Portsmouth because they need the comfort that only she is able to bestow. Lacking introspection, Lady Bertram is nevertheless aware enough to write to Fanny, "how glad I should be, if you were here to comfort me" (427). Once Fanny arrives, Lady Bertram hurries to meet her, exclaiming, "Dear Fanny! now I shall be comfortable" (447). Alexander reads these lines as the climax of the entire novel, with Fanny "the comforter [. . .] welcomed by Lady Bertram the comfortable" (241, 246). Alexander notes the frequency of "the word 'comfort' or its derivatives" in Mansfield Park, but she stops short of describing "comfort" as one of the "core issues in the book" (246), which it is. Like Mrs. Grant, Fanny comforts in uncomfortable circumstances, gently enduring others' shortcomings.

The Grants are eventually summoned to a position "in Westminster," and with Dr. Grant's death afterward, Fanny and Edmund have not only Thornton Lacey, but the "Mansfield living" to enjoy, a "home of affection and comfort" (MP 469, 472-73). Austen's doubling the womanly role of effective comforter in Mrs. Grant and Fanny Price (Mrs. Edmund Bertram)—both wives of clergymen—reveals the novelist's understanding comfort as of primary importance to both family and community, as it promotes a harmonious society.²⁶ However, Fanny's limited success in bringing comfort to her Portsmouth family—she reconciles her quarreling sisters but "despair[s] of making the smallest impression" on her noisy, undisciplined brothers or her vulgar father

(397, 391, 389)—reveals comfort's inability to solve the problems of poverty.

In well-regulated Mansfield Park, however, the ability to tender comfort to others becomes the litmus test for tenure, a difficult challenge even Mrs. Grant cannot perfectly meet, as she remains outside the Bertram family circle, while the hard work of comforting necessitates someone laboring—with love—from the inside. Aunt Norris leaves to discomfort Maria in a house abroad, as Sir Thomas finally realizes how unsuited his sister-in-law is to life at Mansfield Park. In departing forever, Mrs. Norris provides Sir Thomas with “the great supplementary comfort of [his] life”—her absence—while in Fanny he finds “a prime comfort for himself” (465, 472).²⁷ Of his treatment toward Fanny, Sir Thomas comes to regret his former “appearance of harshness,” and he and Fanny become mutually attached (472). Once Sir Thomas moves the new bride into Thornton Lacey “with every kind attention to her comfort,” her uncle's daily goal involves visiting Fanny there or inviting her to Mansfield (472).

That Mansfield Park, a novel ostensibly concerning ordination, should end in a happy marriage fits D. H. Lawrence's notion that the “indissolubility of marriage” is the true rock upon which the Church is built, and should marriage's position be made precarious, “the Church falls” (97).²⁸ For Edmund's priestly role to be made meaningful, he must marry, according to both Austen and Lawrence's logic.²⁹ Years of comforting the Bertrams reveals Fanny's future effectiveness as a clergyman's wife, and her efforts are finally reciprocated in comforts to herself. For Lynne Vallone, Austen's use of Fanny as conduct book heroine is un-ironic: without the didactic tradition, Mansfield Park's form and meaning are lessened (98). Fanny is rewarded for her high morals, but in a

secluded remove from society because love is “rational, sober, dutiful” (Vallone 84). Vallone compares Fanny to Samuel Richardson’s earlier heroine Pamela, who gains spiritually and materially by following a moral code in a fallen, commercial world (104). Cohen writes that by the novel’s end, the Bertrams and Fanny have become “one undifferentiated mass—a family ideal that no longer conceives of individuals,” the “result of a perfectly balanced dynamic within a closed system” (134). Auerbach interprets Austen’s critical decision to end the novel, not with a picture of domestic happiness between Mr. and Mrs. Edmund Bertram but with a “reference to the parsonage,” as showing a positive move for England with Edmund’s replacement of the morally inferior Reverends Mr. Norris and Dr. Grant, even if “the Nation” only goes so far as Mansfield Park’s borders (Searching 190). Fanny’s marriage into the Bertram family is the direct result of the comfort Fanny renders upon her return from exile in Portsmouth, and with Edmund, Fanny finds home a comfort at last. Edmund’s near-marriage to Mary Crawford instead of his cousin Fanny reminds readers of how precariously situated Fanny’s final comfortable lot in life is: the Mansfield Park narrator assures us that Fanny would have married Henry Crawford had Edmund wed Mary, a less satisfying ending perhaps better suited to the overall tenor of this “cold comfort” novel. For Austen, bestowing comfort is a labor that brings its own reward, eventually becoming itself a source of comfort for the woman whose valuation depends on the recognition of her work’s importance at home, which happens to be wherever she goes.

3.4 Persuasion's "Cold Comforts" of Illness, Indebtedness, and Warfare

As self-deceived and as selfish as Mansfield Park's Mrs. Norris, Persuasion's Mary Musgrove imposes on herself and her sister Anne in writing what is patently false: "Mrs. Harville and I quite agree that we love [Louisa Musgrove] the better for having nursed her" (P 165). In Persuasion's famous scene on the Cobb at Lyme, headstrong Louisa has fallen in jumping from too high a stair step and is taken away in a coma (109-112). Although Mary is unable to render any help (she has "been hysterical again this morning"), she insists on staying and sending Anne away. The exemplary women in the novel, Anne Wentworth and Mrs. Harville, are both presented as excellent nurses to the sick in comfort's largest undertaking, while changeable Mary alternately fakes illness to receive others' comfort-giving (P 37), shirks her own responsibilities in the sickroom when her son has dislocated his collar bone (57), or supplants her sister, who is the acknowledged best nurse ("no one so proper, so capable as Anne!") in order to receive the glory attendant on being in the spotlight and avoid the boredom of going home early (114-115). As soon as Anne is gone, "jealous and ill-judging" Mary resumes her favorite posture of requiring care herself (going to bed early, having hysterics, walking with Captain Benwick), in fact vying with unconscious Louisa for attention from everyone else (115, 121).

Louisa would have been badly situated had it not been for the comforting wife of Captain Wentworth's close friend, Mrs. Harville. Like Mrs. Grant of Mansfield Park, Mrs. Harville is one of Austen's capable minor characters who succeeds in the matronly business of comforting, proving herself adept at handling both crises and day-to-day

situations. She fits the profile of eighteenth-century care-givers: Vickery explains that since nursemaids do not replace mothers, the full burden of nursing the sick falls on the wife (117). The role of housekeeper / manager is a source of personal pleasure, Vickery learns, as it garners public approbation for the eighteenth- / early nineteenth-century gentlewoman (160). In *Persuasion*, Louisa's brother Charles praises "Mrs. Harville's exertions as a nurse. 'She really left nothing for Mary to do. He and Mary had been persuaded to go early to their inn last night. [. . .] When he came away, [Mary] was going to walk out with Captain Benwick, which, he hoped, would do her good. [. . .] but the truth was, that Mrs. Harville left nothing for any body to do'" (P 121). The "nothing" that hard-working Mrs. Harville leaves undone encompasses numerous tasks involving the care of her patient, including giving up her own bed for Louisa's use and "arranging every thing before the others began to reflect" (112-113), and perfectly accords with the nothing that Mary is willing to do for her own sister-in-law. However, the amount of work each woman completes is noticed and commented on by several characters in the novel, so it is neither invisible nor unimportant.

By contrast (and unusual in Austen's novels), a man—Captain Harville—is also a skilled and intuitive care-giver, as "a look between him and his wife decided what was to be done" for unconscious Louisa. Bringing "sense and nerves" that are "instantly useful" to the scene of the accident, Harville also performs the womanly work of providing "assistance, cordials, restoratives" to Henrietta and Mary once everyone arrives back at his residence (P 111-112). Worth considering because he is an anomaly in this regard, Harville's comfort-giving goes literally hand-in-hand with his wife's.³⁰

Alan Richardson finds in Austen's portrait of Captain Harville proof that even her "thinking" characters are described as "organic assemblages of nerves and senses under duress" (150). His years on board ship have not only prepared the captain for domestic employment such as making "new netting-needles and pins" and a "large fishing-net" in the corner of his house, but seem to have wrought in him the feminine ability to provide solace to those with physical or emotional needs. His taking in of grief-stricken Captain Benwick to an already crowded home reveals a kindness of heart Austen associates mainly with nurturing older women (P 98), such as Mrs. Jennings of Sense and Sensibility who asks the Dashwood sisters along for a lengthy visit at her London home (S&S 154), or Jane Bennet's Aunt Gardiner, who invites her depressed niece to stay in London after Bingley's defection (P&P 141). Making up an unlikely company, the threesome of Mrs. Jennings, Mrs. Gardiner, and Captain Harville, whom Anne Elliot considers a "perfect gentleman" (P 97), are evidence that the ability to tender comfort, usually woman's work, can be done well by a man, so that the separate spheres division and essentialist notions of gender are done away with in ideal interactions.

At the novel's beginning it is Anne's practice, when tired, to comfort herself with sonnets on the "declining year," while others are more happily employed—for instance Louisa and Captain Wentworth walk outdoors, flirting enthusiastically (P 85). A friend of Wentworth's, Captain Benwick had seemed to admire Anne during her visit to Lyme, when she recommended a reading program for him to help in his "struggle against affliction"—his grief over his fiancée's sudden death. Benwick appeals to Anne because,

though shy, he possesses intelligence and “feelings glad to burst their usual restraints” (100), evidence of the warmth Anne prizes, so conspicuously absent in her cousin and suitor Mr. Elliot. The insinuation of Anne’s mutual attraction to Benwick is suggestive of the “other possibilities” that reality in the novel (the possibility of alternate couple alliances, such as Benwick and Anne, Wentworth and Louisa) “bears within itself,” according to Mikhail Bakhtin (37). However, Louisa’s fall and subsequent coma insure her stay in Lyme for some weeks, and when Anne removes to Bath, a recovering Louisa and the “not inconsolable” Benwick fall “in love over poetry” (P 167). Louisa experiences a gradual return to health, but her temperament is forever altered. Her brother Charles describes the change: “there is no running or jumping about, no laughing or dancing;” instead, she and Benwick sit together reading and whispering all day (218). Louisa now takes on Anne’s former characteristics of poetry reading and quotation, and after hearing that Benwick and Louisa are to marry, Anne “could not help laughing” at Charles’ wry assessment, knowing it to be unsuited to the sportsman’s taste for action, and perhaps also rejoicing that Wentworth is safe from the eldest Musgrove daughter. Richardson examines the contrast between Anne and Louisa, the “false heroine,” who in folktale fashion works to “delay the eventual union of the true heroine with her ‘object’ (Frederick Wentworth) by temporarily displacing Anne” (145). The true heroine, however, has been formed through mental and emotional difficulties and is “able to transcend bodily discomfort,” enduring the “pangs of a broken heart,” while Louisa deals with the “lasting effects of a cracked head” and a mind that was even prior to the accident “deficient” (Richardson 148).

While the Musgroves are congenial, if somewhat unrefined, the elegance of the Elliot clan comes at a price. The Elliot family's indebtedness in Persuasion exceeds anything else of its kind in Austen, even George Wickham's gambling debts in Pride and Prejudice, paid off for him by the combined "pledges" of Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Bennet, and Mr. Darcy, although only the last supplied the necessary capital (P&P 313, 326). The "cold comfort" here is that as a baronet, Sir Walter should be far removed from the margins of gentility, but in fact the money he owes reveals how unstable his situation really is. Susan Staves's Married Women's Separate Property in England, 1660-1833 holds that the eighteenth-century upper classes were generally in debt as a result of living above their means (207); in this respect, Sir Walter is a representative member of his class. Furthermore, his marginalized status is underscored by his incessant harpings on those not-quite gentlemen lacking property, Captain Wentworth's brother the curate of Monkford and even the Captain himself—"You misled me by the term *gentleman*. [. . .] Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember" (P 23)—before Wentworth's return from the war with £20,000 (P 23, 27). Sir Walter's slighting remarks reveal his own precarious position—Robert Miles calls him a "feckless parasite" (83)—and his determination to keep old social boundaries in place despite the changing times (and his own changing fortunes). Although his estate and his title lend him the semblance of gentility, Sir Walter is in reality a middle-class man, anxious for money and concerned about appearances.

Pierre Bourdieu's Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste reveals the mark of the privileged classes to be exemplified in that "being sure of what they are,

[they] do not care for what they seem” (253). Lady Russell realizes the truth of this statement in her attempt at drawing up plans for the Elliots to retrench, telling Anne, “Kellynch-hall has a respectability in itself, which cannot be affected by these reductions” (P 12). Sir Walter, however, upon understanding that he must rent out his ancestral home, requires the fact to be kept a secret: he “could not have borne the degradation of being known to design letting his house” (P 15). Sir Walter is Bourdieu’s “man of appearances, haunted by the look of others and endlessly occupied with being seen in a good light” (253). Bath instead of London is chosen for the Elliots’ relocation because it will allow Sir Walter to appear “important at comparatively little expense.” Taking a smaller house in the same neighborhood as Kellynch is completely out of the question for the baronet, despite the economy of such a choice and his daughter Anne’s stated preference for it (P 14).

Austen scholars (Sales 188; O’Farrell, Complexions 43; C. Wilson 62) and the novelist herself have frequently pointed to Sir Walter’s vanity as his characteristic fault, evidenced in his critiques of others’ appearances. His fondness for good looks is only one indication of the avenues his vanity takes: the baronet’s love of his own position in the world is evidenced in his Lady Catherine De Bourgh-like satisfaction with the situation of his new tenant, Admiral Croft, “which was just high enough, and not too high” (P 24). However, Sir Walter’s famous opposition to the navy, “as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction” and for “cut[ting] up a man’s youth and vigor most horribly” (19) actually hides his cowardice, a greater moral failing than mere vanity of person.

The sailors' scars and wounds testify to their personal courage in battle on behalf of their country at a time when England was threatened by (and threatening to) Napoleon's forces, as my history chapter states.³¹ That Sir Walter resents these naval disfigurements—pain's evidence—indicates not only his vanity of appearance, but also his cowardice and a distinct lack of patriotism, characteristics which Austen, the proud sister of two naval brothers (Francis and Charles), would have abhorred. In fact, Brian Southam considers both Mansfield Park and Persuasion to be Austen's "tribute to [her] sailor brothers—to their patriotism, their sense of duty, and their humanity" ("Brothers" 40).³² For Southam, Austen is not simply a patriot, but one "with brothers in the service" (44), and therefore her support of the war effort would have been unquestioning.

Sir Walter's surface objections to the navy have nothing to do with Elaine Scarry's critique of warfare as morally ambiguous (65): the baronet's disapproval of the navy and its men only goes skin deep. O'Farrell interprets Sir Walter's disgust with sailors' visages as stemming from a failure of imagination: reading in these men's faces "the simple fact of naval history," the baronet can see "only one story," and as it is not his own, he discounts their intrinsic and extrinsic worth. Incapable of looking beyond the men's tanned faces, Sir Walter concludes they are "obviously unfeeling" (Complexions 43-44). As a substitute for the ever-changing blush, then, the scar is more permanent, yet for O'Farrell its "commitment to legibility" is just as fickle (Complexions 86), especially when the interpreter is the class-biased Sir Walter, who can only admit with profound understatement that the naval profession "has its utility" (P 19). Since he is insecure about his own status (beneath his arrogant demeanor), he must look to the surface

appearances of naval officers (whose scars are in reality badges of courage), manufacturing some other standard for maintaining his superiority over their social encroachment.

Though Austen does not describe literal warfare, her novels—and her perspective on life—focus on jockeying for position in the social realm. Struggle occurs in the social world as an effort to “win everything”—recognition, power, honor, domination, the comforts of life—and is about “distinguished possessors” and “pretentious challengers” (Bourdieu 251). A generation prior to Austen’s stay in Bath, an incident occurs there which makes unlikely bedfellows of domesticity and war. A work Austen probably consulted, The Original Bath Guide (1811), gives an account of the bitter rivalry for Master of Ceremonies in Bath after Beau Nash’s death in 1761. Said to be “a contest betwixt Irish and English,” two men were simultaneously elected to appease the different factions (97). One night when the supporters of Mr. Plomer and Mr. Brereton met, a “scene of anarchy, riot, and confusion took place” (99). Personal insults soon led to fisticuffs between the men as well as “among the ladies (who began the affray),” which made “work for their milliners and mantua makers—gauzes, laces, silks, and finery of all sorts, were flying about in every direction” (99). The Guide includes the following extract of a poem called “The Bath Riot Described,” written by “W. W.” in 1769 to humorously commemorate the women’s part in the Master of Ceremonies wrangle, as part of a larger work, The Conciliade:

Fair Nymphs achieve illustrious feats,
off fly their tuckers, caps and tetes; [. . .]
Pins and pomatums strew the room,
Emitting many a strange perfume;

Each tender form is strangely battered
 And odd things here and there are scattered.
 In heaps confused the Heroines lie,
 With horrid shrieks they pierce the sky,
 Their charms are lost in scratches—scars—
 Sad emblems of domestic wars! (Guide 99, “Riot” lines 26-27, 32-39)

These lines from “The Bath Riot Described” conclude in an odd way, given that the so-called “domestic wars” were fought in a public arena. Perhaps the fact that women were the combatants led the author to describe the fracas as a domestic one, in addition to its location on home soil. This poem’s epigram parodies the pattern established by Virgil’s Aeneid (in translation “Of arms and the man I sing”), as W. W. begins, “Of *Females*’ metamorphos’d Forms I sing” (12). Writing ostensibly to delineate the “Bath Riot” and its “direful Deeds of *Civil Dudgeon*” (line 1), the author takes pleasure in a carnivalesque world where order has been reversed, and ladies behave in undignified ways. In a companion piece called “The Bath Squabble” by Hibernicus, some of the women are described as revealing their backsides in the fray (line 40).³³ Eventually both MCs stepped down to allow Captain Wade, a man favored by all, to reunite the social world of Bath, “one of the most distinguished spots in the Kingdom,” where “every comfort and convenience” is to be had for the rich, “every rational pleasure” is to be enjoyed for the young, and “renovation to health” is available for the sick (Conciliade 7; Guide 3).

Austen articulates the gate-keeping methods of the Bath social world, a generation after the Bath Squabble occurred, as her snobby Sir Walter Elliot and his daughter Elizabeth have no intention of aiding anyone socially, “leav[ing] the Crofts to find their own level” and denying them an introduction to Lady Dalrymple, who “might

not approve” (P 166). The importance of social ties is well understood by everyone in Austen’s novel: as Mr. Elliot explains to Anne, “here you are in Bath, and the object is to be established here with all the credit and dignity which ought to belong to Sir Walter Elliot” (151). Merited dignity is beyond Sir Walter, whose debts have forced him into renting out his estate, much like Sir Andrew Baynton, baronet, whose Spy-Park (near Bath) is “now the residence of Colonel Thornton,” according to the Bath Guide (150).³⁴

Enjoying real dignity are Captain Wentworth, together with his brother-in-law and sister, Admiral and Mrs. Croft, who appear to be the “challengers” to the “distinguished possess[ion]” of Sir Walter Elliot (Bourdieu 251). However, the middle classes’ commitment to the symbolic in the “usurpation of social identity,” which consists in “seeming” to be a certain way, is more characteristic of the baronet than the up-and-coming naval officers. Throughout the novel, in his representation of himself and his circumstances, Wentworth acts as a “man of principle,” what Anne all along vainly wishes her father would do (P 12). Mr. Woodhouse-like, Sir Walter’s decisions are engineered by other, wiser heads than his own. He must be steered away from London, where his agent Mr. Shepherd feels the baronet “could not be trusted” to live within his means and directed towards Bath, where he can present the appearance of wealth without going to great expense (14). Show and no substance is the beginning and end of Sir Walter, a man whose title makes him everything that he values, but at the same time nothing of any moral consequence.

Of great moral consequence is the military’s effort to win by “out-injur[ing] the opponent,” the objective Wentworth and his fellow sailors have been engaged in (Scarry

63). “Omission” is Scarry’s term for this discussion of the ways in which purposefully injuring during battles is made invisible (66). This omission is perfectly evident throughout Austen’s Persuasion, where the naval talk focuses on ship-board comforts (P 64), or the geography traversed under various commands (P 70), even the friendships made and prizes won (P 96-97), but elides the fighting, injuring, or killing involved in the Napoleonic wars. As Southam explains, in Austen’s novels “naval heroism is kept strictly off-stage” (Navy 3). While the aforementioned subjects are not the stuff of polite dinner-table conversations, even Mrs. Croft, who has sailed around the world with her admiral husband, claims “that the happiest part of my life has been spent on board a ship” and has nothing to say concerning the dangers involved in living such a hazardous, uncomfortable existence. Rather, she discounts any idea of harm: “While she and Admiral Croft “were together, you know, there was nothing to be feared” (P 70). The only time her brother, Captain Wentworth, admits to having been in danger of his life was from a terrible storm that fortunately struck his ship, the “poor old Asp,” six hours after they landed safely at the Sound (P 66). The possibility of his early death gives Anne the tremors, while the sympathetic Musgrove girls exclaim aloud their “pity and horror” (66). That Captain Wentworth doubtless encountered many more life-threatening situations during his seven years at sea is not mentioned by the narrator or any character. The Musgrove family’s loss of a younger son to early death while serving in the navy is not rendered the tragedy most authors would make of it. Instead, the boy’s death is what Terry Castle might call a “strangely unrecuperable textual event” (Thermometer 102), as the narrator affects disinterest over the “destiny of a son, whom alive nobody had cared

for” (P 68). Dick Musgrove, it turns out, was ill in Gibraltar where Captain Wentworth found him on the “recommendation” of his previous commander, and whether he later died of the same illness after Wentworth transferred him to another ship or from an injury sustained in battle is not made clear, thanks to Admiral Croft’s interruption of the conversation between Mrs. Musgrove and Wentworth (P 66, 68). Apparently the hazards of warfare are so self-evident that they need not be mentioned in the polite text of the novel.

It is left to Anne to confess that naval men possess “at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give” (P 19). On the other hand, Anne may not be the only character in the novel to have ever provided naval men with some version of home comfort. The sexually available Mrs. Clay, who by Persuasion’s end has become Mr. Elliot’s kept mistress, claims to “have known a good deal of the profession”; she goes on to cite naval “liberality,” and their “neat and careful [. . .] ways!” (P 18). How Mrs. Clay has happened to be so involved with the navy is not explained in the text. What is explicitly stated, though, is Lady Russell’s belief that Mrs. Clay is “a very unequal, and in her character [. . .] a very dangerous companion” for Anne’s older sister Elizabeth (P 16), an opinion that is seconded rather than reversed in the subsequent narrative. Mrs. Clay is an asset for Elizabeth Elliot because she is freckled, plain, and a flatterer to Miss Elliot’s vanity, as she is “clever” and understands “the art of pleasing,” eventually becoming mistress to Mr. Elliot (P 15, 250).

Anne herself will be the only member of the Elliot family to recompense Captain

Wentworth—the most exemplary naval man of Persuasion—with all the comforts of home in return for the many (though elided) hardships he endured as a defender of King and country. This response flies in the face of Sir Walter’s wisdom, which holds that his own home-for-rent, Kellynch-hall, is “the greatest prize of all, let him [a naval officer] have taken ever so many before” (P 17). Sir Walter would cheat his hard-working tenant out of the “use of the pleasure-grounds” and the flower beds if to do so were not highly irregular (P 18-19). The baronet’s parsimonious views prove that Kellynch-hall as a prize is not at all comparable to a man-of-war or enemy merchant ship. If captured, either vessel pays off handsomely to those who bring her in, a practice Southam claims was established via the Cruizer and Convoy Act of 1708 (Navy 115). Sir Walter’s analogy of his family estate to a war-prize falls short of any real similarity between the two for another reason: the capture of an enemy vessel distinguishes the victorious captain and crew and also provides a monetary reward (a form of comfort), helping to balance out the sailors’ low pay (“Brothers” 37; Navy 115). Southam quotes the successful naval prize-taker Lord Cochrane on the relationship between risking one’s life in battle and the Admiralty’s reward system: “prize money formed then, as it will ever form, the principal motive of seamen to encounter the perils of war” (qtd. Navy 115). In other words, it worked much like a bribe, and a successful one at that, as Winborn concludes that England’s economy gained overall as a result of warfare (87). Winborn cites A. D. Harvey on the typicality of “major wars to be fought at serious cost to the national economy.” Between the years 1793-1815, Britain found itself, according to Harvey, in the atypical position of “fighting a major war and getting richer at the same

time” (qtd. 87).

Though not a prize of war, the Elliots’ Kellynch-hall will require a sum of money on par with what a vanquished war ship might yield, differing also in that the dignity of ownership will not be transferred to the new tenants, at least not if the baronet has his (self-interested) way. After all, his property classifies Sir Walter as a bourgeois according to its Hegelian definition rendered by Carl Schmitt, who interprets the class-based term to mean “pacifist,” specifically a person “who does not want to leave the apolitical riskless private sphere,” and who thinks that his land-ownership provides immunity for him from inevitable war (62).

Austen’s novels’ focus on this private sphere is usually taken to be the reason for the absence of war between the pages, whether in overt action or in conversation. Miranda Burgess reads history in Persuasion as a “problem of interiors”: history starts at home, and Britain’s future can be saved “only in the private sphere, in the spaces it opens as correctives” to Britain’s larger economic and social decline (177, 180-81). Despite the importance of home life to its pages, Persuasion is concerned with the war: its way of elevating the enterprising (Frederick Wentworth) and dispatching the unworthy (Dick Musgrove). The novel begins with Sir Walter’s dislike of sailors and accession to taking advantage of their prize money, but ends with Anne’s happiness as “a sailor’s wife,” disrupted only by the apprehension of “a future war” and her nervousness about losing Wentworth, signaled in “pay[ing] the tax of quick alarm” (P 252). Anne has indeed vacated Schmitt’s “apolitical riskless private sphere” to join her new husband in a risky public arena. Her marriage ideologically aligns her with

Wentworth against her father's social economy, so that Anne's central conflict involves the discomfort of relinquishing parental approval in favor of forging not only romantic but political engagements. Southam disagrees, seeing "no suggestion that [Anne's] married life will ever take her to sea," as the potentiality for future war at Persuasion's end "implies separation" (Navy 284-285). For him, Mrs. Croft is not a prefiguring of Anne as a married woman, since the Admiral's wife must show "unladylike toughness" in facing the floggings and other regulated horrors of naval life (Navy 284, 279).³⁵

Whether her future life will be ashore or afloat, Anne's tendency to fear the worst concerning a future uprising is not the effect of poor nerves only: as Scarry explains, so-called peace treaties actually "specify the next occasion of war; they in effect become predictive models or architectural maps" charting the anticipated war (142). The last chapter of Persuasion changes tense from past to present, one indication of what Bakhtin sees as every novelist's affinity "toward everything that is not yet completed" (27).

Austen's readers are left with the sense that the world of Persuasion is on-going and still liable to change, especially if another war breaks out. In reality and in the mind of Persuasion's narrator, a "future war" to "dim [Anne's] sunshine" will come at last, and the certain knowledge of this event will be the ultimate "cold comfort" in Anne Wentworth's erstwhile happy ending, unless her lucky spouse succeeds on land as well as at sea, to survive the war and become a baronet (P 252, 250).

3.5 Conclusion

The familial "cold comforts" this chapter has covered are of various kinds, from

mercenary sibling relationships (S&S) to wrong-headed parental guidance (MP) to embarrassing family debt (P). Courtship is another area of discomfort for these protagonists, who are neglected by the men they care about (Willoughby and Edward Ferrars in S&S, Edmund Bertram of MP, Captain Wentworth of P) while enduring the unwanted attentions of others (Mrs. Jennings' mistaken belief in Brandon's interest in Elinor, Henry Crawford's proposal to Fanny, Mr. Elliot's proposal to Anne). Offers of food fail to sustain Marianne Dashwood during her grief, though the absence of a fire in her hearth seriously discomforts Fanny Price, and the threat of war hangs over Anne Elliot's otherwise happy marriage to Wentworth. Though comfort is often an unacknowledged ingredient in the pages of Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion, each middle-class, comfort-giving heroine eventually comes into a comfortable establishment of her own (though Anne's may be at sea, not on land). After painfully watching their antagonists parade their own enjoyable comforts (hair rings, letters, laughter, good health), the "cold comfort" heroines' quiet endurance and unceasing attentions on the domestic front win the day. The ending of these "cold comfort" novels suggests a closely-averted tragedy (the marriages of Edward and Elinor, Marianne and Brandon, Fanny and Edmund, Anne and Wentworth each seems unlikely), in contradistinction to the "warm comfort" novels, whose heroines are not unappreciated and who do not have to labor so intensely for the comforts of life.

Notes

¹ The well-known cliché, “cold comfort” appears in literature most obviously in Stella Gibbons’s 1932 novel, Cold Comfort Farm (London: Penguin, 1996), itself influenced by Austen. For Gibbons’s protagonist Flora Poste, who succeeds at the nearly impossible task of reforming the depressed and repressed family at Starkadder Farm, Austen’s Mansfield Park is a source of comfort, reassurance, and even enlightenment as Flora discovers while reading one of its chapters exactly how she will influence the family matriarch, Ada Doom, who has kept to her room for years (Gibbons 115).

² In a personal interview, Susan Staves also mentions her disappointment with Austen’s letters.

³ Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms (Springfield, MA: G.&C. Merriam, 1951), gives “employment” as another term for work and quotes Austen in its use: “She sat quietly down to her book after breakfast, resolving to remain in the same place and the same employment till the clock struck one.” The Dictionary notes, however, that “employment” can only substitute for “work” if “one has been engaged and is being paid for by an employer or master” (893). The designation of work as indicating a salaried position only is one I take issue with in this dissertation.

⁴ This quotation comes from Austen’s 7 Nov. 1813 letter to Cassandra.

⁵ In Dangerous Intimacies: Toward a Sapphic History of the British Novel (1997), Lisa Moore presents four categories of “lesbian desire” first described by Martha Vicinus. The final category, and the one Moore focuses on, is that of the “romantic friend” (7). While Moore notes the appropriateness of this designation for Emma Woodhouse’s relationship with Harriet Smith (112), it is hard to see how this same appellation might not apply equally to Austen and her own sister (and indeed many pairs of eighteenth-century sisters), especially as the chaste sister relationship is so obviously a workable substitute for the sexual marriage partnership. In “Sisterly Love” (World Press Review 42.11 (Nov. 1995): 40-41), Terry Castle also describes reading Austen’s letters to Cassandra and finding a “primitive adhesiveness—and underlying eros—of the sister-sister bond,” determining that “both found greater comfort and pleasure in remaining with one another” instead of marrying (40). Moore explains further that chaste vs. sexual are the contradictions inherent in the superstructure of romantic friendship (18).

⁶ This was probably just as well, considering that the early Blues (Elizabeth Carter, Catherine Talbot, Elizabeth Montagu) themselves felt “inner ambivalence” about publishing (Sylvia Myers, The Bluestocking Circle: Women, Friendship, and the Life of the Mind in Eighteenth Century England, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990: 156). According to Myers, their work was marked by uncertainty. A generation older than Austen, they did not find the publishing market as encouraging for women to enter as she did (Fergus ix).

In addition, the Bluestockings were writing non-fiction such as Montagu's Essay on Shakespear [sic], in an established men's arena.

⁷ The Austen marriage can be a torment or a comfort for the partners involved. Carole Moses contends that Austen scholarship is "passing beyond the need to be defensive about the marriages at the end of her works," and Oliver MacDonagh acknowledges Austen's presentation of various perspectives on marriage in her fiction ("Jane Austen and Elizabeth Bennet: The Limits of Irony," Persuasions 25 (2003): qtd. Moses 163 n9).

⁸ Ellis's description of an outsider longing for inclusion in the world of the domestic woman shares a common thread with Mary Ann O'Farrell's essay on "Jane Austen's Friendship" in Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees (Ed. Deidre Lynch, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000: 45-62), specifically her treatment of readers' fantasy that "being with Jane Austen must simply have been the most fun thing in the world" (45).

⁹ I follow the standard abbreviations for Austen's novels in this as in my other dissertation chapters: E for Emma, NA for Northanger Abbey, MP for Mansfield Park, P&P for Pride and Prejudice, S&S for Sense and Sensibility, and P for Persuasion.

¹⁰ Roger Sales's intriguing essay, "In Face of All the Servants: Spectators and Spies in Austen" (Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees, ed. Deidre Lynch, Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000: 188-205) examines in detail Anne Elliot's menial roles as housekeeper and governess within her own family, especially as displayed in the 1995 BBC adaptation of Persuasion (191-93).

¹¹ I agree with Emily Auerbach's assessment of Sense and Sensibility as "a tale of two heroines—or rather, two young women." Austen moves readers from one sister to the other and "everything they represent" (Searching 102). John Halperin also mentions the "two heroines" of S&S (84). However, Auerbach's next idea, one shared by Margaret Anne Doody in her Introduction to the novel (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998: vii-xlvi), of Marianne as a figure for Jane Austen (xvii), with S&S originating as a "tribute to Cassandra Austen's propriety and end[ing] as a celebration of Jane Austen's vitality" is not a contention that I share, given Auerbach's own point that Elinor and Edward are the only characters to view "life ironically" (114). Taking life seriously rather than seeing it ironically, Marianne cannot be a representation of the novelist, even if, as Doody observes, Marianne shares her creator's love of music and the poetry of William Cowper (xvii).

¹² Doody remarks of Elinor that "being right about Edward's love" even though he is promised to Lucy Steele and has acted deceitfully "may seem a cold comfort" (xxxvii).

¹³ Comparing a typical utterance by Huckleberry Finn to one of Edward Ferrars's remarks, Auerbach describes Mark Twain's reaction to "Oxford-educated mother-

dominated Edward Ferrars” as one of disgust for this “milquetoast” figure (“Twain” 113).

¹⁴ According to Edward Copeland’s “The Economic Realities of Jane Austen’s Day,” (in Approaches to Teaching Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, ed. Maria McClintock Folsom, NY: MLA, 1993), in every Austen novel except P&P, annual income is “assumed to be invested in the 5-percent government funds” (34). In Pride and Prejudice Mr. Collins alludes to Elizabeth’s inheritance using the “more conservative 4-percent rule of thumb” (Copeland 35).

¹⁵ The title character of Samuel Richardson’s Pamela (1740), Sophia Western of Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones (1749), Emily St. Aubert in Ann Radcliffe’s The Mysteries of Udolpho (1794), Laura Montreville of Mary Brunton’s Self-Control (1811), and Gertrude Aubrey in The Countess and Gertrude; or Modes of Discipline (1811) by Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, all deprive themselves of sustenance during times of mourning or duress. The hunger strike itself is a particularly British mode of resistance, though Marian Eide explains that it has been co-opted by the colonized, as in the case of Mahatma Ghandi’s passive (and effective) protest tactics (Lecture 4/8/02).

¹⁶ Barbara Lide’s “Durrenmatt’s Gastronomic Grotesqueries: Eating in a Disordered World” (Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment, ed. Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham, University Park: Penn State UP, 1992: 215-230), has this to say about food binges: “Many people continue throughout their lives to turn to food in their search for comfort, for satisfaction of nonphysical hunger, for a means of coping with different situations” (216). In addition, Lide explains how “corpulent people [. . .] both literally and figuratively bolster themselves with fat in order to ward off their real and imagined fears of the world’s horrors” (216), in a defensive gesture of abjection that does violence to their own bodies. Discussing Charles Dickens’s Martin Chuzzlewit, Polhemus describes how words in the novel are used to break down the mass of “not-self” into handle-able parts (107); food is what connects the self with the not-self (113).

Helen Deutsch considers disability as a form of excess in the eighteenth century in her essay “Exemplary Aberration: Samuel Johnson and the English Canon” (Disability Studies: Enabling the Humanities, ed. Sharon L. Snyder, Brenda Jo Brueggemann, and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, NY: MLA, 2002: 197-210).

For evidence of eating as an activity not befitting a proper lady, see Byron’s 25 Sept. 1812 letter to Lady Melbourne. The poet gives this constricting if tongue in cheek argument, that “a woman should never be seen eating or drinking, unless it be *lobster sallad* [sic] & *Champagne*, the only truly feminine & becoming viands” (qtd. Lord Byron, Letters and Journals, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1973, 2: 208). While overeating was thought vulgar, overdrinking was considered even worse, as Alice Browne’s The Eighteenth-century Feminist Mind (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1987) makes clear (34). Author Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins felt horrified at the trend for schoolgirls to imbibe “French” brandy, and sarcastically asks, “What are *liqueurs*,

between the courses of a dinner, compared to these comforts for youth?" (The Countess & Gertrude; or, Modes of Discipline, 4 vols, London: F.C. and J. Rivington, 1811. I: 7). Hawkins's novel reads like a conduct manual, as it pontificates on the proper way to spend a Sunday and the evils of a young girl's situation as poor relation in a household of money-grubbing snobs. In the end, of course, well-behaved Gertrude is rewarded by marriage to the man of her choice, Colonel Sydenham (IV: 421). See Chapter III for a discussion of Hawkins's xenophobia.

¹⁷ Eighteenth-century authors tend to speak of gluttony as a man's vice: in a homily delivered in the Church of England and published in 1795, Adam Gordon warns of the impending dangers if "men give way to gluttony, and an irregular mode of life" (314), while The Merry Droll, or Pleasing Companion (London, 1767) tells the story of a "certain Venerable in a college of one of our Universities, who was remarkable for two things; a great stock of wit, and as great a stomach" (41), reminiscent of MP's Dr. Grant. I have modernized the spelling for both eighteenth-century texts.

Anorexia was and is more usually connected to women. Paula Marantz Cohen's intriguing essay on "The Anorexic Syndrome and the Domestic Novel" (Disorderly Eaters: Texts in Self-Empowerment, ed. Lilian R. Furst and Peter W. Graham, University Park, Penn: Penn State UP, 1992: 125-139) reads female anorexia in the nineteenth-century family as a way of keeping the family unit stable (129). Richardson's heroine Clarissa becomes literature's first anorexic as she wastes away, becoming asexual after Lovelace rapes her, thereby setting the pattern for "the novel system itself" (Cohen 132). John Dussinger's In the Pride of the Moment: Encounters in Jane Austen's World (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1990), also connects a pre-Victorian "delicacy" in women with lack of appetite, "whether sexual or gustatory" (67).

¹⁸ Lide affirms that the "bond between food and comfort, perhaps the first bond that human beings establish, is especially strong and ingrained, developed immediately after birth, when infants are cradled and suckled by their mothers" (215).

¹⁹ Austen's fragmentary story The Watsons contains more instances of discomfort, and its heroine's nearly hopeless position, thrown back on her disagreeable family after her aunt's sudden remarriage, is "unrelievedly bleak"—one reason Austen may have abandoned it (Castle, Introduction xxix).

²⁰ Prior to Colonel Sydenham's appearance, several suitors for Gertrude's hand have been turned away by the jealousies of her foster mother, Lady Luxmore, whose timely death allows Gertrude to finally choose her own spouse.

²¹ While G. J. Barker-Benfield sees tea-drinking positively associated with women, implying their "ritualistic power," with houses as sites for consumption helping women's position (159-60), Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace describes the tea table's history as one of (English) culture's first creating, then trying to sustain a certain

repressive definition of “female subjectivity based on an essentialized understanding of the female body” (69).

²² John Wiltshire argues in favor of “psychologizing” characters as real people because even real people are “real” only to the “degree they become real in our thoughts and imaginations” (i.e., celebrities, politicians often not seeming “real”) (Recreating Jane Austen, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001: 103).

²³ Louise Flavin follows the transition in Austen beginning with MP, which moves away from the dialogue characteristic of NA, S&S, and P&P and toward “internal views,” or FID (137). Fanny Price receives the highest quota of free indirect thoughts (FIT—a subset of FID), while her cousin Maria garners an “average number”: most of these disclose her desire for Henry and consequent disinterest in Rushworth (Flavin 147, 143). As such, these examples are typical of Maria’s thinking as revealed by the narrator.

²⁴ Michael Giffin’s article, “Jane Austen and the Economy of Salvation: Renewing the Drifting Church in Mansfield Park,” (Literature and Theology 14.1 (2000): 17-33) also locates Fanny’s fireless room as central to a reading of the novel. For Giffin, the act of starting a fire in the cold grate is “loaded with Kantian symbolism that was current in Austen’s age: the cold attic is pure reason and the life of the mind, while the fire is pure feeling and the life of the heart.” The eventual fire in Fanny’s attic, ordered by Sir Thomas, means that reason has been modified with the “embers of pure feeling” and allows Fanny to deal with her feelings “reasonably” while facing her destiny (28).

²⁵ In a post to the Austen List, Sarah Green states that one “major reason Austen is considered ‘comforting’ is because of the confidence of the narrative voice. The narrator is so knowing and sensible, and even when things are going badly for the characters, there’s the narrator telling you (the reader) that she’s going to bring everything to a satisfying conclusion in the end.” Green goes on to cite D. A. Miller’s belief as a child that Austen’s novels had “healing powers: ‘Mansfield shall cure you’.”

²⁶ Miller does not connect comforting to women but sees that for Austen, the “operation of closure” is defined as the “restoration of ‘comfort’ proceeding by an exclusion of what made things uncomfortable” (in MP this mostly has to do with getting rid of the Crawfords) (Narrative 77).

²⁷ In her reading of Mansfield Park as a conservative text, Claudia Johnson views Mrs. Norris as the scapegoat for Sir Thomas’s “offenses,” thus allowing the father figure to “save face” (Jane Austen 115).

²⁸ That the church has sometimes taught its people to tolerate earthly injustices, while thus promoting continued “suffering itself,” for example, is one of the major problems facing Christianity, according to Charles Y. Glock, Benjamin B. Ringer, and Earl R.

Babbie, authors of To Comfort and to Challenge: A Dilemma of the Contemporary Church (Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1967): 211. Therefore, attempts by the church to console the oppressed are only “cold comfort”s and complicitous with hegemony.

²⁹ In Origins of Unhappiness, Smail critiques “priests, doctors, and therapists” who “have no doubt all in their different ways contributed to the pro mystification of comfort-giving,” the real crux of which is “to allow another person to *be* without trying to impose upon him or her either a responsibility for being that way or a blueprint for being another way” (169-70). In his capacity as village clergyman, Edmund Bertram will be called upon to offer comfort, and his past interactions with his diffident cousin, now wife Fanny should help him to avoid officiousness in carrying out his parish duties.

³⁰ While Edmund Bertram of Mansfield Park is the main person his cousin Fanny can turn to “directly [. . .] for comfort,” the assistance he renders is less direct than the needs Harville meets, such as Edmund’s recognition of the necessity for Fanny’s daily horseback ride for her health’s sake (MP 21, 74). An exception to this practice occurs after Fanny’s tiring day in the sun, cutting the roses for her “unreasonable aunts,” when Edmund offers her a glass of wine for her headache (74).

³¹ James Jenkins, author of the popular Naval Achievements of Great Britain for the years 1793-1817 (first pub. 1817, rpt. 1830, London: SimComfort Associates, 1998), writes, “To her seamen, in the hour of danger, the country looks with the utmost confidence, not only for the protection of her liberty and laws, but of her very existence; and as often as she has been menaced, as often as any attempt has been made to disturb her internal tranquillity [sic], so often have her enemies felt the superior prowess of her seamen, so often have their countrymen been witnesses of their intrepid conduct, and so often have they been reassured by the brightest examples of courage and glory” (iv). This glowing account of what England owes her naval men is at variance with Sir Walter’s lackluster attitude toward them. Jenkins’s description also enumerates one of the most long-standing arguments in favor of warfare: “‘defense’ [. . . as] a justifiable basis for entering a war that has already been started against one’s own country” (Scarry 139).

³² Specifically, Southam sees “aspects of Charles” in Austen’s depictions of the eager lieutenant William Price in MP, while Captain Harville’s “gravity” and “serious tones” merit a resemblance to Francis in P (“Brothers” 39-40).

³³ The tone and theme of “The Bath Riot Described” falls between the mock-epic satire of Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock” (1712-14) and “The Dunciad” (1743), while “The Bath Squabble” appears similar to a common street ballad, with its refrain of “Sing tantararara” following every stanza.

³⁴ However, the Bath Guide does not say why Sir Andrew Baynton rented out his house,

so he might have been traveling abroad or retrenching.

³⁵ According to the log books for his ship Elephant, Austen's own disciplinarian brother Francis was a "flogging captain" (Navy 281-82). The more enlightened Charles Austen, however, preferred punishing offenders on his ship Aurora with lectures rather than beatings (284).

CHAPTER IV

JANE AUSTEN'S "WARM COMFORT" NOVELS: PRIDE AND PREJUDICE, EMMA, and NORTHANGER ABBEY

This chapter examines how comfort functions in Jane Austen's lighter novels featuring heroines who are in a good (appreciated, safe) position in life—Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse, and Catherine Morland—whose ties to their homes and communities are more solidified than those of the Dashwood sisters (S&S), Anne Elliot (P), and Fanny Price (MP).¹ Jan Fergus argues that with time, Austen loses interest in heroines who “rather easily triumph over their circumstances” (such as Catherine Morland, Elizabeth Bennet), and the novelist turns her attention to describing the way women “are enmeshed in circumstance” (146). However, the protagonists of the “warm comfort” novels, especially in the ways that they are doubled through minor characters who react differently to similar circumstances—Elizabeth and Lydia Bennet, Emma Woodhouse and Miss Bates, Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe—have much to teach readers about comfort's operations. Of interest as well for this chapter are the parental figures in the “warm comfort” novels, whose presence or absence profoundly affects the lives of their children. The troubled marriage between Elizabeth's parents (P&P); Mr. Woodhouse's unceasing need for comfort (E); and the untimely death of Mrs. Tilney (NA) are especially significant. Psychoanalytic theory and practice is especially relevant here, as characters' repetitions, secrets, anxieties, and sicknesses (real and pretended) suggest the ways the protagonists and minor characters in Austen's

novels accept or avoid society's expectations for comfort-giving and receiving, burdens that at times are too much to bear. In agreement with Freud, Adam Phillips asserts that psychoanalysis "doesn't know anything that literature doesn't know" (Terrors 35), so that in Austen's fiction, characters can in some sense read their own and others' symptoms, determining what types of comfort are needed as well as determining when comfort is not enough, as in Emma's visit among those cottagers whom "sickness and poverty together" have struck (E 86). She stays "as long as she could give comfort or advice," but on leaving reflects that the "poor creatures" will soon "vanish from my mind" to give place to more immediate scenes (87), while the ill and impoverished family will suffer on, only slightly helped by Emma's charity.² Ostensibly accepting society's mandate for providing comfort to the poor, Emma feels an interest in them only while with them, and her occupation with scenes where suffering is absent show her to be rejecting the role of comforter to the poor, on anything more than a superficial level.

This chapter asks the following questions regarding Austen's portrayal of comfort in these works: if situated less precariously than the "cold comfort" heroines, do these protagonists consequently experience less severe discomfort, witness Emma's ability in "comfort[ing] her father better than she could comfort herself" at the prospect of curmudgeonly John Knightley's making a ninth at dinner (E 292), as opposed to Fanny's terror over the prospect of going to live with her hateful Aunt Norris (MP 25)? What is the nature of the comforts they partake of, and what sorts of comfort are unavailable to them, in contrast to the "cold comfort" heroines? To what extent do the "warm comfort" heroines render comfort to others? Of what kind is it?³

If the “cold comfort” novels make comfort-giving a rite of passage into marriage, in the “warm comfort” novels comforting is more an extension of who the heroines are already, within their own families. A few examples include the way “affectionate” Catherine Morland serves as “a comfort to [her brother] under any distress” (NA 204), and Emma experiences “pleasure” in sacrificing the “sweetest hours of the twenty-four” to her father’s comfort (E 377). Without her sister Elizabeth at home to help deal with the crisis of Lydia’s running away, Jane Bennet bears “every care and anxiety upon” herself “alone” (P&P 292); however, Elizabeth relieves her when she and the Gardiners speedily arrive at Longbourn, and it is “a comfort to Elizabeth to consider that Jane could not have been wearied by long expectations” of their arrival (286). Elizabeth will be Jane’s main comfort during the scandal, notwithstanding the “great use and comfort” offered by their Aunt Phillips or neighbor, Lady Lucas (292-293).

Marcia McClintock Folsom has said that one of the amazing qualities of Austen’s novels is “their responsiveness to various critical approaches and their resistance to final interpretation” (Preface xi). While I am interested in bringing forward Austen’s attention to multiple kinds of comfort, this focus is necessarily limited, and I am not offering a “final interpretation” of the novels but a new emphasis on their theme of comforting as women’s work.⁴ In Recreating Jane Austen, John Wiltshire observes the definition of “comfort” in Johnson’s Dictionary as in the traditional sense of “consolation, support under calamity or danger” (qtd. 132). As opposed to physical comfort, this is the other end of the spectrum, the religious sense of “comfort” as a “fundamental human need, an equilibrium at once psychological and social” and is, as

D. W. Harding points out, the “instigating design of Austen’s art” (qtd. 132). Austen’s attention to what “comfort” might mean also brings up questions relevant to her criticism and cultural reception, Wiltshire finds (132). As a psychologist, Harding is interested in explaining where Austen’s novels came from: he thinks from categorized “tensions within the writer,” her novels therefore “in their successful equilibrium [are] able to bring comfort—in the older and more exalted meaning of the word—to readers who necessarily experience similar dilemmas within civil life” (132). Austen comforts readers of her works by working out life-like problems in her novels, according to Harding. Although some Austen readers agree with Harding, his vision of Austen verges on turning her fiction into a series of “how to” handbooks, an approach simplifying the novelist’s achievement, when the ways comfort is put to use in Austen’s novels are more complicated.

As Wiltshire observes, the “reiterated notion of ‘comfort’ in this novel [Emma], so easy to overlook, so contrary to romance, ultimately releases meanings that are central to its artistic design” (“Health” 178). In fact, the privileged if unobtrusive place of comfort in all Austen’s works, is the fulcrum of her novelistic endeavor. My vision of comfort’s sustained importance in every Austen novel diverges from Wiltshire’s view, as he notices that “happiness” is the term that resounds throughout her early works while comfort, with its connections to “maternal sustenance, [. . .] nursing, [. . .] solace, is the notion whose promises, and traps, Austen savours and tests in the Chawton novels [Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion] and especially in Emma” (Recreating 131). Wiltshire is not alone in his view on thematic happiness in the earlier Austen novels:

Julia Prewitt Brown argues that the “ethos,” the “spirit of Pride and Prejudice is one of pleasure,” though she too brings in the concept of comfort, in that Wickham for a time helps Elizabeth to feel “comfortable” or “narcissistically contented with herself” (63, 62). While Wiltshire distinguishes between happiness and comfort in Austen’s novels, with the former condition in evidence in Pride and Prejudice, while Emma privileges the latter, I read the two concepts as intertwined, with happiness dependent on comfort, not separated from it, in each of Austen’s novels. Prewitt Brown links Elizabeth’s comfort to her “narcissistic *feeling* of happiness” (62)—though comfort in this rendering seems completely negative when in the novel primarily it is positive.

Austen’s “warm comfort” novels are Pride and Prejudice (1813), Emma (1816), and Northanger Abbey (1818). Both “comfort” and “novels” are warm, in the absence of much suffering and the presence of a number of comic situations. Each of these works features an energetic heroine in an enviable situation, consequently allowing her a fuller share of the physical and emotional comforts of life, both increasingly prized in late eighteenth-century England. As Susan Morgan emphatically states, “I can think of no novelist who has believed more in women’s own power, who has demanded more of her heroines, and thus has granted more to them, than Austen” (50). While all three heroines of the “warm comfort” novels make mistakes in their assessments of other people, they are all brought up under favorable circumstances. Elizabeth Bennet is her father’s favorite child and is endlessly amused with life (P&P 4, 12); “handsome, clever” Emma Woodhouse is an heiress and runs her father’s house (E 5); “shatter-brained” Catherine Morland is one of ten children in a family belonging to Hannah More’s middle class

“order” (More 62; NA 15-17). Each family’s financial situation is different, but what these protagonists have in common is their youth, high spirits, a position between girl- and adult-hood (Auerbach 37), and the work of comforting cut out for them.

The rise of the middle class and the comforting work women do in the home are connected historically and literarily. In Desire and Domestic Fiction, Nancy Armstrong finds that a graph of household income and budget translates the economic contract into the sexual; the woman labors at home to alter an amount of income into a “desired quality of life” (84). Despite Dror Wahrman’s assertion that prior to the 1830s, “nothing [was] immediately self-evident about a connection between the ‘middle class’ and the domestic sphere” (381), comforting is a major part of this “quality of life” that women work to create within the late eighteenth-century home. Even modest landowners in England had approximately seven live-in servants, according to Amanda Vickery’s The Gentleman’s Daughter: Women’s Lives in Georgian England (134). Whether women are making tea, treating the sick, or managing an extensive household, much comforting work remains to be done.

As a mainly middle class phenomenon, the work of comforting excludes the servants’ labor of milking cows or scrubbing floors, as well as more luxurious enterprises such as decorating a new carriage. Comforting nearly always involves more direct interpersonal contact, such as giving advice or feeding an infant. That men’s work is more highly regarded if less essential than women’s is obvious from Carolyn Steedman’s description of eighteenth-century tax reports: from 1778 into the nineteenth century, man servants were “taxed as a ‘luxury’ item, female servants between 1785 and

1792” only (128-29). Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall describe the family enterprise as a profitable social entity, although women’s tasks in the home are not acknowledged as “work” (32-33). For Michael McKeon, writing about the “Secret History of Domesticity,” “productive labor” came to be done by men only, while “domestic labor” more gradually gained the “status of ‘housework’, the exclusive domain of women and increasingly denigrated as unproductive” (180). Additionally, Vickery holds that the Marxist view of pre-capitalism as a lost golden age for female work is untrue (5). Conduct books revised eighteenth-century culture, allowing an idea of the middle class to evolve even before it existed historically, by representing the household as a world with social relations of a feminine bent (Armstrong 63, 66). Unwilling to separate gender from class in looking at women’s history and politics, Armstrong discovers that many conduct books originate at the same time that books extolling upper class women decline in publication numbers (257-58). Armstrong views these events as indicative of the birth of a “new kind of woman,” whose position in the “modern household” makes the connection between women and the home appear natural (258). Examples of this modern domestic woman—a member of neither upper nor lower class—proliferate in Austen’s fiction, as all her heroines with the exception of Anne Elliot are born into untitled families.⁵

Austen’s “warm comfort” heroines—Elizabeth, Emma, Catherine—are generally comfortable with and interested in society around them, though their families are far from perfect, in some cases even dysfunctional. The following sections trace each protagonist’s interactions in her community and family, using psychoanalytic theory to

tease out “unconscious conflicts and fantasies” (Dalton 49), competitions, and identities among the characters. The meanings of comfort for each heroine and her double are thus brought to the forefront.

4.1 Pride and Prejudice: The Comforts and Discomforts of Kinship

Austen’s most beloved novel, Pride and Prejudice, deals with comfort more subtly than some of her other works, as it features the lively and light-hearted Elizabeth Bennet, a favorite among Austen readers.⁶ In her Introduction to Approaches to Teaching Austen’s “Pride and Prejudice,” Folsom provides multiple testimonies from teachers on the success of that novel in the classroom: “Students at all levels enjoy it more than any other Jane Austen novel, and I consider it her best work”; “Students are enthusiastic about the book. They love the ironical treatment of romance and yet the wish fulfillment of getting one’s fondest desire”; “Elizabeth and her wit appeal the most” (qtd. 8). These reactions are similar in many ways to ones I have received while teaching the novel as part of an introduction to literature course.⁷ Folsom continues by citing the “structural coherence, brilliant language, and joyful mood” that generate classroom excitement for this novel in particular (8). Feminist scholars are still divided over the book’s content, one school seeing it as “profoundly conciliatory” (Ruth Perry, Deborah Kaplan, Pamela Brombert, and Paula Bennett), while another perceives it to be “progressive” in terms of gender politics (Prewitt Brown, McClintock Folsom, Susan Kneedler, Juliet McMaster) (Folsom 23). Providing a compelling defense of Austen’s happy endings, Kneedler unveils the “twin assumptions” behind much criticism that

“neither single nor married women can be powerful, useful, or happy,” leaving open the “perverse” verdict that the only “‘life-affirming’ choice” for females lies in killing themselves (156). For Austen, married and single women can achieve power, happiness, and a useful place in society, as the title character of Emma so clearly demonstrates.

That women are often not any of these things—Kneedler’s “powerful, useful, or happy” designation—is apparent in the subtext of Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, dealing with nervous disorders and their association with the laziness of the landed classes. G.J. Barker-Benfield explains that the term “Impression” was often used as another term for sensation or feeling in eighteenth-century nerve discussions (18); significantly, Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, portraying a mother concerned about marrying off her five daughters, was nearly titled “First Impressions.” Nervous illness was critiqued as imaginary in many cases, but Barker-Benfield does not dismiss complaints of nervous disorders because a whole class of women were languishing under “nervous oppression” (29).⁸ Austen is not so sympathetic: her annoying Mrs. Bennet often pleads for “a little compassion on my nerves” and longs to visit Brighton, reasoning that “a little sea-bathing would set me up for ever” (P&P 6, 229). Vivien Jones finds that Austen’s “unsympathetic” portrayal of Mrs. Bennet’s nervous complaint as “self-centred hypochondria” is a negative version of Mary Wollstonecraft’s position that females were “socially manipulated” into viewing themselves as “nervous creatures of sensibility” (n318). Mrs. Bennet is proof of what Barker-Benfield notes was a frequent eighteenth-century joke—that women became “sick” in order to visit fashionable spots instead of staying home (31). He also reads “tasteful objects” and “fine nerves” as a part of the

same system (213), so that Mrs. Bennet's nervous complaints may indicate (in her mind) a move into the upper classes, instead of the gentry position she actually occupies.

Moreover, Mrs. Bennet's feeling of discontent or discomfort, her "nerves," are emotions arising often from the perceived lack of something—trips to London, her husband's neglecting a visit to a new neighbor, and so on (P&P 164, 6). The Bennet marriage is represented as an unequal yoking: the narrator of Pride and Prejudice describes Mr. Bennet as "so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character." As to Mrs. Bennet, "*Her* mind was less difficult to develope [sic]. She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" (5). Mr. Bennet's retreats to his library, an escape from the rantings of his wife (P&P 305), also have repercussions for his relationship to his children.

In Femininities, Masculinities, Sexualities: Freud and Beyond, Nancy Chodorow cites research indicating that "if marital tension increases, differentiated behavior increases: fathers become more authoritarian toward and rejecting of daughters as they gain less satisfaction from their wives" (87). Paula Bennett argues that Elizabeth and Jane act typically in their dysfunctional family: they have taken on the "parental roles their mother and father have abandoned," maturing early, and thereby gaining "whatever positive attention" Mr. Bennet provides and avoiding the fallout from "his growing antipathy to his wife" (134). The two eldest Bennet daughters do not entirely escape censure, however: upon being asked if Jane and Elizabeth may show their uncle's letter to their waiting mother, Mr. Bennet is said to "coolly" reply, "Take whatever you like,

and get away” (P&P 305). This cold remark is worse than his (empty) threat to Kitty, made after Lydia runs off with Wickham, of never allowing her to “stir out of doors, till you can prove, that you have spent ten minutes of every day in a rational manner” (300). Kitty cries over her father’s harsh words, though the narrator takes them less seriously.

As symptomatic withdrawal from the family, Mr. Bennet’s library retreat may be an indicator of the blame he places on his wife for not giving him a son: men are “also more likely to stay in marriages that have produced sons,” Chodorow explains (Femininities 87). Though divorce is not an option for Mr. Bennet, he responds to his wife’s over-enthusiasm with sarcastic remarks, never with sympathy. As John Halperin states, Mr. Bennet serves as a “warning against excessive detachment,” and her father’s false assumption that Elizabeth will marry Darcy in order to out-do Jane in luxury items proves to Kneedler that “the would-be sage [is] a fool” (Halperin 89; Kneedler 154). Because he has irresponsibly neglected planning for a future without a son, Mr. Bennet’s estate will pass on to his silly cousin Mr. Collins, leaving his family with very little—only fifty pounds a year after his death for each daughter to live on (P&P 304).

Displacing part of his guilt over not saving money onto his silly wife and daughters, Mr. Bennet occasionally can see his part in the mess after runaway Lydia is located, asking his favorite daughter Elizabeth to “let me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame” (299). As Terry Eagleton discovers, much of the “immoral behaviour in [Austen’s] novels flows from weak or irresponsible parenting, not least on the part of fathers” (111). Pride and Prejudice centers on the “miserable of marriage” rather than the “triumph of love,” Paula Bennett contends, as the novel reveals the “high

price children [especially Lydia] pay for their parents' follies, inadequacies, and mistakes," thus falling into line with Mansfield Park, Persuasion, and Northanger Abbey, "which also dwell subtextually on the dark side of family life" (138). Pride and Prejudice is considerably less light, bright, and sparkling, given this reading; were this interpretation the only way of understanding Austen's lively and generally happy novel, it would be much less popular with readers. For Claudia Johnson, Lydia acts as a "decoy" to attract our censure away from Elizabeth's also "'improper' rambles, conceit, and impertinence" (Jane Austen 77). Some of these "negatives" are what modern readers like most about Elizabeth, a more attractive character than Lydia because Austen shows us her strengths—loyalty to her sister Jane and friend Charlotte, realistic appraisal of her limited prospects, sympathy with her father, and sense of humor, in addition to McClintock Folsom's sense of Elizabeth's "wit, independence, self-regard, and capacity for growth" (8)—as well as the weaknesses she shares with her youngest sister.

Because of Elizabeth's "rambles, conceit, and impertinence," Darcy comes to respect and finally to love her, although he prefers to deem her faults "the liveliness of your mind" (P&P 380). Since serious-minded Darcy is not "of a disposition in which happiness overflows in mirth," part of the comfort Elizabeth will bring to a marriage with Darcy is teaching him to be laughed at (P&P 372, 371; Brownstein 67). Enabling him to get beyond his discomfort with laughter will humanize Darcy and improve his social habits. While the period of their engagement leaves Elizabeth with "something to be wished for," she looks forward to the "comfort of ease and familiarity" that "would come in time" (P&P 378, 377). Here, comfort is not something to be attained all at once,

like pin money or a new carriage, but is similar instead to respect or trust, a quality that develops with the growth of a relationship. Later on in the novel, Elizabeth designates their engagement as “our comfort,” meaning the relationship itself, when she jokingly asks her fiancé, “what becomes of the moral, if our comfort springs from a breach of promise” since Elizabeth “ought not to have mentioned the subject” of Darcy’s saving Lydia from disgrace (381).

A removal from Longbourn, the scene of so much of Elizabeth’s laughter, may reinforce Patricia Meyer Spacks’ understanding that Elizabeth also must learn to “restrain her comic impulse” (“Laughter” 74). Penelope Joan Fritzer also finds that Austen’s “most memorable” character is in possession of too much laughter (64), while Regina Barreca worries that this very restraint will shackle Elizabeth after her marriage, a tragedy indeed (56). If Mikhail Bakhtin is correct that in the comic world, one “ridicules to forget” (23), no wonder that Elizabeth is eager to move on to Pemberley. In this light, her laughter throughout the novel appears as a coping device, indicating the presence of comfort and discomfort alternately: while Mrs. Bennet groans her displeasure over another visit from Mr. Darcy, not knowing that he is engaged to her second daughter, Elizabeth can “hardly help laughing [. . .] yet was really vexed” (P&P 374). Elizabeth’s own reflection that her fiancé has not yet learned “to be laught [sic] at” anticipates her behavior as a wife and sister-in-law (371). Though Georgiana is initially startled by Elizabeth’s “sportive manner” in jesting with her brother, that she makes Darcy the “object of open pleasantry” as his spouse proves that Elizabeth’s laughter does not belong to her single state solely. For Barreca, Elizabeth finds out how to laugh at the

“man who has power over her,” even helping Darcy to tolerate and enjoy the experience (56). Pride and Prejudice concludes with a union between equals, or as Prewitt Brown describes the pair, as “surrogate parents, moral guardians, and educators to Georgiana and Kitty,” using the “power of marriage as an agent of constructive social change” (62).

With the culmination of their marriage and departure from Meryton, a “society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley” (P&P 384), Darcy and Elizabeth forge a new community. Rachel Brownstein reads the ending of Pride and Prejudice as concluding with Elizabeth not only laughing at Darcy, but also teaching Georgiana, resulting in the union of a new set of sisters which undercuts the marriage plot (67). For Darcy to learn what Elizabeth intends him to, the value of laughter, his wife must maintain her comic sensibility, which in time will lead to the continued improvement in Darcy’s manner, a comfort to everyone. Mr. Bennet’s sadness, and indeed fear, that Elizabeth may be marrying where she does not love, thus “scarcely escap[ing] discredit and misery” (perhaps a hint that Elizabeth would engage in extra-marital affairs, even as her sister Lydia has been involved in sex outside of marriage) are placated in her explanation of the “many months suspense” Darcy’s love has already undergone along with his other “good qualities” (P&P 376-77). Instead, Elizabeth fits Lynne Vallone’s description of the girl who succeeds as one able to take in the messages sent her by reading, community, social class, and sexuality, to find that happiness and virtue are both within her control (5).

While Elizabeth’s sister Lydia denies society’s messages of sexual self-control, she is Elizabeth’s double in other circumstances and also procures comfort from having

her own way. That women's sexuality is in need of paternal control is made explicit in a 1793 text that Austen knew, whose author James Fordyce warns against the dangers of "promiscuous [sic] amusement." In his Sermons to Young Women, Fordyce traces women's moral degeneracy from start to finish. At first, simple girls like Lydia Bennet "run, they laugh, they prattle" until grown up, when they find themselves with awakened sensibilities (78). Participating in "public diversions" and hearing swearing and double entendres initially horrifies them, but gradually "custom begets indifference" (79). Of all the Bennet daughters, Lydia is the most "indifferent" in Fordyce's sense and the one most exposed to the public eye, as she goes off to Brighton, the soldier's summer camp, under the dubious chaperonage of Colonel Forster and his silly wife, completely disregarding any discomfort or disgrace her inappropriate actions will bring to her family. Paula Bennett blames Lydia's father completely for his daughter's "defection," as the girl simply rehearses the "source of the family problems," not so much "in Mrs. Bennet's 'foolishness,' per se, but in her husband's passive-aggressive response to it" (137). The youngest Bennet girl envisions herself the "object of attention, to tens and scores of [officers] at present unknown" (P&P 232), and her letters to Mrs. Bennet consist of nothing but remarks on public excursions: "they were just returned from the library, where such and such officers had attended them" or they were "going to the [soldiers'] camp" (238). Harmless as these actions may appear, they retain certain implications for the author and her early nineteenth-century readers about sexual temptation and the public sphere.

Regarding the story's progression, Amanda Anderson explains the natural

likeness between sexual error and narrative, as “fallenness is assimilated to narrative itself, identified or equated with a ‘downward path’” (qtd. Vallone 9). D. A. Miller categorizes Austen as a traditionalist in her moral ideology, suggesting that the knowledge of what a character “ought to have done” is available to him / her from the start. Therefore, in Austen the need for “novelistic construction” is absent with the exception of “lapses” or events that did not need to occur. Her novel is “always on the wrong track” for Miller because her putting it on the wrong track is the only way, according to Austen’s moral ideology, that action can take place (Narrative 54). Elizabeth denigrates Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, tracing it back to his regiment’s first being encamped at Meryton; since that time, “nothing but love, flirtation, and officers, have been in her head” (283-84), though without Lydia’s “lapse” in morals, Darcy would not have an opportunity of proving how greatly he has improved in humility, though his “affections and wishes [for marriage to Elizabeth] are unchanged” (P&P 366). Lydia is the “problem child” in her family, and Bennett reads the girl’s “ejection” from the Bennet household at the novel’s conclusion as “a classic example of scapegoating.” In “sacrificing Lydia” to Wickham, the Bennets save themselves, the ultimate irony in the novel (Bennett 136).

Bennett absolves Lydia of any blame for her actions, though Copeland reminds us that “Lydia’s little slip from virtue” comes at an enormous financial cost of at least \$800,000 in 1990s currency (44). Forming a darker view of the situation, Fordyce describes this sunken state of once pure young women whose minds are now sullied by using a metaphor to express their subsequent loss of virginity: “All the internal fences of

modesty are broken down. Can you wonder, if it is then easily assailed from without?” (79). The narratorial prediction of Lydia’s misfortune, in terms of conduct book dictates, appears earlier in Pride and Prejudice with her decided preference (though probably her sisters’ as well) for a novel from a circulating library over Mr. Collins’ choice of reading material, Fordyce’s Sermons. Mr. Collins wonders, although Austen does not, how young women can so easily pass over “books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit” and instruction (69). Eagleton describes the way that the Austen narrator’s “quintessentially ‘English’ tone [. . .] chides and tolerates at the same time.” Austen’s irony is not shocked by “human immorality,” but it also does not “cynically indulge [in] it either” (106-07). After Mr. Collins hears of Lydia’s escapade with Wickham, he “consoles” the other Bennet family members with the thought that Lydia’s death “would have been a blessing in comparison” and that Lydia’s lively disposition “must be naturally bad” for her to have taken such a step (P&P 297). Lydia’s fate, which turns out rather well in that she gets the “one man in the world [she] loves” (291), is perhaps the most unlikely happy ending to be found in Pride and Prejudice. Happiness and comfort are usually intertwined for Austen, so that the Wickhams’ future shortages of money and frequent changes of address render their ability to “help and comfort [. . .] one another in prosperity and adversity” or to bring lasting happiness to each other, seem unlikely (P&P 387; “Celebration of Marriage” 423).

In contrast, Lydia shares a striking similarity to the “Beautifull [sic] Cassandra,” a heroine from Austen’s juvenilia who wears a bonnet meant for a countess, eats ice cream at a bakery without purchasing it, and randomly drives in a hackney coach

without paying for the ride (45-46). Cassandra's madcap doings are reminiscent of Lydia's purchase of a bonnet which she intends to "pull to pieces," and "treat" of a cold lunch for her sisters (they end up with the bill) at an inn between London and Meryton—on the way, she and Kitty had pulled up "all the blinds" in the coach, and "pretended there was nobody" inside for a joke (P&P 219, 222). A "favourite of fortune" (E 428), Lydia runs away with Wickham as another "good joke" and avoids punishment for her sexual intrigue, taking comfort in sheer fun (P&P 291, 315). She may go on leading a charmed, happy-go-lucky life—her "ease and good spirits increased" (317), in its own way as fortuitous as her sister Elizabeth's.

Once Lydia is married to Wickham, her mother warmly welcomes her favorite child back to Longbourn; in Lydia's absence, the other Bennet sisters have not been able to gratify or comfort Mrs. Bennet much, who formerly found comfort in seeing her old habits and opinions re-lived through her youngest daughter. When the regiment is to leave Meryton, Lydia and Kitty are miserable, and their sympathetic mother recalls crying "for two days together when Colonel Millar's regiment went away" twenty-five years previously. "I thought I should have broke my heart" (229). After the newlyweds leave for Newcastle, Mrs. Bennet becomes "very dull for several days" and complains about "parting with one's friends," despite Wickham's unconscionable acts of running away with her daughter and amassing large debts (P&P 330, 303). On the other hand, while Bingley postpones returning to Netherfield, Mrs. Bennet relieves her feelings of frustration by saying, "my comfort is, I am sure Jane will die of a broken heart, and then he will be sorry for what he has done" (228). Unthinking Mrs. Bennet implies that she

could derive comfort in her daughter's death (a stance Mr. Collins would agree with), although what she really means is that for Bingley to admit his wrongdoing—"I shall always say that he used my daughter extremely ill" (228)—will bring her mother mental satisfaction. Once Jane is engaged her mother is thrilled and once again assigns a use value to her daughter: "I was sure you could not be so beautiful for nothing!" (348).

However, Mrs. Bennet's least favorite daughter becomes her most treasured one when Elizabeth announces her engagement to wealthy Mr. Darcy. For her mother, the wonder is not over two such different people coming to an understanding, but rather the material benefits such a match will mean for Elizabeth: "Oh! my sweetest Lizzy! how rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have! Jane's is nothing to it—nothing at all" (P&P 378). Elizabeth's wealth is a treasure and a comfort to her mother.

Mrs. Bennet's focus on the profits such a marriage will bring is a commentary on her own view of her union with Mr. Bennet, a highly practical view she has partially transmitted to Lydia, who, not having known her father's love, concerns herself with what Bennett calls the "material and social advantages of this 'love' instead" (138). As McKeon elucidates, "the wife's desire for a modicum of financial autonomy [pin money] transforms the matrimonial state of nature into a state of war" ("Secret" 184). The pre-wedding legal arrangements are important to the wife for obtaining a provision in marriage independent of her husband's will, especially given the assumption that husbands quickly tired of their empty-headed spouses and looked elsewhere for comfort—their wives might do likewise (McKeon, "Secret" 184; Staves, Married 134).

Mrs. Bennet knows the score for typical marriages (such as the Collinses' financially motivated union, though in this case he is the empty-headed spouse), if she does not know her daughter Elizabeth very well. Mrs. Bennet's own self-worth is dependent on the value of the financial settlements of her children's marriages, leaving readers with the sense that a deceased daughter is preferable to an unmarried one, as Mr. Collins understands (P&P 296-97). The similarity between a dead daughter and a profligate one such as Lydia Bennet becomes evident in a consideration of the definition of "death" as rendered in Eagleton's The English Novel: An Introduction: it is the "outer limit of society, its natural or metaphysical Other, the only place where a ferociously destructive desire is finally appeased" (134). For Mr. Collins, Lydia's heedless affair with Wickham places her outside the boundary of regular society, even as her death would, while Bennett reads Lydia's final circumstances as tragic "—the wasting of a human life" (P&P 297; Bennett 138).

A summation of Lydia Bennet's trivial occupations—little comforts that offset the boredom of the everyday—is given in Barker-Benfield's statement that non-working women in the eighteenth century were exposed to the vices of finery, cards, balls, morning trifling, and the trimming of bonnets (P&P 221; Barker-Benfield 203). Wollstonecraft agrees that women were made "insignificant" by "visiting, card-playing, and balls," forms of self-comfort (Vindication 209). In the eighteenth century, England's modernization takes away meaningful work from middle-class women, argues Spacks, who notes the double bind enforced on women: young women's lives are rather boring, but they must never allow themselves to be bored (Boredom 63, 67). In the

1770s, thirty years of “feminist tendencies” bring a backlash of sermons to women (Barker-Benfield 204). By the early nineteenth century, Armstrong argues, card playing and dancing are fine with conduct book writers unless a woman plays and dances as public spectacle, out of her own home, thus losing her value as subject when she is objectified in the male gaze (77), which is what Elizabeth rightly represents to her father as occurring if her sister Lydia visits Brighton (P&P 230).

Good morality is associated with comfort in the domestic arena, even as vice is linked to the public sphere, for women. Julia Epstein argues that because the novel is “identified with women both as writers and as readers,” it is “expected first and foremost to provide moral instruction” (218-19). Austen’s non-punitive handling of Lydia, a “fallen” woman, sets her apart from other early nineteenth-century women writers attending to morality and comfort. Jane and Elizabeth Bennet’s discomfort with Lydia’s out-of-bounds behavior, however, aligns comfort and morality in Pride and Prejudice, while comfort and a different version of self-regulation—hiding one’s emotional distress, maintaining the status quo—keep company in Emma.

4.2 Emma: The “Warm Comfort” of Daughters

While Pride and Prejudice is the most popular Austen novel, Emma is considered by most scholars to be her finest work. Though Austen worried that she had created a heroine “whom no one but myself will much like,” Prewitt Brown observes that in Emma readers see most perfectly “Austen’s forte: mastery of the moral landscape of the everyday” (qtd. Austen-Leigh 140; 18).⁹ Wiltshire believes that in a classroom

discussion of Emma, new readers of Austen will easily pick up on the notion that “a world devoted to comfort, above all, has turned its back on risk, adventure, and excitement,” as comfort “can be a seductive and problematic value” (“Health” 174). Less prescriptive than her contemporaries Priscilla Wakefield and Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, Austen nevertheless establishes the connection between comfort and the home as self-evident. Terry Castle attends to an early scene in Emma where the heroine shows Mr. Elton a portrait of her nephew asleep on the couch: for Castle, “the fictional world constantly adjusts itself so as to keep its babies comfortable,” the characters who will experience neither cold nor hunger (E Introduction xxv). In Prewitt Brown’s opinion, however, the more ordinary the “social situation,” the higher Austen’s achievement in proving that “it does have human importance” (18). With 110 mentions of the word “comfort” (and its variations), Emma is second only to Mansfield Park (132 instances) in Austen’s oeuvre for the frequency with which characters and the narrator refer to comfort to explain their circumstances and personal feelings.

Comfort is also important in Wakefield’s A Family Tour through the British Empire (1804), which features the fictional Mrs. Middleton taking her children to various destinations throughout England; her sons go on to Ireland and Scotland under the guidance of their tutor. As they travel toward Lichfield, Mrs. Middleton speaks disparagingly of the “cottagers” nearby since “‘there is reason also to believe,’ said she, ‘that their morals are less pure and their lives less comfortable’” than other classes of working poor the Middletons have observed (29). Bent on improving young minds with her proscriptive travelogue, Wakefield uses Mrs. Middleton as a mouthpiece in

specifying that those acting immorally should also be seen living uncomfortably. The reverse is also observable—the morally sound deserve comfortable lives—as upright Mrs. Middleton finally ends her months of travel as a result of “that invincible inclination to enjoy the comforts of her own house, which is so natural to those who value social enjoyments and the sweets of domestic life” (354). The life of virtue is natural, comfortable, and home-centered, Wakefield explains, a conclusion ill-befitting a narrative concerning various multi-country tours for the Middletons, an average family as their name implies. Wakefield’s conclusion that staying home is a great virtue may be at odds with the thrust of her plot, focused as it is on a family’s travels, but not if her work is considered within the framework of her culture’s dominant ideology.

The eighteenth-century connection between (middle- and upper-class) women and home as their rightful sphere is highlighted.¹⁰ However, mothers are also responsible for their children’s (especially sons’) education. As a widow, it behooves Mrs. Middleton to absent herself from her own house for the sake of educating her children, but as soon as that goal has been accomplished, an “invincible inclination” urges her homeward (Wakefield 354). Without this powerful preference for home, Mrs. Middleton’s status as respectable widow / mother would be called into question. Readers are assured that Mrs. Middleton detests watering places for the dissipation and intrigue they tend to promote, although she and her family end up spending the winter in Bath, as do Anne Elliot and her family (Chapman, “Chronology” 302-303). Audrey Bilger affirms in Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen that women could gain patriarchal approval with novels

(and Wakefield's fictional travelogue certainly approaches the novelistic) if they provided some type of "domestic fulfillment" (28). Epstein goes on to say that contemporary reviewers kept their highest praise for "realistic depictions of contemporary society, and the novel of manners took its impetus from this" (219), as did travel guides, apparently.

Centered around domestic fulfillment through comfort, Emma opens with a loss in the Woodhouse family circle: Emma's longtime governess / companion Miss Taylor has married, gaining "a home of her own" as well as a "comfortable provision," as Mr. Knightley points out (11). Austen writes that the position of governess, under even "the most favourable circumstances," exacts "something more than human perfection of body and mind to be discharged with tolerable comfort" (166). Mr. Knightley goes on to argue that Emma "cannot allow herself to feel so much pain as pleasure" at the thought of her friend's marriage, and in fact that is what Emma struggles to do in adjusting to life at Hartfield without Miss Taylor (11). Phillips maintains that mourning can appear to be a "punishment for our attachments" and from an outsider's perspective, grieving looks like a time-waster (Terrors 79). Austen illustrates both points, as Emma heroically steers the conversation away from the question of "who cried most" at her beloved governess's wedding, even as she suppresses tears over her loss of Miss Taylor (E 10-11). Moving from the socially ambiguous position of governess to the socially secure position of wife and (by the novel's end) mother, Mrs. Weston (née Taylor) does what the novel assures us "every friend of [hers] must be glad to have her" do: marry happily and securely,

thereby escaping what the novel's other would-be governess, Jane Fairfax, calls the "sale—not quite of human flesh—but of human intellect" (11; 300).

In danger of dropping out of the bottom of the middle class, Jane nearly forsakes all of life's comforts, "of rational intercourse, equal society, peace and hope," to endure a life of "penance and mortification for ever" (165). Jane's bodily illness—"severe headaches [sic], and a nervous fever [. . .] her health seemed for the moment completely deranged" (389)—after accepting Mrs. Smallridge's offer demonstrates Paula Marantz Cohen's point that often heroines are sick and frail in nineteenth-century novels, but their symptoms should be viewed as "functional with respect to the effective resolution of the narrative" (128). While Cohen's description of the typical heroine does not fit robust Emma Woodhouse, it does match Jane Fairfax. Were Jane strong in body, she would have gone to Ireland with her wealthy friends instead of returning to her poor grandmother's house in Highbury, where her presence soon attracts Frank Churchill (E 160-61, 445).

Cohen finds that daughters have the least power in the family and are thus more likely to bear "the family's emotional stress" (129). By contrast, Emma is the most powerful person at Hartfield (possibly even Highbury) and fits Cohen's classification only obliquely—she subtly carries her family's stress—but powerless Jane Fairfax obviously fits the role as traditional heroine in distress, finally rescued by marriage to the wealthy if inconsiderate Frank Churchill. Jane does not have any better options: living with Frank may not add to her peace of mind, as Mr. Knightley foretells that she "will be a miserable creature" (E 426), yet going as a governess to one of Mrs. Elton's

friends would be uncomfortable mentally and physically. Miss Bates's ridiculous assurances are small consolation: "impossible that any situation could be more replete with comfort" as her niece "will be only four miles from Maple Grove" (E 380). These remarks are probably parrotings of Mrs. Elton's off-stage comments on Jane's upcoming tenure as governess, for Mrs. Elton alone could derive comfort from such a near residence to her sister, and in her usual selfishness, Mrs. Elton is unable to see anyone else's perspective: "She would not take a denial. She would not let Jane say 'no'" (380). Jane's proximity to the Sucklings will add nothing to her comfort and very probably increase the humiliation of her situation, which would be lessened were she inconspicuously placed.

Jane Fairfax's resistance to Mrs. Elton's attempts at finding her a governess position may have its basis in her sense of the difficulties of living a life of near-degradation. Angeline Goreau notes in her introduction to Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey how the "plight of the governess was inseparable from the larger dilemma of marriage" in the early to mid-nineteenth century, thanks to an ever "increasing surplus of women in England" (38). Of the few options available for middle- to upper-class women needing to work, the position of governess appealed to educated women, though the situation was often humiliating, as Charlotte and Anne Bronte found out (10). In performing domestic duties for her livelihood, the role of governess, Armstrong writes, often blurred the lines between respectable women and prostitutes, for many conduct authors (79).

Even when the situation is a comparatively comfortable one, such as Miss Taylor's in the Woodhouse family, difficulties arise from the resistance of the governess

life to classification, as it is neither leisure nor working class. Upon meeting Emma's former governess, now Mr. Weston's wife, Mrs. Elton exclaims how she felt "rather astonished to find her so very lady-like!," a sentiment disgusting to Emma (E 278). Later, Mrs. Weston appears to have forgotten her own humble origins as well as her husband's former misalliance with wealthy Miss Churchill: Mrs. Weston confides in Emma that Frank's engagement to impoverished Jane Fairfax "is not a connexion [sic] to gratify; but if Mr. Churchill does not feel that, why should we?" (400). For his part, Frank inadvertently draws attention to the connection between his fiancée, who nearly becomes a governess, and his step-mother, who was one once, as he confuses the sender of the news of Mr. Perry's short-lived plans for a new carriage (344-46). Having received letters at Enscombe from his two female correspondents, Frank conflates Jane's letter with his step-mother's, and his confusion causes Mr. Knightley to suspect an "attachment between them [Frank and Jane]," though Mr. Knightley also observes a growing intimacy between Frank and Emma (350-351).

No longer trusting in Emma's resolve never to marry in order to care for her father (E 41), Mr. Knightley worries on. While Emma herself is in the most financially comfortable situation of any Austen heroine, her father's enormous need to be coddled insures that comforting is the main business of the title character in her role as dutiful daughter. The widespread dependence on daughters within family groups perhaps leads Chodorow to theorize that "in some sense feminine identity is more easily and surely attainable than masculine identity" (Feminism 32); feminine identity is a function of the ability to provide comfort.

Comforting is also the work of Emma's other central daughter figure, Miss Bates, of whom J. F. Burrows observes that "ideas of social comfort and mutual reliance" figure most frequently "in [her] idiom," since she often speaks for those in the household around her (26): "'Ay, very true, my dear,' cried [Miss Bates], though Jane had not spoken a word—'I was just going to say the same thing. It is time for us to be going indeed. [. . .] Jane's alertness in moving, proved her as ready as her aunt had preconceived'" (E 349). For Marylea Meyersohn, Miss Bates's wish of protecting her niece allows her "to speak without anxiety. When the spinster becomes protector, she is momentarily rational—and brief" ("Garrulous" 44). Miller reads Miss Bates as Austen's testimony to the conception of "her text" in the "womb of trivial communications and unreserved gossip" (Narrative 39). In spite of her speeches' general vacuity, Miss Bates occasionally communicates something of importance to her audience, Emma and Emma's readers, though she is at her best when protecting, and thus comforting Jane.

Not only speaking but acting for her family, Miss Bates means well but is less adept at giving comfort than Emma. For Auerbach, Miss Bates appears "modest, unassuming, and 'obliging,'" yet she shows "a kind of egotism and tyranny in her monopoly of the airwaves to tell *her* story" (209). Miss Bates does exert a lot of control in her Cranford-like family circle of all women.¹¹ Pre-reading her niece Jane Fairfax's letters before showing them to Jane's deaf grandmother, Miss Bates comes unexpectedly upon "the mention of her being unwell," then "burst[s] out quite frightened with, 'Bless me! Poor Jane is ill!'—which my mother, being on the watch, heard distinctly, and was sadly alarmed at" (E 162). Miss Bates's lack of self-restraint involves her mother in

needless worry, as the sickness turns out “not near so bad as I fancied at first” (162).

Mrs. Bates’s daughter believes herself to be more successful at hiding from her mother how little Jane eats—“makes such a shocking breakfast, you would be quite frightened if you saw it”—so resourceful Miss Bates “say[s] one thing and then I say another, and it passes off” (E 237), or so she hopes. Emma’s cautious watchfulness and suppression of her own emotions is more convincing: immediately after rejecting an embarrassing proposal of marriage from Mr. Elton, she makes “a very strong effort to appear attentive and cheerful” until bedtime so that her father will suspect nothing, despite her extraordinary mental “perturbation” (133).

Emma is a novel showcasing the title character’s many mistakes, but in comforting her elderly father and sparing his feelings, Emma believes herself to be always in the right (E 377). Kathryn Sutherland describes how “the appropriation of the language of reason by the ideology of domestic containment” gives women room for “self-development and social influence,” a condition she sees being worked out in the “complexly interiorised yet socially confined heroines” of Austen’s works (31). Living with her sickly father, Emma is “absolutely fixed, in the same place” with the kind of “confined and unvarying society” Pride and Prejudice’s Mr. Darcy notices (E 143; P&P 43). However, Emma’s situation offers the heroine ample vents for her wild imagination with the corollary task of disciplining it (E 137). These aims are worthy of Austen’s contemporary More, who in Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education, views women’s imaginations as overactive, their judgment as “naturally” incorrect, so that education is needed to help them regulate the latter without over-stimulating the

former (I: 167). For humorless More, wit is a “perilous possession” for women, and only sober Christianity can keep it in order (II: 70).

In Emma’s infamous Box Hill episode in which the heroine insults Miss Bates, Austen appears to be in dialogue with More.¹² Emma goes through little fundamental change, merely regretting her rudeness: “how could she have been so brutal, so cruel to Miss Bates!” Emma atones for her sarcasm in an early morning call to the Bates family and an inquiry after Jane Fairfax, instead of offering a verbal apology for the mental anguish and social discomfort she had caused (E 376-78). Spelling out her wrongdoing to Miss Bates, who so often misspeaks herself, would involve Emma in losing the comfort of the status quo, and her own psychological ease would lapse were she to apologize to her social inferior, a person below Emma not so much in terms of money but of sense. Miss Bates’s honest humility proves her to be Emma’s superior, morally speaking, and Emma knows it. If Emma’s own discomfort keeps her from apologizing directly, then her acuteness of mind discerns Miss Bates’s greater discomfort, figured through the absence of her usual “cheerful volubility” coupled with “less ease of look and manner,” and Emma works hard to restore her neighbor to her usual pitch, free from emotional pain (378).

Psychoanalyst Jonathan Lear understands that “the life of the mind is always trying to keep pain at the door” (71). For Spacks in Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind, Emma is trying to forestall boredom, a prominent condition for nineteenth-century women, indicating an “incapacity to engage fully” (165). Boredom and pain meet, then, at the point where each is avoided and comfort is maintained, the

comfort of the status quo, the comfort of hiding feelings that if acknowledged, would lead to a rupture of the social world.¹³ Emma reveals that the proper response to boredom is acceptance because of its inevitability, not rage or imagination, says Spacks (172). Were Emma to cry openly over Miss Taylor's leaving (instead Miss Woodhouse "turn[s] away her head"), she would discompose her father and the culture that endorses marrying for love, money, or security, for material comfort at the cost of independence.¹⁴

Obsessed with his own comfort, Mr. Woodhouse's preference for a fire in June is the marker of someone whose habits—including his ritual of taking gruel—discomfort everyone else (10, 101). Colin Winborn aptly describes Mr. Woodhouse as taking "neurotic reassurance from fashioning around himself a world which, for him, is comfortably close, and yet for others (especially those intimates penned within it) is claustrophobically closed in" (72). Wiltshire claims that Emma's father's "invalidism can be thought of as an emotional or characterological constriction or failure" and juxtaposed against his daughter's energy, creates an "ethical conflict" in the novel ("Health" 171). Imagining the overly warm, stuffy room at Donwell Abbey encourages in Austen's readers a sense of the claustrophobia that accompanies those who often keep company with Mr. Woodhouse. Mr. Knightley on one occasion refutes his old friend's assumption that he "must have had a shocking walk," and instead explains that the lovely evening is "so mild that I must draw back from your great fire" (E 10). Wiltshire reads comfort to Mr. Woodhouse's mind as indicating nothing more than "habit, familiarity, safety, a reassurance premised on compensation for unacknowledged loss."

As a “replacement for a failure” that resists delineation, comfort for Mr. Woodhouse serves as a consolation prize (“Health” 175). While Wiltshire does not specify the nature of Mr. Woodhouse’s “unacknowledged loss,” his dead wife and past youth are two possibilities. Managing her father and his incessant need for the comforts of life is Emma’s full-time job, and it requires a level of heroism seldom recognized by critics.¹⁵

Besides caring for her father, Emma Woodhouse finds match-making an irresistible temptation, though one without the capacity to satisfy. Emma’s match-making is a compensatory activity that comforts her in giving the heroine a sense of her work’s importance to her community. Most scholars align themselves with Mr. Knightley in viewing Emma’s pastime as irredeemable and unworthy of her (E 12). Auerbach describes Emma’s penchant for making matches as “wast[ing] her talent” in a conflation of “matters of import with trivia” (210). Castle calls Emma “obsessional yet inept” in her attempts at drawing couples together (Introduction x), while Marvin Mudrick derides the heroine for her “blind willfulness” while being “foolish enough to play God” at the same time (242; 201). In turn, Johnson critiques Mudrick because in her view, what he really (and incorrectly) means is that Emma “plays man, and he, as well as others, will not permit her thus to elude the contempt that is woman’s portion” (Jane Austen 123). In match-making, Emma participates in an activity traditionally consigned to women and if she fails at it, Emma likewise dodges the contempt that makes no part of Austen’s delineation of her favorite. Only Emma’s doting father believes that she had any material hand in bringing together Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston, and Mr. Woodhouse even begs, “Pray do not make any more matches” (E 12). Mr. Knightley’s

frankly owned disbelief—“why do you talk of success? where is your merit?—what are you proud of?—you made a lucky guess; and *that* is all that can be said”—provokes Emma to prove herself again, this time in making a match for Mr. Elton, which she believes is “doing him a service” (E 13), though the activity is really self-serving.

Perry argues that Emma’s “exclusive attention to marriage plots of her own devising” goes hand-in-hand with her “inability to enter into a relation of equality with other women” (113). Johnson agrees that “female authority” is Emma’s subject, and that discomfort with it is the reason critics are not fond of Emma (Jane Austen 122). For Johnson, “Emma recuperates a world Austen savages in novels such as Mansfield Park and Northanger Abbey, in order to explore what was precluded in those novels, the place such a world can afford to women with authority” (Jane Austen 127). Even Emma gives way to her neighborhood’s “civilizing restraints,” showing “conservative ideology” at its finest (Jane Austen 130). Overly focused on “the marriage plot,” Emma fails to befriend Jane Fairfax, even as she delights in her patronage of lowly Harriet Smith (Perry 113). After her scheme for Elton to wed Harriet comes to nothing, Emma has a brief realization that “it was foolish, it was wrong, to take so active a part in bringing any two people together” (E 136-137). One paragraph later, however, Emma considers who else might fit Harriet, imagining a suit from a local lawyer before stopping “to blush and laugh at her own relapse” (137), an action readable in Phillips’s startling relation of how “unsurprised we are by ourselves (we comfort ourselves by simulating repetitions)” (Terrors 15-16). Emma continuously makes matches as a defense mechanism against being left behind in spinsterhood while everyone else in Highbury pairs off. In this way,

she takes an active part in the marriage market without risk to her independence, anticipating an old age surrounded by nieces and nephews, a plan “suit[ing] my ideas of comfort better than what is warmer and blinder” (E 86). A preference for the comfort of her sister’s children rather than an imagined husband indicates that “comfort” as Emma conceives of it here means rationally choosing the level and degree of intimacy with her relations, rather than blindly marrying. Much later in the novel and once Emma has understood herself better, she admits that with the birth of Mrs. Weston’s baby and the marriage of Frank to Jane, “all that were good would be withdrawn,” especially if Mr. Knightley ceases “coming [to Hartfield] for his evening comfort! [. . .] walking in at all hours” if he discovers “in Harriet’s society all that he wanted” (422).

Another perspective on Emma’s match-making is evident when the following statement from Ella Sharpe is brought to bear on the heroine’s situation: “The people who enjoy the greatest ease, and to whom work and conditions in life bring the greatest internal satisfaction, are those who have justified their existence to themselves” (qtd. Feelings 242). Perhaps Emma is not so much the tale of a young woman’s learning to admit she is wrong (MacCarthy 273; Litz 141)—nor marriage the “aim and end” of the novel (Polhemus 58; Booth 137-69)—as it is the story of self-justification for living, both Emma’s and Austen’s.¹⁶ Castle cautions, however, that Austen’s universe “for all its atavisms [. . .] is not like Freud’s” neurotically imagined one (xxvii). The difference between Austen’s world (where order, sense, and goodness prevail) and Freud’s is the secret of Austen’s comfort. However, Freud “showed that people make their lives by what they do,” according to Roy Schafer, who explains in his A New Language for

Psychoanalysis that what people “do” includes all their mental operations and thereby all the circumstances they contrive and all the meanings they ascribe to their circumstances” (qtd. Chodorow, Feelings 272). Within fictional Highbury, Emma can be seen to manipulate circumstances with her match-making and interpretations of events (Miss Taylor’s wedding, a proposal letter to Harriet from Robert Martin).¹⁷

Comfort as community pastime is lodged oftentimes between the inconsequential and the all-important, but it has different effects. According to Spacks, Emma entertains with wit and “verbal energy” but leaves its readers in “emotional limbo,” boredom’s moral equivalent (Boredom 169). Boredom, for Spacks, is the “register of inadequacy” and the “explanatory myth” of our culture, linking the trivial and the important (23). Paul Langford understands English boredom as distinct from that experienced in France or Germany, since in England boredom connotes “irritation at the intrusion of others rather than dislike of being thrown upon one’s own resources” (51). Novelist George Gissing explains that “the English have never (at all events, for some two centuries past) inclined to the purely ceremonial or mirthful forms of sociability; but as regards every prime interest of the community—health and comfort, well being of body and of soul—their social instinct is supreme” (qtd. Langford 254). Winborn reads Emma as a work concerned with “the over-extension of the mind within the confined space of Highbury,” as well as preoccupied with “the over-extension of the verbal sphere” (78). As previously mentioned, Spacks sees Emma revealing that the proper response to boredom is acquiescence (rather than wrath or imagining it away) because of boredom’s inevitability (172). Comfort is a major goal for Mr. Woodhouse, and if Emma’s interest

is sometimes sacrificed to his comfort (she can not leave Hartfield), the rewards of getting one's own way are eventually hers to enjoy (she can get married anyway, since Mr. Knightley agrees to live at Mr. Woodhouse's home).¹⁸ Emma demonstrates Armstrong's argument that the Austen novel ends at the point when a character finds out what she wants (193). Joining forces in Mr. Woodhouse's domain, the concepts of comfort and boredom might appear too close for comfort, but Wiltshire indicates that Austen saves "comfort from the material and the debilitated, puts it into vital connection with ethical and psychological health" at climactic points in Emma, including the title character's own commendable love of home ("Health" 175-76).

A perusal of Emma's pages reveals that the title character, though endowed with the "best blessings of existence," is not truly comfortable with her circumstances (5). The primary position that Emma occupies at the novel's beginning—first in the social circles of Highbury, in her father's house, and with Mr. Knightley—are all threatened by the marriages or potential pairings of others as the story progresses (5, 7, 415). Emma's proclaimed satisfaction with her single status is jolted by the upstart Mrs. Elton and the specter of lonely spinsterhood evinced by Miss Bates. Emma attempts to dissociate herself from Miss Bates's company by explaining that the real evil of the spinster's situation is poverty, not singleness, when in reality the two conditions are intertwined, even causal. The idea of a rich, never-married woman is a novelty in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century society. As Davidoff and Hall explain, women were thought to need being in a family; to be unattached is to be surplus (114).

A widower for many years, Emma's neighbor Mr. Weston, on the other hand, is neither pitied for his single state nor gifted at comforting others in their distresses. Warm-hearted and good natured, he has "realized an easy competence" and at Emma's beginning has just "made his fortune, bought his house, and obtained his wife" and is now starting off on a "new period of existence," the point where most novels usually close (E 15-17). In teasing Mrs. Weston about the couple's happiness, Mr. Knightley imagines that her husband "may grow cross from the wantonness of comfort, or his son may plague him," the latter a circumstance that does arise (38). Contented and social throughout Emma, Mr. Weston's only moments of discomfort come with the revelation of his son's secret engagement to Jane Fairfax, when Mr. Weston fears that Emma will be heart-broken to learn the news (396). Unable to offer Emma any consolation, he takes her home to his wife, who is much better at comforting people. His complacency restored by Emma's assurances of safety, Weston's "air and voice recovered their usual briskness" (400-401).

Mr. Weston is not one of those analytical people who comprehend "human life" best, realizing in Lear's words that "what is best is to organize life so as to escape its ordinary conditions—even the conditions of excellence within it" (55). As an "imaginist," Emma herself fits this description much better (E 335), endeavoring to deal with the excess comfort that is Mr. Woodhouse's standard of living but that leads to such boredom for his younger daughter. For Lear, happiness appears to be the "profound organizing principle for human life," whereas in actuality "its injection into life has a profoundly disturbing effect" (60). Whether in organizing a ball or planning her

marriage to Mr. Knightley, Emma discovers the pulse-raising anxiety that attaining one's dearest wish can bring about. Lear explains that through contemplation, we find out that the "lives we have been living are not *completely* happy," but while this realization is far from the majority's idea of happiness, we are reaching its "highest conception" within an Aristotelian framework (38). If happiness of the first rate involves contemplation, then Emma may have only had a sort of "second rate happiness"—Lear's term for living the ethical life following Aristotlian principles, which recognize that even the virtuous person may be discontented (35, 22). In coming to terms with her own desire to be "first with Mr. Knightley," an adept comforter, Emma is moving toward ultimate happiness—and the comfort of self-knowledge (E 412, 415).

On the other hand, Phillips fears the scandal of a happy marriage, in which "there is nothing more terrorizing than the possibility that nothing is hidden" (Monogamy 74). Thanks to Emma's habit of interfering in others' lives, her relationship with Mr. Knightley will never reach the alarming level of stasis that Phillips detests, although her husband may not realize that this is so. After reading over Frank Churchill's letter accounting for his secret engagement to Jane Fairfax, Mr. Knightley concludes, "My Emma, does not every thing serve to prove more and more the beauty of truth and sincerity in all our dealings with each other?" Emma acquiesces, although "with a blush of sensibility on Harriet's account, which she could not give any sincere explanation of" (E 446). Out of both kindness and embarrassment over her part in the scheme, Emma will never tell him that Harriet thought at one time that the owner of Donwell Abbey loved her. Loving and comforting for Emma have involved protecting her father from

hurtful information, and she will continue her established pattern of loving in protecting Mr. Knightley from knowing details of her busy-bodying, as much for her own sake as for his.

In describing Emma's reaction to the news of Harriet's engagement to Robert Martin, Austen proves that she is in step with Lear's assessment of the dual nature of happiness: "Emma dared not attempt any immediate reply. To speak, she was sure would be to betray a most unreasonable degree of happiness. She must wait a moment, or he would think her mad" (472). Emma's "silence disturb[s]" Mr. Knightley, unacquainted as he is with her change of mind. Emma's real joy is so great that she suppresses it, afraid it will be confused with insanity, but in so doing she appears to be disturbed, reasoning that Mr. Knightley must have misunderstood Martin: "It was not Harriet's hand that he was certain of—it was the dimensions of some famous ox" (473). While Knightley takes Emma's questioning as a sign that she thinks him a "great [. . .] blockhead" (474), Emma has trouble believing how well things have turned out because of her intense guilt feelings over misleading/misplacing Harriet's affection so many times (over Mr. Elton, Frank Churchill, Mr. Knightley). In fictional Highbury as well as in real life, everyone "is left out of being someone else" (Phillips, Monogamy 116). Emma is proud of her high status but also worries about not receiving an invitation to a party given by the Coles, "of low origin, in trade" (E 207-208). Phillips understands that being left out is "no comfort" but that "Coupledom is as close as you can get" (Monogamy 116). Harriet Smith and Emma Woodhouse have both been excluded (even

if by choice) from the various couple formations in Emma, until in the last pages each meets her match, a comfort indeed for those concerned about being left behind.

Receiving little comfort from marriage is Frank's uncle Mr. Churchill, whose selfish and self-indulgent wife runs his life (E 17). Mrs. Churchill also interferes with the plans of her adopted son Frank, who is beckoned home, though "without feeling any real alarm for his aunt [. . .] he knew her illnesses; they never occurred but for her own convenience" (258). Mrs. Churchill is good at apportioning comfort to herself but not to anyone else. By using free indirect discourse, Austen expresses her sentiments about this character's true nature:

Mrs. Churchill was unwell—far too unwell to do without [Frank]; she had been in a very suffering state (so said her husband) when writing to her nephew two days before, though from her usual unwillingness to give pain, and constant habit of never thinking of herself, she had not mentioned it; but now she was too ill to trifle, and must entreat him to set off for Enscombe without delay. (E 258)

Austen's exaggerated and ironic language here—"usual unwillingness to give pain" and "constant habit of never thinking of herself" when by demanding Frank's presence Mrs. Churchill disproves her own words—typifies Austen's often noted impatience with hypochondriacs, in fiction and in life.¹⁹ Mrs. Churchill fits the model outlined by Armstrong of the domestic woman exercising a type of power; it only looks unlike a political force because it appears "forceful" only when wanted (19). In relating the news of Mrs. Churchill's death, the narrator (mis)quotes Goldsmith, adding that when woman "stoops to be disagreeable, [death] is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill-fame," as Mrs. Churchill is now discussed sympathetically "after being disliked at least twenty-five years" (E 387). Not a comfort to those around her when she lived, Mrs.

Churchill's passing away brings for Frank and his uncle the comfort of having their own way at last.

Moving from the domestic to the political—and as H el ene Cixous reminds us, for women the political or “theoretical” is always personal (251)²⁰—as already noted in the history chapter, Austen takes part in the work of defending English nationalism against a French (cultural) invasion (a large-scale discomfiture for the English), and not merely dealing with the realm of home. In *Emma*, Austen demonstrates both France's attractions and England's dependability in her characterizations of Frank Churchill and George Knightley. Their Christian names alone indicate each character's association: Frank is cognate with France or French (Wiesenfarth 152), while George is the name shared by four of England's monarchs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as England's patron saint. Spontaneous and mischievous, Frank rides sixteen miles to London ostensibly to have his hair cut (though really to buy a piano for his fianc ee, Jane Fairfax), while George Knightley remains at home, responsibly engaged in business. While others in the Highbury community make “liberal allowances [. . .] for the little excesses of such a handsome young man,” Mr. Knightley does not warm to Frank and calls him a “trifling, silly fellow” (E 206). Frank upsets the balance of power and disrupts the usual course of events in Highbury, fascinating Emma and discomforting Mr. Knightley at once, much as the English were both interested in and uncomfortable with French culture.

Frank's excessive courtesies, according to Michelle Cohen, were “condemned as French, aristocratic, and effeminate, in contrast to a preferred mode of plain sincerity,

which was considered manly and English” (qtd. Michaelson 137). Frank is also aligned with the aristocracy because, as Wahrman indicates, the upper classes were criticized for their supposedly feminine qualities while the “middle class” was thought to exhibit masculinity in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century (382). Further, Knightley castigates Frank for not visiting his new step-mother, a former governess, as he exclaims (though not without some jealousy), “No, Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very ‘aimable,’ have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him” (E 149). Aligning Frank with effeminate France may be George Knightley’s way of belittling his rival’s masculinity, thereby privileging Knightley’s own manly, English identity.²¹ As Joseph Wiesenfarth explains, Frank is not just a ladies’ man, but he also wants to leave England, a remark made at George Knightley’s Donwell Abbey, and as Joseph Kestner reminds us, “Knightley IS England” (qtd. 154). Warren Roberts’s Jane Austen and the French Revolution also contrasts Knightley and Frank Churchill as “English ‘virtue’ and French ‘depravity’” (37).

Anne Crippen Ruderman’s The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen expands the view of an English-French rivalry between Knightley and Frank to include the whole of Emma. For Austen, “virtue needs political support” and the virtues she looks at in Emma are especially English in nature; according to Ruderman, “the national difference between England and France is a running theme of the novel” (44). Winborn associates virtue in Emma with visibility, so that Mr.

Knightsley's "openness" is approved as the "antithesis of the veiled proceedings of a Jane Fairfax or a Frank Churchill" (146). Austen excoriates the French personality, as demonstrated by Frank Churchill, for its over-emphasis on "politeness, its vanity," and its laziness, Ruderman thinks (45). With Emma's choice of Mr. Knightsley over Frank at the novel's resolution, she is also emblematically choosing England over France.²²

Emma, finally, is about putting up with the need of others for (sometimes excessive) comforting, while the greatest comfort in the novel is getting one's own way. France (Frank Churchill) attracts temporarily, but domestic comfort, most perfectly rendered in England (George Knightsley), is the heroine's choice. Emma's matchmaking serves as a compensatory activity for the protagonist's own singleness and boredom; she does it imperfectly because Emma's true calling is as a comfort-giver, and Emma herself is included in her comforting duties.

4.3 Northanger Abbey's Carefree Comforts of Youth, Innocence, and Display

If Emma is Austen's best work, Northanger Abbey is usually considered her worst, though few critics are so blunt, choosing instead to label the latter as a juvenile work, the product of an immature writer.²³ Recent critics view Austen's handling of Catherine in a more positive light: Tomalin describes "the narrator's stance" in NA as "that of a cheerful elder sister who from time to time disrupts the story by commenting on it" (165), and Auerbach vindicates the "protean storyteller" who narrates the novel and purposefully outdoes both hero and heroine (71-72). Compellingly, Auerbach reads Northanger Abbey as a novel more directed toward the "author's craft than about her

characters' lives" (72). With only 42 references to comfort, Northanger Abbey initially appears to be less concerned with the subject than Austen's other novels. A closer inspection reveals a very comfortably-situated young heroine, who feels even less anxiety and pressure to marry than wealthy Emma Woodhouse. Catherine's kindness to her younger siblings and enjoyment of country-living at a parsonage (novel-reading, shirking lessons, and playing cricket are some of the child Catherine's "warm comforts") place her on a continuum with Austen's other comfort-giving protagonists (NA 14), while Catherine's double, the anti-heroine Isabella, finds comfort in danger, breaking countless social rules in her quest for notoriety and excitement (133).

In Austen's treatment of the deceased Mrs. Tilney, seriousness breaks through the novelist's otherwise unremitting ironic stance in the novel, as Mrs. Tilney's maternal comfort is sadly missed by her family. In contrast to Emma's controlling Mrs. Churchill is Henry and Eleanor Tilney's mother, who stoically refuses to see a doctor until the third day of her complaint. Two days later Mrs. Tilney passes away, and Catherine Morland suspects that she was hounded to death by her cruel husband (NA 197). The narrator's description of Mrs. Tilney, who when alive "often suffered, a bilious fever—its cause therefore constitutional" diverges from her handling of "capricious" Mrs. Churchill in Emma, another invalid (NA 196; E 17). While Mrs. Churchill's demise means freedom for Frank, Mrs. Tilney's children regard her death as a perpetually crushing blow (E 388; NA 180). Though not often spoken about, Mrs. Tilney is greatly missed by her entire family: even the General supposedly "loved her" as much "as it was

possible for him to [. . . T]hough his temper injured her, his judgment never did. His value of her was sincere” (NA 197).

Dying when her daughter is only thirteen years old, Mrs. Tilney is still mourned nine years later, as Eleanor explains how “a mother would have been always present. A mother would have been a constant friend; her influence would have been beyond all other” (180). Clearly not envisioning a parent like Mansfield Park’s slothful Lady Bertram or an insufficient mother-figure like Northanger Abbey’s empty-headed Mrs. Allen, whose entire protection of Catherine Morland consists of cautioning her charge against buying cheaply-made muslins (28), Eleanor fantasizes about her absent mother’s propensity for doing good. Eleanor stops short of saying that her mother would have been almost the sole consolation in her daughter’s dreary existence with her impatient, sometimes severe father. Henry admits to Catherine that his sister is “uncomfortably circumstanced—she ha[s] no female companion” and is sometimes completely solitary (157). While Castle finds that Mrs. Tilney’s death is a “telling sign of a generalized failure of maternal guidance in Northanger Abbey” (xxi), Henry appears not to regret his mother’s untimely death in the same manner Eleanor does. In her relationship to her second son, Mrs. Tilney may already have completed the comforting work of mothering prior to her death. Chodorow reminds us that the portions of men’s love that stem from their “relationship to their mothers are more likely than women’s to be subjectively gendered: that is, to be intertwined for a man with his sense of (cultural and personal) masculinity” (Femininities 83). Mrs. Tilney has enabled Henry to become a whole man, one not impaired by living with a dysfunctional, controlling father, Eagleton’s “callous

domestic tyrant” (114). Eleanor Tilney has more in common with Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot, the protagonists of Austen’s “cold comfort” novels who strive against difficult circumstances at home, than she does with untroubled, comfortable Catherine Morland.

The “heroine” of Northanger Abbey comes of age in a loving family who permit her to have her own way: they “allow her to leave off” her studies in music when she dislikes practicing and tolerate her “noisy and wild” behavior and distaste for “cleanliness” and indoor pursuits (15, 14). While Alice Browne finds that “tomboyish romping is linked to early seduction in the scandalous Life of Jenny Cameron” (32), this correlation no more holds true for Austen’s Northanger Abbey than the supposed link between seduction and novel reading. At the age of ten, the heroine of Austen’s novel enjoys “nothing so well in the world as rolling down the green slope” behind her house, and seven years later Catherine and her friend Isabella endure rainy mornings in Bath by “shut[ting] themselves up, to read novels together” (NA 14, 37). Far from ending miserably seduced and abandoned, Catherine marries Henry Tilney, a clergyman (14, 252). Of Austen’s novels that include a clergyman in a leading role, perhaps only Northanger Abbey depicts a minister escaping the narrator’s mockery, mainly because Henry’s laughing gaze so often encompasses others. Anticipating Freud by a century, Austen demonstrates, in delineating Henry Tilney, “clinically and theoretically how men experience women” (Femininities 3), or rather how a female author experiences a man experiencing women.²⁴ Confusing to Catherine at first until she learns how to respond, Henry’s satirical ways match the young author’s more closely than that of any of her

later characters. Mudrick points out that Henry Tilney “know[s] about as much as the author does” and “respond[s] with a similarly persistent and inviolable irony toward all characters and events” within his purview (48, 51). Auerbach similarly comments that Henry is among the “few Austen heroes” to share Austen’s “dry humor, flair for words, and ability to mock society” (83). The clergyman’s authoritative position (and relative safety from the laughter of others) may be the error of an immature writer, if Austen truly hands over her own interpretive role to Henry Tilney, as Mudrick and Mary Lascelles have noticed (51; 61). By contrast, Johnson finds that too often, Austen’s ironical clergyman has been “mistaken for an authorial surrogate” (Jane Austen 34), and Castle interprets Henry’s actions as a repeated “resist[ance to] the role of moral and intellectual tutor” (NA Introduction xvii).

Beginning “perfect happiness at the respective ages of twenty-six and eighteen,” Henry and Catherine together will experience what Phillips calls the “scandal of a happy marriage,” in actually enjoying each other’s company as much as they seem to (NA 252; Monogamy 74). For Phillips, nothing is “more terrorising [sic] than the possibility that nothing is hidden” from the outside world (74). Catherine’s open-heartedness and naiveté indicate that her marriage to Henry will be one with very few secrets, as the General’s delay of their marriage has only “improve[d] their knowledge of each other” (NA 252). Morgan thinks better of Catherine, admiring Northanger Abbey’s originality in its heroine’s learning to educate herself instead of waiting for the right man to do it for her (27). “To love our partners we have to be addicted to the rules,” Phillips explains (Monogamy 33). Perhaps this is why Henry and Catherine’s relationship finally works—

they both enjoy discussing society's rules, whether for ballroom behavior or for Catherine's Radcliffean experiences at Northanger Abbey—while Isabella and James's does not. In the early Bath section of the novel, however, neither couple has the clear advantage, as the spa city functions as a place where the truth is muddled: once Eleanor Tilney and Catherine Morland meet, the narrator observes satirically that though “in all probability not an observation was made, nor an expression used by either which had not been made and used some thousands of times before, under that roof, in every Bath season, yet the merit of their being spoken with simplicity and truth, and without personal conceit, might be something uncommon” (NA 72).

In her portrayal of Catherine Morland, Austen goes Samuel Richardson one better: while his protagonist Harriet Byron of Sir Charles Grandison (1754) attends a masquerade as a shepherd girl or “Arcadian Princess” (I: 159), Austen's heroine does not require a costume for the role of provincial, innocent rustic. Richardson implies that Harriet is partly to blame for succumbing to the morally ambiguous entertainment—“this cursed Masquerade,” “Hated diversion!” (I: 164, 183)—in London which results in her subsequent kidnapping at the hands of the rake Sir Hargrave Pollexfen.²⁵ While the imaginary events of seduction and abduction in Northanger Abbey better fit Austen's realistic purposes, Catherine, familiar as she is with Richardson's novel and the romance tradition from which it springs, is disappointed to discover only a laundry list in her room at the abbey, rather than the manuscript detailing someone's forced captivity (NA 41, 172-173).

Without attending a masquerade, the other characters of Northanger Abbey—General and Captain Tilney, the Thorpe siblings, even James Morland in pretending he has come to visit his sister (51)—while in Bath disguise their true motives and selves. In the public sphere comfort is less in evidence; for Castle, the entire eighteenth-century culture is one “of travesty,” especially in London, and for the duration of the century, the mask represents “transgressive desire” (Thermometer 83, 88). The real work of comforting is not forwarded when people don masks, and Isabella Thorpe’s constant talk about turbans that fit her “odd face” and “what is behind the black veil” in Ann Radcliffe’s Mysteries of Udolpho align her with this transgressive (and in Isabella’s case, ineffectual) desire for mystery and public attention, a way of simultaneously hiding and revealing herself (NA 217, 39).

While Isabella is characterized by her transgressions, Catherine follows a more acceptable social trajectory. Austen’s description of her heroine’s occupations in Bath parallels the recommended course of action given in The Original Bath Guide (1811):

The general place of early rendezvous is at the Pump-Room; then part of the day is devoted to walking in the Crescent, Parades, or Sydney Gardens, visiting the shops, &c. thence to the Pump Room again, and after a fresh stroll, to dinner; and from dinner to the Theatre [. . .] or to the Rooms, where dancing or the card table concludes the evening; but the rage for private routes has in some measure altered these long-established regulations.²⁶ (107)

Chapter 3 of Northanger Abbey reads like an abridgement of the Bath Guide: “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 they paraded up and down for an hour” (25). During Catherine’s visit to the Lower Rooms, she meets Henry Tilney, who superciliously questions Catherine as to “whether you have been at the

Upper Rooms, the theatre, and the concert” (NA 25). The Bath Guide bewails the fact that “for some years [the Lower Rooms have] been much deserted, and for the last season wholly abandoned” (159), an occurrence Austen was familiar with, as her Advertisement to Northanger Abbey suggests: “This little work was finished in the year 1803, and intended for immediate publication. [. . .] The public are entreated to bear in mind that thirteen years have passed since it was finished, many more since it was begun, and that during that period, places, manners, books, and opinions have undergone considerable changes” (NA 11).

While certain habits and manners go in and out of fashion, the behaviors of several characters in Northanger Abbey, if not unheard of, are yet symptomatic of psychological problems, although not every Austen reader agrees that Isabella’s behavior merits critical attention. Alistair Duckworth, for example, writes that “in Bath the conduct of the Thorpes is all too plainly outrageous to need much in the way of comment” (92). Alternatively, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar view the Thorpe siblings as a “nightmarish version of what it means to see oneself as a hero or heroine” (130). For Gilbert and Gubar, Isabella is Catherine’s double, the “distillation of Catherine’s ambition” to see herself as a heroine, and she is Austen’s only major character to be designated as such (142; Auerbach 72).

While Catherine easily blushes upon Henry Tilney’s “sudden reappearance” in the Upper-rooms, Isabella can only fantasize about circumstances in which her “cheeks *would have* been as red as your roses,” had her friend happened to overhear James and Isabella’s conversation: “You would have told us that we seemed born for each other, or

some nonsense of that kind, which *would have* distressed me beyond conception” (NA 53; 71; italics mine). Isabella’s admission reaffirms Miller’s argument that the knowledge of what a character in an Austen novel “ought to have done” is available to her from the start (Narrative 54). In Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush, O’Farrell reads blushing as an involuntary “response to embarrassment” or delight, as it is part of the worlds of both “body and language” (3-4). Noticing Austen’s blush at work in Pride and Prejudice, O’Farrell argues that it serves as a reliable character indicator, unlike a lie told or a code followed (9). If, as O’Farrell posits, the Novel of Manners is a form that uses the readable blush as a way of schooling the body’s public behavior, then the Austen novel’s dependence on the blush is the novel’s own fantasy of exposure enacted (11).

In Northanger Abbey, Catherine’s blushes signal her innocence and true emotional response, while the anti-heroine Isabella, incapable of a real blush, fabricates a story in which, heroine-like, she blushes and proves her starring role. Whether blushing or only imagining doing so, for Catherine and Isabella the signification of blushing is “the body” like the novel itself, “asking to be read” (Complexions 81). While Catherine’s blush indicates her discomfort and unfeigned delight at Henry’s return, Isabella’s imagined blush is more complex, revealing her understanding that desirability is heightened through a woman’s display of what O’Farrell terms the “discomfitting sincerity of mortification” (23). That Isabella must imagine her would-be embarrassment at discovery that she and James “seemed born for each other” is a signal to readers who understand the blush’s function that her desire for Catherine’s brother, as well as her

supposed blush, are alike products of her fancy. Isabella's fantasies comfort her with the reassurance that her own ordinary story is a fairy tale, complete with handsome prince.

As a character in her own right (rather than just a foil for Catherine), Isabella is noteworthy for her compulsive lying and infidelity to her fiancé, symptoms of a deeper trauma stemming perhaps from her absent father and resultant striated finances.

According to Phillips, "symptoms are forms of private knowledge, expressions of private interests" (Terrors xiii). When Isabella assures Catherine, "Had I the command of millions, were I mistress of the whole world, your brother would be my only choice" (NA 119), readers can only wonder whether Isabella deceives only her friend, or also herself. Isabella's unremitting vanity is another fault. Recalling the first day she met Catherine's brother, Isabella explains, "I wore my yellow gown, with my hair done up in braids; and when I came into the drawing room, and John introduced him, I thought I never saw any body so handsome before" (NA 118). The elaborate description of her own appearance makes a non sequitur out of her compliment regarding plain James Morland. What Isabella really means is that when James saw her, he must have been the one who "never saw any body so handsome before." She reveals her discomfort with other women to Catherine in describing her past fear over the possibility of James Morland's falling in love with a Miss Andrews who "looked so heavenly" in her "puce-coloured sarsenet" at an evening party (118). As Mudrick has argued, Catherine little suspects Isabella's "indefatigable coquetry, her malice toward women," though both intertwined characteristics are obvious to readers of the novel (45). Immediately after her declaration, Isabella promises not to pain Catherine "by describing my anxiety" and the

“many sleepless nights I have had on your brother’s account!”—Mrs. Churchill-like, she has revealed it in assuring her friend that she will not do so (NA 118; E 258). Isabella also errs in her belief that her own uncomfortable “feelings are stronger than any body’s; I am sure they are too strong for my own peace” (NA 98). Along with Persuasion’s hypochondriac Mary Musgrove, whose “sore-throats, you know, are always worse than anybody’s” (P 164), Isabella’s placing herself beyond the scope of common experience is a typical Austen signal for a hugely flawed character. Austen “is suspicious of terms which smack of the universal,” Winborn reminds us (68). For Marilyn Butler, Isabella is one of Austen’s “dangerous women,” whose ranks include Mary Crawford, Lucy Steele, and Lady Susan, each chasing her own selfish interests (180).

Before a rival appears, Isabella draws society’s attention to herself by dancing repeatedly with James even though The Bath Guide specifies, “In order that every lady may have an opportunity of dancing, *resolved*, That Gentlemen shall change their partners every two dances” (160). Adherence to the rules may have resulted in the criticism from foreigners that English dancing lacked “sexual magic” and gave only “an impression of wholesomeness rather than excitement” (Langford 162).²⁷ Isabella expresses herself fluently on the topic of following the rules: “only conceive, my dear Catherine, what your brother wants me to do. He wants me to dance with him again, though I tell him that it is a most improper thing, and entirely against the rules” since they have already danced twice together (NA 57). However, Isabella is all talk, as what she claims to reprehend—the discomfort of becoming “the talk of the place” (57)—is actually her goal.

Chodorow writes that “a particular feeling condenses and expresses an unconscious fantasy about self, body, other, other’s body, or self and other” (Feelings 239). When Isabella says that she “feel[s] that I have betrayed myself perpetually” in letting outsiders realize her interest in James before they are engaged (NA 118), she reveals her own obsessive fantasy about the public’s supposed interest in her love life. Isabella dances with dashing Captain Tilney once James leaves Bath, and despite her protestations of being “quite jaded with listening to [Tilney’s] nonsense,” she admits that “being such a smart young fellow, I saw every eye was upon us” (134). Her grammatical error causes the phrase “smart young fellow” to modify “I,” doubtless Isabella’s actual interpretation of events: everyone must be watching them because of her good looks, not Tilney’s. This self-focused pattern emerges again in a later letter to Catherine, where Isabella describes how her new turban worn to a Bath concert caused “every eye [to be] upon me” (217). Isabella’s exchange of Catherine’s older brother for Henry’s is an open secret discernible to “every eye,” finally even Catherine’s. Isabella finds “comfort in danger,” what Phillips terms “the truth that the monogamist dreads, and the unfaithful rarely let themselves notice” (Monogamy 92). Narcissistic Isabella fails to mask—because she fails to realize—in both relationships her consuming love of self, for as Phillips notices, “in Freud’s view our first loves are both forbidding and forbidden” (Terrors xi).

The would-be heroine desires to attain what her own mother claims for her: “there never was a young woman so beloved as you are by every body that knows you,” a popularity that mother and daughter hope will reap a financial reward. Even as Isabella

disclaims wanting a large income for herself, she and her mother charge Catherine's father with the moral "failing" of not "doing something more" for Isabella and her betrothed (NA 136). Leaving no room for interpretation of the matter, the narrator declares the living to be "no trifling deduction from the family income," no small portion for "one of ten children" (135); such small-mindedness belongs to the Thorpe family, not to the Morlands. Austen may appear to take a hypocritical position in making the Thorpes seem petty for their awareness that "four hundred pounds is but a small income to begin on" (135). In Sense and Sensibility, a novel Austen started working on in 1797, the year before she began Northanger Abbey, one of the pairs of protagonists, Elinor Dashwood and her fiancé Edward Ferrars, are said not to be "quite enough in love to think that three hundred and fifty pounds a-year would supply them with the comforts of life" (Castle, "Chronology" xxxvii; S&S 369). This explanation is far from being a slur on the kind of love subsisting between Elinor and Edward, as Halperin suggests (88). The former nearly runs from the room and "burst[s] into tears of joy, which at first she thought would never cease" after learning that Edward is not married to Lucy Steele (S&S 360). The narrator merely makes it plain that the couple understands how the "comforts of life" that involve "increasing expenses of housekeeping" contribute to familial happiness (27), and love without comfort soon becomes misery. Isabella's unhappiness with James's small living has more to do with pride in her own consequence than an understanding or value of home comfort.

In Sense and Sensibility, Marianne Dashwood's speech about a yearly "competence" sounds similar to Isabella's pronouncement that "It is not on my own

account I wish for more” and her mother’s assurances concerning “your wishes, [. . .] so moderate” (NA 135). Despite Marianne’s naiveté about worldly matters in general, Isabella-like, she claims not to be “extravagant in my demands,” calling eighteen hundred or two thousand pounds a year a “very moderate income” since it needs to sustain “a proper establishment of servants, a carriage, perhaps two, and hunters” (S&S 91). What Marianne designates as essentials are really luxuries: the proposed Triple Assessment Bill of 1797 would have taxed purported luxuries, such as house windows, male servants, horse and carriages, dogs, etc. (Wahrman 110).²⁸ As Auerbach explains, the “happiest characters in Austen’s fictional world” are those who comprehend finances but are not blasted by the “corrupting power” of money (120), as Isabella is. However, Marianne and Isabella’s ability to calculate their prospective husbands’ incomes and expenditures serves little purpose, as Willoughby does not wed Marianne nor do James Morland or Captain Tilney marry Isabella. Marianne’s difficulty—self-deception—is ultimately a more forgivable offence than Isabella’s habit of deceiving other people, so their different fates seem merited. Marianne ends up with the devoted Colonel Brandon, a man with two thousand pounds per annum (S&S 223), while Isabella is left alone (NA 217).

Flaunting the order of things early on, Isabella is finally unwilling to conform to the convention of fidelity to one’s intended when a better offer appears. Isabella humiliates her fiancé by openly flirting with Captain Tilney, thereby fulfilling Phillips’ injunction to “replace the idea of the ‘real’ relationship” (what one has) “with the idea of the pleasurable relationship” (what one desires and finds fulfilling) (Monogamy 68).

Unfortunately for Isabella, her pleasure in Tilney is only transitory, and when he stops paying attention to her, she is left with neither real relationship—an engagement to Morland—nor pleasurable one—a flirtation with Tilney. Instead, Isabella has lost her reputation as a good woman, and as Phillips notes, the most feared person in society is the one who does not hold “coupledom” to be sacred. “As homophobia, xenophobia, all the phobias tell us”: unless we select monogamy we will be doomed to “isolation or the chaos of impersonality” (Monogamy 98). In trying for two men at the same time, Isabella has broken the rules of engagement and is punished with a double desertion, though perhaps at the psychic level this development is not her fault. Phillips quotes Freud on the way desire is always “in excess of the object’s capacity to satisfy it” (Kissing 100). Neither man, Morland with a minimally comfortable income nor Tilney with the future probability of great wealth and an estate, has the ability to satisfy Isabella’s desire for public glory, although she does not ever acknowledge that fame and admiration, as well as wealth, are her objects.

Trying to recoup her losses, Isabella writes to Catherine, and in hindsight exclaims how “many girls might have been taken in, for never were such attentions [from Captain Tilney]; but I knew the fickle sex too well” (NA 217). Knowing well neither the opposite sex nor her own best interests, Isabella, even with “great personal beauty” fails to “secure” her man and is left without any material comforts that such a union would have provided (NA 34, 202). Mrs. Bennet-like, Isabella is unbalanced in her calculations and misinterprets what marriage is about. Eagleton articulates the meaning of marriage in Austen’s novels, where equal importance is placed on “both the

inward or spiritual (love) and the external or material (rank, property, family).” Unifying the “subjective and objective,” marriage “is the place where social forms and moral values most vitally intersect” (120).

Ill-suited to quiet domesticity / wifhood, Northanger Abbey’s anti-heroine has a fondness for public attention that surpasses her concern for others: she leaves Catherine and James Morland “uncomfortably circumstanced,” with “uncomfortable feelings” (NA 202, 136). The siblings would be much worse off had Isabella married into their family, as James’s four hundred pounds per annum, an “income hardly enough to find one in the common necessaries of life,” would not have satisfied his wife for long, and Isabella’s discontent would distress Catherine (135-136). As it is, Castle finds “self-interested” Isabella’s domineering treatment of Catherine to include “its sinister side” (NA Introduction xvii). How Isabella might turn out is unknown, but Castle postulates that the “hardened bitch” Jane Watson, money-grubbing sister-in-law to the heroine Emma in Austen’s fragmentary work, The Watsons, is a sort of “Isabella Thorpe grown old” (NA Introduction xxviii-xxix).

Comfort, as in all Austen’s novels, is highly valued in Pride and Prejudice, Emma, and Northanger Abbey, as the (fairly comfortable) protagonists work at comforting, with varying degrees of success. Unlike the “cold comfort” novels, comforting here is not a rite of passage into marriage, and the “warm comfort” heroines are generally able to think and act more in their own interests than their counterparts in Sense and Sensibility, Mansfield Park, and Persuasion. However, compared to minor characters such as Lydia Bennet, Miss Bates, and Isabella Thorpe, Elizabeth, Emma, and

Catherine are far more capable of consistent comfort-giving, as the former are sidetracked by selfishness, busyness, and materialism, respectively. All of the female characters' struggles with the burden of comfort ironically prove comforting to readers who turn again and again to these novels for solace in their own complicated lives, as the final chapter on ethnography reveals.

Notes

¹ I follow the standard abbreviations for Austen's novels in this as in my other dissertation chapters: E for Emma, NA for Northanger Abbey, MP for Mansfield Park, P&P for Pride and Prejudice, S&S for Sense and Sensibility, and P for Persuasion.

² In Persuasion, the poor widow Mrs. Smith, Anne's old school friend, needs not comfort so much as the "activity & exertion of a fearless Man" in reclaiming her husband's West Indian property, something Captain Wentworth accomplishes at the novel's end (273).

³ As I explained in the "cold comfort" chapter, specific biographical circumstances may account for the differences between Austen's "warm comfort" novels and the "cold comfort" works. Austen's beloved father was still living while she wrote Northanger Abbey and Pride and Prejudice, and Emma was penned during Austen's residence at Chawton, where she was settled and happy (Tomalin 242). In contrast, England's war with France forced Cassandra's fiancé to the front in 1795, the year Austen wrote Elinor and Marianne (Tomalin 106); Mansfield Park and Persuasion were written after Austen's father died, the latter work penned while Austen herself was ill and in some pain (Tomalin 254-255).

⁴ The work of comforting well particularly belongs to women. In P&P, Darcy interrupts Elizabeth as she has just heard the news of Lydia's elopement, and though he offers to give her a glass of wine (as Edmund does for Fanny in MP), Elizabeth refuses and cries, while Darcy "in wretched suspense, could only say something indistinctly of his concern" (276-277). His attempts at comforting are rather poor, though he succeeds better at hunting down Wickham and convincing him to marry Elizabeth's sister (321-323).

⁵ Though born into the upper classes, Anne Elliot chooses to marry a working man,

Captain Wentworth, rather than her cousin, the heir to Kellynch Hall (P 250).

⁶ See Table B.8 in Appendix B for evidence pointing to P&P's status as best-loved Austen novel.

⁷ Several female students excitedly informed me after class how much they "loved" Pride and Prejudice, and asked what other Austen novels were available. One student convinced her roommate who was not in our class to read the novel also. However, a number of male students expressed a preference for Jane Bennet over Elizabeth, perhaps because they found the latter's mockery intimidating.

⁸ By 1734, philosopher Alexander Hume believes that men and women possess differing nervous systems (Barker-Benfield 27).

⁹ Lionel Trilling, Marilyn Butler, Reginald Farrer, and Harold Bloom are the scholars Brown cites as those favoring Emma as Austen's best work (18). Mudrick seems to share their opinion, as he verifies that in Emma the novelist and her characters "move with a freedom and assurance unparalleled" in the earlier novels, and he adds that none of Austen's other works "offers so pleasant and comfortable an atmosphere, so much the effect of an uncomplex and immediate art" (181). In her Preface to Approaches to Teaching Austen's "Emma", editor McClintock Folsom insinuates her concurrence with Brown about Austen's "fifth novel [. . . as] her greatest book, the one that most fully matches performance with intention," by quoting Farrer and Trilling at length (xi). Terry Castle agrees that Emma is "Austen's greatest and most characteristic work" (ix), and John Halperin labels Emma the most psychological of her novels, "full of humour and suspense, beautifully written, and brilliantly plotted" (274). Auerbach has amassed her own collection of scholarly opinions on Emma, citing Park Honan, who calls Emma "Jane Austen's 'greatest novel'"; Edith Wharton, who believes it to be "the most perfect example in English fiction in which character shapes events"; R. W. Chapman, who states that it is "clearly Jane Austen's masterpiece"; and Ronald Blythe, who terms Emma "the climax of Jane Austen's genius and the Parthenon of fiction" (qtd. 201).

¹⁰ Wahrman disagrees in thinking that prior to the 1830s, no link was automatically visible between the domestic realm and the "middle class" (Imagining 381), while I read Wakefield's A Family Tour through the British Empire (1804) as proof of this link.

¹¹ Cranford (1851) is an early novel by Elizabeth Gaskell, featuring a town of nearly all women, most of them older. Like Austen, Gaskell is deeply concerned with comfort.

¹² Spacks notices that Emma's enjoyment of the day and delight in Frank's flirtations is only pretended ("Laughter" 81).

¹³ While Morgan praises Emma's "divine imagination" which struggles "to make Highbury interesting" (38), Eagleton indicts Emma for her "imaginative self-indulgence" which leads to hurting other people, a result he believes, of the heroine's social prominence, wealth, and concomitant "idleness" (112).

¹⁴ Mr. Woodhouse is at odds with the dominant culture over the issue of marriage though, as he selfishly prefers members of his community to remain single and pities those who do marry out of his misguided notion that he wants what is best for them (E 7).

¹⁵ John Wiltshire views Emma heroically, as his "Health, Comfort, and Creativity in Emma" praises the title character's striking "capacity to contain anxiety" in her relations with her father (175).

¹⁶ For John A. Dussinger (In the Pride of the Moment: Encounters in Jane Austen's World, Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1990), Emma's actions are ultimately "a system of existential defenses through vicarious role-playing (Harriet as princess in disguise, Jane as the 'other woman,' Mrs. Weston as happy newlywed)," revealing the heroine's desperation to "regain selfhood" (138).

¹⁷ While Winborn admits that Emma "teasingly urges the reader to psychologize its heroine," he finds that Austen's work ultimately "frustrates psychological readings [. . .] her use of free-indirect discourse is too slippery, and does not afford the critic the sure individual purchase necessary to psychologize" (114-115), a compliment to Austen's prose works' resilience. As this dissertation chapter reveals, I disagree with Winborn about the limits of a psychological reading, even if surety proves elusive.

¹⁸ In Recreating Jane Austen, Wiltshire argues that at one extreme, comfort is giving in to Mr. Woodhouse's preference for "entertainments that never take him beyond the gate of Hartfield or out of himself" (132).

¹⁹ See Halperin on Austen's dislike of her mother's hypochondria (19; 295-296), Claire Tomalin on Austen's enjoyment of doling out her mother's daily laudanum dose (143-144). Tomalin also implies that Mrs. Austen relishes her sicknesses and improves suddenly when visitors arrive (144-145), not unlike Mary Musgrove of Persuasion. Halperin views Austen's portraits of Mrs. Churchill and Mr. Woodhouse in Emma as inspired by her own mother's tendency toward imaginary illness (269).

²⁰ Helena Michie, in Sororophobia: Differences Among Women in Literature and Culture (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992) argues that in splitting "individual and personal discourse," the feminist movement has strayed away from one of "its foundational insights: that the personal is political and vice versa, and that making these distinctions allows feminists to trivialize and to despair over differences among women" (5).

²¹ In her preface to Approaches to Teaching Austen's "Emma", Folsom tracks her changing responses to Mr. Knightley, finally seeing in him a character "both vigorously masculine and comfortingly able to make mistakes" (xiii). While the novel's narrator reveals Knightley to be wrong about several of his assumptions, his deduction about Frank Churchill's lack of consideration for others is substantiated by the novel's denouement.

²² However, in Sense and Sensibility the values are reversed, as the name "Marianne" represents 1790s France in a "deliberate replacement of the Virgin Mary" (Doody xvii). Auerbach writes that Austen would have comprehended how paintings and statues during this period show France symbolized as Marianne, a "half-clothed, vibrant young woman whose youth and spirit conveyed the dawning of a new era" (104). The three "Johns" in the novel may also be revelatory of Austen's way of "invoking the spirit of John Bull—the prosaic, mercenary, soulless symbol of England," Auerbach opines. John Dashwood is a "selfish materialist," Sir John Middleton an unimaginative, wealthy member of the aristocracy, and John Willoughby a lazy, extravagant seducer of innocent women (Auerbach 119). While "England" carries the positive value and "France" the negative in Emma, the reverse is true of Austen's earlier novel, suggesting that she may not have hated France as thoroughly as some scholars have speculated (Halperin 52-53; Roberts 32).

²³ Other scholars who view Austen's treatment of Catherine as derogatory include early reviewers Julia Kavanagh, who accuses Austen of "laugh[ing] at her first heroine, Catherine Morland" and characterizing her "by negatives" (178) and Richard Simpson, whose 1870 review of the Memoir critiques Austen's "polemical intention" in NA as on the "verge of caricature" (255). Castle describes NA in her introduction as "an experiment in negation," with Austen crafting a "statement about her own art" by discussing what it will *not* do (x). Halperin states that Austen's Catherine is "both stupid and successful" (112), while W.D. Howells calls the heroine "a goose" (55). In his classic text Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery, Mudrick observes that Catherine is not as "interesting and complex a person as she would have to be—intellectually or emotionally—to sustain the necessary tensions at the center of a realistic novel" (53), later referring to her as a "pleasant vacuity" with a "light head" and "wide-eyed credulity" (63, 242).

²⁴ Austen's depiction of Henry Tilney's relationship with Catherine Morland suggests that women's lack of knowledge is an asset on the marriage market. The narrator advises that "where people wish to attach, they should always be ignorant. [. . .] A woman especially, if she have the misfortune of knowing any thing, should conceal it as well as she can" (NA 110-111).

²⁵ I have modernized the eighteenth-century long "f", replacing it with "s".

²⁶ Austen recognizes the difference in Bath's customs between 1798-99, when she composes her first major work, and 1815-16, when she writes her final complete novel, so that in Northanger Abbey her heroine takes part in the various public offerings, but in Persuasion the characters entertain a select company at home.

²⁷ In addition, Paul Langford explains that "Englishness" became synonymous with prudery in Germany (159).

²⁸ Austen's own parents tried to maintain a carriage but found it too expensive for their reduced income of just under £550 a year, once the Deane curacy went to their eldest son James in 1798 (Halperin 82).

CHAPTER V
**FANS OF JANE AUSTEN: READING THE NOVELIST IN THE TWENTY-
FIRST CENTURY**

As ethnographic study, this chapter attends to Austen's readers—fans and scholars alike—and their search for comfort in her novels, while my earlier chapters prepare for this one by considering comfort in Austen's culture and in her works. Austen fans appreciate the comfort of familiarity and achieve a feeling of safety by taking part in the novelist's well-ordered world. Whether mourning the loss of a friend, seeking entertainment, or working through stress, Austen's readers can find comfort in returning to her novels. Austen's own attention to the home and to women's roles in the act of comforting are reciprocated in her fans' recognition of Austen's remarkable ability to offer comfort, in this century as well as the last.

Many Austen scholars (Deirdre Lynch, Claudia Johnson, Mary Favret) refer to the ways lay readers use her books, though as yet no study has supplied direct evidence from readers themselves to substantiate these claims. The official website for the Jane Austen Society of North America proclaims itself to be “a serious but not a stuffy group” (“JASNA” 1): an ideal forum for researching the intersection (or clash) between academic and popular versions of the “cultural” Austen, who is “a crossover phenomenon” (Lynch 5).¹ For this reason, and as a way of fulfilling the call first sent out by John Szwed and echoed by Janice Radway for “more specific studies of what people do with printed texts” (“Interpretive” 466), I initially journeyed to Austin, Texas, in

2001, surveying and video-taping a meeting of the local Jane Austen Society chapter.² For my dissertation I expanded on this initial ethnographic study by attending the Milwaukee 2005 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), where 139 (of 450) attendees returned the survey distributed via their conference packets. Given the demographics of the AGM (average age: 59), I decided to survey another group of Austen fans, members of the online website, The Republic of Pemberley. The RoP's Ramble Board hosted my survey for 5 weeks, and 40 people responded (average age: 37).³ I compiled data from these two groups in an attempt to avoid what Robert Irvine cites as a commonplace of academic criticism: the tendency to deal with "the types of pleasure gained by the non-specialist reader of Austen" through "speculation and hypothesis" (148).

Discussing a personal response to Austen, Johnson explains that Janeites represent a "reading community whose practices violate a range of protocols later instituted by professional academics when novel studies emerged": Janeites' violations include discussing characters "as if they were real people" and carrying on the work of novel reading in a social rather than solitary setting ("Divine" 30-31).⁴ Janeites' attentions to "all things Austen" are seen as misguided, and they themselves are classified as "overzealous and undersophisticated" (Lynch, Introduction 12). Lynch also notes the way that journalists vilify the "white middle-class women (the so-called frilly bonnet brigade) who go to the movies for the costumes and for romance" (8).⁵ This unfair assessment comes about in large part because so many of the members are female, specifically women interested in another woman's writings, and also because popular

culture is usually given low status in our society (Tasker 85). For instance, Judy Simons bluntly describes her essay on Austen as concerning the “interaction between classics and trash, between high art and popular culture” (28). Michael Mason defines popular fiction as “a novel which deliberately offer[s] nothing but a means of temporary distraction to as many readers as possible, without any attempt at distinction in its expression or seriousness in its content” (xii). Mason’s characterization fits romance novels, as well as some readers’ perceptions of Austen, insofar as her novels are used for sheer escapism and comfort.

Does (or should) Austen belong to professional academics or popular readers? Johnson praises the “middle-class professorate” for wrenching Austen from the clutches of “upper-class Janeites” at the same time that a “disciplined study of the novel” was begun (“Divine” 27), though in an earlier essay Johnson had admitted that “the very different reading traditions of the Janeites can accordingly now enrich our own” (“Cults” 222). Johnson later implies that Janeites and a serious perusal of the novel are mutually exclusive, but my findings disagree: some respondents who claim to have only a personal interest in the novels notice the types of details academics like to point out, such as Austen’s focus on social history, and some academics describe quite personal responses to Austen (“she is my friend and my hero,” one professor writes on her JASNA survey; another professor states that she joined JASNA because of her “Love of Jane Austen, wish to meet others who love her; love of dressing up and dancing”).⁶ In valorizing both academic and popular approaches to Austen, my ethnographic study of her fans provides at least one measure to bridge the gap between these two fields.

My survey asks a variety of questions about readers' jobs, hobbies, favorite Austen novels, and the film adaptations but does not mention the word "comfort," though I hypothesized that if Austen's works comfort readers, survey respondents would discuss it. When respondents mention comfort in relation to any question, it is therefore unprompted. In my research I practice an emically-based approach, not listing possible answers on the questionnaire but letting Austen fans volunteer their own responses, which become my subcategories of data in the tables I created based on their replies.⁷ The members' responses to Austen novels are finite (approximately one dozen various answers), and the response of feeling comforted is certainly suggested in Austen's texts. (See Appendix A for the survey form, Appendix B for the tables of data.)

The people who filled out my survey are mainly middle-class, middle-aged Caucasian women, with a few exceptions (see Table B.1).⁸ Concerning occupations (see Table B.2), the highest percentage of Janeites are retirees (24%), followed by those in business (17%), teachers / professors (14%), librarians (9%), and those in the medical field (6%). For RoP members, fully 20% are teachers / professors, followed by students (17.5%), those in business (17.5%), homemakers (10%), secretaries (7.5%), and retirees (7.5%). Quite a few of those in the "retired" category are former school teachers, also. However, working class occupations (plumber, janitor, wait staff) are noticeably absent from the list, suggesting that while members of the working class may read Austen, they do not belong to official Austen clubs or internet discussion groups. In addition, the 9 members of the Austin, Texas chapter are also nearly all professionals. While more students and fewer retired individuals make up the RoP membership compared to

JASNA, the lack of working class members in both samples is indicative: reading Austen and having the time to talk about her with others is a middle- to upper-class pursuit. With so many educators in each group (more than 14% in JASNA; 20% in RoP), Henry Jenkins's conclusion that many times fans are "overeducated for their jobs, [their] intellectual skills are not challenged by their professional lives" (282) seems less likely here than in Jenkins's samples of television viewers.

Table B.3 reveals that more than half of the respondents to the JASNA survey have been members of the Jane Austen Society for 7-20 years, while less than 10% of the respondents have had a membership for one year or less.⁹ A slight majority of long-time RoP members filled out this survey. Of JASNA survey respondents, 69% have been members for 7 years or more, compared to only 27.5% of RoP members, unsurprising given the greater length of time JASNA has been functioning as an organization (27 years vs. RoP's 10 years).¹⁰ Membership length is important because it shows the life-long commitment many readers have made to Austen.

Austen's readers are generally well-educated, and they (re)turn to her novels on a regular basis, during bad times as well as good: in periods of stress or grief, as well as during vacations and for intellectual stimulation (see Tables B.12 and B.13). The vast majority of JASNA and RoP survey respondents (88% and 97.5%) indicate that they re-read Austen's novels, and roughly 20% of JASNA respondents mention comfort as a reason for repeated readings of Austen. Fewer Pemberleans allude to comfort directly, though around half the respondents from each group cite reading the novelist to de-stress or to relieve depression: Austen's novels' comfort-giving is established. Her works

reassure and comfort readers of both groups through their familiar and enjoyable stories and humor. These fans see Austen as speaking to their own concerns, and while members of JASNA may seem more seriously engaged with Austen's texts, RoP members, in watching and discussing the adaptations as well as reading Austen, are making use of "Austen" in an equally critical and valid way. Austen's female characters' struggles with the burden of comfort ironically prove comforting to readers who look to her works for solace in their own complex lives. Some North American and Western European readers of Austen find that in acceding to the novelist's version of domesticity, comfort is available for modern problems.

Since her first novel's publication, Austen has had a devoted following, and the growth of her readership over the past 195 years has been steady despite the grumblings of certain critics. Austen has been co-opted for diverse purposes since at least the early twentieth century, and Johnson notes how hard it is to "disentangle the 'real' Austen from the acknowledged or unacknowledged agendas of those discussing her" ("Cults" 212). Therefore, one of the primary questions this chapter asks is, "what are the uses to which current readers put Austen?" My general purpose was to discover how interest in Austen as "crossover phenomenon" is manifested on a practical level and to learn how those who read the novelist outside of academia do so. I also wanted to find out whether critics' views of Janeites are accurate or not, and whether Austen's readers look to her works for some type of comfort.

One serious question often asked concerning the study of reader communities is, "Which is of greater importance, the readers or the text they read?" Although in previous

chapters, new historicism and psychology are more useful to my work, here I take a reader-response, ethnographic approach to the question of reader and text—to advocate the reader’s side. Although critics such as Lynch take a text-based approach to understanding the Janeite movement, my method of working with a small JASNA chapter, on the one hand, and asking questions of individual members of the larger parent organization / virtual community online on the other, prioritizes the reader who actively engages the discourse of the author and the wider social contexts, both past and present, that collaboratively create meaning. Through participation in such oral and written discourse surrounding writers like Austen, readers thus become the locus of the text’s meaning. As Mary Louise Pratt states, “Literature itself is a speech context [. . .] One of the most obvious kinds of contextual information we bring to bear in confronting a literary work is our knowledge of its genre” (86). Pratt’s ideas apply not only to JASNA members who discuss Austen’s cultural context, but also to RoP members who compose their own fan fiction (continuations of or sequels to the novels), fulfilling Pratt’s criterion of the “tellability” of literary texts: “Clearly, it is the reader who focuses on the message in a literary speech situation, not the message that focuses on itself,” Pratt argues (88).¹¹ Academic genre criticism as well as fan forums provide readers a means of further comfort—that of knowing others share their thoughts and feelings. In order to arrive at conclusions about readers’ emotions and choices, I analyze not only the texts themselves but what readers do with them.

Keeping Clifford Geertz’s injunction to ethnographers in mind, that “thick description” requires an “emphasis on context and on detail” in order to assign meaning

to people's actions (140), I have attempted to allow not only the Janeites' own words, but their preferences and leisure activities to speak for them as well. In her landmark study on readers of romance novels, Radway handles reading as a "temporally evolving act by an individual who attributes sense to textual signifiers encountered on a page." That definition is the basic premise of reader-response theory: "literary meaning" is not located "*in a text*" (Romance 10-11). While the women readers of romances Radway documents in 1984 are involved in the "private, isolating experience of reading" and never get together (Romance 212), the opposite is true of JASNA, or even the virtual Republic of Pemberley, whose main function is to facilitate the "bringing together [of] like-minded Austenians for exchanges of ideas, information, advice, recipes, and everything else" (S. Davis 14). Group membership brings with it the comfort of belonging.

Through her comfortable and safe reassurances, Austen has sometimes appeared to reinforce the status quo of English patriarchy. Connecting Austen to the comfort of power, Clifford Siskin's literary analysis implicates the novelist for her on-going role in a Foucauldian "engendering of modern disciplinarity," defined as the "organizational form of comfort with writing" (54, 62). Austen furthers the work of hegemony in this interpretation, giving readers the sense that the world is alright and not in need of changing. Viewing Siskin's project as a pairing of "Austen's afterlife with Literature's," Deidre Lynch notes that Siskin thinks Austen can be used as a plumb line to determine how literary studies evaluate and classify literature in general, because Austen has been challenging to classify (Introduction 24 n23). For Lynch, people and books get

“connected in new ways,” as over the centuries people discover individual selves, then position themselves in an “economy of prestige” where “cultural capital” is not distributed equally—only a select proportion who read are said to read rightly (Economy 126). For Siskin, Austen’s works defuse the worry many of her contemporary critics felt over the “discomforting question” of whether or not readers “become what we read” (thus implying incredible transformatory power to the written word) because Austen distills “writing comfortably,” pleasurably, and safely (60, 58). Siskin is probably right when he credits Austen’s initial popularity with her containment of writing’s potential threat. Richard Whately’s 1821 article in The Quarterly Review “safely” recommends Austen’s works for their “unexceptionable” nature and for bringing together “instruction with amusement” (445). Walter Scott’s earlier review of Emma, also published in The Quarterly Review (1815) agrees with Whately’s, in that readers will “never miss the excitation” of mere action-packed narratives (437); again, Austen’s safety in “keeping close to common incidents” of domestic life is the predominant theme (436). One hundred years after Austen’s death, biographer Constance Hill quotes Samuel Johnson as “peculiarly applicable” to Austen in the introduction to her Jane Austen, Her Homes, and Her Friends (1901): “To be able to furnish pleasure that is harmless pleasure, pure and unalloyed, is as great a power as man can possess,” Johnson opines (qtd. Hill vii). Apparently Austen offers safe, “harmless pleasure” to Hill’s satisfaction.

That Austen continues to be regarded as safe reading material is in evidence today. In the Editor’s Note of the 2005 volume of Persuasions, Laurie Kaplan argues that in reference to Austen, “‘safe’ is a word [. . .] worth contemplating” (9). Miranda

Burgess calls Austen's works "predictable commodit[ies]" purchased for their "conventionality" and thus made social and harmless, like the novels which Henry Tilney (of NA) "makes safe" (172-73).¹² Burgess's Austen, a conservative who maintains the status quo, produces a network of upright families across England who would "defuse the dangers of reading" and of radical criticisms of "aesthetic and political artifice" (175). Further, Rachel Brownstein views Austen as "accountable" for attracting snobbish readers and even "encouraging" them in their elitism to take part in Austen's "sure, exclusive Lady's tone" (59-60). In her introduction to the collection of essays comprising Janeites: Austen's Disciples and Devotees, editor Lynch, though not seeing Austen in an apolitical light, expresses her sense that for Hollywood producers and sequel publishing houses, Austen, "ever the well-mannered lady [. . .] is 'safe,'" both in terms of returning a financial investment and in not presenting "political challenges" to an audience, as our culture "has already got her number" (5).

As far as her fans having obtained Austen's number is concerned, several of the survey respondents wished me luck and expressed their interest in hearing how my project turned out, while a couple of others cautioned me not to overanalyze Austen, but to "just enjoy."¹³ This statement against critical work with the novelist—one that implicitly finds comfort in the text—is a provocative one, especially as it highlights fans' perception of the tension between academic pursuits of interpreting Austen and reading her for enjoyment (in this circumstance, the latter is privileged). Victor Nell's Lost in a Book: The Psychology of Reading for Pleasure describes the carefree nature of reading for enjoyment: "it is a free activity standing outside ordinary life; it absorbs the

player completely, is unproductive, and takes place within circumscribed limits of space and time”; citing previous studies, Nell uses the term “ludic reading” to recall an aspect of play “engaged in for its own sake” (2). “The absolute control readers exercise over their reading with regard to pace, content, initiation, and duration,” Nell explains, “means that reading can be used to accomplish two very different goals, to dull consciousness or to heighten it” (9). Austen fans who read to de-stress and those who read to pick up new details and insights can thus use the same novels for different purposes. Nell’s data tell us that for some readers, “relaxing with a book does not necessarily or always mean relaxing with fiction. But for most, it does” (19). O’Farrell adds that “the demands of reading Jane Austen have generated notorious alliances between writer and readers and in doing so have produced a devoted readership practiced in the ways, and sophisticated in the acknowledgements, of an Austenian universe” (Complexions 36). For many sophisticated fans and scholars, as well as for their unsophisticated counterparts, Austen’s universe is one that provides comfort.¹⁴

5.1 Surveys of JASNA (2005) and Republic of Pemberley (2006)

According to my survey results, men and women possess differing motivations when it comes to joining an Austen group. Comparing the JASNA men’s responses to the women’s is instructive: while 47 of 119 women (40%) said that their own interest in Austen brought them to the group, only 4 men out of 17 (23.5%) listed their own interest as their primary reason for joining JASNA. Only 2 female respondents mention their husband’s buying a membership for them, and 0 women claim to be members of JASNA

due to a spouse's interest. However, over half of the male respondents (9 out of 17, or 53%) cite their wife's, daughter's, or girlfriend's interest in Austen as the main reason for joining the organization. One man replies that he joined "to meet women," while another writes "marriage." Clearly, Austen is far more attractive (and comforting) to women than to men, at least among the surveyed male members of the Jane Austen Society, whose commitment to their female family members is more often cited than their own interest as a reason for participation.¹⁵

In addition to reading and discussing Austen's works, members of both groups take part in numerous other activities, and Table B.6 displays both important similarities and differences between the members concerning their pastimes, comforting distractions from work. JASNA members enjoy a wide variety of interests apart from reading Austen, though nearly a quarter of the members cite some type of sewing (quilting, embroidery, knitting) as a hobby. Many of the women at the Annual General Meeting in Milwaukee had their sewing projects with them, steadily working during the speakers' presentations. One member explains (in answer to question 11) that her interest in Austen's culture has to do with women being "valued for their characters, motherhood, intellects and even sewing skills rather than the modern way of valuing a woman merely for her salary." In the United States, sewing itself is largely neglected in the dominant culture, so that those who sew may see themselves in alignment with an earlier century's practices. Sewing provides comfort on multiple levels: it produces something useful, such as a blanket or sweater, and the process of creation seems peaceful and fulfilling for the sewer.

Creative writing and letter-writing as hobbies among Pemberleans tie with hiking / spending time out-of-doors, at 20% each (JASNA's figures are close, with 22% citing hiking / the outdoors as a hobby, though only 9% of JASNA's members list writing as a pastime). Whether in hiking or gardening, the outdoors brings participants closer to nature and to their own bodies, and letter writing brings the writer closer to others, in defiance of a modern age where isolation and technology are prevalent, and despite the "ease and efficiency of the internet," which make "the art of the letter appear to be lost" (Kaplan 10). In addition, the pastimes of walking, gardening, and letter-writing are also ones that Austen (and her characters) find gratifying, even comforting. The comforts of reflection and / or relaxation (through enjoyable exercise) are thus available in these types of pursuits, as opposed to sky-diving or rock climbing, intense activities seldom mentioned by (typically older) Austen fans.

The replies from women in JASNA (see Table B.7) reveal that nearly three-quarters of the respondents claim to engage with Austen on a personal level only: two typical explanations from this segment of the JASNA population are: "Personal. I love to escape and Jane's world is the perfect place to do so" and "I do it for enjoyment, not for intellectual exercise. (I have always felt that way; I loved reading literature, but hated dissecting it." Many respondents refer to the author or her novels as comforting "old friends," and in a Persuasions article, Tita Chico explains that in "re-reading Emma" one finds the experience of "having a friend let you in on the secret" of intimacy (212). O'Farrell also describes the reader's fantasy that "being with Jane Austen must simply have been the most fun thing in the world" ("Friendship" 45).¹⁶

Among the 32 JASNA women (27%) who declared their interest in Austen to be academic as well as personal, responses include: “[I] began teaching her novels in 1980—but I began reading them in 1952”; “I work with our college English department [as a librarian], advise student researchers on Austen, do Austen-related programming and write and publish academic articles on Austen”; and “I read P&P at age 12 and fell in love with her novels. That is personal. When I became a psychologist, I discovered what a great psychologist she was, understanding cognitive processes, interpersonal relations, and personality development.” Though many Austen fans discover her around the age of 12, the latter response is not typical though it ably demonstrates the way reading Austen can saturate an individual’s professional as well as personal life.

Male JASNA respondents are evenly divided as to whether their interest in Austen is personal or academic. One man underlines the word “personal” in the question twice, saying, “I never taught her novels.” A man who circles “both” also writes, “I like to read and as a teacher of English her work is noteworthy.” The sole respondent who does not fall into one of these categories at first claims a personal interest, though with the caveat that it is a “rub-off from wife and now Janeite daughter” but when asked about his favorite Austen novel in the next question, replies, “none; I’m not a Mark Twain type, but Jane’s not my cup of tea.” This candid answer, I decided, indicates neither a personal nor an academic interest, and may signal his discomfort with a literature that appeals so strongly to women.

Of women respondents to the Pemberley survey, 64% indicate that their interest in Austen is mainly or solely personal; this statistic corresponds to the 73% of JASNA

women who also indicate interest in Austen along personal lines. One of the Pemberley respondents says, “I grew up in Hampshire, and many aspects of [Austen’s] biography intersect with my life and my experiences.” Another woman says her interest is personal because she wants “to know why a lot of us women (Southern, in particular) [are] doormats.” Though she may mean that Austen serves as a lesson in what not to do, the respondent probably finds in Austen a comforting antidote to a culture of feminine submission. A more typical reply was the woman’s saying that she “enjoy[s Austen’s] works and love[s] getting lost in her stories. They are a most interesting diversion. If I do want to know more on a particular subject I will turn to academic works though.” Several of the “personal” replies also indicate a possible interest in an academic approach to the novelist, though not everyone agrees. As one woman emphasizes, “I am interested in her works from an academic point of view, but also feel that ANY work, be it literary, musical, etc. can be ‘killed’ with too much analysis!” As with the JASNA replies, the Pemberley surveys did not elicit any responses—from men or women—indicating an exclusively academic interest in the novelist.

For the 13 Pemberley women (36%) who cite an academic as well as personal interest in Austen, reasons usually involved being introduced to her works through learning or teaching the novelist in school. For example, one RoP respondent writes, “as a teacher of English literature, I am interested in it from a pedagogical standpoint, but it appeals to me on a personal level as well.” Alternately, a few “regretted not reading any of Jane Austen’s books in secondary school.” One person who says her interest was personal (“it’s just a hobby for me”) also writes, “I would say Jane Austen is a big

reason for my deciding to study English at university. And I did manage to fit in some Austen into my studies as well: writing a linguistic paper on female and male characters' use of language in P&P." What began as a hobby turned into a professional interest for this reader.

Of the male respondents to the Pemberley survey, all cite a personal interest only in Austen; while this statistic differs widely from the half of male respondents at JASNA who claim only a personal interest, the sample from the RoP may be too small (4 men) to draw any firm conclusions about male interest in Austen, except that the Pemberley men are all drawn to the website because of their own interest in Austen, not because of a spouse's interest, as is the case with several of the JASNA men. Readers' search for comfort is clearly a personal one.¹⁷

5.2 Re-reading Austen

Re-reading a novel has a lot to do with finding comfort. In a recent Message from the President (of JASNA), Joan Klingel Ray defines members of her organization as "avid, repeat readers" of Austen's works (7).¹⁸ Members of JASNA and RoP re-read Austen to discover new insights and details, for sheer pleasure, to gain comfort, to enjoy her language and humor, and to prepare for an AGM or a class. Tables B.10 and B.11 present the data on re-reading Austen, whether in preparation for quizzes or for other purposes.¹⁹ In addition to the afore-mentioned reasons, 8 people admit to re-reading as a memory aid, 3 re-read because of television and film adaptations, and 2 mention re-reading the novels to gain insights into their own lives. Roland Barthes believes that

because rereading opposes the “commercial and ideological habits of our society,” publishers design books so as to hold our attention on a first reading only: “we can then move on to another story, buy another book.” Only certain types of people—“children, old people, and professors,” Barthes says, can get away with rereading books, an activity which rescues “the text from repetition” (15-16). In fact, many Janeites fall into one or both of Barthes’s two latter categories. However, the work done by Tony Bennett and Janet Wollacott (1987), Radway (1984), and Helen Taylor (1989) shows that rereading takes a significant role in “the popular consumption of books”: these studies cause Jenkins to re-evaluate Barthes’s idea that rereading is “a relatively rare occurrence” (H. Jenkins 68).²⁰

Many of the respondents mention multiple reasons for reading an Austen novel repeatedly: “for recreation, to appreciate Austen’s artistry, to soothe the spirit” is one person’s answer, while the “comfort of the familiar; to re-enjoy her dialogue; after viewing movies like ‘Clueless’ or ‘Bride and Prejudice’ to read the ‘real’ thing again” is another’s. Someone else explains, “I’ve read them at different ages, which is definitely a different experience (a reading at 12 does not equal a reading at 25!)—and there is always more to discover—but they’re also a bit like comfort food.”²¹ According to another female respondent, “You keep finding more things in them—also they are a refuge if life is getting you down a bit.” These comments confirm H. Jenkins’s declaration that the “reread book is not the work we encountered upon an initial reading”; it is simultaneously “the same and new” (67). His view contrasts with that of Robin Wood, whose 1986 study views academic rereading as “producing new insights”

while “fan rereading simply rehashes old experiences,” which for Wood is babyish and regressive (qtd. H. Jenkins 74). My findings indicate that fan re-readings of familiar and comforting Austen texts also provide new insights for their audience. While fandom generally “celebrates not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings,” the two are hard to keep separate (H. Jenkins 284), though many fans of Austen are very clear that her novels are “great literature” (65 year-old JASNA member), with their remarkable “use of English, wit, analysis of people, insight” (74 year-old JASNA member). Writing in 1980, Bernard Sherratt finds that the “intimate knowledge and cultural competency of the popular reader also promotes critical evaluation and interpretation, the example of a popular ‘expertise’ that mirrors in interesting ways the knowledge-production that occupies the academy” (qtd. H. Jenkins 86). The survey responses I received support Sherratt’s theory. Intellectual stimulation is just as comforting to fans as reliving the familiar episodes of favorite works; readers take comfort from gleaning new ideas and details from novels they know well, a justification for further re-reading.

A total of 26 JASNA respondents (19%) mention comfort as a reason for re-reading Austen’s works, but often in the context of gleaning additional insights or information from the text. One woman says, “I pick up new things on each re-read. It’s also ‘comfort reading’ and always makes me smile,” while a 74 year-old attendee writes that in re-reading Austen there is “Always a happy recognition of the familiar and always a discovery of forgotten riches.” Psychoanalytic theorist Norman Holland argues in The Dynamics of Literary Response that literature in general brings relief: “in the last analysis all art is . . . a comfort.” For him, comfort is wrought by the answers the

work gives that fit readers' expectations, so that if the text causes an audience to "feel pain or guilt or anxiety, we expect it to manage those feelings so as to transform them into satisfying experiences" (qtd. Iser 43). And many of Austen's readers come away from her novels with satisfaction. For a 58 year-old woman, "Somehow reading Austen relieves my stress. In some of my lowest times, her words make me smile at myself and give my trouble perspective." A 57 year-old respondent describes "Find[ing] something new and fresh every time; it is comfort food, but much more—always gives perspective about humanity in all its varieties." More specifically, "P&P is comforting because I know the story so well, and the others because I like the Austen heroines, even Fanny Price!" writes a 59 year-old woman. A 51 year-old woman re-reads for "emotional comfort, insight into human nature, confirmation that the world might make sense." Alternately, the male responses evince a different tone (and none of them mention reading Austen for comfort): one cites re-reading out of "sheer love and teaching," a work-related response more typical of male answers than female, for this survey. A 62 year-old man gives this cheeky answer: "(Haven't) [reread the novels.] It would have been from a profound sense of moral or aesthetic deficiency, but I've fought off the impulse."

The lone RoP respondent who has only read Austen's novels once indicates that she is interested in re-reading them in the future. In addition to these responses, one reader admits re-reading the novels because of T.V. and film adaptations, one re-reads Austen's novels in other languages, and one returned to Pride and Prejudice frequently during a year when she "worked in a small, isolated village in the jungle" where "the

only book I had with me was P&P.” This same respondent also claims in answer to question 9 about reading Austen at specific times of life that “It’s always a comfort read, but I can’t think of any specific occasions.” Nevertheless, it seems indicative of comfort that P&P was the one book she brought with her when entering a difficult and solitary foreign assignment, not unlike John Perry, a member of the Austen-List who describes “backpacking across South America two years ago. P&P was the only book I took with me (or needed). [. . .] I read it and enjoyed it 10 times in all.” A JASNA member told me about reading P&P while giving birth at the hospital years ago. (Her doctor did not approve, suddenly claiming that they didn’t allow P&P in the delivery room, much to his patient’s chagrin then and amusement later, retelling the story.)

For many RoP members, re-reading Austen is an action taken for multiple reasons. One person breaks it down into categories: “1. Great literature. 2. Entertaining stories. 3. Entertaining and elegant language (descriptions, irony etc.) 4. Have many details and levels not detected after just one reading.” Another person replies that “You can always find something new in them [the novels], because they are like old friends that you visit with, and because they encourage the best in the reader.” Someone else mentions that with the exception of Shakespeare, “I know of no other author whose use of words I enjoy more. [. . .] I know of few authors who reward re-reading as much as JA does in that sense.” Another respondent cites Austen’s “wonderful insight into human nature (I joke with my D[ear] H[usband] that ‘everything relates to JA’—because her insights come up time and again. Humor. Comfort (which stems from her humor and happy endings and triumph of good sense).” Though only 2 RoP members mention

“comfort” in answer to question 8, the additional 6 respondents who call Austen’s novels and characters “old friends” are tapping into a version of readerly comfort, the comfort of the familiar, as well.²²

Readers of Austen list numerous reasons for their enjoyment of her works (the *why*), and Tables B.12 and B.13 display the various responses to *when* readers pick up an Austen novel. Sixty-five JASNA members (47%) answer “yes” to reading Austen at specific times; 56 (40%) say “no.” The “no” group splits into people who either leave the question blank or write, “not really” and those who state that they read Austen “all the time!,” “they’re good always,” “always from 16 to now.” An unusual “no” answer (for Austen fans) is given by a 72 year-old retired social worker who writes, “Her novels aren’t very relevant to my circumstances in life.” In addition, 3 people discuss seeing the films as well as reading the novels, and 1 person admits to reading Austen after viewing the film adaptations. 23 Pemberleans (57.5%) say “yes” to reading Austen at certain times; 17 (42.5%) answer “no.” As with JASNA, the RoP “nos” are divided between those who are “always drawn to Austen’s fiction,” who feel that there is “no time when I haven’t been, ever since I first read P&P more than forty years ago,” and those who “can’t think of any specific occasions.” At least one of the “yes” responses includes fan fiction because it helps the respondent “to feel like home,” a cultural conception which extends the experience of being in Austen’s world through continuations and elaborations on the lives of Austen’s characters and themes when one has exhausted the author’s actual oeuvre.

Within the sample of 15 members (23%) reading Austen to escape or relax (a form of comfort), 4 mention reading more when they are “very busy at work[.] I escape into the joy of Jane’s genius [sic] [It] relaxes me. Comforts me.” In addition, 3 discuss reading the novels when natural disasters or political situations seem overwhelming, and 2 specify turning to Austen after dealing with rudeness. One 63 year-old woman confides, “My husband says, ‘Has life been pressing in on you again?’ when he finds me sitting, reading JA.”

Of the 12 JASNA respondents (18.5%) reading Austen’s works during times of sadness or depression, many mention the sickness or death of a loved one: “I started reading Austen when my father was sick and then died. When things in my personal life are stressful, they are a good escape” (44 year-old) or “At times of stress in life, Austen’s fiction provides great comfort, especially when family members are ill” (30 year-old). Another woman writes specifically, “When my mother died I reread Persuasion because I identified with Anne” (58 year-old), while a 74 year-old respondent answers more generally, about reading Austen, “At times of crisis—family, personal—great comfort.” As “safe” reading material, Austen’s novels provide reassurance for readers in the midst of crises. In “How to Do Things with Austen,” James Thompson writes that attendees at a 1996 continuing education seminar at the University of North Carolina said they were attracted to Austen because it was “better than drugs,” meaning antidepressants: Jane Austen “represents a therapeutic return to something pleasurable, and an often-remembered pleasure” (21).

Some of the respondents’ answers overlap between the categories of reading

during depression and / or stress. As a 54 year-old woman explains,

When there is a great deal of stress in my life I often take a novel and read a chapter or two—it is like visiting an old friend. Savour them [novels] like a glass of wine. This year I dealt with the death of both my parents, a good friend and a beloved aunt. Rereading P&P was so comforting to me. As I read the novel (or parts of it) I would imagine my friend (an actor / director) and aunt (JA devotee) discussing the novel with me.

For this respondent, rereading Austen brings her departed loved ones back again, via this (once) shared activity. Another response comes from this JASNA member in her 50s:

“When I am under a lot of stress or sorrow, when my father died, when I was ill, I read Austen to escape, but otherwise I read her for fun.” A Pemberlean says, “I do find them comforting, so I’m drawn to them especially when things aren’t going well and I want something cheerful. But there’s never a bad time to reread JA, and I certainly don’t have to be low to want to read her.” As these responses suggest, many JASNA members read Austen during times of personal ill health as well as when coping with the deaths or sickness of others. “When recovering from an appendectomy [sic] in a hospital, I asked my mother to bring me P&P,” explains a 72 year-old female, and a 74 year-old adds that she reads “When under stress—such as going through six months of chemotherapy.” A 67 year-old respondent starts to discount the idea of reading Austen at certain occasions, only to finish with a telling anecdote: “Since I read her all the time, I’d say there aren’t particular times but I do find her books comforting—on trips, e.g., or this past year when I suffered a long siege of whooping cough I definitely reached for an Austen novel at that time.” Scholars as diverse as D. A. Miller, reading Austen when sick for reassurance that his “health would be completely restored” (“Late” 55), and C. S. Lewis, writing to a friend that he has had “a grand week in bed—[reading] Northanger Abbey” and other

works because “Jane Austen, Scott, and Trollope are my favourite authors when ill” (Letters 313, 371), use Austen as an antidote to illness. Conversely, an atypical response is given by a 62 year-old male JASNA respondent quick to discount the notion of reading Austen for any reason: “When my wife & daughter laugh uncontrollably or talk for hours about some theme or fictional element, I’m sometimes tempted to read a bit so I don’t feel left out or stupid—but, again, the impulse usually passes quickly.” This non-reader nearly turns to Austen to alleviate the discomfort of not fitting into his family’s dynamic, but then he apparently decides against the effort. However, the 65 “yes” responses to rereading Austen indicate that among Janeites, his is the minority opinion, as quite a few respondents read Austen during times of upheaval—when living in a foreign country, for instance. Barbara Everett says that this “second Janeite movement,” including the founding of the Jane Austen Society—the first movement occurred among gentlemen scholars in the early twentieth century, according to Johnson (“Divine” 33-34)—could be antiacademic, a “protest by ordinary readers [. . .] that the writer is not like this [conservative or radical]: she is only definable as a presence supremely capable of giving large pleasure” (qtd. Thompson 28 n9). A 44 year-old respondent writes about reading for the mental challenge and for comfort: “I read Austen for pleasure, and part of that pleasure is the intellectual stimulation she offers, which most other authors don’t. When I crave that challenge, I read her books. I also find them familiar and comforting, like old friends.” A 57 year-old member explains, “I usually read the novels in summer when I have time to read outside. Each time I move I keep the novels handy—the familiar is comforting.” A Pemberlean recalls how “Recently I moved house and JA was

all I wanted to read I think because it is stable and reassuring.” A 66 year-old female discusses the logic behind returning to a familiar text during difficult times: “Jane is peaceful when life gets chaotic and when you are very stressed, rereading a book takes less concentration than reading a new one.”

While these readers’ responses praise Austen’s comfort as a positive, some scholars disagree. Critiquing Karen Joy Fowler’s Jane Austen Book Club (2004), Edward Neill concludes that the novel “‘appreciates’ the Austen style after its fashion, but reads as if it, or ‘the group,’ needs Austen mostly as a kind of comforter, a marker of ethical centrality and reassurance in a world without much in the way of moral piloting or ‘emotional intelligence’” (253). Whether or not this assessment is valid for Fowler’s fictional representation of Austen’s readers, my sample JASNA and RoP members demonstrate more depth regarding the comfort they receive from Austen. Joanna Trollope writes, “Jane Austen is often accused of comforting her readers too much, of shielding them from the horrors and squalors of her time,” and she makes “no mention at all of riots or madhouses [. . .] or public hangings or press gangs” (23). Harriet Margolis follows Radway, applying that scholar’s research on romance novelists to Austen: “reassurance through the familiarity of a happy ending contributes to a novel’s success. Because we know what to expect, we can derive comfort and security from the experience” (38). Austen’s modern readers—Janeites and Pemberleans—do derive such comfort from repeat visits to the author’s fictional world, but they do not require simplistic fictional formulae. Their comments reveal an appreciation for the complexity of life in Austen’s late eighteenth- / early nineteenth-century world.

Lynch frankly admits that looking at the history behind Austen's literary reception may reveal audiences who are "more tough-minded [. . .] than is sometimes rumored" (Introduction 15). At the same time, she does not want this new configuration to take away from the accolades bestowed by many for Austen's power of taking readers out of their world (15). In the examples below are two dove-tailed "kernel stories," Susan Kalcik's term for "brief reference[s] to the subject" under discussion or a kind of "potential story" told by women (7). These narratives that two Austin, Texas JASNA members share with the group admirably demonstrate both of these readers' tough-mindedness and their use of Austen's works for escapism and dealing with grief:

Lydia: I've said this many times—when my husband died, it was Jane Austen who pulled me through. I read her books for comfort and some peace and she um, she "knits up the raveled sleeve of care," she really does.²³

Maria Grace: I know exactly what you mean. My husband was dying for six months and the book I turned to most often was Jane Austen's because I could escape into the pleasant world of people I knew.

These Austen fans find solace and reassurance from their favorite reading materials, particularly in times of grief. Apparently Jane Austen, as accessed through her books, is not "easily put down," understandable in part because books in general have "a higher social value than magazines" (Hermes 34). For these Austen readers, the novelist's works provide a palpable comfort and a certain kind of strength comparable to that received from an old and trusted friend. While some scholars (Copeland, Monaghan, Roth) might shudder at the gross appropriation, for personal aims, of one of the nineteenth-century's most brilliant novelists, Lynch provides a timely reminder that "we [critics] are far from having exclusive title to the real Jane Austen" (Introduction 6). For

these two Austin Janeites who have spent upwards of fifty years in the company of Austen's books, there is no more "real" Jane Austen to be found than that voice that speaks words of comfort in the darkest hours.²⁴ Academics also find comfort in Austen: Marcia McClintock Folsom's Preface to Approaches to Teaching Austen's "Emma" describes the editor's process of "making my way through the death of my husband and the decisions that took me more into academic administration[.] I continued to read and teach Emma—to find in it an examination of the imperious necessity of change and the health of embracing the necessity" (xii-xiii).

5.3 Austen Film Adaptations

For John Wiltshire, the new films of Austen's novels are geared to audiences who like Jane Austen for her representation of "a privileged, genteel, amusing and consoling world—in fact a form of comfort" (Recreating 134). Wiltshire also posits that the name "Jane Austen" flags a "variety of cosiness" that is "seductively close" to ideas of domestic comfort "naturalis[ed]" in her novels (8). While admitting to generalizing, Margolis argues that television and movie adaptations of Austen's works provide a benign experience for Caucasians of the middle-class, who pride themselves on their discernment and acquisition of "cultural capital" (28). Citing Pierre Bourdieu, Margolis concludes that "to be cultured, can be materially beneficial, and the attainment of culture is rarely achieved in the absence of material comfort" (29). Further, the buyer, according to Margolis, is "anxious for a viewing experience that comfortingly meets expectations" (39). However, my survey results indicate that the films do not always meet Austen

readers' expectations.

When time is short, many readers often turn to the film adaptations for a portal into Austen's comforting world. In answer to the question, "what do you think of recent film adaptations of Austen's works?" respondents either evaluated the movies collectively or gave an opinion on one or more individual films—few did both, which is why the percentages do not equal 100%.²⁵ The movies hold more importance for Pemberleans than Janeites: 14 total RoP members (35%) attribute their membership to the film adaptations, while only 7 JASNA members (5%) do. Coincidentally, for Pemberleans movie- and T.V.-watching top the list of hobbies, at 25% (vs. 7% for JASNA, because of the generation gap, perhaps). Table B.14 provides a break-down of Austen fans' views on the movies. Younger Pemberleans are more likely than Janeites to approach Austen through film rather than text, at least initially: this circumstance may explain the RoP's greater approval of the adaptations: 28 (70%) RoP members approve of the movies; 3 (7.5%) disapprove. Overall in JASNA, 67 (48%) approve of the films generally; 9 (6.5%) disapprove; and 9 (6.5%) are ambivalent.

For those Pemberleans who dislike the films generally, complaints have to do with "modern versions [being] too caught up in pop culture" or "however good, they can't do justice to JA's brilliance in a short précis version." For the Janeite crowd, many damn with faint praise, calling the film adaptations "always less than the books," "vile to adequate," or "not as awful as I thought they would be." One person claims to "deplore what I suspect is substitution of films for the books." For these Austen fans, the films are a source of discomfort, adding little to their experience of the novelist's works. Some

who approve of the adaptations mainly do so because films bring in new members and new readers: “I enjoy them all—anything to draw others to her work” or “I applaud them in general. Anything that brings new readers and young readers to discover our Jane is a wonderful thing. Each new reprint with updated cover I put in my public library and display cover out.”

Others, however, appreciate the films for what they offer: “I don’t think there are any right or wrong versions of the movies,” “there have been a few mis-steps, but on the whole, they have been excellent even if they cannot wholly capture the language and irony of the books,” “Of course they are not exactly like the books [. . .] but I love that they make the stories alive,” and “Since I’m not a ‘purist’—I judge them as movies—and have enjoyed most.”

For members of the Republic of Pemberley and the Jane Austen Society, the A&E / BBC P&P (“the Colin Firth P&P”) is the favorite film adaptation.²⁶ With 20 votes from RoP (of 22 responses to the question), members state, “while not perfect, I think it is as close as any adaptation is going to come” and “I admire greatly the 1995 P&P2, though it has some flaws and bloopers.” With 37 votes from JASNA (of 39 responses to the question), members remark, “I do like [the] A&E adaptation of P&P. I do love to see the movie settings in the lush English countryside” and laud the film for staying “close to the text, and [being . . .] historically accurate.” Another respondent says what many probably feel: “Colin Firth rules.” Kate Bowles indicts sentiments such as this, assuming that it provides evidence of the “growing horde of fans for whom the dark and difficult nature of misunderstood Mr. Darcy seems inseparable from the mop-

headed appeal of Colin Firth”; new Janeites, Bowles fears, view Austen as “synonymous with film and television” and sentence her to “the hamster-wheel of posthumous productivity” (16). However, I see readers of P&P gaining comfort from viewing faithful adaptations of the novel, and at 5 hours long, the A&E P&P provides more dialogue, characters, and details from the novel than shorter films (the 2005 P&P, for instance) can accommodate. For film adaptation viewers, the familiar is comforting and preferable.

With 23 votes against it (of 30 responses to the question), members of JASNA despise the 2005 P&P starring Keira Knightley more than any other: “[I] disliked this new P&P like Wuthuring [sic] Heights! For God’s sake”; “dark and dreary and bore little resemblance to ‘light, bright and sparkling’”; “Darcy has all the sex appeal of an anemic goldfish[.] Bleah!”. Another JASNA member says, “I’m very disappointed in the latest [2005] P&P and MP which seem [to] be emphasizing the negatives of the Regency Period and leaving out the beauty. The ‘pig pen’ aspect of P&P and dowdy drab dresses seem completely out of character. Dizzying camera techniques left me feeling nauseated!” Following on the heels of the beloved A&E version of P&P, this new adaptation displeases many Austen readers because it purposely defeats expectations of beautiful costumes and stately elegance, in the film sets as well as in camera techniques. Paying close attention to the novel’s plot and details results in discomfort for viewers when those aspects are not followed faithfully in the movie version. And yet, a more positive outlook is evinced in this response: “Last night’s [2005] P&P had great cinematography. The movie was a little too melodramatic / gothic for my taste. I’m sure it will succeed as a ‘chick flick’ however.” Members of RoP are evenly divided over

their reception of the 2005 P&P, which may have succeeded at reaching the younger generation.²⁷ Nearly half, or 10 votes (of 21 responses to the question) were somewhat in favor (“enjoyable, but nothing spectacular,” “enjoyable but tainted by things that seemed to conflict with the mores of the time period,” “quite disdainful of the newest P&P. But I loved it for its entertainment value and with that story, you can’t go wrong”) with 11 against (“too melodramatic,” “jarring and false,” “dumbed down,” and “Brontefication” were criticisms).

RoP members are least enamored of Rozema’s MP with 13 votes against it (“serious misgivings” and “badly adapted” were frequent comments). Another Pemberlean explained her dislike this way:

I find it irritating when great liberties are taken and that’s why ‘Mansfield Park’ is my least favorite. I thought some of the additions were strange e.g. suggesting Mary Crawford was attracted to Fanny and that Mary and her brother ‘shared’ their husband/wife. I’m sounding very conservative, aren’t I? I am really not (pretty liberal otherwise, just a sort of J.A. purist, I guess ☺).

Uncomfortable with major deviations from the novel, JASNA members also largely agreed about their dislike of this MP, with 21 votes indicating distaste for the film (“many distortions,” “needs to be seen as a movie quite apart from the novel,” “atrocious!” were comments), though a few Janeites indicate enjoying it when directors “take artistic license.” For the most part, Austen fans favor fidelity to the novels as their standard for deriving enjoyment and comfort from the costume adaptations.

Non-P&P adaptations gain varying scores from JASNA and RoP members. The Emma Thompson / Ang Lee S&S does well among both groups (“excellent,” “very well done and true to the novel’s spirit”) with 19 votes from JASNA and 20 from RoP (only 1

vote is cast against S&S in each group).²⁸ In a reading that actually aligns comfort with a bad version of Austen, Roger Sales notes that “adaptations promote heritage myths of Austen, and yet they also contain shots that unsettle such cosy images,” such as the BBC’s P (1995) which highlights Anne Elliot’s position as housekeeper (189, 191). Starring Amanda Root, this latest P also scores well in each group, garnering 20 votes from JASNA (“excellent”) and 17 from RoP (“it captured the book very well though the circus at the end was a little strange,” “almost perfect, too short”), though 2 Janeites vote against the film, calling it “coarse” and “vulgar.” Sales agrees in part, noting that the actor who plays Captain Benwick is “unattractive” and “badly in want of a bath and a life. He is a very low-rent Lord Byron indeed” (195). “Fun and clever” Clueless rethinks “Austen’s Emma as a high-fashion Beverly Hills teen with very little to distress or vex her” (O’Farrell, Complexions 1), proving extremely popular with members of JASNA (19 votes for, 0 against). Frequently respondents who do not like any of the other adaptations enjoy that film (“Clueless great. Others, poor” or prefer “non-period adaptations” are comments). Perhaps the success of Clueless has to do with the film’s adherence to the “distresses and vexations Austen’s novel imposes on its heroine” (O’Farrell, Complexions 146 n9). Among RoP members, 4 mention it favorably (10%). Austen’s fans appear not to mind a film’s divergent take on an Austen novel as long as the movie does not pretend to faithfulness to the original work (inspiration and adaptation are thus terms with different standards attached, for viewers).

The Paltrow and Beckinsale Emmas both score fairly low, with Janeites giving Paltrow’s version 2 and 1/2 votes (and 3 against), and Beckinsale’s 5 and 1/2 (0 against);

unfortunately, some members do not distinguish between Emmas, so I could not tally their opinions. Pemberleas, perhaps because filling out the survey in Adobe Acrobat gave them more room than that available to those filling out a hard copy, mentioned both Emmas more frequently: Paltrow garners 14 votes (2 against) vs. Beckinsale with 11 votes (4 against). Several RoP respondents who favor the Paltrow version indicate that their preference is an unpopular one within the online discussion group, though the numbers from this survey support Paltrow's version as the more popular one, among RoP members who respond to the questionnaire. JASNA members prefer Beckinsale's E, though few Janeites mention either performance. Bride and Prejudice, with only one mention among the RoP sample, is applauded by 14 JASNA members, versus 3 who dislike the film ("too silly"). RoP members may have been so eager to discuss the films—some respondents gave multiple pages of comments on the adaptations alone—because February is No Adaptation Month at the Republic of Pemberley, which means that a moratorium is placed on the usual discussions of Austen movies, a useful strategy if discussions of the novels themselves are flagging.

5.4 Nineteenth-century British Culture

My final survey question asks, "what interests you about nineteenth-century British culture?" Nostalgia, a type of comfort with the past, plays a large role in readers' interest, though replies were numerous and varied. I use separate tables to display the JASNA responses (Table B.15) and the RoP answers (Table B.16). The members of the Austin, Texas JASNA chapter make comments that dovetail with the answers given

from attendees at the Milwaukee AGM. When asked what caught her interest regarding nineteenth-century British culture, for example, one 57-year-old respondent in Austin writes, “Women who observe, reflect, and try to achieve independence.” Another Austin, Texas member comments during the meeting that “Jane had a feeling for feminism.” Concerning the importance of Austen to these women’s personal lives, I turn to Maria Grace’s memory of her initial purchase of Austen’s works, which remains distinctive: “I know when I bought the first volume [a one volume edition of the six novels] of Jane Austen—that was in Danville, Illinois, in the bookstore in 1940.” More than six decades later, Austen is still a large part of this woman’s life, and she is not alone. For these nine women in Austin, Texas, and their counterparts at the larger AGM, Jane Austen and her works are not simply enjoyable pastimes, but an actual gateway to experiencing and understanding what it is to live in the world, as well as occasionally to escape from or to be comforted by a certain version of it. Table B.16 provides the areas of interest to a younger generation of “Austen obsessives,” members of the RoP (“Pemberley” 3).

Of all areas of interest in nineteenth-century British culture, manners tops the list for RoP members with 12 votes or 30%, while JASNA members rank it third, with 25 votes or 18%. A 34 year-old JASNA member explains her fascination with manners this way: “different kinds of formality—how the manners reveal & conceal underlying emotion. Also identity, especially class identity and personal identity, how they mingle in a person’s sense of self.” Literature of the period (including some respondents who say their only interest is in Austen’s work) ranks first for JASNA, with 28 votes (20%).

The broader category of literature is not a typical RoP response, though several people mention Austen as their only interest in the time period. However, the culture of Austen's era, including everyday life, is of great interest to both groups, with 15% of the RoP vote and 19% of the JASNA vote. In "Free and Happy: Jane Austen in America," Mary Favret examines Austen's U.S. readership from a century ago, seeing in them a desire for "the comforts available in Austen's world [. . .] without looking anglophilic" (172). Margolis cites academic studies over the last one hundred years, tracing the qualities typically associated with "Austen's name" to a

high culture aesthetic that values literature; history; class hierarchies; an appreciation of irony and satire at the expense of class hierarchies; anglophilia, or at least a tolerance thereof, with a latent or implicit nostalgia attached to it; dialogue-driven narratives delivered in an elevated language; and the repression of foul language and overt sexuality. (27)

A fair amount of nostalgia—one version of comfort with the past—has been credited to JASNA members by both academics and the members themselves, such as the 35 year-old Janeite who writes, "As a dedicated Anglophile, I enjoy all things British—I also enjoy the more genteel, simple lifestyle." Empowering for women, the nineteenth-century as conceived by Austen fans, focuses on elevated manners and rules of etiquette. These areas become associated, for Austen's readers, with the female potential to be appreciated in more sophisticated terms (wit, eloquence, ability to manipulate circumstances), rather than overt sex appeal. Concerned with re-creating the look of nineteenth-century Regency England, attendees at the JASNA ball both "look back to a romanticized past" as well as "focus on a period in documented history" (Bacon-Smith 36).²⁹ Amanda Gilroy also describes how "Jane Austen has been

thoroughly historicized of late,” through “internet chats about Austen characters, [. . .] Regency costume balls, heritage films, and coffee table books with bucolic images of England.” She continues with the confession that “Austen’s admirers are often accused of nostalgia, a sort of inauthentic memory of the past, a wishful faith in simulacra” (119), that renders fan activities suspect.

Both samples value heritage as another important aspect of nineteenth-century British culture: 21 JASNA members (15%) and 4 RoP members (10%) name it as one of their primary interests because “It’s our immediate history—what has formed our [U.S.] culture & therefore important to understand & to know how we got this way, or ‘The Way We Are,’ according to Trollope” (57 year-old female member of JASNA); a 63 year-old male RoP member (also a U.S. citizen) affirms that his “family came from England in 1850. Have done British genealogy. Family was lower middle class.” Another U.S. Janeite states, “I have English cousins. I enjoy traveling in England, Ireland, and Scotland. I want to visit Jane Austen territory,” an answer that comfortably brings Austen into line with her ancestors.

Artifacts or souvenirs from Austen’s part of the world—quill pens, amber crosses, and tea towels—are another means by which fans connect to their favorite writer. In “Placing Jane Austen, Displacing England: Touring between Book, History, and Nation,” Mike Crang examines tourism of Austen sites in England, places that allow visitors / readers to experience the comfort of entering a world that is both new and familiar to them. Memorabilia at these locations provide touchstones with authors’ fiction and personal history unique “to the experience of visiting”; this material aspect is

often overlooked in academia, which keeps out anything that may provoke a personal, emotive response (120). One critic, according to Crang, finds a “cult of the country house” that makes a “symbolic heartland for this nostalgic English nationalism” (112), and my history chapter goes into further detail about comfort’s role in English nationalism. At these sites, says Crang, lots of objects “offer contact with other worlds—both that of the authors and the place-time specific to the experience of visiting,” despite Simon Jenkins’s warning that “Austen’s work cannot be commemorated in inanimate objects” (120; 284). Rather, tangible links to Austen’s world are comforting for fans of her novels.

A Pemberlean from the U.S. describes being “drawn to it [19th c. British culture] because of the rich traditions that define the culture—the roots of my culture. I believe it is hard to hold on to these traditions (or at least their quality) in present day times.” The varied answers I have received to the question about nineteenth-century British culture, especially from JASNA members (the vast majority of whom are American) but also to an extent from RoP members, controverts Favret’s claims that U.S. readers of Austen

Tend to dissociate themselves from England and from the historical person, Jane Austen, who lived and died there. Indeed, a dominant pattern among these American admirers of Austen neglects Chawton Cottage, Steventon Parsonage, the Royal Navy, rooms at Bath, the Anglican Church, and the English countryside; Jane Austen, for these readers, is about something else. And that something else might be named, loosely, freedom and the pursuit of happiness. (167-168)

Conversely, for many of the survey respondents Austen is a product of her distinctly British culture, and the statistics reveal how interested members of the Jane Austen Society and the Republic of Pemberley are in discovering more about “all

aspects” of her culture (64 year-old JASNA member), “women’s role and place in society in that time period” (57 year-old JASNA member), “Everything—a culture of manners!” (71 year-old JASNA member), “the strictures women had to live within, and how they coped. The scenicness of the countryside and clothes” (44 year-old RoP member). Although one JASNA member indicates that she would “like Jane Austen regardless of the era she lived in” and a couple of others answer that “not much!” interests them about nineteenth-century British culture, many more respondents view the issues and events of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as important “to understand[ing] JA’s books better” (49 year-old Pemberlean).³⁰

As my history chapter demonstrates, comforting is deeply involved in women’s roles in the early nineteenth century, which are of interest to both JASNA (20 votes or 14%) and RoP members (7 votes or 17.5%). A 46 year-old Janeite explains that by women’s roles she means “their responsibilities, habits, verbage [sic].” A 19 year-old RoP member describes her understanding of women’s roles in the Regency period compared to contemporary culture:

The way men treat women is so different from today and the family functions very differently now! I enjoy thinking and reading about a time when men were more chivalrous. Also, I get a laugh from the gossip aspect of their lives. I know gossip exists today, but sometimes it seems that their (women’s) whole lives were lived through gossip. It also astonishes me that women’s only job in life was to get married and have children. Many did not marry for love. I know I couldn’t do that. When I get married, it will be because I love the person I am marrying.

This response simplifies the complicated roles of wife- and motherhood, as well as the process of choosing a spouse and (understandably) prioritizes modern culture over the past. While Johnson states that “when novels themselves lacked the cultural prestige of

poetry and drama, people who studied them could be considered lightweight as well” and studies in the novel “could seem to be a species of gossip of precisely the sort in which Janeites delight” (“Cults” 221), this JASNA member debunks the view that fans of Austen might want to be aligned with gossiping. However, Patricia Meyer-Spacks’s Gossip affirms this 19 year-old member’s idea that women did in fact exist via gossip, which underscores the “importance of the trivial, the value and the pleasure of talk” (259). Spacks concedes that Austen, among other novelists, highlight’s gossip’s double-sidedness, including “social destructiveness, triviality, small-mindedness, or ridiculousness of such talk, but demonstrating also its life-affirming” and comforting dimensions as in Emma (260-61). The “liminal position [of gossip] between public and private” (Spacks 262) is more relevant to modern life than most 19 year-olds may realize, though older readers of Austen may comprehend gossip’s functions better.

The class system is another nineteenth-century draw for many readers in both organizations, with 19 votes or 14% of JASNA expressing interest, compared to 6 votes or 15% from RoP. “Delving into life in another century is fascinating. I have always loved the British. Their class differences are ‘mind-boggling’ and intriguing. Glad we don’t have that culture here and now but it sure is fun to read about,” states a 72 year-old JASNA member. This is a typical response in its discussion of her interest in the class system, along with the caveat that it was not good to everyone. Her reply appears to overlook the way Britain’s own class system has shifted since Austen’s time, though other respondents remarked on the change, a “Time of great dislocation and transition” (JASNA member). Other Janeites describe an interest in “The sharp contrast between

upper class and poor. The sometimes mindless indulgence of the upper class and the strict adherence to social rituals,” “The dissonances among the levels of society,” or “The chaos of change from 1780 to 1830, & Austen’s calm, lively voice.” An RoP member describes the nineteenth century as “restrictive . . . but in a safe way. Lines in the upper-classes were not crossed easily. With chaperones [sic] and ladies maids . . . you knew what was proper behavior . . . but wouldn’t want that type of life for me . . . but for my daughter LOL! ☺.” In these responses, the myth of Austen as safe writer emerges once again. One aspect of Austen’s comfort involves proscribing modes of proper behavior that readers enjoy imagining but may find stifling to put into practice.

Most respondents indicate certain aspects of nineteenth-century British culture they admire or believe that modern society lacks. Two RoP members write about their preferences for Austen’s “more sanitized version of the era than the reality of early 19th century England. ☺ Her books depict a time when wit and conversation were valued, and there’s a sort of elegance and charm about the period that we lack in today’s graceless society,” and “the lifestyle seems so easy (reality tells me it wasn’t, but hey I can fantasise [sic]).” These responses acknowledge the drawbacks and / or the overall improvement for more people that modernity accomplishes. Two additional RoP members comment, “I guess it seems such an elegant era. [. . .] Having said all this, I would never want to live in a period / country like this, where the life you are going to have is very much decided when you are born,” and “some things they had right which we have wrong now, like the family being important. [. . .] I have to remind myself my ancestors would have been starving Irish peasants dying young etc. and that modern life

isn't all bad". A JASNA member admits, "I know I'm looking at it through rose-colored glasses—it was a great time only for the gentry and aristocracy. I like its civility, its slower pace, the comfortable life in country homes, the many diversions of life in London." A male RoP respondent declares, "What I find interesting in the novels is comparing how attitudes have changed over 200 years—thinking of Mary's lecture on the loss of virtue in a woman in P&P, thankfully that is no longer the case, or the perceived importance of a good marriage." These responses separately register audience reactions: comfort in (re)imagining the orderly world Austen depicts, discomfort with the less pleasant realities (starvation, hard labor for many, strict morals), revealing that readers' surface delight in Austen's stories is complicated by many factors.

Multiple answers from single respondents to the question about what is of interest in nineteenth-century British culture are frequent, as expressed in this response from an RoP member suggesting that her interest lies along lines of "the differences between the classes, the manners and social rituals, the stifling environment for women, the 'gentlemanlike' code of behavior. I'm oversimplifying, but the values in Jane Austen's England (love, wit, self-control, propriety) are more satisfying to me than modern values. Her values match my own." This answer accords with H. Jenkins's idea that fans pick certain "media products" over others because they are conduits for "expressing the fans' pre-existing social commitments and cultural interests" (34). Other respondents frame their answer in nostalgic terms: "the higher code of behavior that was expected of all at the time (ex.: proper manners, treating one another with respect). I know that culture was no more perfect than my own, but looking back I see some things

that I wish we still had today” (21 year-old RoP member). Though aware of the harsh realities, Austen’s readers often continue to take part in the comforting fantasy of an imagined nineteenth-century life, one complete with leisure time, beautiful surroundings, and witty banter, though distanced from the starving poor and moral rules that seem overly rigid. In bringing Austen’s novels into modern lives, her readers can experience the best of both worlds.

5.5 Conclusions

H. Jenkins persuasively argues that “Ethnographic work, in the sense of drawing on what we can perceive and experience in everyday settings,” earns its “critical mark” when it reminds us that “reality is always more complicated and diversified than our theories can represent, and that there is no such thing as ‘audience’ whose characteristics can be set once and for all” (286). Bearing Jenkins’s formidable warning in mind, then, what can be concluded about Austen’s readers today? The results of the surveys indicate that reading Austen brings to her readers a variety of comforts, such as the delights of humor and a feeling of belonging.

In reading the novels or watching the adaptations, Austen fans—mostly middle-class Caucasian women aged mid-30s through late 50s—find the comfort of familiarity and gain a sense of safety by taking part in what they perceive as Austen’s orderly, mannered world. Whether grieving the loss of a family member, seeking entertainment, or dealing with stress, Austen’s readers can find comfort in reading and re-reading her novels. Austen’s own attention to English domesticity and women’s roles in the act of

comforting—displayed in various ways in her fiction—are reciprocated in her fans’ acknowledgement of Austen’s remarkable ability to offer comfort, in the twenty-first as well as the nineteenth century.

Notes

¹ Much Austen scholarship in the past has ignored popular readings of Austen, but Irvine finds that critics who do mention lay readings of the novelist do so only to “denigrate” them “in contrast to the intellectually rigorous response of the critics themselves” (148-149). This is a dichotomy I equally wish to abrogate in my methodology, though natural divisions in the data are impossible to avoid. My research project attempts to answer Derek Attridge’s call for literary studies to provide “some account of the role of ideology, of gender, of institutional practices, perhaps of the unconscious;” as well as for researchers to “take account of our own position as culturally and ideologically situated readers” (23).

² All names of Texas JASNA members mentioned in this study are pseudonyms. In referring to JASNA members by first name and academics by last name, I may be creating an artificial hierarchy. However, with regard to the academics it is standard practice, and with reference to the Janeites it reflects the personal nature of my interactions with them.

³ While I have handled the surveys as if the members make up two discrete groups, some overlap between memberships is a given. After posting the questionnaire on the RoP’s message board, the first response I got asked if it were the same survey as the one distributed in Milwaukee at the JASNA AGM. Once I explained that it was, the individual stated that he had already filled out a survey there, so he would refrain from completing another one. It is possible, though unlikely, that a few RoP members also attended the JASNA AGM and filled out surveys at both venues.

⁴ The Austin, Texas JASNA chapter’s self-identification with the term “Janeites”—specifically on the photocopied handwritten letter mailed out by the regional coordinator—might seem to enforce Lynch’s sense (although she later disputes it) that critics are put off by the “Janeite” phenomenon because the word itself rouses suspicions that the vast cultural interest in Austen involves a sort of girls’ club mentality (Introduction 14). At the same time, the JASNA group’s appropriation of the word “Janeites” might startle Lynch, who writes that the term is “now used almost exclusively

about and against *other* people,” not applied to oneself or to one’s group (13). The national JASNA publication does not always refer to its readers as Janeites: in one article the president calls member George Justice a “JASNA-ite” (Joan Klingel Ray, “Farewell and Thanks,” *JASNA News* 21.3 (2005): 2). That the designation is still a positive one for many members is evidenced in, among others, Elsa A. Solender’s description in *JASNA News* of visiting Chawton, England, “as a tourist and Janeite (and pilgrim)” (4), and Ray’s reference to notes received “from fellow Janeites” (“Close Reading” 3). Following the organizations’ own practices, I refer to members of JASNA as Janeites and members of the Republic of Pemberley as Pemberleans (“Pemberley” 4).

⁵ A condescension worthy of *P&P*’s Lady Catherine De Bourgh is still evident in much of academe’s perspective on popular interest in Austen, and Lynch explains in her Introduction to *Janeites*: “a customary method of establishing one’s credentials as a reader of Austen has been to regret that others simply will insist on liking her in inappropriate ways” (7). In an essay on teaching *P&P*, Edward Copeland admits that “In spite of every caution to the contrary, enthusiastic students will respond to Jane Austen with the inevitable recipes for white soup, ‘Whip’t Syllabub’, and plans for a Regency costume ball” (34). Peter Monaghan describes “Janeites” as “sentimentalizing fans” whose views of their favorite novelist are “slow to change,” and without directly accusing these Austen readers of anti-intellectualism in their occasional disagreements with a scholarly interpretation of Austen, he derides them as “enraged, self-appointed guardians of Austen-as-exemplar-of-propriety, if not of asexual aridity” (A10-11). Perhaps the strongest anti-Janeite language appears in Barry Roth’s review essay, “The Once and Future Austen,” where he shreds Joan Austen-Leigh’s contribution to Janet Todd’s *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* (1983) for Austen-Leigh’s discussion of the subject in “‘Janeite’ terms—uncritical, unenlightening, self-serving—perhaps the oldest point of view available and in this context certainly unrespectable” (219).

⁶ During my initial analysis of the surveys from JASNA and RoP, I decided to examine responses from self-identified professors to see if any of them read Austen in non-scholarly ways. Of the 19 total professors surveyed, 14 (74%) read like fans: they discuss their “love” of Austen, often using exclamation marks, and describe uses for Austen’s novels that have little or nothing to do with their academic work. An associate professor of English describes “start[ing] to read them to prep for a class then find[ing] myself just reading for pleasure the whole novel again!” A university lecturer returns to the novels “for academic research and for pleasure and comfort,” a response similar to the professor who writes, “They are comforting, relaxing, and fun. It’s like a little vacation.” With such a high percentage of professors reading Austen in popular as well as professional ways, it is tempting to view the dichotomy between academics and lay readers as, to a large extent, an artificial one. On the other hand, membership in a popular reading group such as the Jane Austen Society (a self-proclaimed “community of Janeites!”) or the Republic of Pemberley (self-described “Jane Austen obsessives”) may encourage the academic readers who join to express their feelings candidly,

whereas in a professional capacity outside JASNA and RoP circles, these same respondents would not use such language or be so open about their enthusiasm for Austen. Perhaps the groups subtly encourage academic members to sideline their analytic impulses, also.

⁷ Kenneth Pike's Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior (Glendale, CA: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954) sets forth two distinct, linguistically-influenced methodologies: the first tries to "describe the pattern of that particular language or culture in reference to the way in which the various elements of that culture are related to each other" (emic approach); the second characterizes "any newly found data in reference to this system which has been created by the analyst before studying the particular culture (etic approach) (8).

⁸ After my session with the Texas chapter, I emailed leaders from several other regional JASNA groups in order to compare demographics. Linda Troost of the western Pennsylvania chapter wrote that her group is composed of about 30 members, 80% of whom are female. Troost reported having "virtually no one under the age of 40, and a lot over the age of 65." When asked about the group's ethnicity, she responded, "very white." Anna Quillen, writing in for the Oregon / Washington state JASNA chapter, reports that of the 64 members enrolled, only 13 are males (and of these, only 5 have come to meetings in the last year). All attendees at meetings are Caucasian (although one Latina has membership in the reading group, which gathers separately from the semi-annual meetings). The age range extends from late teens through the eighties. Jo Anne Jones, representing the South Carolina region, says that of their 70 members, only nine are male. Since losing their only Asian member (she moved), the group is mainly white, with a few Jewish members. The South Carolina chapter has members ranging in age from late twenties through age 85. These figures corroborate my findings for the Texas chapter concerning ethnicity and age. Apparently, the Texas chapter is the smallest (perhaps also one of the newer regional chapters since it was only begun in 1993).

⁹ It is difficult to know how accurately these figures represent overall membership in JASNA: since so many of the attendees at the Milwaukee AGM are retired, it is unsurprising that the majority of respondents to the survey have been members a long time. Younger JASNA members may not be able to leave their work as easily as their retired counterparts to attend the week / weekend long AGM every year. However, a December 2004 letter from the current JASNA president, Joan Klingel Ray, specifically requested the recipients to recruit new members under the age of 50, suggesting that the age of the average member is at least that, if not significantly higher, and that JASNA's aging population is a concern. Comfort appears to be something older members require more than younger ones, in an increasingly destabilized world.

¹⁰ Some RoP members have belonged to Pemberley ever since a core group "seceded" from the now defunct Austen-L site in 1996, largely because they "wanted to feel free to

gush” over the A&E / BBC Pride and Prejudice miniseries starring Colin Firth and Jennifer Ehle: “the roots of this community were a support group for people addicted to P&P2” (“Pemberley” 5). In contrast, JASNA came into existence in 1979, through the combined efforts of Joan Austen-Leigh (Jane Austen’s great-great-great niece) and Jack (J. David) Grey, who were put off by the overly “formal and entrenched” manners of the British Jane Austen Society (Thom 11). The chairman of JAS in England had greatly discomfited Joan Austen-Leigh’s husband in not allowing him “the use of a washroom,” so that the founding members of JASNA determined that in their organization, “people would speak to each other, the committee would be democratically elected, and compassion would be shown for those who needed a washroom” (qtd. Thom 11).

¹¹ In her examination of the massive RoP internet site, Bowles describes the disdain some types of Austen scholars cherish because of the site’s “publishing, discussing, and then archiving community members’ own epistolary, novelish, undoubtedly harlequinesque, even soap-operatic speculations as to the further life of Jane Austen’s characters beyond the closed narratives” of the novels, a practice of “sequelization” that the Internet classifies as “fanfic, or fan fiction” (18). More positively, Bowles concludes that Internet Janeitism does not, however, stoop to cooperate fully with commercialization because at bottom, “fandom is not mere consumerism—it is the game of cultural production itself” (21).

¹² I follow the standard abbreviations for Austen’s novels in this as in my other dissertation chapters: E for Emma, NA for Northanger Abbey, MP for Mansfield Park, P&P for Pride and Prejudice, S&S for Sense and Sensibility, and P for Persuasion.

¹³ Despite my initial explanation, the Texas JASNA chapter did not appear to recognize my project as not about Austen’s writings, but as an investigation of their relationship to each other, to the larger culture, and also to the texts of Austen’s works. At their June 3, 2001 meeting, I presented an abbreviated version of my research findings to the chapter.

¹⁴ O’Farrell’s sense of Austen’s readers’ sophistication is borne out in Joan Pawelski’s review of Deirdre Le Faye’s Jane Austen: The World of Her Novels in JASNA News. Pawelski notes her assumption that the newsletter’s readers “have read each of [Austen’s] novels multiple times, four or more of the biographies, Marilyn Butler, Alistair Duckworth, possibly D. W. Harding, and certainly Claudia Johnson” (17).

¹⁵ A large shift has occurred in JASNA’s membership numbers during the last five years—from 4,000 in 2001 to 3,022 in 2005 (up by 53 from 2004), according to the winter 2005 JASNA News (“USA” 8). Membership may have reached a high point because of the 1990s Austen film adaptations, so those who left the organization were possibly not readers but fans of the movies and / or Colin Firth.

¹⁶ Fictional characters as well as real people take solace in Austen: in F. M. Mayor's novel The Rector's Daughter (1924), the title character Mary Jocelyn takes comfort "in reading her favourite novels for an hour before dinner, finding in Trollope, Miss Yonge, Miss Austen, and Mrs. Gaskell friends so dear and familiar that they peopled her loneliness" (qtd. Trumpener 158). Mayor's novels, for Katie Trumpener, are "haunted by Austen" (157). Additionally, Trumpener lists Rosamond Lehmann's The Weather in the Streets (1936) with its pregnant protagonist who, worried and lonely, reads Austen's MP in bed. After obtaining an abortion she reads P&P while she waits for her body to miscarry, though Trumpener reads these vignettes not as instances of novelistic comforting but of highlighting the protagonist's "isolation, uncertainty, and grief" (160 n4). In Chapter III of this dissertation, I discuss Flora Poste of Cold Comfort Farm, who finds in MP inspiration for dealing with the difficult Starkadder family (Gibbons 207). Thus, other writers demonstrate how Austen's readers use and respond to her fiction.

¹⁷ Whether personal or academic in nature, most responses indicate a favorite Austen novel (see Table B.8). Pride and Prejudice is cited oftenest as the preferred work, and Persuasion is a close second ("as I've grown older P has come to the fore" or "P. When I was younger it was P&P"). P&P is the favorite among RoP members by a far wider margin than among members of JASNA (75% compared to 40%). Among RoP respondents, the average age of those citing P as their out-and-out favorite is 47.2 years, while the average age of those citing P&P as their only favorite is 33.2 years: a preference divided by age is immediately apparent, with older RoP members on average preferring P, the novel featuring a more reflective mood and Austen's oldest heroine.

¹⁸ In Appendix B, Table B.9 combines data for reading P&P, MP, NA, and all the novels one to two times. Among JASNA and RoP members, only 1 person (of 139 and 40 responses) in each group mentions reading P&P only once; 5 people in JASNA cite reading MP only once vs. 5&1/2 in RoP; 3 members of JASNA claim to have read NA only once vs. 6 in RoP; 11 JASNA members have read all the novels just once, compared to 3 RoP members. These numbers reveal that re-reading is a widespread activity among both groups. For nearly all surveyed members of JASNA and RoP, reading Austen means re-reading her, as well.

¹⁹ Another impetus for rereading Austen is to prepare for the quizzes at regional meetings. At the Austin, Texas, meeting I attended in March 2001, a quiz formed a significant portion of the gathering. For Johnson and Lynch, the quiz is one of the defining characteristics of Jane Austen fans (Introduction, Janeites 16). In keeping with the general collaborative air in the Austin, Texas chapter, the quiz is taken or played in five rounds, with the members divided into two teams. The quiz takes over half an hour to complete—at the end of every round, the teams pass up their answers. While they seem purposive on one level, their camaraderie is more in evidence than their competitiveness. The rewards are books: Austen's novels and sequels.

As a signifying practice, the quiz is somewhat problematic in that it appears to be a

source of stress as well as fun for the members, yet remains a standard feature of every meeting. The Texas JASNA chapter is not the only one to give quizzes (Lynch 16; Ray, “Regional News” 32), which suggests that the choice to have a quiz is not a decision left up to the members but is one handed down from on high, either through tradition or at the discretion of the regional director or national JASNA council. Another possibility is that, despite their grumbling, the Texas Janeites really do not mind the quiz very much.

²⁰ In the 20+ category, two JASNA respondents said they had read the novels more than 50 times, one had read the novels more than 60 times, and one had read the novels more than 100 times. While these numbers may sound inflated, one respondent explained that it is “hard to tell” how many times she’s read the books—“I have reread at least 1 or 2 of Austen’s works yearly since the 1960s.” Approximately half of the respondents had difficulty specifying the precise number of times they’ve read the novels, often saying “too many times to count” or “innumerable times.” Nell warns that “When reading professionals (teachers, librarians, and the like) study reading, there may be an unspoken bias in favor of reading; and subjects may feel encouraged to inflate self-reports of how much they read—a failing to which this study is not immune” (23). My study, also, may suffer from inflated numbers, though many respondents’ hesitancy to list an exact number for any given novel indicates a desire for accuracy. Many respondents indicated that they read the novels with different frequency rates, although whether respondents read the novels many or few times, P&P is read most (see Table B.9).

Why is P&P such a favorite? The film industry should probably be given credit for keeping that particular novel in the public consciousness, as should Penguin and World’s Classics paperback publishers, mothers, and high school English teachers who find it the most accessible for their daughters and students. If novels were regularly anthologized, P&P would be Austen’s representative work. The results from this study indicate that people read that novel more often than the others, perhaps due to its comedy and the pleasure it offers in terms of fulfilling the middle-class fantasy of being accepted by the upper-class, through Elizabeth’s marriage to handsome, rich Darcy, an argument Vivien Jones’s Introduction to P&P also makes (New York: Penguin, 1996: vii). While 91% of JASNA members have read P&P either one or many times, a startling 97.5% of Pemberleans indicate that they have read the novel, the majority having read it multiple times (“I have read P&P 5 or 6 times” . . . “P&P is my favorite book of all time!”).

²¹ Several readers’ comments liken their reading of Austen to “comfort food,” a form of consumption that soothes or even deadens feelings of pain and sorrow. The Austen novel’s ability to console suggests that it can be unhealthy if it lulls a reader into a state of torpor. None of the people who took the survey mention limiting their reading of the novels, however.

²² For RoP readers who enjoy Austen’s plot lines, common responses include, “The stories are so wonderful and full of love that I just want to keep coming back to them.” This response coincides with that of the woman who says, “P&P renews my belief in the

transformative power of love,” or another woman who reads “P&P over and over again because I love the story. The characters and plot never get tiring and I fall in love with Mr. Darcy every time I read it!” (One suspects that “Mr. Darcy” here may look a lot like Colin Firth of the A&E / BBC film adaptation.) However, another female RoP member states, “When I read them [Austen’s novels] as a teenager, I was in it for the romance. Now I enjoy Jane’s wit and humor,” a response indicating, one is tempted to say, her growth as a person and as a reader. In addition other respondents gave the following reasons for reading Austen: after seeing the film adaptations; because of identification with the main characters; when lonely; as a reward; and because being a stay-at-home mom allows time for reading.

²³ This (mis)quotation comes from Shakespeare’s Macbeth: “the innocent sleep, / Sleep that knits up the raveled sleeve of care,” (II.ii.40-41). Instead of turning to sleep for curing grief, this member of the Austin, Texas chapter declares that Austen does the healing work of sleep.

²⁴ Whether observing, with Emma, two dogs fighting over a bone and a “string of dawdling children round the baker’s little bow-window eyeing the gingerbread” in Highbury (E 233), or watching through the night over indisposed Marianne, with Elinor (S&S 313), readers find comfort in observing Austen’s protagonists’ struggles with their own lives.

²⁵ Following the March 2001 meeting of the Austin, Texas, chapter of JASNA, the two youngest members, both in their twenties, ridiculed the 1940 P&P for its inauthentic costumes and unfaithfulness to the original storyline. Once again, the JASNA members’ critique parallels what some Austen scholars have recently noticed. Favret is one in particular, as a portion of her essay notes the oddity behind Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s decision to move the “historical setting forward forty years,” which allows the characters to dress a la Gone with the Wind (181). In Favret’s view, while the 1940 production was originally lauded for its “faithfulness” to the text of Austen’s work (180), it cannot keep from reading P&P “into America’s own traumatic history” (182). Conversely, Irvine forwards the “usual explanation” for the 1940 P&P’s antebellum costumes as attributable to Greer Garson, who thought the “high-waisted Regency dresses did not suit her figure” (159-160). Garson took the role of Elizabeth Bennet in the film.

²⁶ The two votes against the A&E P&P are actually mixed reactions. Though not included in Table B.14, other productions mentioned among JASNA members were the 1980s BBC adaptations (11 for; 3 against); Bridget Jones’s Diary (1 for); the “Utah” P&P (1 against); the 1940 P&P (2 for; 2 against); and the Bollywood S&S, Kandukondain Kandukondain (2 for). Other films mentioned among RoP members were Bridget Jones’s Diary (1 vote for, 1 against), Bride and Prejudice (1 vote for), the 1981 BBC S&S (2 votes for), and the 1940 P&P with Greer Garson (1 vote for, 1 against).

²⁷ Austen has been attractive to British royalty since the Prince Regent asked her to dedicate Emma to him via the offices of his librarian, James Stanier Clarke (16 Nov. 1815), and the pattern continues today, with Princess Beatrice of York planning her 18th birthday party around a Pride and Prejudice theme (“Royal News,” 7 April 2006, <http://www.nettyroyal.nl/newsfeb06.html>.) On 8 August 2006, guests “including Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, the Prince of Wales, Prince William and Prince Harry, will be expected to dress as characters” from Austen’s most popular novel, to the delight of many Pemberleans. This party theme doubtless owes its genesis to the recent P&P adaptation (2005).

²⁸ Emma Thompson, author of The Sense and Sensibility Screenplay and Diaries: Bringing Jane Austen’s Novel to Film (New York: Newmarket P, 1995), writes with tongue in cheek in her diary entry for 19 May 1995 that the cast of S&S are “working on the second scene between Willoughby and Marianne where they read the sonnet together.” Afraid the scene will become overly sentimental, Thompson jokes that she may be “assassinated by the Jane Austen Society” (244).

²⁹ While the JASNA Regency Ball seems more fannish than most of the other conference activities, Janeites are not the only group to indulge this whim. The International Medieval Congress also holds a dance and shows popular Hollywood film adaptations, like the recent King Arthur starring Keira Knightley, at its annual conference in Kalamazoo, Michigan (attended by academics), in another example of scholarly and popular integration.

³⁰ This response to Austen may not be deemed a positive one for everyone; Emily Auerbach interviews Fay Weldon, who has this to say about the British JAS: Austen is “used rather unfairly here in England. She has turned into heritage. She has become something that’s associated with cream teas and vicarage lawns and a kind of England that barely existed” (qtd. 283). Weldon’s version of what JAS does with Austen highlights a bad kind of comfort, associated with a nearly ahistorical upper class. Instead, Auerbach’s version focuses on “Austen’s ability to appeal simultaneously to a popular and academic audience demonstrat[ing] the clarity, universality, and profundity of her works” (283).

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation I have argued that comfort, in forms as various as independence, wealth, service, leisure, and material goods, is important to Jane Austen culturally and personally. Comfort is therefore significant to a fuller understanding of Austen's novels and is often sought by her current readers. Intrigued by the shifting nuances of comfort in the late eighteenth century, Austen may not have attended to comfort's emergence from luxury, a particularly middle-class phenomenon, while writing her novels. Undoubtedly, however, Austen understood the implications of giving and gaining comfort for women, as each novel's narrator, laughingly or seriously, depicts the heroines and occasionally other characters in the act of comforting (i.e., engaged in real work for others' good that provides emotional satisfaction for both parties). I maintain that whether her comfort-giving is noticed or not, each character's quality of life is indicated through the measure of comfort she dispenses and receives. While the "cold comfort" heroines lack psychological comfort themselves because their labors are under-appreciated, they excel at comforting others, whether in nursing the sick, counseling the distressed, or rehearsing the lines of a play with friends who need help; eventually, public recognition of their abilities and marriage to the men of their choosing follows. The "warm comfort" protagonists are consistently appreciated in their happier family positions, and their comforting, if not always as prominent in the text as the "cold comfort" heroines', is contrasted with the ineptitude of their minor character doubles. I find that Austen's approach to each pair of characters reveals her

understanding of comforting as a positive, active choice for women, not an essentialized, automatic role. I argue also that Austen's own varying circumstances influenced the tone and mood of her "cold" and "warm comfort" novels, though they all uphold the idea that women do the work of comforting because it is expected of them, and that material comforts—having a sufficient income and housing—as well as social interaction, are vital to psychological comfort or ease.

Moreover, the depiction of comforting in Austen's novels attracts readers in search of comfort and intellectual stimulation. Austen, like her contemporaries, associates England with comfort, and North American and European readers of Austen find that in acceding to the novelist's version of Englishness, comfort is available in the face of modern difficulties. I argue that academic and personal interpretations of Austen novels are not mutually exclusive: openness to both perspectives can elicit a greater understanding of the novelist. Some readers today view their interactions with Austen's novels as escapism (for them, analogous to indulging in "comfort food"). For these members of the Jane Austen Society and the Republic of Pemberley, Austen's world is a nice place to visit, and many (though not all) would like to live there. Others envision their reading as refreshingly instructive for dealing with human failings, for gaining perspective on personal difficulties, and for intellectual quickening.¹ My survey results indicate that during periods of depression, stress, vacation, or illness, Austen fans (middle-class white women) find in her novels a multi-faceted comfort that questions the status quo even as it consoles. Thus, Austen's comfort challenges as much as it reassures her audience. Readers find themselves reevaluating their long-held assumptions

regarding relationship dynamics, stereotypes, and gender roles, even upon perusing familiar novels, as their own life circumstances alter their interpretive positions. These readers bring Austen back into the real world with them.

Jane Austen is writ large in the cultural imagination, and for those wanting to incorporate a bit of Austen into their own lives, the vast Republic of Pemberley website hosts a shop, CafePress.com, containing all things Austen for the devoted fan. The site sells a cookbook, a calendar, various T-shirts, tote bags, and stationery, but what is in greatest abundance are the numerous mugs for coffee or tea. Each mug sports a quotation invoking either the novels directly or Austen fandom—“Stupid men are the only ones worth knowing after all”; “Run mad as often as you choose, but do not faint”; “I am excessively diverted”; “Retrench!”, “I married my Mr. Darcy”; “I blame Jane (A.I.S.S.B.H)” (CafePress.com 1-4).²

These hot drink mugs with their pithy Austen maxims (“You don’t know how I suffer”) bring together, in a modern format, Austen’s late eighteenth-century conceptions of comfort / discomfort, womanhood, and Englishness. The mugs’ slogans allow their owners either identification with Jane Austen’s ironic narratorial voice (“Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery”) or the fantasy of being married to one of her heroes (“Mrs. Knightley”; “Mrs. Tilney”). Not surprisingly, there are no mugs for characters whom readers have tended to find unpleasant. For the masochistic reader of Austen, the “Mr. Darcy is my severest critic” mug should suit well. Austen’s words and her characters’ titles, attached to a comforting coffee or tea mug, may thus enable many people to face each workday morning, as well as times of high stress “when life gets

chaotic” (JASNA survey). As Carlyne Van Der Meer proclaims in her review of Carol Shields’s Austen biography, “Austen novels bring comfort. [. . .] there is a comfort in finding oneself immersed in the Romantic era” (1). Drinking from an Austen mug, then, is another form of immersion and identification with the novelist, a tea imbiber herself. The combination of hot tea or coffee with an Austen witticism brings together physical and psychological comfort, antidotes to the poor “modern ‘manners’” of “today’s graceless society” (RoP surveys). If, as I have argued in this dissertation, Austen’s novels’ comfort is about leisure, independence, and ease, then sipping from an Austen mug similarly refers to comfort’s modern-day operations. Austen is accessible to her audience through the comfort of owning a sound bite-inscribed mug, almost as if the novelist has given her stamp of approval on the mug owner’s habits and life.

Just as Austen mugs bring her fiction into the modern world, readers enter the novelist’s world when they open her books. Audiences find in Austen’s heroines’ uncomfortable situations (financial or familial) and their eventual successes comfort for their own difficulties. This dissertation controverts the long-held opinion of Austen as “safe” reading (in the sense of maintaining the status quo while eliding controversial or difficult ideas), while it valorizes notions of Austen’s works as comforts for readers, supplying reassurance often missing in the world outside the texts of her novels. For many members of the Jane Austen Society and the Republic of Pemberley, the comfort of Austen’s fiction is not merely an escapist pastime but is a necessary condition for enjoying and not just enduring life. Austen’s novels demonstrate in a powerful way the importance for society that (mainly) women’s comforting can bring, as her narratives

depict characters engaged in the task of comfort-giving while at the same time the novels themselves perform identical work for readers. Without sympathizing with Mr. Woodhouse, Austen's audience can still enjoy reading about Emma's endless comforting of her hypochondriac father while considering the repercussions of Emma's constancy for the heroine's emotional life, or can still enjoy laughing at Mrs. Jennings's comical comforting of Marianne Dashwood, seeing it as equally valid though contrasted with depressed Elinor's better-suited overtures toward her sister.

Examining Austen in terms of comfort and discomfort, within both texts and readers enlarges the boundaries of Austen scholarship by revealing that a significant, if seldom queried issue for the author—the inner-workings of comfort—is also what audiences reread the novels to obtain. My project's bringing together of academic and popular discourse on the novelist also raises questions for future study. For example, the data I collected from members of the Jane Austen Society of North America and the Republic of Pemberley indicate that many women readers of Austen are first introduced to the novelist at around the age of twelve, also my own experience. Further inquiry could be made concerning the way that the gift of an Austen novel (usually Pride and Prejudice) functions as a sort of secular and literary bat mitzvah, inducting the pre-pubescent girl into womanhood, signified for white, middle-class culture in Austen's oeuvre. Her works have been seen as educational for women, and what else Austen might be teaching readers (how to grow into maturity, perhaps) besides comforting them, is worth a closer investigation. For many fans of the novelist, Austen is above all a

comfort, at the best of times and at the worst, in sickness and in health; in short, a life-long companion.³

Notes

¹ In addition to my survey respondents, D. W. Harding's notorious "Regulated Hatred: an Aspect of the Work of Jane Austen" (in Regulated Hatred and Other Essays on Jane Austen, ed. Monica Lawlor, London: Athlone P, 1998: 5-26) castigates the way the Austen novel, when read wrongly, provides reassuring comfort for an audience of "comfortable reader[s]" undergoing comparable life experiences (6).

² These letters are shorthand for part of a Republic of Pemberley expression that reads, "I blame Jane, and I'm sure she blames herself," indicating Jane Bennet's tendency in P&P to take too much responsibility for others' mistakes, a habit that annoys members of RoP discussion boards.

³ My final statement points to the larger issue of readers' fantasy of marriage to Jane Austen, dealt with at length in D. A. Miller's Jane Austen, or the Secret of Style (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003). Miller describes being thrilled while reading Austen for the first time, finding in her art "the thing that (our youth notwithstanding) *we had been waiting for all our lives*" (2).

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APPENDIX A

JASNA SURVEY FORM 2005

JASNA Questionnaire 2005

This questionnaire is voluntary and completely confidential. As part of a dissertation project through Texas A&M University, the purpose is to gather data about readers of Austen and their ways of enjoying her novels. Please drop completed questionnaires in the ballot box, or mail them by 10/31/05 to:

Amanda Himes
623 Raines Road
Siloam Springs, AR 72761
USA

-
1. Sex: M / F Age: _____ Race / Ethnicity: _____ Nationality: _____
 2. What is your primary occupation?
 3. How long have you been a member of JASNA?
 4. What brought you to this organization?
 5. What are your hobbies?
 6. Is your interest in Jane Austen academic, personal, or both? (Explain)
 7. How many times have you read Austen's novels? Which is your favorite?
 8. If you have read Austen's novels more than once, why have you done so?
 9. Are there certain times in your life when you have been especially drawn to Austen's fiction? When?
 10. What do you think of recent film adaptations of Austen's works?
 11. What interests you about 19th century British culture?

APPENDIX B

TABLES OF JASNA AND ROP SURVEY RESULTS

Table B.1 *Question 1: Demographics*

	<i>a. Sex</i>	<i>b. Average age</i>	<i>c. Race / Ethnicity</i>	<i>d. Nationality</i>
JASNA Survey, 139 total sample	114 female 16 male 9 not specified	59.2 years (58.2 female) (62.5 male)	133 white / Caucasian 5 white / Jewish 4 Asian 1 Hispanic 1 "mixed"	121 U.S. (87%) 12 Canadian (8.6%) 4 English 1 German
RoP Survey, 40 total sample	36 female 4 male	37.2 years (35.1 female) (53.8 male)	38 white / Caucasian 2 "mixed"	23 U.S. (57.5%) 3 Canadian 2 Australian 2 English 2 British 2 Dutch 1 German 1 Swiss 1 Finn 1 Norwegian 1 Albanian 1 Spaniard

Table B.2 *Question 2: What is your primary occupation?*

	<i>Retired</i>	<i>home-makers</i>	<i>business</i>	<i>teachers/ professors</i>	<i>students</i>	<i>librarians</i>	<i>medical field</i>
JASNA Survey, 139 total	34 (24%)	---	24 (17%)	19 (14%)	---	13 (9%)	9 (6%)
RoP Survey, 40 total	3 (7.5%)	4 (10%)	7 (17.5%)	8 (20%)	7 (17.5%)	---	---

Table B.3 *Question 3: How long have you been a member?*

	<i>less than 6 months</i>	<i>6 months to 1½ years</i>	<i>2-3 years</i>	<i>4-6 years</i>	<i>7-10 years</i>	<i>11-20 years</i>	<i>21 years or more</i>
JASNA Survey, 139 total sample	---	10 (7%)	10 (7%)	22 (16%)	32 (23%)	43 (31%)	21 (15%)
RoP, 40 total sample	6 (15%)	9 (22.5%)	5 (12.5%)	9 (22.5%)	11 (27.5%)	---	---

Table B.4 *Question 4: What brought you to this organization (JASNA)?*

	JASNA Survey, 139 total sample
<i>Women's Responses (119):</i>	Percentage is based on women only
Her own interest in Jane Austen	47 (40%)
Read about it (newspaper, online-5)	17 (14%)
A friend	16 (13%)
Attended a local or national program	15 (13%)
Desire for fellowship	10 (8%)
Love of history / literature	8 (7%)
JASNA website	7 (6%)
Saw film adaptations	6 (5%)
JASNA committee members, founders	4 (3%)
Husband	2 (2%)
Gift membership	2 (2%)
Daughter	2 (2%)
Sister	2 (2%)
Love of dressing up / dancing	1 (1%)
<i>Men's Responses (17):</i>	Percentage is based on men only
Wife	6 (35%)
His own interest in Jane Austen	4 (23.5%)
Woman he was dating	2 (12%)
Attended a local or national program	1 (6%)
JASNA committee members	1 (6%)
Read about it (newspaper, online)	1 (6%)
Student request to teach Austen	1 (6%)
Saw the film adaptations	1 (6%)

Table B.5 *Question 4: What brought you to this organization (Republic of Pemberley)?*

	RoP Survey, 40 total sample
<i>Women's Responses (36):</i>	Percentage is based on women only
Search Engine	15 (42%)
1996 A&E / BBC <u>Pride and Prejudice</u>	8 (22%)
To discuss Austen, other issues	4 (11%)
For research purposes	4 (11%)
Film adaptations	3 (8%)
Fan fiction	2 (5.5%)
Another Austen-focused website	2 (5.5%)
Mother	2 (5.5%)
Colin Firth	2 (5.5%)
Because of teaching Austen	2 (5.5%)
Jane Austen Magazine	1 (3%)
A friend	1 (3%)
<i>Men's Responses (4):</i>	Percentage is based on men only
Hearing others' thoughts on the novel	2 (50%)
Search Engine	1 (25%)
Film adaptations	1 (25%)
Article on Austen	1 (25%)

Table B.6 Question 5: What are your hobbies?

	JASNA Survey, 139 total sample	RoP Survey, 40 total sample
<i>Sewing</i>	34 (24.5%)	6 (15%)
<i>Hiking / Outdoors</i>	31 (22%)	8 (20%)
<i>Traveling</i>	29 (21%)	5 (12.5%)
<i>Gardening</i>	27 (19%)	2 (5%)
<i>Theatre/ opera / art</i>	25 (18%)	7 (17.5%)
<i>Music-playing</i>	24 (17%)	5 (12.5%)
<i>Sports</i>	20 (14%)	9 (22.5%)
<i>Cooking / baking</i>	15 (11%)	6 (15%)
<i>Crafts</i>	15 (11%)	4 (10%)
<i>Writing (creative, letter)</i>	13 (9%)	8 (20%)
<i>T.V. / movies</i>	10 (7%)	10 (25%)
<i>Family / friends</i>	10 (7%)	5 (12.5%)

Table B.7 Question 6: Is your interest in Jane Austen academic, personal, or both?

	<i>Academic</i>	<i>Personal</i>	<i>Both</i>
JASNA Survey, 139 total			
Women	0	87	32
Men	0	8	8
			(1 marked neither)
RoP Survey, 40 total			
Women	0	23	13
Men	0	4	0

Table B.8 Question 7: Which is your favorite [Austen novel]?

	JASNA Survey, 139 total sample	RoP Survey, 40 total sample
<u>Pride and Prejudice</u>	55	30
<u>Persuasion</u>	46	11
<u>Emma</u>	14	7
<u>Mansfield Park</u>	8	1
<u>Sense and Sensibility</u>	3	4
<u>Northanger Abbey</u>	3	2

Table B.9. *Question 7: How many times have you read Austen's novels?*

JASNA Survey, 139 total sample					
	1-2X	3-9X	10-15X	Many X	20+
<u>P&P</u>	36 (26%)	19 (14%)	9 (6.5%)	45 (32%)	17 (12%)
<u>MP</u>	32 (23%)	22 (16%)	0	@ 25 (18%)	0
The novels generally	35 (25%)	36 (26%)	5 (3.5%)	39 (28%)	13 (9%)
RoP Survey, 40 total sample					
	1-2X	3-9X	10-15X	Many X	20+
<u>P&P</u>	8 (20%)	18 (45%)	6 (15%)	6 (15%)	1 (2.5%)
<u>MP</u>	13 1/2 (34%)	8 (20%)	0	3 (7.5%)	0
<u>NA</u>	13 (32.5%)	4 (10%)	0	2 (5%)	0
The novels generally	18 (45%)	13 (32.5%)	1 (2.5%)	5 (12.5%)	0

Table B.10 *Question 8: If you have read Austen's novels more than once, why have you done so?(JASNA)*

JASNA Survey, 139 total sample

- a. 122 respondents (88%) say that they re-read Austen's novels
- b. 62 discover new insights and details during re-reading
- c. 41 cite the sheer pleasure of the act of re-reading
- d. 26 gain comfort from re-reading
- e. 26 enjoy Austen's language, humor, and style repeatedly
- f. 21 re-read to prepare for an AGM or a class

Table B.11 *Question 8: If you have read Austen's novels more than once, why have you done so? (RoP)*

RoP Survey, 40 total sample

- a. 39 of 40 respondents (97.5%) say that they re-read Austen's novels
- b. 15 discover new insights and details during re-reading
- c. 12 enjoy the stories / plots / characters
- d. 11 enjoy Austen's language, humor, and style repeatedly
- e. 8 cite the sheer pleasure of the act of re-reading
- f. 6 prepare for school / a reading group / work
- g. 6 refresh their memories
- h. 6 re-read because the novels are "old friends"
- i. 4 obtain insights into their own lives
- j. 2 gain comfort from re-reading
- k. 2 re-read for escape

Table B.12 *Question 9: Are there certain times when you have been especially drawn to Austen's fiction? When? (JASNA Survey)*

For those 65 members who answered "yes":

- a. 18 read when stressed;
- b. 15 read to escape or relax;
- c. 12 read when depressed or sad;
- d. 9 read on vacation, in between semesters, or when out of work;
- e. 7 read when taking / prepping for a class or AGM;
- f. 5 read in winter;
- g. 5 read when ill

Table B.13 *Question 9: Are there certain times when you have been especially drawn to Austen's fiction? When? (RoP Survey)*

For those 23 who cite certain periods in life when Austen's works are especially pertinent:

- a. 6 read when depressed or sad;
- b. 6 read when stressed;
- c. 4 read to escape or relax;
- d. 4 read in winter;
- e. 3 read when in need of comfort;
- f. 2 read for intellectual stimulation;
- g. 2 read when taking / prepping for a class;
- h. 2 read in summer

Table B.14 *Question 10: What do you think of recent film adaptations of Austen's works?*

<i>Film</i>	JASNA Survey, 139 total sample		RoP Survey, 40 total sample	
	<i>Like</i>	<i>Dislike</i>	<i>Like</i>	<i>Dislike</i>
<u>P&P</u> (2005)	7	23	10	11
A&E <u>P&P</u> (1996)	37	2	20	2
E. Thompson <u>S&S</u>	19	1	20	1
Rozema <u>MP</u> (1999)	6	21	2	13
A. Root <u>Persuasion</u>	20	2	17	0
Paltrow <u>Emma</u>	2 1/2	3	14	2
Beckinsale <u>Emma</u>	5 1/2	0	11	4
<u>Clueless</u>	19	0	4	0
<u>Bride and Prejudice</u>	14	3	1	0
BBC <u>Northanger Abbey</u>	0	0	0	3

Table B.15 *Question 11: What interests you about 19th century British culture?*
(JASNA Survey)

a. Literature	28 (20%)
b. Culture; everyday life then	26 (19%)
c. Manners	25 (18%)
d. Heritage	21 (15%)
e. Women's roles	20 (14%)
f. Class system	19 (14%)
g. History	15 (11%)
h. Fashion / costumes / balls	12 (9%)
i. Leisure	10 (7%)
j. Wit / language	9 (6.5%)
k. Politics / laws	9 (6.5%)
l. Empire	7 (5%)
m. Landscape / gardens	7 (5%)
n. Architecture / houses	7 (5%)
o. Science and medicine	6 (4%)
p. Music	5 (3.5%)
q. Cookery	5 (3.5%)
r. Differences from modern life	5 (3.5%)
s. Traditions / stability	5 (3.5%)

Table B.16 *Question 11: What interests you about 19th century British culture?*
(RoP Survey)

a. Manners	12 (30%)
b. Differences from modern life	8 (20%)
c. Women's roles	7 (17.5%)
d. Social behavior	7 (17.5%)
e. Wit / conversation / language	7 (17.5%)
f. Class system	6 (15%)
g. Culture; everyday life then	6 (15%)
h. Fashion / costumes / balls	6 (15%)
i. To understand Austen's books	5 (12.5%)
j. History	5 (12.5%)
k. Heritage	4 (10%)
l. Values / morals	3 (7.5%)
m. War / politics	3 (7.5%)
n. Leisure	3 (7.5%)

VITA

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Educational Background

Ph.D., English, Texas A&M University, 2006
M.A., English, Baylor University, 2000
B.A., English, East Texas Baptist University, 1998

Publication

“Fanny Price and the (Dis)comforts of Home,” *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal*, 27 (2005) [2006]: 253-259

Conference Presentations

“Cultures in Conflict: Austen and Burney Defend Hartfordshire from the French,” British Women Writers Conference, University of Louisiana, April 2005

“Drawing Us into Her Circle: Jane Austen’s Contagious Laughter,” “Women’s Writing in Britain in 1660-1830” Conference, University of Southampton, July 2003

“Textual Evidence for Mary Shelley’s Changing Relationships to her Works,” British Women Writers Conference, University of Wisconsin-Madison, April 2002

“The Black Church as Represented in Zora Neale Hurston’s Works,” Southwest Conference on Christianity and Literature, Dallas Baptist University, Oct. 1998

Teaching Experience

Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: John Brown University, 2004-present

Literary Analysis and Research: John Brown University, 2005-2006; Texas A&M University, 2001-2003

Freshman Composition and Rhetoric: John Brown University, 2004-2006; Texas A&M University, 2000-2001; Baylor University, 1999-2000

Technical Writing: Texas A&M University, 2001-2003

Survey of World Literature II: Trinity Valley Community College, 1998