JANE AUSTEN: LOOKING AT THE MARRIAGE PLOTS THROUGH THE MALE CHARACTERS IN FOUR NOVELS

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgements</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sense and Sensibility</em></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Northanger Abbey</em></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pride and Prejudice</em></td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Emma</em></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Jane Austen's novels have always held a great interest for critics because of their humor, wit, and memorable characters. She shows her humor and wit most distinctly and cleverly through her memorable marriage and courtship plots. But most critics who analyze her marriage and courtship plots tend to look at them through the female characters. In "Emma," Arnold Kettle argues that what makes the novel interesting is the fact that Austen portrays the characters and their personal relationships with each other realistically. And in presenting the characters and their environment in a realistic light, Austen enriches her readers reading experience by allowing them to actually step into and be closely involved with the world of Hartfield. But Kettle only closely analyzes the marriage plots of Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, and Jane Fairfax.

Joel Weinsheimer in "Chance and the Hierarchy of Marriages in Pride and Prejudice" discusses how choice and chance affect the marriage plots of the characters. In the novel, Austen interconnects choice and chance, which means that there is a good deal of both affecting and determining what happens in the marriage plots. But this is not always the case because when a character begins to self-improve,
then choice begins to take over. In his article, Weinsheimer mentions most of the characters in the novel, but focuses mainly on the female characters.

According to Susan Morgan in "Guessing for Ourselves in Northanger Abbey," the novel explores the everyday world and educates readers on the influences of others. Morgan mainly focuses on Catherine Morland and her interactions with the other characters, especially Henry Tilney. She analyzes what Catherine learns, what Henry Tilney teaches her, and how she improves with her education.

And even when critics do choose to analyze the male characters, many tend to just do a close analysis of the major male characters. In "The Importance of Being Frank," John Peter Rumrich discusses the important role Frank Churchill plays in Emma. When he comes to Highbury, he immediately creates change and establishes new ways of thinking. And this is Austen's role for him: to transform Highbury into a place of excitement for a brief period of time.

Gene W. Ruoff in "The Dramatic Dilemma" focuses mainly on the relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth with special emphasis on their action scenes. The dilemma, Ruoff argues, is that Austen has both action and reflection scenes in the same book, and sometimes even side by side. This should
create a problem because "action separates while reflection unites" (52), but it does not because Austen uses them cleverly and masterfully.

In "Love and Pedagogy: Austen's Beatrice and Benedick," Juliet McMaster analyzes the marriage plot of Darcy and Elizabeth and compares them to Beatrice and Benedick from Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing." McMaster goes on to mention that in the end they both learn and teach each other a lesson.

But my thesis will look at marriage and courtship through the minor male characters and will show that Austen portrays them differently in each novel.

In Sense and Sensibility the minor male characters I will look at will be Mr. John Dashwood, Sir John Middleton, Mr. Palmer, and Edward Ferrars. The marriage plots of these characters show couples who have opposing personalities and temperaments. Mr. John Dashwood marries a woman who is a strong caricature of his worst qualities, which in turn brings them out in full force. Sir John Middleton and Mr. Palmer both have wives whose personalities and temperaments are their complete opposites. Edward Ferrars is engaged to a woman who he does not love and whose manners are his opposite, but he has fallen in love with another woman who is perfect for him and who can make him truly happy.
In Northanger Abbey the minor male characters I will analyze will be Mr. Allen, John Thorpe, James Morland, and Captain Tilney. With the exception of Mr. Allen, the rest of the characters are not married nor do they become married in the end, so the focus of this novel is on courtship and its games. Mr. Allen has a wife who is his complete opposite, but he finds clever ways to tolerate her. John Thorpe sees marriage as a way to climb the social ladder, so he tries to win Catherine Morland’s hand by deception. Both James Morland and Captain Tilney’s marriage plots involve the same woman. Because of his naivety, James Morland does not see his fiancee’s deceptive and mercenary nature until it is too late. Captain Tilney steals James Morland’s fiancee away by deceiving her into thinking that he loves her.

In Pride and Prejudice Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bingley, and Mr. Collins represent the minor male characters. In this novel, Austen creates and reveals her ideal marriage. Mr. Gardiner’s marriage is the ideal marriage because their temperaments are equal, they always agree with each other, and they are always together. Mr. Bennet’s marriage is less than ideal because he married a woman who is silly and foolish, and the only joy he finds in her now is being able to tease and mock her. Mr. Bingley’s
marriage plot revolves around Jane Bennet who is exactly like him in temperament. They are a little too naïve and trusting for Austen's liking, but together they make a good couple. Mr. Collins's marriage plot involves two women: Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas. He marries for convenience and because Lady Catherine has told him to.

In *Emma* Mr. Elton, Robert Martin, Mr. Weston, and John Knightley represent the minor male characters. With the exception of Mr. Elton, though opposing temperaments do exist in these marriages, they do not harm the marriages in any way. Because Mr. Elton marries a woman who is a very strong caricature of his worst qualities, he begins to become a carbon copy of her. Robert Martin marries a woman who in time will become less silly under his guidance. Mr. Weston makes a much better choice his second time, and marries a woman who, despite her pessimism, has a great deal more in common with him. Even though John Knightley has a much different personality than his wife, it does not seem to affect the marriage at all.
Most critics when they read Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* look at marriage and courtship through the female characters: Elinor Dashwood, Marianne Dashwood, and Lucy Steele. Even when they tend to look at the male characters, it is only the major male characters that interest them: Willoughby and Colonel Brandon. But this chapter will look at marriage and courtship through the minor male characters: Mr. John Dashwood, Sir John Middleton, Mr. Palmer, and Edward Ferrars. Austen uses these minor male characters to show unequal and unbalanced marriages in which the husband and wife possess opposing temperaments and personalities.

Austen first demonstrates these opposing forces when Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood discuss the well-being of Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters. After his father's death, Mr. John Dashwood decides among himself to give to his sisters three thousand pounds since everything including the estate was entailed to him, which left his stepmother and sisters with nothing. But his wife manages to convince him otherwise. What then takes place is an exchange of the most disturbing nature in which Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood rationalize amongst themselves what they should provide for
Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters. The conversation begins with giving his three sisters one thousand pounds each, but then goes down to five hundred when his wife tells him to think about their son:

'Well, then, let something be done for them; but that something need not be three thousand pounds. Consider,' she added, 'that when the money is once parted with, it never can return. Your sisters will marry, and it will be gone for ever. If, indeed, it could ever be restored to our poor little boy--'

'Why, to be sure,' said her husband, very gravely, 'that would make a great difference. The time may come when Harry will regret that so large a sum was parted with. If he should have a numerous family, for instance, it would be a very convenient addition.' (7)

But the sum goes down even further when Mr. John Dashwood considers instead to give out an annuity to their mother:

"'A hundred a year would make them all perfectly comfortable'"(8). But his wife rationalizes that an annuity would be a financial burden to them by saying that "'[...] people always live for ever when there is any annuity to be paid them [...]’" and "'It may be very inconvenient some years to spare a hundred, or even fifty pounds from our own expences’"(8-9). He agrees with her saying that if he were to give them an annuity, they would also not benefit from it "'because they would only enlarge their style of living if they felt sure of a larger income, and would not be sixpence the richer for it at the end of the year’"(9). So instead
he agrees to give them fifty pounds every now and then as a present, but his wife convinces him that he need not give them any money at all because she tells him that they will live most comfortably on the money that they already have: "They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expences of any kind"(9)! So in the end Mr. John Dashwood heeds his wife’s advice and decides to only help them move and maybe make them presents of food and furniture(9-10). Austen uses this conversation to show how easily manipulated Mr. John Dashwood is. He wants to do his duty, but fails to do so because he lacks his wife’s strong personality. He marries a woman who brings out his worst qualities:

He was not an ill-disposed young man, [...] but he was, in general, well respected; for he conducted himself with propriety in the discharge of his ordinary duties. Had he married a more amiable woman, he might have been made still more respectable than he was:--he might even have been made amiable himself; for he was very young when he married, and very fond of his wife. But Mrs. John Dashwood was a strong caricature of himself;--more narrow-minded and selfish. (3)

In Austen’s description of him and his marriage she makes the point that he is not a truly selfish person, but has become increasingly selfish due to his wife. His wife’s personality is too strong for him; therefore, it creates an unequal and unbalanced marriage. In Mr. John Dashwood’s
case any respectable qualities that he had before his marriage are now completely gone and have been replaced by selfishness. In *Jane Austen on Love*, Juliet McMaster states that in their marriage plot "husband and wife seek out their common ground, and confirm and reinforce one another, [...]" (78). His wife reinforces and develops his selfish side until he begins to deceive himself into believing that his actions towards his sisters and stepmother are indeed sensible.

But Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood's sense is clearly flawed because what they propose to do for Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters is not at all sensible. In fact, their reasoning is quite horrific because they are using sense to justify their own selfishness. But in order to be truly sensible, one must have principles and a sense of rightness, which Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood clearly lack. And because they lack these things, their conversation holds no rational thought. Throughout the entire conversation, they only make assumptions as to the future living conditions of Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters. They do not know for certain that the money Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters have will be enough; nor, do they know that if given more money, Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters will waste it. They also make assumptions about their own living conditions and that of
their son's. Even though Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood are far better off than Mrs. Dashwood, they present themselves as being the ones in need of money. Even though their son has inherited a large estate and will probably be secure for the rest of his life, his mother refers to him as "poor" and his father assumes that when he comes of age he will blame them for allowing his money to be stolen away. These assumptions allow them to come to the irrational conclusion that Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters do not need any monetary assistance at all. And they come to this conclusion due to their selfishness and lack of sense.

The marriage plots involving Sir John Middleton and Mr. Palmer are also unbalanced and unequal. But unlike Mr. John Dashwood, both men have strong personalities that are not easily swayed by their wives. Sir John retains his "frankness and warmth" despite his wife's "reserved" and "cold" nature(26). Their personalities and temperaments are complete opposites, but their marriage is stable because as McMaster notes they "seem to suit each other in their very distance, [...] drive them both to seek any company but each other's"(76). Although less than ideal, the marriage succeeds because they are hardly in each other's company for very long:

They were scarcely ever without some friends staying with them in the house, and they kept more company of
It was necessary to the happiness of both; [...]. Sir John was a sportsman, Lady Middleton a mother. He hunted and shot, and she humoured her children; and these were their only resources. Lady Middleton had the advantage of being able to spoil her children all the year round, while Sir John's independent employments were in existence only half the time. Continual engagements at home and abroad, however, supplied all the deficiencies of nature and education; supported the good spirits of Sir John, and gave exercise to the good-breeding of his wife. (27)

This description of their marriage reveals that without their different responsibilities and engagements, the marriage would fail because they would not be able to stand each other's company. But luckily Sir John has his hunting and his wife has her children, and, as Austen mentions, these two distractions save the marriage.

Mr. Palmer is the exact opposite of Sir John, while his wife is the exact opposite of Lady Middleton. McMaster suggests that this marriage in the future will most likely become even more distant than it is now(76). The warning signs are certainly all there. Mr. Palmer constantly and purposely ignores his wife whenever she asks him any kind of question:

Mr. Palmer made her no answer, and did not even raise his eyes from the newspaper.
'Mr. Palmer does not hear me,' said she, laughing, 'he never does sometimes. It is so ridiculous!' This was quite a new idea to Mrs. Dashwood, she had never been used to find wit in the inattention of any one, and could not help looking with surprise at them both. (92)
Mrs. Palmer needs to be able to laugh at her husband's behavior to her because to take his actions seriously would be much too painful. She tries to make the best of her marriage because she will be with him forever and has to find some way to cut the tension:

'Aye, you may abuse me as you please,' said [Mrs. Jennings], 'you have taken Charlotte off my hands, and cannot give her back again. So there I have the whip hand of you.'

Charlotte laughed heartily to think that her husband could not get rid of her; and exultingly said, she did not care how cross he was to her, as they must live together. It was impossible for any one to be more thoroughly good-natured, or more determined to be happy than Mrs. Palmer. The studied indifference, insolence, and discontent of her husband gave her no pain: and when he scolded or abused her, she was highly diverted.

(96)

Though this marriage is far from being ideal, it is stable because both husband and wife have learned to deal with their differences: he scolds and ignores her, while she refuses to take his remarks seriously. Though unconventional, it works for them and saves the marriage.

In the marriage plot of Edward Ferrars, Austen gives him three choices: Lucy Steele, Miss Morton, or Elinor Dashwood. He chooses to keep his promise of engagement to Lucy, even though his mother disowns him for it, as Mr. John Dashwood tells Mrs. Jennings, Marianne, and Elinor: "'Nothing should prevail on him to give up his engagement. He would stand to it, cost him what it might'"(232). But he
does not wish to marry her--it was "a continual source of disquiet and regret to him"--because he does not love her and finally sees her real character, but he feels that it is his duty to honor his promise (322). And he is right, and Mrs. Jennings agrees: "'Then [...] he has acted like an honest man! [...] but if he had done otherwise, I should have thought him a rascal'" (232-33). Even though he knows that his marriage to Lucy will be a miserable one, he is willing to sacrifice his happiness to prove that he is an honest man in this respect. But since Lucy would never tolerate a penniless marriage, she leaves him for his brother Robert. Edward reveals his unselfishness by keeping his promise because he could have married Miss Morton, who is rich and the daughter of a nobleman (196), but chooses instead to honor his commitment and risk impoverishment. If he had married Miss Morton, his action would have been mercenary because he would have chosen to abandon Lucy in order to better himself.

But since Lucy has abandoned him, he is finally able to follow his heart and propose to Elinor. In Jane Austen: Illusion and Reality, Christopher Brooke acknowledges that Edward's "best hope of improvement and happiness lies in marriage with Elinor" (68). If he had married Lucy instead, his marriage would be the same as that of Sir John and Mr.
Palmer. He cannot ignore his desire for Elinor any longer, and as soon as he is free he goes to her. His personality changes almost immediately: "[...] was not only in the rapturous profession of the lover, but in the reality of reason and truth, one of the happiest of men," and now when he speaks his words reflect in him "a genuine, flowing, grateful cheerfulness, as his friends had never witnessed in him before" (317). But Edward, before this change takes place though, almost becomes another Willoughby (227) by not telling Elinor about his engagement and by spending so much time with her at Norland. And she scolds him for it saying, "'Your behaviour was certainly very wrong,' [...]" (323). Edward thought that he could control his feelings and remain faithful to Lucy, but he was indeed wrong:

'I was simple enough to think, that because my faith was plighted to another, there could be no danger in my being with you; and that the consciousness of my engagement was to keep my heart as safe and sacred as my honour. [...]--The danger is my own; I am doing no injury to anybody but myself.' (323)

He realizes his mistake and understands how badly the situation could have been, and he takes responsibility for his actions. He sees that love is always stronger than will and, as Anne Crippen Ruderman in The Pleasures of Virtue points out, "that [the reason why] his efforts did not succeed is a testimony to the power of love" (79).
Edward is fortunate that he did not have to marry Lucy and become stuck in a loveless marriage like the Middletons and Palmers. Both of these marriages lack true domestic happiness. And in the case of the Dashwoods, the lesson here is to be more diligent when choosing a marriage partner.
Most critics when they read Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* look at marriage and courtship through the eyes of the female characters: Catherine Morland and Isabella Thorpe. And even when they tend to look at the male characters, usually they only do a close analysis of Henry Tilney. But this chapter will look at marriage and courtship through the eyes of the minor male characters: Mr. Allen, John Thorpe, James Morland, and Captain Tilney. In this novel, Austen focuses her attention on courtship because Mr. Allen is the only minor male character who is married and whose relationship is stable.

Though Mr. Allen's marriage is stable, it is not ideal because both him and his wife possess distinctly different personalities. She is silly and foolish, while he is clever and sensible:

Mrs. Allen was one of that numerous class of females, whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man, like Mr. Allen. (7)

Mr. Allen tolerates her because she has an easy temper, but knows and accepts that she will never be the companion he
most desires. His wife's temperament teaches him patience, but in order for him to remain patient with her, he tries to avoid her company as much as possible: "As for Mr. Allen, he repaired directly to the card-room, and left them to enjoy a mob by themselves" (7-8). Mr. Allen does not help his wife get settled, but leaves her promptly because he knows that she will start talking about the room and her clothes any minute. But these brief separations help him deal with her unintelligible remarks that she will make in his company later on with absolute patience:

' [...] These schemes [says Mr. Allen] are not all the thing. Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages! Now and then it is very well; but going to inns and public places together! It is not right; [...] Mrs. Allen, are not you of my way of thinking? Do not you think these kind of projects objectionable?'

'Yes, very much so indeed. Open carriages are nasty things. A clean gown is not five minutes wear in them. You are splashed getting in and getting out; and the wind takes your hair and your bonnet in every direction. [...]'.

'I know you do; but that is not the question. Do not you think it has an odd appearance, [...]?' (80)

This quote shows just how different their minds are. While Mr. Allen talks about propriety and decency, Mrs. Allen thinks that the subject matter is about gowns and appearances. But Mr. Allen is very patient with his wife and calmly explains the topic to her until she finally understands him. He knows how to cleverly gain the most
satisfaction out of his marriage by, as Ivor Morris in *Mr Collins Considered* says, "[allowing] his wife’s observations to flow unimpeded when he is in her company, and [using] his best endeavours to place himself out of it" (126).

Even though Mr. Allen’s marriage plot is interesting, the courtship plots of John Thorpe, James Morland, and Captain Tilney are far more interesting and dramatic. John Thorpe tries to use deception to win Catherine Morland’s hand in marriage. He purposely lies to her about seeing the Tilneys, so that he can spend some time with her:

‘Stop, stop, Mr. Thorpe,’ [Catherine] impatiently cried, ‘it is Miss Tilney; it is indeed.--How could you tell me they were gone?--Stop, stop, I will get out this moment and go to them.’ But to what purpose did she speak?--Thorpe only lashed his horse into a brisker trot; [...]. [...]. ‘Pray, pray stop, Mr. Thorpe.--I cannot go on.--I will not go on.--I must go back to Miss Tilney.’ But Mr. Thorpe only laughed, smacked his whip, encouraged his horse, made odd noises, and drove on; [...]. [...]. ‘How could you deceive me so, Mr. Thorpe?--[...]. How could you say, you saw them driving out in a phaeton?’ Thorpe defended himself very stoutly, declared he had never seen two men so much alike in his life, and would hardly give up the point of its having been Tilney himself. (65-6)

This quote shows that John Thorpe knows what he wants and will use any method of achieving it. He knows that in order to survive and advance in society, he must have money and plenty of it, which is why he pays Catherine great attention. He constantly obsesses over money and rank because he wants to climb the social ladder; he really cares
about nothing else. John Thorpe thinks realistically and in present terms and is not the least bit romantic. In Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision, David Monaghan addresses the fact that John Thorpe will do whatever needs to be done in order to gain wealth, prestige, and privilege: "Brought up in a world of business, the Thorpes are essentially acquisitive and self-seeking. Both cultivate what they take to be the ways of the gentry—[...]" (25).

John Thorpe wants to be a part of the gentry, and he sees Catherine as a way in, so he tries to persuade her to marry him. According to Monaghan, the Thorpes "are simply preparing themselves for an attempt to enter a social realm they equate with wealth and prestige" (25). And in order to do this, John Thorpe must learn the ways of the gentry through practical means, such as reading books like "Tom Jones" (32) and by learning as much as he can through acquaintances. He befriends Catherine's brother James at college because he believes he comes from a wealthy family: "[...] that if people [says John Thorpe] who rolled in money could not afford things, he did not know who could; [...]" (67). Even though he tells Catherine that he would never marry for money, his words are lies and contradict his behavior:

'[...]. My notion of things is simple enough. Let me only have the girl I like, say I, with a comfortable
house over my head, and what care I for all the rest? Fortune is nothing. I am sure of a good income of my own; and if she had not a penny, why so much the better.' (98)

John Thorpe would not likely marry someone poor because that would ruin his ambition, and if he had a choice between someone who he loved, but was poor and someone who was rich, but who he did not love, a good guess would be that he would most likely sacrifice love in order to be wealthy. One reason that guess can be made is in his conversations with people: he constantly wants to know about their financial situation, and when he describes people to Catherine he always mentions how wealthy they are. He asks Catherine about Mr. Allen's wealth: "'Old Allen is as rich as a Jew--is not he'" (45)? He also likes General Tilney because he is also "'as rich as a Jew'" (73). In creating John Thorpe, Austen portrays a character whose pursuit for wealth and power leads him to become vulgar, rude, and, according to Morris, "shallow" (69). Even Catherine cannot stand him after awhile and wants nothing more to do with him, and she vehemently denies to his sister Isabella that she gave him any kind of encouragement (112-3). And so John Thorpe fails miserably in his attempt to court Catherine.

Another failed courtship and engagement is that of James Morland's. He allows Isabella to deceive him about
her true character: "[...]; she [says James Morland] has so much good sense, and is so thoroughly unaffected and amiable; [...]" (33). James Morland is so naïve that he does not see her true character until it is too late. He truly believes that she loves him and does not realize that Isabella’s true goal is to snare herself a rich husband. He finally realizes his mistake when she deserts him for Captain Tilney who is richer. He learns the hard lesson that sometimes people are not what they seem and tells Catherine in a letter to "'beware how [she] give[s] [her] heart’" (163). Though his heart is broken, at least he now understands how deceptive some people can be.

Unlike James Morland, Captain Tilney understands well the game of courtship and how to be victorious in it. Even if their motives are different, both he and Isabella play the same game. She plays to snare a rich husband, but he plays solely, as his brother Henry acknowledges to Catherine, out of mischief (176). In order to win the game, he returns all of Isabella’s slight encouragements and flirts with her shamelessly in front of Catherine:

'What! always to be watched, in person or by proxy!' 'Psha, nonsense!' was Isabella’s answer in the same half whisper. 'Why do you put such things into my head? If I could believe it--my spirit, you know, is pretty independent.' 'I wish your heart were independent. That would be enough for me.' 'My heart, indeed! What can you have to do with
hearts? You men have none of you any hearts.'

'If we have not hearts, we have eyes; and they give us torment enough.'

'Do they? I am sorry for it; I am sorry they find anything so disagreeable in me. I will look another way. I hope this pleases you, (turning her back on him,) I hope your eyes are not tormented now.'

'Never more so; for the edge of a blooming cheek is still in view—at once too much and too little.' (115)

This exchange represents true flirting, and it is what one does when he or she is an expert at the game of courtship.

But Captain Tilney is much more of an expert in this game than Isabella is, and according to Juliet McMaster in Jane Austen on Love, Captain Tilney wins:

[...]: a better catch for the woman, another conquest for the man. Tilney wins. Isabella is not clever enough to make him marry her, and by his calculated flirtation—the whispered intimacies, the verbal sex play—he has at least made her enough his own that her legitimate fiance relinquishes her. (65)

He wins because he successfully deceives her into thinking that he will marry her. But Captain Tilney never intends to do such a thing, but instead plays the game for his own amusement.

John Thorpe and James Morland fail because they do not understand the game of courtship very well. John Thorpe is too vulgar and rude to be successful, while James Morland is too naïve. Captain Tilney succeeds because he has mastered the art of flattery and flirtation. The courtships in Northanger Abbey are surprising because the one that
succeeds does not even end in marriage, but succeeds because of its deceptive nature.
Most critics when they read Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* look at marriage and courtship through the female characters: Charlotte Lucas, Lydia Bennet, Jane Bennet, and Elizabeth Bennet. And even when they tend to look at the male characters, the only ones they look at are usually the major male characters: Wickham and Mr. Darcy. But this chapter will look at marriage and courtship through the minor male characters: Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Bennet, Mr. Bingley, and Mr. Collins. In this novel, Austen introduces her ideal marriage plot represented by Mr. Gardiner and compares and contrasts it to the other marriage plots.

Mr. Gardiner’s marriage could be considered among the minor characters to be the most ideal. In *Jane Austen: Illusion and Reality* Christopher Brooke comments that Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner’s relationship is by far “the most congenial” (75). Austen describes them as being perfectly suited for each other:

> Mr. Gardiner was a sensible, gentlemanlike man, greatly superior to his sister [Mrs. Bennet] as well by nature as education. The Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade, and within view of his own warehouses, could have been so well bred and agreeable. Mrs. Gardiner, [...], was an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman, [...]. (108)

They both possess a good deal of sense and refinement, and
though many people of a higher social class look down upon them because they earn a living by trade and live in the city "within view of [their] own warehouses"(108), their situation is actually ideal for their marriage. Since Mr. Gardiner is never too far from home, he can enjoy the company of his wife and children more frequently. In the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner are always together and delight in their constant companionship. This can be seen when they go on their "Northern tour" together with Elizabeth for three weeks(182):

One enjoyment was certain--that of suitableness as companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences--cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure--and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad. (183)

Austen uses this quote to show how truly successful Mr. Gardiner's marriage is. Because he chose sensibly, he can enjoy his marriage and his relationship with his wife. He does not find his wife to be a burden; in fact, at Pemberley they walk arm in arm when his wife feels tired from walking and needs support(193).

Unlike Mr. Gardiner, Mr. Bennet does find his wife to be a burden. He no longer sees her as an equal companion and has lost all real joy in his marriage and affection for her:
Her father captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown. [...] To his wife he was very little otherwise indebted, than as her ignorance and folly had contributed to his amusement. (180)

Because Mr. Bennet chose his wife on the basis of her outward appearance and gave no thought to her real character, he suffers the consequences of his choice now. The only joy that he finds in her now is being able to tease and mock her foolishness:

'Mr. Bennet, how can you abuse your own children in such a way? You take delight in vexing me. You have no compassion on my poor nerves.'
'You mistake me, my dear. I have a high respect for your nerves. They are my old friends. I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least.'
'Ah! you do not know what I suffer.'
'But I hope you will get over it, and live to see many young men of four thousand a year come into the neighbourhood.'
'It will be no use to us, if twenty such should come since you will not visit them.'
'Depend upon it, my dear, that when there are twenty, I will visit them all.' (2-3)

This dialogue between Mr. Bennet and his wife shows his sarcastic humor and his cleverness. He is amazingly polite throughout the entire exchange, and Jane Nardin in "Propriety as a Test of Character: Pride and Prejudice" mentions that he is "able to pervert the forms of
politeness--[...--into a weapon which he uses against those
whom he despises" (12).

Though Mr. Bingley makes a wise decision in choosing
Jane Bennet to be his wife, he is too malleable, naïve, and
trusting for Austen's liking. But his marriage succeeds and
is happy because Jane's temperament is exactly the same as
his:

`[...] I have not a doubt [says Mr. Bennet] of your
doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means
unlike. You are each of you so complying, that nothing
will ever be resolved on; so easy, that every servant
will cheat you; and so generous, that you will always
exceed your income.' (265-6)

Because both of them are so naïve and trusting, it is good
that they have a fair amount of money that they can use to
just hide themselves away from the rest of the world, which
will prevent them from having to lose their innocence.
Mordecai Marcus in "A Major Thematic Pattern in Pride and
Prejudice" describes Bingley and Jane's courtship as
possessing "immobility" and "passivity" (84). Their
courtship starts out very conventional in that Austen has
them meet at a ball where Bingley falls in love with Jane at
first sight: "'Oh! [says Bingley] she is the most beautiful
creature I ever beheld'" (7) ! After this moment, he has no
eyes for anyone else. Marcus states that both Bingley and
Jane "lack insight, strength, and self-confidence" (86).
Because Bingley has absolute trust in Mr. Darcy's judgement and advice, this trust causes a slight misunderstanding between him and Jane: he believes that she does not love him as much as he loves her. But this misunderstanding causes no real harm in that in the end everything is resolved and no one suffers badly because Darcy admits to Bingley that his opinion of Jane was wrong and gives him his permission to ask Jane to marry him:

'And your assurance of it, [says Elizabeth] I suppose, carried immediate conviction to him.'
'It did [says Darcy]. Bingley is most unaffectedly modest. His diffidence had prevented his depending on his own judgement in so anxious a case, but his reliance on mine, made every thing easy.' (284)

This quote shows that Bingley depends on Darcy a little too much to make his decisions concerning love for him because he cannot come to a decision on such matters on his own.

Mr. Collins's marriage plot is unlike all the others. A note that can be made about Mr. Collins is that the famous first line of the novel is actually describing him, and not Bingley. Mr. Collins is "a single man in possession of a good fortune" and is "in want of a wife" most desperately(1). This statement parallels another statement made later in the novel that describes Mr. Collins as "having now a good house and a very sufficient income, he intended to marry [...]" (53). This statement means that if a
man has a good house and good money, the practical thing for him to do is to marry because he has the means to support a wife and family; this is the natural course of life and what society expects. But catering to society and letting society tell one what to do is foolish because marriage should be something that one wants to do and does out of love, and not something that one needs to do due to social pressures. But as Austen shows with Mr. Collins, many times the reality is different.

Before the discussion of his marriage to Charlotte Lucas can take place, his courtship of Elizabeth Bennet needs to be discussed with special attention being paid to the humorous proposal scene. Even how he chooses Elizabeth to be the one he proposes to is humorous because of its lack of feeling and practical nature: "Mr. Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth--and it was done--done while Mrs. Bennet was stirring the fire" (53). With this quote, Austen compares Mr. Collins's want of a wife with the mundane household task of stirring the fire. He lacks emotion about his marriage proposal and switches very mechanically from Jane to Elizabeth in an instant. But to him this is practical because after all Jane is taken, and Elizabeth is the second oldest, so it makes perfect sense to just go down the hierarchy of sisters until a marriage
prospect is found. His rationale can be compared with Mrs. Bennet stirring the fire because he marries and Mrs. Bennet stirs the fire out of necessity, not because of want.

Mr. Collins needs to find a wife, and his reasons for needing to do so are equally hilarious:

'My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish. Secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly--which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness.' (81)

Mr. Collins proposes very mechanically by stating his reasons very calmly almost as if he is checking off a mental list of what he should be saying. The words he uses, such as "I think..." and "I am convinced..." show that he is not quite sure of himself because what he should say is "It is a right thing..." and "I know it will add..." But because he marries not because he wants to, but because Lady Catherine has told him to shows that he marries not to make himself happy as he says, but to make his patroness happy and perhaps further his favor with her. In The Novels of Jane Austen, Darrel Mansell notes that Mr. Collins "is a caricature, climbing heavenward in the clergy while aggrandizing his little kingdom here on earth, and his god is Lady Catherine"(83).
What is also remarkable about Mr. Collins is that he deceives himself into actually believing that he is "run away with by [his] feelings" (80) and that his affection is "animated and [violent]" (81). But his words and behavior prove the opposite because instead of being run away with his feelings he is surprisingly unemotional and instead of his affection being animated and violent it is calm and passive. He also refuses to believe Elizabeth's rejections and makes foolish comments about women:

'When I do myself the honour of speaking to you next on this subject I shall hope to receive a more favourable answer than you have now given me; [...] because I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application, and perhaps you have even now said as much to encourage my suit as would be consistent with the true delicacy of the female character.' (83)

' [...] As I must therefore conclude that you are not serious in your rejection of me, I shall choose to attribute it to your wish of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females.' (83)

As foolish as he sounds, he truly believes that he is Elizabeth's best marriage prospect and truly believes that he understands women, even though he cannot propose in the correct way or even say the right words. And because of this Mr. Collins appears ridiculous, and it is this ridiculousness that makes the scene comedic.

When Mr. Collins realizes that his efforts with
Elizabeth are all in vain, he is lost until Charlotte Lucas comes along. Though Charlotte does not love or really care for him, she agrees to marry him because her options are very limited: she is twenty-seven years old, has only a small fortune, and is no beauty (94). Mr. Collins is most likely the best she can do, as she tells Elizabeth:

' [...] I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collins's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.' (96)

This quote shows her practicality and the fact that she does not expect much in her marriage. She has a traditional view of marriage. Ivor Morris in Mr Collins Considered quotes David Cecil in saying that "marriage in Jane Austen's world 'was not regarded as a culmination of a romance but as a social arrangement for the promotion and maintenance of the family'" (137). Charlotte understands this and knows that she must cleverly make the best of her situation under Mr. Collins's nose. To give herself some peace of mind, she pretends not to hear certain comments that he makes, and to keep him out of the house longer, she encourages him to garden (120-21). To also avoid him as much as possible, she stays in a room at the back of the house because "for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own
apartment, had they sat in one equally lively" (129). According to Stuart M. Tave in "Affection and the Amiable Man," "the necessary wisdom for living with Mr. Collins, which Charlotte accepts, is to give up a piece of herself, suppress her shame, lose her ears, see less, diminish her life" (35). This is the only possible way in which she can keep sane and still find reasonable joy in her marriage.

In Austen's world, not all marriages can be as ideal as the Gardiners. Their marriage is really something special to celebrate because that kind of domestic happiness is more rare than common. The Bingleys come close, but they possess too much naivete. The Bennets and the Collins' are the least ideal. In the case of the Bennets, two different personalities are clashing, while in the Collins' case, two people marry for convenience.
Most critics when they read Jane Austen's *Emma* look at the marriage and courtship plots through the female characters: Jane Fairfax, Harriet Smith, and Emma. And even those who look at the male characters, tend to only pay close attention to the major male characters: Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley. But this chapter will look at marriage and courtship through the minor male characters: Mr. Elton, Robert Martin, Mr. Weston, and John Knightley. Except in the case of Mr. Elton, though these couples have differences in their personalities, Austen makes them subtle enough that they do not affect the marriage in a dramatic way as they did in *Sense and Sensibility*.

Mr. Elton's marriage plot involves three female characters: Emma Woodhouse, Harriet Smith, and Augusta Hawkins. In looking at his marriage plot involving Emma, the humorous proposal scene must be analyzed. Mr. Elton sees marriage as a way to advance himself in society. Emma's wealth and social status in Highbury make her a sought after marriage prospect in Mr. Elton's eyes. The scene where he proposes to Emma is humorous because of his passion and the fact that he has been drinking. According to David Monaghan in *Jane Austen: Structure and Social*
Vision, Mr. Elton's "style as a suitor [...] is based on the conventions of romance" (124):

[...], than she found her subject cut up—her hand seized—her attention demanded, and Mr. Elton actually making violent love to her: availing himself of the precious opportunity, declaring sentiments which must be already well known, hoping—fearing—adoring—ready to die if she refused him; [...]. (117)

Mr. Elton's words would be romantic if he truly means what he is saying, but he does not because his motive for being passionate is not at all romantic; he just uses the conventions of romance to achieve his goal of winning Emma's hand and money. By mocking the conventions of romance, Austen shows in Mr. Elton how ridiculous they really are.

Mr. Elton's declaration of love shocks Emma because she believes him to be in love with Harriet.

Mr. Elton has to vigorously defend himself against the charge from Emma that he is in love with Harriet, so half the proposal scene in which he is supposed to be talking about Emma, he ends up talking about Harriet:

'[...]'—Miss Smith!—I never thought of Miss Smith in the whole course of my existence—never paid her any attentions, but as your friend: never cared whether she were dead or alive, but as your friend. [...]—But, Miss Smith, indeed!—Oh! Miss Woodhouse! who can think of Miss Smith, when Miss Woodhouse is near! [...]!' (118-9)

Mr. Elton's inconsistencies are amazing in that even though he makes such horrible comments about Harriet, saying that
he could care less if she were dead or alive, he still tries to compliment Emma by stating an obvious cliché, which makes him look even more foolish because he has already lost all credibility by insulting Emma’s friend. Austen goes on to show just how pompous and prideful Mr. Elton is when she has him again insult Harriet:

‘[...]--Miss Smith is a very good sort of girl, and I should be happy to see her respectably settled. I wish her extremely well: and, no doubt, there are men who might not object to--Every body has their level: but as for myself, I am not, I think, quite so much at a loss. I need not so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing myself to Miss Smith!--[...].’ (119-20)

When Mr. Elton says, ‘‘[...], there are men who might not object to--[...],’’ and then stops himself, what he means to say is that “there are men who might not object to [marrying someone that low and inferior on the social ladder].” He degrades Harriet, and he degrades her in front of Emma of all people, but his words are deceptive because they sound very complimentary at times. Austen does this purposely to reveal Mr. Elton’s contradictions: he may use the romantic conventions in his courtship of Emma, but his words and actions are far from being romantic; instead they show that money and advancement are his real motives.

Even though Mr. Elton claims that if Emma rejects him he would die, he does not die but finds someone else soon
afterwards because love is not his real motivation for marrying. Austen reveals that "he had gained [Augusta Hawkins] with such delightful rapidity--the first hour of introduction had been so very soon followed by distinguishing notice [...]" (162). Mr. Elton makes a huge mistake in marrying Augusta Hawkins because she is extremely vain, and after meeting her Emma notes "that her society would certainly do Mr. Elton no good" (244). Mr. Knightley also agrees with Emma: "'[...], I will do you the justice to say, that you would have chosen for him better than he has chosen for himself’" (298). Both are absolutely right because Mr. Elton’s character begins to change in the worst possible way after he marries her. He starts to become a carbon copy of her:

He seemed not merely happy with her, but proud. He had the air of congratulating himself on having brought such a woman to Highbury, as not even Miss Woodhouse could equal; [...]. [...]. Her manners too--and Mr. Elton’s, were unpleasant towards Harriet. They were sneering and negligent. [...]. When they had nothing else to say, it must be always easy to begin abusing Miss Woodhouse; and the enmity which they dared not shew in open disrespect to her, found a broader vent in contemptuous treatment of Harriet. (252-3)

This quote shows the bad influence his wife is having on him and that he is becoming as prideful, rude, and selfish as she is. They even go so far as to become conspirators in developing ways to snub Harriet. At a dance, and with the
encouraging glances of his wife, Mr. Elton deliberately ignores Harriet who is sitting down and waiting to be asked to dance, and when Mrs. Weston points her out to him he rudely refuses to dance with her:

'Miss Smith!—oh!—I had not observed.—You are extremely obliging—and if I were not an old married man.—But my dancing days are over, Mrs. Weston. You will excuse me. Any thing else I should be most happy to do, at your command—but my dancing days are over.' (295)

Mr. Elton says this even though he had said just a moment ago that he would like to dance with Mrs. Weston and Mrs. Gilbert. Mr. Elton's wife affects him and the marriage dramatically by making him emphasize his worst qualities. He becomes a new person, and as Juliet McMaster in \textit{Jane Austen on Love} says, "Elton is completed, almost created, by his marriage"(78).

Though Mr. Elton may not approve of a marriage with Harriet, Robert Martin does. He falls in love with Harriet at first sight and proves his love by doing simple acts:

'He [says Harriet] had gone three miles round one day, in order to bring her some walnuts, because she had said how fond she was of them—and in everything else he was so very obliging!' (24)

These actions show him to be very much in love, and Harriet returns his affections until Emma steps in. Emma persuades Harriet to reject his marriage proposal, even though one
gets the feeling that Harriet would have had no qualms about marrying him (45-8). Even though she rejects him, he asks her again because, as McMaster suggests, he "loves her enough [...]" (75). This time she accepts, and in the end, they marry and suffer very little from the misunderstanding. Even though their personalities differ, it will not affect the marriage negatively because although Harriet is not as sensible as Robert Martin, she can be molded into one:

[...] she had a sweet, docile, grateful disposition; was totally free from conceit; and only desiring to be guided by any one she looked up to. (22)

[...]; but with [Robert Martin], and in the home he offered, there would be the hope of more, of security, stability, and improvement. She would be placed in the midst of those who loved her, and who had better sense than herself; [...]. She would be never led into temptation, nor left for it to find her out. She would be respectable and happy; [...]. (438)

Robert Martin will be a good influence on her, and in time she will become less silly and more sensible. Robert Martin possesses a good deal of sense and can decide matters for himself, but knows when he needs advice:

"He [says Mr. Knightley] came to ask me whether I thought it would be imprudent in him to settle so early; whether I thought her too young: in short, whether I approved his choice altogether; [...]. I was very much pleased with all that he said. I never hear better sense from any one than Robert Martin. He always speaks to the purpose; [...]. He told me every thing; his circumstances and plans, and what they all proposed doing in the event of his marriage. [...]. I had no hesitation in advising him to marry. He proved
Robert Martin speaks in simple and realistic terms when he asks Mr. Knightley for advice: he tells him about his plans and finances. A sensible man knows when he needs advice and that asking for advice is not in any way shameful.

Unlike Robert Martin, Mr. Weston did not choose his wife carefully enough the first time. In his first marriage, Mr. Weston married a woman who was unsuitable for him, and because of this it "did not produce much happiness" (12). But he chooses much better the second time and marries a woman who can ensure his domestic happiness. Even though Mr. and Mrs. Weston are alike in many ways, Austen does make the point of mentioning their subtle differences. Mr. Weston has a tendency to be too optimistic, good-natured, and good-humored:

'[...] Mr. Weston [says John Knightley] is rather an easy, cheerful tempered man, than a man of strong feelings; he takes things as he finds them, and makes enjoyment of them somehow or other, [...]'. (88)

Because of his easy and cheerful nature and his ability to see the good in everything, he hardly ever finds fault with anyone. In "Civilization and the Contentment of Emma" Julia Prewitt Brown states that Mr. Weston can be compared to a "great indiscriminate [town]" (88). But though Mrs. Weston also has a warm and easy temper, she has a touch of
pessimism especially where Frank Churchill is concerned:

These feelings rapidly restored his comfort, while Mrs. Weston, of a more apprehensive disposition, foresaw nothing but a repetition of excuses and delays; and after all her concern for what her husband was to suffer, suffered a great deal more herself. (130)

She understands the situation better than her husband because, as Mr. Knightley tells Emma, she possesses "'good sense and quick feelings'"(134). But even though Mr. Weston does not see what she sees, she truly loves, admires, and respects him. Their differences do not hinder the marriage at all because at their core they are more alike than not.

Unlike the Westons, John Knightley and his wife have very different temperaments, but like the Westons they are truly happy with each other. Austen describes Mrs. John Knightley as being a woman who does not possess a "strong understanding or any quickness" and who much resembles her father Mr. Woodhouse(84). John Knightley, on the other hand, is clever, but reserved and "capable of being sometimes out of humour"(84):

He was not an ill-tempered man, [...]; but his temper was not his great perfection; and, indeed, with such a worshipping wife, it was hardly possible that any natural defects in it should not be increased. The extreme sweetness of her temper must hurt his. He had all the clearness and quickness of mind which she wanted, and he could sometimes act an ungracious, or say a severe thing. [...]. Mr. Woodhouse's peculiarities and fidgetiness were sometimes provoking him to a rational remonstrance or sharp retort equally ill bestowed. It did not often happen; for [he] had
really a great regard for his father-in-law, [...]. (84-5)

This description suggests that John Knightley does not really mean to make sharp remarks to his family, but sometimes he just cannot help himself due to his temper and lack of patience. His greatest displeasure comes from people who make irrational or nonsensical remarks:

'My dear Isabella,'--exclaimed [John Knightley] hastily--'pray do not concern yourself about my looks. Be satisfied with doctoring and coddling yourself and the children, and let me look as I chuse.' (94)

'Then, my dear Isabella, it is the most extraordinary sort of thing in the world, for in general every thing does give you cold. Walk home!--you are prettily shod for walking home, I dare say. It will be bad enough for the horses.' (115)

Even though these remarks are quite harsh, it does not in any way lessen his love for his wife or his joy in his marriage. Christopher Brooke in Jane Austen: Illusion and Reality also agrees that they are "a couple utterly devoted to one another"(170). Their home, as Mr. Knightley points out, is a perfect picture of complete "domestic happiness"(392). And John Knightley also sometimes uses the endearment "'my love'"(86) towards his wife.

Not all differences are bad or lead to troubled marriages. In the marriages of Robert Martin, Mr. Weston, and John Knightley, different personalities actually make
the marriages more interesting. Only in the case of Mr. Elton does marrying have a truly bad influence on a husband and tend to bring out only his worst qualities.
Conclusion

The minor characters of *Sense and Sensibility* show us that a person needs to be very careful in choosing a wife or a husband. No one wants their married life to mirror the Middletons or the Palmers. Both of these marriages are absolutely horrendous, even if they are stable. They have nothing in common, and in the case of Mr. Palmer, he has lost all respect for his wife and treats her like a child. Mr. John Dashwood’s marriage is not much better because his wife has turned him into a stingy person. If he had married a more good-natured woman, he would be much better off. Edward Ferrars’s marriage to Elinor Dashwood is by far the happiest, even though he had to suffer to be with her.

*Northanger Abbey* teaches us about the deceptive ways of some people and how some people are not what they seem. John Thorpe and Captain Tilney have ulterior motives for their actions. John Thorpe’s motive for pursuing Catherine Morland is money and social status. Captain Tilney’s motive for pursuing Isabella Thorpe is mischief and conquest. James Morland realizes too late Isabella’s true character and has his heart broken because of his naivete about the game of courtship.

*Pride and Prejudice* shows us Austen’s ideal marriage.
Most people would want their marriage to mirror the Gardiners. The Gardiners do everything together; they are completely devoted to each other. Compared to the Gardiners, the Bennets and the Collins' are very unappealing. The Bennets' relationship has lost all its affection and respect. Mr. Bennet only finds joy in it now by tormenting his wife. And the Collins' marriage—if one can even call it a marriage—is much worse because the marriage is a marriage of convenience.

*Emma* teaches us that sometimes possessing differences in personalities and temperaments does not necessarily hurt a marriage. Differences bring variety into a marriage as in the case of the Westons, the Martins, and the John Knightleys. Mr. Weston is very optimistic, while his wife is a bit pessimistic. Robert Martin possesses sense, while Harriet Smith is a trifle silly. John Knightley is clever and quick-witted, while his wife is prone to making irrational and nonsensical remarks. But the reason why their marriages survive despite their differences is because of respect.
Works Cited


