

Marital Love in Jane Austen: A Peircean Analysis of  
*Lady Susan and Pride and Prejudice*

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## ABSTRACT

One way to view Jane Austen's novels is as an exploration of her ideals for love and marriage, at least her conception of their possibilities within the culture of which she was a part. Because her stories generally present a series of married or courting character couples, they lend themselves well to analysis as a set of different but related representations of marriage. This dissertation uses the semiotic categories of Charles S. Peirce to analyze the representations of marriage in two of Austen's novels: *Lady Susan*, as an example of her early, experimental work; and *Pride and Prejudice*, as an example of her mature work. It tracks the increasing balance in her usage of the various representational modes outlined by Peirce in his semiotic categories, treating the various character couples in the stories as different signifier types, such as the Iconic, Indexical, and Symbolic types, as well as the predicted subtypes formed from mixing these three primary sign types. It also uses Peirce's universal categories, which are the underlying primitives from which his sign categories are derived, to analyze the completeness of Austen's conception of marital love, dividing the latter into such fundamental areas as love feeling, love interaction, and marital law, and into predicted subareas such as compatibility, virtue, and duty. The analysis yields new insights that are relevant to ongoing critical discussions of the tensions between the natural and the codified aspects of marriage, between the free and the constrained elements of the relationship, and between the ideal union and the pragmatic one. The results also suggest that Austen's conception of marital love was surprisingly complete even in her late juvenile years, but that subsequently her novelistic art progressed significantly in semiotic integrity as she found and settled into the style of her mature novels.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

Jane Austen's works are abbreviated in this thesis as follows:

<i>NA</i>	<i>Northanger Abbey</i>
<i>SS</i>	<i>Sense and Sensibility</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>Pride and Prejudice</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Mansfield Park</i>
<i>E</i>	<i>Emma</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>Persuasion</i>
<i>LM</i>	<i>Later Manuscripts</i>
<i>Letters</i>	<i>Jane Austen's Letters</i>

All novel references are to the Cambridge editions (2005 – 2008); references to the letters use Deirdre Le Faye's compilation (Oxford, 2011).

Charles Sanders Peirce's work is abbreviated in this thesis as follows:

<i>CP</i>	<i>Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce</i>
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Citations include the abbreviated title, volume number, and paragraph numbers from the Harvard University Press 1960 edition; for example, *CP*, II, 244-5





# INTRODUCTION

Her novels are centrally concerned with courtship, and their culmination is marriage . . . . [H]er subject was love, and she knew her subject.

Juliet McMaster<sup>1</sup>

## AUSTEN'S MARRIAGE THEME

Most readers would agree that love and marriage are major themes of Jane Austen's novels. One could make an argument, in fact, that one of her purposes in writing her novels, besides bringing the enjoyment of a good love story to her readers, was to explore her own idea of what an ideal marriage might be, at least within the realm of the apparent possibilities offered by her culture. Such a quest is perhaps universal—to consider what possible arrangement of one's circumstances might afford the greatest personal happiness.<sup>2</sup> And although marriage practices, ideas, and values have certainly changed over time and will vary from person to person and place to place, marriage as a general practice has played a significant role in society for thousands of years, and so its contribution to the happiness or misery of individuals, and its relation to societal structure and stability, rightly occupy some interest. Even today, when the viability of marriage as an institution is increasingly challenged, Austen's marriage stories continue to enjoy considerable popularity.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Jane Austen on Love* (British Columbia: University of Victoria, 1978), p.7.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hinnant observes that all of Austen's full novels 'are concerned with the quest for an ideal love-match'; see 'Jane Austen's "Wild Imagination": Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels', *Narrative*, 14.3 (2006), 294-310 (298). And Claudia Johnson asserts, 'In all of Austen's novels... pursuing happiness is the business of life'; see *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.80.

<sup>3</sup> Ashley Tauchert, after citing statistical data on Austen's continuing popularity among readers, comments, 'We still seem to read Austen for pleasure, while we continue to read her peers and

Novels that appeal to readers for centuries do more than just address what might be seen as timeless themes, important as that may be.<sup>4</sup> Indeed we might ask ourselves why the novels of Maria Edgeworth, for example, which were written in the same time period and also touch on the marriage theme, have not enjoyed as much popularity over the years as Austen's.<sup>5</sup> Such questions can be studied from a number of different angles, and literary scholars have taken a variety of approaches to studying Austen, most of them concerned with cultural, historical, and political contexts. With the growth in recent decades of linguistic and textual studies, literary questions have increasingly been investigated with empirical methods as well. One hybrid approach that has gained some traction is the semiotic study. This approach essentially views literature, or written texts, as a communications medium between writers, readers, and the larger community of both. Since written texts are made up of linguistic signs (words in a language), they can be studied in terms of semiotic theory—that is, in terms of how signs operate in human communications.

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predecessors because they are on the syllabus'; see *Romancing Jane Austen: Narrative, Realism, and the Possibility of a Happy Ending* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hants: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.21.

<sup>4</sup> Many critics argue that the marriage story is not so timeless, but rather is something of an invention of the Enlightenment. Roland Barthes' *A Lover's Discourse*, for example, might broadly be considered a reflection of this view; see *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978). Nonetheless, I can relate with Laura Mooneyham White's quip: 'One might puzzle—briefly—why the marriage plot becomes stale only in the many thousandth year of its existence while it only takes three or four novels about people and porpoises conjoining before the impulse arises to say "stop"'; see 'Jane Austen and the Marriage Plot: Questions of Persistence', *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. by Devoney Looser (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1995), pp.71-86 (p.74).

<sup>5</sup> Audrey Bilger comments that although Edgeworth and Austen 'each found acclaim as a leading novelist of her day', the two 'met with vastly different fates in the late nineteenth century and beyond', with 'Edgeworth being situated far below Austen in literary prominence'; see *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), p.9.

Such an approach does not always appeal to literary scholars, because it may seem to divert our focus from the ideas and values of a literary work to the mechanisms used to convey those ideas and values. What insights, one might ask, can a semiotic study offer into Jane Austen's style, her social context, or her ideas about marriage? Though sign theory might explain how communications work in general, what can it tell us about the literary communications of Jane Austen in particular (as compared to those of other writers), or even more particularly about her thoughts on love and marriage? These are points on which literary scholars might justifiably want satisfaction before seriously considering a semiotic study of Austen. Indeed, in 2001 upon reflecting on the progress of semiotic studies of literature over the previous two decades, Jonathan Culler admits:

Semiotics... ran up against a deep assumption about the goals of literary and cultural study. In general, when people study literary and cultural objects, they want to know what they mean and thus the test of any new approach becomes whether or not it helps one produce interpretations which are both plausible and new. Since semiotics explicitly claimed that it sought not to generate new interpretations but to understand what made previous interpretations possible, it could seem at best a rebarbative belaboring of the obvious, an attempt to make explicit what we at some level already know, and at worst an irrelevance.<sup>6</sup>

As Culler notes, semiotics generally seeks to understand not the meaning of a literary text but the process by which readers derive that meaning from the words on the page and from related contextual information—a goal that arguably is only secondary to that of literary studies. This is not to say, of course, that semiotics can contribute little of value, but rather that it may have some inherent limitations when it comes to evaluating the actual *content* of literary messages, if indeed we may argue that the primary purpose of fiction is to convey messages at all.

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981; repr. 2002), p.x of new preface.

Semiotic theory today is largely based on the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce,<sup>7</sup> although its application to literary studies has been filtered through the lens of other influential figures such as Roman Jakobson, Umberto Eco, Terence Hawkes, and Jonathan Culler. In general, Saussure's theory has been more influential in Europe and Peirce's in America; there are exceptions to this, but as a broad generalization these are the two leading semiotic systems upon which literary studies ultimately are based.<sup>8</sup> As Culler has noted, Saussure was a linguist and Peirce a philosopher, a difference in background that is significant. Saussurean semiology confines itself strictly to the study of *linguistic* signs (words, phrases, sentences, and so forth), whereas Peircean semiotics addresses both linguistic and nonlinguistic signs.<sup>9</sup> His semiotic theory is in fact just one application of his much broader

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<sup>7</sup> In his introduction to *The Pursuit of Signs*, Culler states: 'Now that people are attempting to [create a new discipline] and have given the name of *semiotics* or *semiology* to the pursuit, one effect is to cast into prominence, as predecessors to be honored, two men who in the early years of the century envisaged a comprehensive science of signs: the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure' (p.22).

<sup>8</sup> Floyd Merrell gives an insightful chronicle of these intellectual developments in 'Semiotics and Literary Studies', *The Digital Encyclopedia of Charles S. Peirce* (FAPESP, ca. 2000), <<http://www.digitalpeirce.fee.unicamp.br/home.htm>>, accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Merrell characterizes early semiotic studies of literature, 'inspired by Saussure', as dealing with formal 'structure' only, whereas Peirce's theory includes 'formal as well as experiential categories, which renders it more comprehensive' (*Ibid.*, par.37). Likewise, Umberto Eco characterizes the semiotic analyses of his day as dealing only with 'verbal languages, whereas Peirce was dealing with a general semiotics concerning all types of sign'; Eco mentions 'images and gestures' as examples of non-linguistic signs that would be covered by Peirce's theory but not by those of others; see *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, *Advances in Semiotics*, ed. by Thomas A. Sebeok (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979), p.178. Vincent B. Leicht notes that in the expanded semiotics of Peirce 'there are three types of signs' including the *icon*, *index*, and *symbol*, whereas 'Saussure focuses mostly on the... *symbol*'; see *Deconstructive Criticism: An Advanced Introduction* (London: Hutchinson, 1983), p.9.

philosophical theory of universal categories.<sup>10</sup> These factors may seem to point us towards Saussurean theory as being more suited to our purpose—we are, after all, talking about studying the *words* that Jane Austen wrote on paper. Nonetheless, as has been noted, semiotics only examines *how* words (working together with other contextual information) produce meaning, and really says very little about the meaning itself. For a more fruitful study of a text, ideally we should use a theory that addresses the nature of both the semiotic mechanism *and* the ideas expressed thereby, which arguably would be a broader philosophical theory than just a linguistically based semiology.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, literary studies to date seem to have largely ignored the potential value of Peirce's universal categories for literary analysis, opting to draw exclusively from the semiotic portion of his theory. Even Umberto Eco, whose synthesis of Peirce's semiotics in *The Role of the Reader* comprehends their close connection with the universal categories, not only bypasses the latter but elects to exclude two of the three basic Peircean semiotic categories: 'I shall limit the subject of [my discussion] to Peircean proposals and examples concerning *verbal* language [symbols], even though this methodological decision obliges me to underestimate the important relationship between symbols, icons, and indices'.<sup>12</sup> If Peircean semiotics so narrowly applied has proven useful to critics like Eco, one wonders whether a broader application—one that employs all of the Peircean sign types as well as their philosophical underpinnings—would prove more fruitful in studying both the literary interpretative process *and* the meanings generated thereby.

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<sup>10</sup> *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, ed. by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, 8 vols (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959; repr. 1960), VIII, par.327-41. (Hereafter, references use the abbreviated form; e.g. *CP*, VIII, 327-41.)

<sup>11</sup> I do not claim that Saussurean approaches to literary studies have not or do not ultimately come around to the interpretation of meaning, but the question is how squarely they apply to such studies in comparison to Peircean theory.

<sup>12</sup> *The Role of the Reader*, p.178.

My purpose in this thesis is not to claim that such a Peircean analysis of Austen's novels will reveal the principal reasons why they have been more popular than comparable novels by other authors, nor is it to persuade critics of literature that Austen's ideas about love and marriage are best understood through that means alone. Rather, it is to see whether a broader Peircean analysis—one that studies Austen's ideas about marriage in light of the universal categories on the one hand, and her use of language and literary devices in light of Peircean semiotics on the other—can sharpen, refine, augment, or correlate in new ways with the culturally, historically, and politically based research of others on Austen's marriage theme. In the rest of this introduction, I lay out the fundamental reasons why I think such an approach is suited to studying this subject. Then, in the body chapters of the thesis, I examine the representations of love and marriage in two of Austen's novels specifically: *Lady Susan* (1794-5),<sup>13</sup> and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813).<sup>14</sup> In each case, I analyze Austen's representations using Peircean categories (both universal and semiotic), and consider how the analysis adds to and correlates with other relevant criticism. In the conclusion, I make a few observations that can only be drawn out

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<sup>13</sup> According to Austen family accounts, she wrote this short novel between 1794 and 1795; the actual publication occurred posthumously in 1871. A few critics, including R. W. Chapman, Jan Fergus, and Marilyn Butler, have argued for possible later dates of writing, but the 1794-5 date remains the most widely accepted one among critics and historians. As Janet Todd and Linda Bree quite reasonably suggest, the actual evidence in favor of later dates of writing is perhaps too scant to place in doubt the family record; see 'Introduction', in *Later Manuscripts*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp.xxxi-cxxix (xlvii-lviii).

<sup>14</sup> I have chosen these two novels because they are, arguably, representative of her juvenile and mature writing periods, respectively. The idea is that changes in her thinking and writing over these two periods might become evident, while trends and commonalities that span the two periods might be considered more permanent traits of her work—the so-called 'auteur' traits by Arthur Asa Berger; see *Cultural Criticism: A Primer of Key Concepts*, Foundations of Popular Culture, 4, ed. by Garth S. Jowett (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1995), p.93.

after considering both novels from the Peircean perspective, with an eye towards suggesting possible further inquiry in the field.

### WHY PEIRCEAN ANALYSIS?

As noted, Saussurean sign theory confines itself primarily to the study of linguistic units—words, phrases, sentences, and so forth—while Peircean sign theory addresses both linguistic and nonlinguistic, or ‘natural’, signs. In Peirce’s famous trichotomy of the kinds of sign (Icon, Index, and Symbol), the first two sign types (icons and indices) operate ‘naturally’ and only the third type (symbols) is wholly *learned* as a linguistic system.<sup>15</sup> As a rough example of what I mean, consider a man in a foreign airport. He can find the restroom by seeing an icon of a male on the restroom door. If he sees a sign with both male and female icons and an arrow pointing down the hall (this is an index), he gets the idea to go down the hall in search of the restrooms. He does not, however, understand the various other written signs he sees about the airport because he has not learned the particular system of written symbols used in those communications.<sup>16</sup> While both Saussurean and Peircean theories describe how written and spoken linguistic symbols work, only Peircean theory includes an account of how the more ‘natural’ (iconic and indexical) signs work as well, and how these three different sign types are interrelated.

The broader scope of Peirce’s semiotic theory gives it some advantages over Saussure’s theory when it comes to literary studies. Saussure allows us to analyze only the words and sentences—the text—of a literary work, while Peirce allows us to additionally study the *imagery* produced by that text in our minds, inasmuch as that

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<sup>15</sup> CP, II, 34.

<sup>16</sup> This is not to say, of course, that icons and indices require no acculturation to understand, for as Stanley Fish argues, all signs are produced within, and shaped by, a shared cultural context; see Stanley E. Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp.322-37. Rather, Peirce’s claim is that icons and indices rely *relatively* less on a schooled response and *relatively* more on our inbuilt sensory faculties than do symbols. This is what I mean by ‘natural’.

imagery may have its own natural iconic and indexical properties. To relate this to Jane Austen's work, we may (for example) consider the common observation of critics that she has a distinctive ability to create natural-seeming, well-rounded characters.<sup>17</sup> Harry Shaw, noting the apparent 'totalizing' effect of Austen's prose, comments that her 'language provides, or seems to provide, a complete, systematic mechanism whereby the reality she presents can and must be processed'.<sup>18</sup> Her marriage stories generally develop a few married couples or potential couples who exhibit in varying degrees the traits, one could argue, that she sees as desirable and undesirable in a wedded pair. She achieves 'meticulous realism'<sup>19</sup> in her characters largely through multivalent comparison and contrast among the several characters in her story.<sup>20</sup> These character couples lend themselves well to analysis as images of

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<sup>17</sup> To cite just a few examples of this observation, an anonymous 1813 reviewer of *Pride and Prejudice* remarks that there is not 'one character which appears flat'; see 'Review of *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), I, 271-74 (p.274). E.M. Forster calls all of Austen's characters 'round, or capable of rotundity'; see *Aspects of the Novel*, cited in Joseph Cady and Ian Watt, 'Jane Austen's Critics', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 231-45 (p.239). Karen Newman speaks of the 'characteristic Austenian balance'; see 'Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 382-97 (p.391). Vivasvan Soni says Austen's characters have 'realistic... roundedness and three-dimensionality'; see 'Committing Freedom: The Cultivation of Judgment in Rousseau's *Emile* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*', *The Eighteenth Century*, 51, no. 3 (Fall 2010), 363-87 (p.379).

<sup>18</sup> Harry E. Shaw, *Narrating Reality: Austen, Scott, Elliot* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p.144.

<sup>19</sup> Ashley Tauchert, *Romancing Jane Austen*, p.x. 'Realism', as Tauchert and other critics use the term, encompasses more than just the mirroring of reality, as discussed further hereafter.

<sup>20</sup> Gilbert Ryle dubs Austen's unique style the 'vintner' technique of characterization. He says she matches a given character trait against 'the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, against deficiencies of it, and against qualities which, though different, are brothers or cousins to that selected quality'. Thus, 'to discriminate the individual taste of any one character is to



marriage—semiotic images. Because Peircean semiotic theory defines a set of several interrelated sign categories (three primary types and several specific subtypes), it lends itself especially well to comparative analysis of sets of related things like Austen's marriage couples. Saussurean theory, on the other hand, makes only binary distinctions like Sign versus Signified, and Langue versus Parole, and so may be less amenable to an analysis of the comparative-style marriage story that is Austen's signature work.

Another common observation about Austen is her tendency to create heroines and heroes who are amply endowed with rationality and morality but not so much with physical passion, at least not overtly.<sup>21</sup> This observation, made both by literary critics and fellow novelists, might lead us to expect the marriage couples in Austen's novels to be characterized as much by the *thoughts and ideas* attributed to them as by their overt words and deeds.<sup>22</sup> The analysis of such character images, abstract and conceptual as they may tend to be, could perhaps be better facilitated by a semiotic theory that is based on 'simple concepts applicable to every subject' (as

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discriminate by comparison the individual taste of every other character'; see 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, II, 90-103 (p.92).

<sup>21</sup> A good sampling of such observations by critics is given by Joseph Cady and Ian Watt in 'Jane Austen's Critics', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 231-45 (pp.234-43). Additionally and interestingly, in reviewing the variety of opinions held by critics during the 1970s and 80s with regard to Austen's political leanings, Janet Todd concludes that the only real point of agreement among the critics is that Austen was opposed to *sentimentality* in all its forms; see 'Jane Austen, Politics and Sensibility', in *Feminist Criticism: Theory and Practice*, ed. by Susan Sellers (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp.71-87. This view is not universally shared, however. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson, for example, presents a lengthy study of what she calls Austen's '[s]picy allusions' to 'the sensual world of things, of stuff, of commodities', of 'sex'; see *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp.1-2.

<sup>22</sup> Shaw indirectly suggests the importance of thoughts in a realist narrative when he cites Georg Lukacs' argument that a narrative risks 'becoming enmeshed in a trivial immediacy of meaningless details' if it does not grasp 'the underlying patterns and dynamics that in fact inform and render intelligible the movement' of those events (*Narrating Reality*, p.12).

Peirce describes his universal categories<sup>23</sup>) than by a strictly linguistic semiotic theory like Saussure's.<sup>24</sup> If Peirce's sign categories really are, as he suggests, based on universal concepts, then any image that we hold in our minds of a character couple, whether it be a wispy image, a concrete image, or even a sort of abstract ideological image,<sup>25</sup> ought to have some basic affinity to one or the other of Peirce's sign categories. Indeed, Peirce describes his three main semiotic categories as signs of Quality, Fact, and Law, respectively, where Quality, Fact, and Law correspond to his universal categories.<sup>26</sup> It is not a stretch to see how a *wispy image* might be a sign of Quality, how a *concrete image* could be a sign of Fact, and how an *ideological image* may be a sign of Law, although some further explanation of what Peirce really means by these three terms would be needed to make such a classification more confidently.<sup>27</sup>

As I will endeavor to show in this thesis, not only may we use Peirce's sign categories to compare and contrast different kinds of mental images generally, we may just as readily use his universal categories to compare and contrast the specific *subjects* of those mental images. For example, if the subjects are particular fictional couples in an Austen novel, we may see in those subjects different degrees of

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<sup>23</sup> CP, I, 1.

<sup>24</sup> The kind of semiotic theory that is generally in fashion among today's literary critics holds that linguistic objects are wholly relative and internally constructed and thus more Saussurean than Peircean in nature. Robert Scholes, however, takes a more pragmatic view akin to that of Peirce: 'Many semioticians would argue that the meaning of any sign or word is purely a function of its place in a paradigmatic system and its use in a syntagmatic situation. But I wish to suggest that meaning is also a function of human experience'; see *Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), p.35.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Tye observes that mental images seem to have both pictorial and logical properties; see Michael Tye, *The Imagery Debate*, Representation and Mind, ed. By Hilary Putnam and Ned Block (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), p.102. This idea is developed further below.

<sup>26</sup> CP, II, 244-46.

<sup>27</sup> Such further explanation is forthcoming in this chapter.

romantic attraction, social compatibility, parental consent or opposition to the union, legitimacy or illegitimacy of the relationship, economic equality or inequality of the match, and so forth—to name just a few of the aspects commonly studied by Austen critics. With regard to these aspects of marriage in Austen’s time, one might argue that, relatively speaking, *romantic attraction* has more to do with the Quality of a couple’s natural feelings for one another than with particular external Facts of their lives or general Laws of society. On the other hand, *social compatibility* may have more to do with the couple’s actual interactions with one another in the quotidian world of Fact, and with the Quality of their personalities, than with prescriptive Laws of society—again, speaking only in a relative sense. Likewise, *parental consent or opposition to the union* has to do with real Facts occurring in the couple’s lives—namely, interactions with their parents—but in this case the interactions involve one authoritative party (the parents) and one subordinate party (the couple), bringing an element of societal Law into the phenomenon. The *legitimacy or illegitimacy of the relationship* is almost purely an issue of Law and has little to do with the Quality of the couple’s romantic feelings or their actions in the world of Fact, unless it is the legal act of their wedding itself. The *economic equality or inequality of the match* is likewise an affair of societal rules or Law, although compared to *legitimacy or illegitimacy* it is a less general law, turning as it does on particular Facts of the individuals’ property possessions and inheritances. Such general observations, though perhaps preliminary and subjective, illustrate how we may relate the Peircean categories of Quality, Fact, and Law to even the most fundamental elements of a literary theme like marriage, quite apart from strictly ‘linguistic’ features of a text that fictionalizes marriages of the period.

An example of a Peircean semiotic study that takes such an approach is Jessica Young’s study of narrative plot structure.<sup>28</sup> Young analyzes the plots of over thirty

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<sup>28</sup> Jessica Young, *Narrative Zoology: Peircean Structure of Grammatical Plot*, Master’s thesis for the Department of Linguistics (Provo: Brigham Young University, 2003).

stories (taken from novels, movies, and comic strips), breaking each story into the traditional plot elements of Setting, Conflict, and Resolve. She relates these three plot elements broadly to Peircean signs of Quality, Fact, and Law, respectively. Using Peirce's rules for how these sign categories interrelate and subdivide, she classifies each story into a third-order Peircean paradigm (a set of ten interrelated categories). She asserts that the resulting classification accurately predicts and explains 'why certain narratives do incredibly well, while seemingly similar narratives fail miserably' with readers. She concludes that 'well-formed stories' according to Peircean rules, like grammatical language constructs, endure and are 'remembered, retold, and imitated', while the reader's 'attention is only alerted to structure when that structure is *bad*'—that is, when it violates Peircean rules, which Young suggests underlie our sense of good narrative structure.<sup>29</sup>

Certainly Austen's marriage tales are examples of stories that have been remembered, retold, and imitated over the years. If Peircean theory has been used insightfully to analyze narrative plot structure, might we not attempt to use it to analyze our mental images of character couples in Austen's work? The broadness of the Peircean categories provides us with the potential to analyze our mental images both in terms of their general nature as images and in terms of their nature as attached to the specific character couples in the novels. Saussurean theory, meanwhile, does not claim a basis in, or a connection with, such broad ideas and thus may be less amenable to the study of particular thematic content such as love and marriage in Austen's fiction.

Countering a Peircean position, much literary and cultural analysis, informed by what might be broadly characterized as postmodern thinking, is not particularly friendly to ideas that are proposed as universals, the view being that truth and

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<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, pp.35,209.

reality are culturally constructed rather than being effective of the external world.<sup>30</sup> As a pragmatist and a believer in the external world, Peirce was happily aware of the provisional nature of his proposals and expected them, as with all 'scientific' efforts, to be revised and refined over time.<sup>31</sup> His universal categories represent those elements that he found to be manifest in the greatest number of phenomena. Nonetheless, he did not make a study of Jane Austen's fiction (at least not that he wrote about), and so the use of his categories to analyze her work represents potentially another test of the 'universality' of those categories. With these factors in mind, I have chosen in this thesis to use Peircean theory as a tool to augment and correlate with existing culturally- and historically-based research in the field rather than to make independent claims.

Besides objecting to the idea of universals, postmodern and many other critics may also object to the notion of studying the mental imagery evoked by a text, since the text necessarily evokes *different* imagery in every reader's mind and therefore we can never objectively analyze *the* imagery in question. This is a given. In the analyses that follow, I endeavor to focus on those aspects and elements of Austen's character imagery that I believe most readers will 'see'. Like many linguists, I am persuaded that there is as much *in common* to how we as humans perceive things as there is *difference*—otherwise how do we manage, with all our diversity, to use linguistic signs to communicate with one another at all? Fish draws on linguistic research by Jerrold Katz, Jerry Fodor, Ronald Wardhaugh, and William Empson to argue that mature speakers of a language share a similar 'semantic competence' that enables communication to work.<sup>32</sup> The differences in how we perceive things are well worth studying; for researchers who are so focused, I note here that Peirce describes the process of sign interpretation as having three parts: (1) the Immediate

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<sup>30</sup> A classic expression of this attitude by Jean-Francois Lyotard is found in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.xxiv.

<sup>31</sup> *CP*, I, 141.

<sup>32</sup> *Is There a Text?*, pp.44-6.

interpretation, which is the core meaning habitually associated with a sign, irrespective of context; (2) the Dynamic interpretation, which is the actual meaning taken by an individual in a particular context (and which may vary from individual to individual and context to context); and (3) the Normal interpretation, which is the set of interpretive rules associated with a sign that constrains different individuals to arrive at similar interpretations in similar contexts.<sup>33</sup> The emphasis by postmodern and other critics on the *dynamic* nature of literary interpretation<sup>34</sup> (corresponding to Peirce's category of Dynamic interpretation) is perhaps a warranted reaction against a previous overemphasis by formalists and early structuralists (like Saussure) on idealized and rule-based interpretations of literary signs (corresponding to Peirce's categories of Immediate and Normal interpretation, respectively). It is possibly Peirce's recognition of the Dynamic component of interpretation, with its emphasis on the criteria of reader and context,<sup>35</sup> that has kept his semiotic theory viable in the postmodern literary climate, whereas more formal semiotic approaches like Saussure's have suffered somewhat in recent years.<sup>36</sup>

### THE UNIVERSAL CATEGORIES

To use the Peircean categories for literary analysis, one needs at least a basic understanding of them. Peirce introduces his universal categories as follows:

My view is that there are three modes of being. I hold that we can directly observe them in elements of whatever is at any time before the mind in any way. They are the being of positive qualitative

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<sup>33</sup> *CP*, VIII, 176.

<sup>34</sup> Eco, for example, emphasizes the creative, iterative, and ever-changing nature of how we create and interpret signs (*The Role of the Reader*, pp.180-98).

<sup>35</sup> Aligning closely with Fish's notion of 'reader response' (*Is There a Text?*, pp.22-32).

<sup>36</sup> So argues Floyd Merrell in his conclusion to 'Semiotics and Literary Studies' (par.43).

possibility, the being of actual fact, and the being of law that will govern facts in the future.<sup>37</sup>

Peirce gives these three 'modes of being' the formal names of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, respectively,<sup>38</sup> so that we have as basic definitions of the universal categories the following:

- (1) Firstness – a positive qualitative possibility,
- (2) Secondness – an actual fact, and
- (3) Thirdness – a law that will govern facts in the future.

What Peirce is saying, in essence, is that no matter what phenomenon we are considering, we will always find these three fundamental elements of the phenomenon to exist. For example, if we consider the phenomenon of a traffic light turning red, we have:

- (1) The color *red*, which is a certain raw perceptual quality that has the possibility of showing up in any number of real-life objects (whether in a traffic light or in a vial of blood), but which is essentially the same quality in all cases. In the traffic light phenomenon, the color red is a Firstness.
- (2) The *event* of the traffic light turning red, which is an actual fact of occurrence in the real world, distinct from all other such facts. Similar events may occur at different times and in different places, but they are not the same fact. In the traffic light phenomenon, the event of the light turning red is a Secondness.
- (3) The *rule* that says we stop our cars when a traffic light is red, which is a general law governing real-world traffic facts, but which itself exists only in

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<sup>37</sup> *CP*, I, 23. Peirce says he formulated these categories through a long process of personal observation of phenomena in many different fields—a study which he calls Phenomenology or Phaneroscopy (*CP*, I, 284-85)—and that they crystallized in his mind during a subsequent period of intense reflection on the categories of Kant (*CP*, I, 300).

<sup>38</sup> *CP*, I, 25.

the minds of those who know the law. This rule is the Thirdness in the phenomenon.

Peirce calls these three elements different 'modes of being' because they all exist but in different ways. The color red exists as a discernible point within the manifold spectrum of the *qualities* or *feelings* that make up our perceptual senses. An event like a traffic light turning red, on the other hand, exists in the external world of *fact*. And the law about the meaning of traffic lights exists in the realm of knowledge and the *mind*. We are conscious of realities in all three of these realms.

We can also think of these three different kinds of realities as different 'forms of consciousness', as Peirce later describes them:

There are no other forms of consciousness except the three that have been mentioned, Feeling, Altersense, and Medisense. They form a sort of system. Feeling is the momentarily present content of consciousness taken in its pristine simplicity, and might be called *primisense*. *Altersense* is the consciousness of a directly present other or second, withstanding us. *Medisense* is the consciousness of a thirdness, or medium between primisense and altersense.... Feeling, or *primisense*, is the consciousness of firstness; altersense is consciousness of otherness or secondness; medisense is the consciousness of means or thirdness.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, when we are stopped at an intersection watching a red light, we are initially conscious only of a steady perceptual quality that we call 'redness'. But when the light turns green, we become conscious of *another* color interrupting that field of consciousness. In addition, we are conscious that this occurrence is the *means* our society has adopted to signal that it is safe to enter the intersection, so we proceed into the intersection. All three elements of the phenomenon exist: consciousness of a perceptual quality, consciousness of something *other* than that quality, and consciousness of the *means* that this second thing represents to us.

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<sup>39</sup> *CP*, VII, 531.



In the preceding descriptions, you may note my (and Peirce's) tendency to define one universal category in terms of the others. This stems from the fact that we cannot really conceive of a Second thing without there being a First thing, and we cannot really conceive of a Third thing without there being a First and a Second. We can, however, conceive of a First thing (such as a red light) without there being a Second thing (a change in that light); and we can conceive of a Second thing (say, the flicker of a firefly) without there being a Third thing (say, a rule attaching significance to such flickers). The important point is that the Peircean categories are not just three independent classes; rather, they are a system of *interrelated* categories with definite containment rules.<sup>40</sup>

The fact that Secondness includes a Firstness subcomponent leads to an important corollary principle, stated thus by Peirce:

Secondness is of two grades, 1st, the normal and genuine and external secondness, where one thing really acts upon another, which I call external secondness; and a degenerate secondness... where there is no pairing in the fact itself, but only in thought.<sup>41</sup>

For example, if I get in a car accident running a red light, this is a genuine external Secondness, but if I read about such an accident in a story, the experience plays out only in my imagination and so is a degenerate Secondness. Because the degenerate experience may be *like* some actual experience with which I'm genuinely familiar (that is, the two experiences may share certain qualities or feelings in common, and the qualities of those two experiences may momentarily become *one* in my mind), it

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<sup>40</sup> Peirce formally states the containment rules as follows: 'The category of first can be prescinded from second and third, and second can be prescinded from third. But second cannot be prescinded from first, nor third from second' (*CP*, I, 353).

<sup>41</sup> *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, ed. by C. J. W. Kloesel, 6 vols (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), V, 307. Due to the poor availability of electronically searchable versions of the *Collected Papers*, I occasionally find it easier to locate passages in this newer (but as yet incomplete) compilation of Peirce's writings.

has a prominent Firstness aspect and is therefore termed a 'Firstness of Secondness' by Peirce and is commonly abbreviated by Peircean scholars as (12). In contexts where this degenerate form of Secondness is being discussed, we may term the genuine Secondness category 'Secondness of Secondness' and abbreviate it as (22).

In like manner, the Thirdness category also has degenerate forms, described thus by Peirce:

Taking any class in whose essential idea the predominant element is Thirdness, or Representation, the self-development of that essential idea... results in a *trichotomy* giving rise to three sub-classes, or genera, involving respectively a relatively genuine thirdness, a relatively reactional thirdness or thirdness of the lesser degree of degeneracy, and a relatively qualitative thirdness or thirdness of the last degeneracy.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, we not only have genuine Thirdness—a general law that governs real-world instances, such as *We stop at red traffic lights*, which Peirce also calls 'Thirdness of Thirdness' (33)—but we also have two degenerate kinds of Thirdness: one that has a prominent *reactional* aspect (Secondness), and another even more degenerate kind that has a prominent *qualitative* aspect (Firstness). Peirce calls these two degenerate categories 'Secondness of Thirdness' (23) and 'Firstness of Thirdness' (13), respectively. An example of the reactionally degenerate kind of Thirdness (23) might be a law triggered by an event, such as *John sues Mary for running a traffic light and crashing into him*. An example of the qualitatively degenerate kind of Thirdness (13) might be a quality acting as a simple rule, such as *Red implies urgency, like blood*.

With the addition of the preceding degenerate forms of Secondness and Thirdness, the number of Peircean categories has been expanded from three to six. By way of summary, this expanded set of (six) categories is as follows:

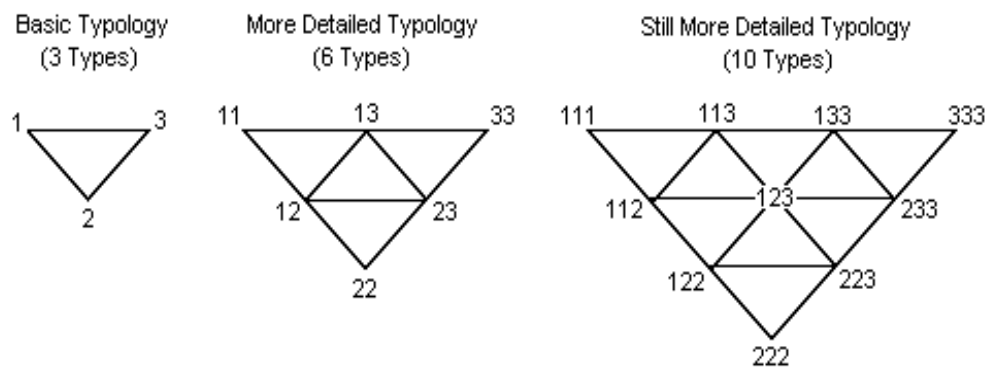
- (11) Firstness of Firstness – a positive qualitative possibility.

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<sup>42</sup> CP, V, 72.

- (12) Firstness of Secondness – a degenerate fact, occurring only in thought.
- (22) Secondness of Secondness – an actual fact, occurring in the real world.
- (13) Firstness of Thirdness – a degenerate law based on a quality.
- (23) Secondness of Thirdness – a degenerate law involving a reaction.
- (33) Thirdness of Thirdness – a law that governs facts generally.

In conjunction with this expanded set of categories, Peircean scholars typically depict sets of Peircean categories using triangles, like so:



As illustrated above, the Peircean categories can be expanded from a set of three to six, and from a set of six to ten, and so on to sets of infinitely more categories. With each expansion of the paradigm, the categories in the expanded set maintain their relationship with the original three categories, as denoted by the right-most digit in their identifying numbers. To understand the Peircean categories used in this thesis, we generally need only consider the second-order expansion—that is, the set of six categories depicted in the middle position above.

### THE SIGN CATEGORIES

With this basic understanding of the universal categories, we may proceed to consider how these categories apply to semiotic phenomena—that is, phenomena involving communication via signs. Regarding such phenomena in general, Peirce states:

A sign... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea... in... that sense in which we say that one man catches another man's idea....<sup>43</sup>

Thus, in every semiotic phenomenon, Peirce believes that three basic elements exist:

- (1) The Sign, or the article used to represent something;
- (2) The Object, which is the thing represented; and
- (3) The Interpretant, which is the basic *idea* of the thing, which the sign calls to mind.

For example, the word 'bird' is a Sign that represents an actual winged animal in the external world, its Object. The basic idea of a bird, called to the mind of someone hearing the utterance 'bird', is the Interpretant (or meaning) of the sign.

To signify a given object, such as a bird, to someone, we may use different kinds of signs. For example, besides speaking or writing the word 'bird' we may also use a simple picture of a bird, or point with our finger to an actual bird in the sky. In all three cases, we may bring to the mind of the person whom we are addressing the same basic idea of a bird, but we are using quite a different *kind* of sign in each case. Peirce suggests that we may distinguish between different kinds of signs in three important ways. For the purposes of this thesis, we will consider only the first two ways that he sets forth.<sup>44</sup>

The first way to differentiate signs is 'according as *the sign in itself* is a mere quality, is an actual existent, or is a general law'.<sup>45</sup> In other words, using this method

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<sup>43</sup> CP, II, 228.

<sup>44</sup> All three ways of differentiating signs are summarized in CP, II, 243. Use of the first two ways is sufficient to generate the six sign categories used in this thesis. Use of all three ways generates the previously mentioned ten sign categories used by Jessica Young in her thesis on plot structure.

<sup>45</sup> CP, II, 243, emphasis added.

we consider only the character of the sign itself—that is, we ignore what it represents and how it represents its object, and simply ask what kind of thing it is. We decide whether, *relative to the other signs under consideration*, it is (1) a mere quality, (2) an actual fact, or (3) a general law. For example, we might compare a simple picture of a bird, the act of pointing at a bird, and the written word ‘bird’ as follows:

- (1) A simple picture is the most qualitative of the three signs. It has a certain *aesthetic quality* as long as we view it. This is a ‘*primisense*’ or Firstness experience. Peirce calls this kind of sign a Qualisign.<sup>46</sup>
- (2) Pointing with a finger at a bird is the most like an actual fact of the three signs. It is an occurrence in the real world. Although the finger and its motion may have a certain shape, these qualities are subordinate to our overall sense of the sign being a *disruptive occurrence*, which is an ‘*altersense*’ experience. Relative to the other two signs, it is a Secondness type, or as Peirce calls it, a Sinsign.<sup>47</sup>
- (3) The word ‘bird’ is the most like a general law of the three signs. It is a visual figure or pattern that has a certain shape (quality), and its occurrence in a particular context may be considered one instance (or fact) of the sign, but these aspects of the sign are subordinate to our overall sense that it is a *rule-based pattern or type* created only as a convenience for communication; it is

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<sup>46</sup> Peirce defines it formally as follows: ‘A *Qualisign* is a quality which is a Sign. It cannot actually act as a sign until it is embodied; but the embodiment has nothing to do with its character as a sign’ (CP, II, 244).

<sup>47</sup> His formal definition is: ‘A *Sinsign* (where the syllable *sin* is taken as meaning “being only once,” as in *single*, *simple*, Latin *semel*, etc.) is an actual existent thing or event which is a sign. It can only be so through its qualities; so that it involves a qualisign, or rather, several qualisigns. But these qualisigns are of a peculiar kind and only form a sign through being actually embodied’ (CP, II, 245). As I noted, a pointing finger has various qualities of shape and motion, but it is their embodiment into a *disruptive event* that constitutes the sign.

not a naturally-occurring quality or object. Seeing such a sign is a ‘medisense’ experience. Relative to the other two signs, it is a Thirdness type, or as Peirce calls it, a Legisign.<sup>48</sup>

By so analyzing any group of signs, we may sort them into the broad categories of Qualisigns, Sinsigns, and Legisigns, which correlate with the universal categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, respectively.

As I noted before, however, Secondness tends to subdivide into two kinds: a genuine Secondness and a degenerate Secondness. Likewise, Thirdness tends to subdivide into three kinds: a genuine Thirdness and two degenerate kinds of Thirdness. This means that we should expect Sinsigns (as Secondness) to subdivide into two sign types, and Legisigns (as Thirdness) to subdivide into three sign types. To achieve these further levels of distinction, we must use Peirce’s second method of differentiating signs. This method differentiates the signs ‘according as the *relation of the sign to its object* consists in the sign’s having some character in itself, or in some existential relation to that object, or in its relation to an interpretant’.<sup>49</sup> In other words, if we consider how the sign relates to its object, we will see some fundamental differences, and these differences can be reduced to the following three general cases: (1) the sign has inherent qualities that relate it to the object, (2)

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<sup>48</sup> Peirce defines it this way: ‘A *Legisign* is a law that is a Sign. This law is usually established by men. Every conventional sign is a legisign [but not conversely]. It is not a single object, but a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. Every legisign signifies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a *Replica* of it. Thus, the word “the” will usually occur from fifteen to twenty-five times on a page. It is in all these occurrences one and the same word, the same legisign. Each single instance of it is a Replica. The Replica is a Sinsign. Thus, every Legisign requires Sinsigns. But these are not ordinary Sinsigns, such as are peculiar occurrences that are regarded as significant. Nor would the Replica be significant if it were not for the law which renders it so’ (*CP*, II, 246). As I noted, a particular instance of the word ‘bird’ is, technically, an actual thing in the real world, but we do not think of each instance of the word as a separate and distinct thing but rather as usages of the same general man-made pattern.

<sup>49</sup> *CP*, II, 243 (my emphasis).

the sign is actually connected with the object in the real world, or (3) the sign is associated with the object only by the mind of an interpreter. For example, we can use these criteria to analyze our same three bird signs as follows:

(1) A simple picture of a bird relates to a real bird by virtue of certain immediate visual qualities that are alike in the two. These qualities momentarily merge together in our minds, producing a 'primisense' experience. This is a Firstness type of relationship of sign to object. Peirce calls this kind of sign an Icon.<sup>50</sup>

(2) Pointing with a finger at a bird compels the observer's eye to that bird, so that an actual (visual) connection is made between the finger and the bird in the external world. Although the finger and the bird could be said to come *together* in the observer's field of vision, there is no qualitative likeness between the two, and so no 'primisense' experience occurs. Instead, the observer has the sense of the sign *pushing against* the object on the one hand and *reacting* with its movements on the other, which is an 'altersense' experience. This is a Secondness type of relationship of sign to object. Peirce calls this kind of sign an Index.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> He describes it as follows: 'An *Icon* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not.... Anything whatever... is an Icon of anything, in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it' (CP, II, 247). I note here that if there were no such thing as a bird, our simple picture of a bird would have the same visual qualities as before, but they just would not relate to any real object.

<sup>51</sup> To quote Peirce: 'An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object. It cannot, therefore, be a Qualisign, because qualities are whatever they are independently of anything else. In so far as the index is affected by the Object, it necessarily has some Quality in common with the Object, and it is in respect to these that it refers to the Object. It does, therefore, involve a sort of Icon, although an Icon of a peculiar kind; and it is not the mere resemblance of its Object, even in these which makes it a sign, but it is the actual modification of it by the Object' (CP, II, 248). I might note here that if a bird is flying through the air, you must move your

- (3) The word ‘bird’—this visual pattern of written figures (or acoustic pattern of spoken sounds)—relates to a real bird not by any innate likeness to the bird visually (or acoustically) or by any real connection to a bird in the external world, but rather by a man-made rule of association that exists only in the minds of people who have learned English. When someone who knows English sees or hears this word, he or she knows that it is the *agreed-upon means of representing* a bird in speech or writing, which is a ‘medisense’ experience. This is a Thirdness type of relationship of sign to object. Peirce calls this kind of sign a Symbol.<sup>52</sup>

With this second level of differentiation in place, we may expand our set of three sign categories (Qualisign, Sinsign, Legisign) to six, so that the set includes the predicted degenerate Sinsign and Legisign cases. To illustrate, let us add the following three new signs to our original set of bird signs:

- (12) A hand gesture pantomiming a bird is a real-world event (Secondness, or Sinsign) that relates to an actual bird through resemblance (Firstness, or Iconicity). Because the pairing of the bird pantomime with the winging of an actual bird occurs only in our minds, it is a qualitatively degenerate Secondness, or Firstness of Secondness (12), and is rightly called an Iconic Sinsign.
- (13) The pictograph 鳥 is the written Chinese word for ‘bird’. Originally, it was a simple drawing of a bird (an Icon), but it morphed over time so that it now

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finger along with its flight to point at it, and in this sense the index (your pointing gesture) is really affected or modified by its object. From the observer’s point of view, your finger is dynamically connected with the bird in the real world.

<sup>52</sup> Peirce’s definition is: ‘A *Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. It is thus itself a general type or law, that is, a Legisign. As such it acts through a Replica. Not only is it general itself, but the Object to which it refers is of a general nature’ (CP, II, 249).



is associated with the idea of a bird as much by convention (Thirdness) as by resemblance to a bird (Firstness). It is thus a Legisign, but a qualitatively degenerate one, or Firstness of Thirdness (13). Peirce calls this type of sign an Iconic Legisign.

- (23) The utterance 'That!' while simultaneously pointing at a bird in the sky is a combination of a conventional linguistic sign (the word 'that') with a real-world act (pointing at a bird). It is thus a Legisign that relies on an Index to convey meaning, and is termed an Indexical Legisign by Peirce and abbreviated (23).

It is important to note that all Qualisigns are Iconic and so can be called Iconic Qualisigns and abbreviated (11); likewise, all genuine Sinsigns are Indexical and so can be called Indexical Sinsigns (22); and all genuine Legisigns are Symbolic and so may be termed Symbolic Legisigns (33). While Sinsigns have the one degenerate subtype (Iconic Sinsign, 12) and Legisigns have the two degenerate subtypes (Iconic Legisign, 13, and Indexical Legisign, 23), Qualisigns have no degenerate subtypes. This is because they consist of pure monadic quality (Firstness), which by definition cannot be subdivided. It is true (as Peirce mentions in his Qualisign definition) that qualities must be embodied to appear in a sign, so Qualisigns technically have some Secondness. It is also true that when a quality functions as a sign, it becomes a go-between for an idea passed from one person to another and so technically has some Thirdness. However, these traces of Secondness and Thirdness are germane to *all* signs and so must be factored out of our analysis, since at present we are only trying to differentiate sign types *from each other* and not from other (non-semiotic) phenomena.

In summary, then, the six sign categories in a second-order Peircean semiotic system are the following:

- (11) Iconic Qualisign – a quality that signifies an object by likeness to it. (Think of the picture of a bird.)
- (12) Iconic Sinsign – a fact that signifies an object by likeness to it. (Think of the pantomime of a bird.)

- (22) Indexical Sinsign – a fact that signifies an object by pushing against and reacting with it. (Think of the finger pointing to a bird.)
- (13) Iconic Legisign – a law that signifies an object by likeness to it. (Think of the Chinese pictograph of a bird.)
- (23) Indexical Legisign – a law that signifies an object by pushing against and reacting with it. (Think of the utterance ‘That!’ with the simultaneous finger-pointing at a bird.)
- (33) Symbolic Legisign – a law that signifies an object only by convention. (Think of the word ‘bird’.)

### APPLICATION TO AUSTEN

As I mentioned earlier, all of Austen’s novels seem to explore, in one way or another, the question of what makes a good marriage,<sup>53</sup> often by developing several married or courting couples who exhibit the traits that she sees as desirable and undesirable in a marriage relationship. As she develops these couples, it may be argued that each pair emerges as an image in the reader’s mind.<sup>54</sup> This image may comprise not only the personalities of the two individuals as the reader imagines them to be, but also the characteristics of their union—the particular ways in which they fit together and interact with each other and with their families and friends in the fictional world. Such images are admittedly complex conglomerates that vary

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<sup>53</sup> The question might be considered, for Austen, what Arthur Berger calls a ‘thematic preoccupation’ (*Cultural Criticism*, p.94). This is not to say, of course, that she does not treat other significant themes in her novels, but clearly marriage is a major one, and understandably so given its significant economic and social impacts on women of her time and situation.

<sup>54</sup> What such an image really comprises in the mind is debatable, as Michael Tye reviews in *The Imagery Debate*. Likewise, how similar neurologically such an image is to the images that we see of the outside world is a subject of ongoing inquiry. But for my purposes here, I speak of the mental images that we form while reading a story in a sense approximating Sergei Eisenstein’s concept of the *montage*, where the image is something of an accumulated entity; see *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. by J. Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1947), p.32.

from reader to reader and often are interpreted in ‘conflicting ways’.<sup>55</sup> Thus, while it may be challenging for us to characterize typical images of the couples in an Austen novel for purposes of mutual comparison and classification, we nonetheless can make some basic observations and assumptions to facilitate our task of analysis.

First, we can observe that any image may act as a sign, whether it is a visual, acoustic, or other kind of image. The fact that the images of marriage that we ‘see’ in an Austen novel exist only in our minds need not change the manner in which they operate as signs. It is true that these images take time to materialize, since they develop in our minds gradually as we read (and perhaps reread) the novel, but this characteristic only ‘spreads out’ somewhat our act of interpreting them. In the end, each image still suggests, indicates, or represents some *idea* to us, and that idea is our Interpretant of the sign. (As Peirce, Eco, and Fish argue, our individual interpretations vary according to difference in situation and experience, but the shared elements of culture also establish habits that constrain our interpretations toward similar ends.<sup>56</sup>) Thus, the image of a particular fictional married or courting couple in a reader’s mind is the Sign, the idea which that image signifies to that reader is the Interpretant, and the actual kind of marriage the author is *trying* to signify is the Object of the sign. This Object, we should remember, is always a product of the author’s real-world experience at some level. So, for example,

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<sup>55</sup> Katie Halsey, *Jane Austen and Her Readers, 1786-1945* (New York: Anthem Press, 2012), p.7. Conflicting interpretations are the main grounds for critical debate. A feminist reader, for example, might view a particular marriage quite differently than a romantic reader. Glenda Hudson observes, for instance, that Claudia Johnson and Johanna Smith see the sibling-like marriage of Fanny and Edmund in *Mansfield Park* as ‘unsettling’ and ‘a paralyzing retreat within the family’, while she herself views it favorably as ‘healing and curative’; see ‘Consolidated Communities: Masculine and Feminine Values in Jane Austen’s Fiction’, *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, ed. by Devoney Looser (New York: Saint Martin’s Press, 1995), pp.101-114 (p.108). This raises the question as to how much such differences lie in the mental images themselves (as held by the different readers) versus how they are *interpreted* by each different reader—a question that we can explore as we go along.

<sup>56</sup> Peirce: *CP*, VIII, 176. Eco: *The Role of the Reader*, pp.190-3. Fish: *Is There a Text?*, pp.356-71.

although Austen was never married herself, her idea of what is good, constructive, and happy in marriage and in man-woman love, as well as what is destructive and unhappy in the same, was ultimately based on what she witnessed of such things in real life, both through first-hand experience and through the mediation of others, including their oral accounts, written histories, and works of drama and fiction.

Thus, if we hypothesize that in creating her various fictional couples one of Austen's purposes was to formulate and share with her readers her conception of what ideal marital love is or could be, then we might identify this conception as one common Object of signification for her fictionalizations.<sup>57</sup> This is akin to saying, as I did before, that a person could potentially use a picture of a bird, a pantomime of a bird, a finger pointing to a bird, a Chinese pictograph of a bird, the word 'That!' while pointing at a bird, or the single word 'bird' to signify the same general idea. While this is not likely to have been the *exact* case with Austen—that is, she perhaps did not consciously set out to create each character couple in her novels with the single idea in mind of representing ideal marital love according to one of several different possible representational modes—nonetheless, it is not unreasonable to suppose that *one* of her purposes could have approximated this general concept, even if she was not always conscious of it as she wrote her novels.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> I posit this intention only as one of many hypothetical possibilities, given what Melissa Burns calls the 'nearly unsolvable' nature of the problem of 'determining authorial intent... in the absence of the author'; here Burns is restating the seminal reader-response literature of Wimsatt, Beardsley, and Barthes; see 'Jane Austen and *Mansfield Park*: Determining Authorial Intention' in *Persuasions On-Line*, 26.1 (Jane Austen Society of North America, 2005), par.1-4, <<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol26no1/burns.htm>>, accessed 7 Aug. 2015.

<sup>58</sup> In this vein, Dorothy Van Ghent calls marriage the 'powerfully primitive' motivation for the story of *Pride and Prejudice*; see 'On *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 294-98 (p.295). I think the same could be said of Austen's other major novels—Carol Shields dubs Austen a 'writer of "marriage novels"' in *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Group, 2001), p.7—though all of her novels, including *Pride and Prejudice*, may also deal with other themes, as mentioned.

If we proceed with the hypothesis that Austen did, in fact, create her fictional couples to communicate, among other things, her ideals for marital love,<sup>59</sup> we might examine our mental images of these various couples (the Signs) to see how they fall in line with her ideals (the Object).<sup>60</sup> Peircean semiotics predicts that such an exercise would yield the following discoveries:

- (1) Some of the images seem to represent the mere *positive qualitative possibility* of Austen's ideals for marital love; these would be Qualisigns.
- (2) Other images show *actual instances* of the affairs of marital love; these would be Sinsigns. Of these images, some might *resemble* her ideals and so be classified as Iconic Sinsigns, while others might *push against and react with* her ideals and so be classified as Indexical Sinsigns.
- (3) Still others of the images might seem merely to represent marital love in a way that is *conventional* for the period; these would be Legisigns. Of these images, the ones that seem to *resemble* her ideals would be Iconic Legisigns, the ones that seem to *push against and react with* her ideals would be Indexical Legisigns, and the ones that seem relatively neutral with respect to her ideals would be Symbolic Legisigns.

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<sup>59</sup> It is not unreasonable to suppose that Austen had a partly didactic purpose for her novels. Jane Spencer observes that the 'moral utility of literature was an all-pervasive concern of eighteenth-century critics', and that by the last decade of the century the novel had 'already [become] a didactic form'; see *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: from Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford, New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp.77,129. J. Paul Hunter suggests that the novel was in some respects a natural evolution of the didactic literature that had proliferated in the eighteenth century. He argues that novels 'present[ed] themselves as exemplary instances of self-examination', and thus in many cases became 'practical (and moral) guides for life'; see *Before Novels: the Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990) p.288.

<sup>60</sup> This assumes, of course, that we can determine what Austen's ideals actually were. The next section addresses this difficult question.

## ABOUT AUSTEN'S IDEALS

I have defined each of the above predicted types of images (the Signs) in terms of their relation to Austen's marriage ideals (the Object). Although it is impossible for us to know exactly what those ideals were, we need at least a provisional notion of them if we are to proceed with a semiotic analysis as framed above, for we cannot classify any Sign in Peircean terms without considering how it relates to its Object.<sup>61</sup> Aside from her novels, we have some historical information and related analysis that give us clues as to the probable general nature of her marriage ideals, including her notions about such things as:

- Suitable gender roles for marriage partners to assume.
- What constitutes 'compatibility' between two individuals in personal terms such as age, looks, nativity, tastes, habits, and ways of thinking.
- How property, social class, and labor factor into marital happiness.
- What personal virtues enhance married life, and in what manner.
- How mutual affection and extended family relations impact marriage.
- What public and religious sanction of marriage are necessary.

Although we cannot *determine* Austen's marriage ideals from probabilities surrounding her life's experiences in these areas, we can reasonably suppose that those experiences, which include what she felt and thought when hearing or reading about the experiences of others (both real and fictional),<sup>62</sup> constitute the ground from which her ideals sprang. (Indeed, it is a pragmatic tenet of Peircean semiotic theory that an Object of signification is always grounded at some level in the real

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<sup>61</sup> *CP*, II, 243.

<sup>62</sup> That Austen was widely read in both fiction and nonfiction is pointed out by Butler in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) and in her biography, 'Austen, Jane (1775-1817)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2010), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/904>>, accessed 24 Jan. 2020. Claudia Johnson makes a similar claim, referenced in the next section.

world, since it is the Secondness element in the communications phenomenon.) In the remaining sections of this introduction, I propose a relatively conservative vision of Austen's ideals, one that I believe is largely grounded in her life experiences and is supported by the Peircean analysis that follows in this thesis.<sup>63</sup>

### *Gender Roles*

It is a matter of history that among the English gentry<sup>64</sup> at the end of the eighteenth century, men and women held relatively distinct roles in marriage compared to present-day Western practice. The man was generally acknowledged as the head of the family and was assumed to be the sole agent in public-facing affairs, while the woman's role was primarily domestic.<sup>65</sup> No matter how different our modern conceptions of gender roles may be, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Austen, growing up in this cultural milieu and never traveling outside it, should form (or at least represent to others) her ideals for a happy marriage largely within its framework. Though James Austen-Leigh's statement that '[h]er own family were

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<sup>63</sup> Here, I do not claim that Peircean analysis supports *only* this vision of Austen's ideals; however, as I must choose an Object of signification against which to stage the analysis, I choose this one, with the hope that the insights brought forth may be useful even to those who have a different conception of Austen's ideals.

<sup>64</sup> J. A. Downie argues soundly that Austen, and the major characters in her novels, belonged to the genteel class, rather than to a so-called 'middle' or 'bourgeoisie' class as some critics have supposed; see 'Who Says She's a Bourgeois Writer? Reconsidering the Social and Political Contexts of Jane Austen's Novels', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 40.1 (Fall, 2006), 69-84.

<sup>65</sup> Period historians Hannah Barker and Elaine Chalus point out that this separation of roles is not as hard and fast as is sometimes supposed, however. While the generalization is true, we should bear in mind that 'the family was a flexible institution, made up of individuals who adopted, adapted, and refuted... behavioral ideals... according to time and circumstances'; see *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge 2014), p.13.

so much, and the rest of the world so little, to Jane Austen'<sup>66</sup> has often been taken as an attempt to over-idealize his aunt's character, we may also view it as a general truth about the cocooned nature of her life. Her forty-one years were passed within a fairly narrow circle of family and friends—a world 'beyond which she went very little', James reports, especially 'during the last ten years of her life'.<sup>67</sup> His description of differences in how ladies of that time occupied themselves (compared to his time of writing in 1870) adds historicity to our sense of the relative confinement of women at the time: they tended to 'the higher branches of cookery', wine-making, medicinal preparation, thread-spinning for linen, and china-washing. Many pursuits 'were then closed, or very scantily opened to ladies', including the serious study of 'literature or science', music or drawing; and 'needlework, in some form or other, was their chief sedentary employment'.<sup>68</sup> The mere existence of these confining conditions for women, of course, does not signify that Austen wholly subscribed to so strict a division in male and female roles (as the last few decades of the critical debate over Austen suggest), but her family and immediate society were steeped in this view, and she made no overt rebellion against it.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> James Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 55-136 (p.60).

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p.63. This is not to say, of course, that Austen was insulated from knowledge of the events, ideas, and debates of the outside world; Johnson argues quite sensibly to the contrary in *Women, Politics, and the Novel* (pp.xvi-xxv). My point, rather, is that her womanhood affected both the vantage point from which she viewed these things and the way she engaged with the outside world.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.72.

<sup>69</sup> Marilyn Butler affirms that Austen's writings 'call for no general changes in the world of the established lesser landed gentry' but rather seek to reform 'the attitudes of individuals'; see *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp.1-2. Johnson argues that Austen's writings suggest criticism of the male-dominated power structures of the time (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp.28-48), but one could as easily read Austen's criticism as being directed to human weakness generally rather than to



Carol Shields comments on both the confining and the liberating effects of marriage on female life in the late eighteenth century:

[Jane Austen] lived in a day when to be married was the only form of independence—and even then it was very much a restricted liberty. A married woman could achieve a home of her own, and with it a limited sphere of sovereignty.<sup>70</sup>

Marriage was ‘liberating’ only in the sense that there were no other forms of power available to women. ‘Within Jane Austen’s immediate view’, Shields observes, ‘there were no women artists, writers, or performers’, and ‘intellectual accomplishment’ among women was ‘rare’; and so, she asks rhetorically, ‘What other possibilities were there?’ By marrying and becoming the mistress of a home, a woman might achieve what Shields suggests the Steventon and Chawton homes provided (to a more limited extent) for Austen: ‘circumstances that were steady and assured’, a ‘measure of autonomy’ with which to develop and express the talents and abilities that were uniquely hers.<sup>71</sup>

These comments of Shields come in the context of a discussion of the disruption to Austen’s life caused by her father’s sudden decision to move the family from Steventon to Bath when Jane was twenty-five years old. Birgitta Berglund cites this same ‘[e]xpulsion from her childhood home’ as a real-life example of the ‘many hardships connected with [a] woman’s life in a society which regarded women only as adjuncts to men’. Berglund notes that the ‘isolation and confinement [of women]

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patriarchal structures specifically; the latter was simply the familiar stuff she had to draw from in fictionalizing human character. In fact, Johnson concedes that, in the case of Mr. Darcy at least, Austen’s positive portrayal of a powerful male ‘affirms established social arrangements without damaging their prestige or fundamentally challenging their wisdom or equity’ (pp.73-4).

<sup>70</sup> Carol Shields, *Jane Austen: A Life* (London: Penguin Group, 2001), p.85.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, pp.86-7.

was built into the legal system',<sup>72</sup> and she cites William Blackstone's famous statement that, under the British laws of the time,

the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage, or at least incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection and cover, she performs everything.<sup>73</sup>

Even for unmarried women like Austen, the ability to move and act outside of the home environment required the mediation of the men in their lives—fathers, brothers, uncles, cousins—a fact which even a casual perusal of Austen's letters makes plain.<sup>74</sup> William and Richard Austen-Leigh, in relating Austen's refusal of Harris Bigg-Wither's offer of marriage in 1802, for example, report that her brother James had to convey Jane and Cassandra home because in that time 'an escort for young ladies travelling by coach was... necessary'.<sup>75</sup> Shields' remark that Austen 'was extraordinarily well chaperoned all her life' reflects the general state of affairs during the period for a woman of Austen's class.<sup>76</sup>

Berglund also describes in considerable detail the 'conventional view of women as weak and passive' that was prevalent at the time. Young ladies were groomed to be delicate and yielding—even frail and unknowledgeable—so as to appeal to the male protective and supervisory functions. Vigorous exercise by women was

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<sup>72</sup> Birgitta Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence: The House as an Image in the Novels of Ann Radcliffe, Mary Wollstonecraft and Jane Austen*, Lund Studies in English, 84 (Lund: Lund University Press, 1993), p.127.

<sup>73</sup> William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, Book the First (Oxford: 1765), p.442, cited in Birgitta Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence*, p.127.

<sup>74</sup> Many of her letters were occasioned by travels away from home and so necessarily make frequent reference to her having to wait on this or that brother to conduct her on her way; see, for example, *Letters*, pp.5, 6, 16, 27, 28, 63, 116, 131, and 239.

<sup>75</sup> William and Richard Arthur Austen-Leigh, *Jane Austen, Her Life and Letters: A Family Record* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1913), p.93.

<sup>76</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.176.

discouraged, and idleness, as a sign of suitability for a life of domestic gentility, was encouraged. Walking was 'almost the only outdoors activity allowed to women'.<sup>77</sup> Berglund highlights the contrary voice of Mary Wollstonecraft to these restrictive views on female health and education, and articulates what has since become nearly consensus in the Austen criticism—that Austen shared the spirit, if not the letter, of Wollstonecraft's views on the subject:

Austen was of course quite aware of the absurdity of regarding either good health or good sense as masculine prerogatives to be concealed by a woman if she happened to enjoy them. Just as she saw no charm in imbecility, she obviously saw none in debility, finding the sparkle of intelligence and the bloom of health infinitely more attractive....<sup>78</sup>

In identifying Wollstonecraft's influence upon Austen, Berglund does not reconstruct in detail the intellectual backdrop against which such views might have been considered radical, as this ground had been well canvassed by Margaret Kirkham a decade earlier. According to Kirkham, we cannot fully appreciate Austen's feminism without grasping how strong an influence, and how pervasive a reach, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideas about women had on the society of the time. Kirkham notes that Austen's novels appeared 'belatedly' during the anti-feminist reaction that followed Wollstonecraft's death, 'a time when open discussion of feminist ideas, however unexceptionable they might seem to modern readers, was impossible'; thus, writing novels with her brand of veiled irony 'enabled [Austen] to say what was unsayable in public otherwise'.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> *Woman's Whole Existence*, p. 209.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, pp.212-13.

<sup>79</sup> Margaret Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983), pp.161-74. Not all critics see Wollstonecraft as a significant influence on Austen. Anne Ruderman maintains that, '[u]nlike Wollstonecraft, [Austen] does not blame social attitudes and institutions for women's plight; indeed, it is not clear in her novels that women as a group have a plight'. Moreover, 'the different strengths of men and of women are shown [in her novels] to complement each other in marriage and thus to contribute to the attachment and dependence of each person on the other, and

Kirkham also believes that Austen disagreed with Madame de Stael's idea that only the rare 'women of genius' had an equal place in society with men.<sup>80</sup> While Austen never directly criticized de Stael, her contemporary Mary Russell Mitford stated in a letter to a friend that,

to tell the truth, I am not very much [Madame de Stael's] admirer... her morality seems to me of a nature to *demoralise* the world; and her novels want that likeness to nature in which the beauty of fiction consists.<sup>81</sup>

Kirkham feels that the 'young Miss Mitford', who grew up in the same neighborhood, time period, and social class as Austen, 'would clearly have understood more than later literary women'—writers like Charlotte Brontë who seemed to agree with de Stael—'about Jane Austen's attitudes' with respect to gender roles, 'for [Mitford] was old enough to know how the battle-lines of the Feminist Controversy of her childhood had been drawn up', and she articulated in her letters a clear preference for Wollstonecraft's view over de Stael's. On the other hand, Kirkham fears that many twentieth-century feminist critics who classify Austen simply as 'traditional' or 'uncritically orthodox' fail to 'take account of the extent to which Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*, and the whole line of English feminism from Astell to Austen', were influenced by 'the rationalist eighteenth-century argument about ethics' which holds that 'women are accountable beings of the same kind as

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on this point Austen is more in accord with Rousseau than with Wollstonecraft'; see *The Pleasures of Virtue: Political Thought in the Novels of Jane Austen* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1995), pp.140,143. As discussed later in this section, David Monaghan also argues sensibly for differences between Austen's and Wollstonecraft's views about the role of women and men.

<sup>80</sup> *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp.164-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Life and Letters of Mary Russell Mitford*, ed. by A. G. l'Estrange, 3 vols (London: 1870), I, 235, cited in Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p.168.

men'.<sup>82</sup> In practice, however, women's exercise of the rational faculties was constrained, Kirkham argues, by their domestic role:

Confined as middle-class women were to a sphere in which "personal relations" became their occupation in life, they were seldom free to draw general inferences from their own experience without, as Anne Elliot puts it, "betraying a confidence, or in some respect saying what should not be said" (*Persuasion*, p.234). Whereas a man's judgement of character and motive, as it affected individual conduct in "public life", might be openly expressed and yet held free of personal animus or bias, this could rarely apply to women, whose sphere was so much more limited as scarcely to admit the possibility of the exercise of rational, principled, moral judgement, independent of personal interest.<sup>83</sup>

David Monaghan suggests that whereas Wollstonecraft wanted an explicit and public equalization of women with men socially and professionally, Austen wanted women to exert an influence in society commensurate with men while keeping their role principally in the home sphere. He states that in Austen's day, 'few women expressed any dissatisfaction with their lot', and Wollstonecraft's call for women's rights 'went almost entirely unheeded'. While Monaghan does not imagine that Austen believed the doctrine, promulgated by figures like James Fordyce, Dr. Gregory, Gisborne, and Lady Pennington, that women are inherently less intelligent and rational than men—consider, he says, how the 'pedagogic relationship into which [the] lovers [in her novels] usually enter' has the woman instructing the man as often as vice versa—he nonetheless notes that 'none of her heroines has any ambition to be admitted into the professions, to manage an estate or join the

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<sup>82</sup> *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp.168,171.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p.173. Hunter similarly argues that 'The biggest difficulty for women novelists was that their subjects and themes were more narrowly circumscribed than were those of men, and their personal lives—or rather, their personal reputations, especially their sexual reputations—mattered more' (*Before Novels*, p.295).

army'.<sup>84</sup> Thus, while it seems Austen may have accepted Wollstonecraft's idea that women are the rational equals of men, and that they should participate as such in the marital relationship, she may not have felt it necessary for them to step out of a domestic role to do so.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, 'the restrictions imposed on the woman's social role [did] not diminish its importance' to Austen, Monaghan suggests. The 'conservative philosophy' of her time held that 'those who control manners and the home have a crucial role to play in preserving the *status quo*'; this conservative philosophy, he argues, includes the tenet that 'society is a divine creation' in which each person has a role, like a microcosm, that 'has a bearing on the health of the total organism'.<sup>86</sup> In this view of the world, the woman,

[b]y concerning herself with the early education of her children, by commanding the servants and by ensuring the comfort of her husband... was considered to be engaged in creating a sense of order and harmony, the implications of which extended beyond the single household.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> David Monaghan, 'Jane Austen and the Position of Women', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, II, 62-70.

<sup>85</sup> It is admittedly difficult to know from historical sources whether Austen really wished for more blurring of the lines between the accepted male and female roles of her time, as she would not likely have expressed such desires openly. Harry Shaw notes that 'in the face of such pervasive support' for traditional marriage roles, 'half-empty may turn to half-full'. A woman like Austen might 'come to value any possibility of contestation, not to deplore the fact that partial contestation or conflicted contestation isn't total—indeed, [she] may begin to wonder whether the best site or perhaps the only site on which to stage one's analysis might not be one that appears to be within the grounds of the ideologically hegemonic. Thinking along these lines, [she] may further conclude that the species of plotting as what I've called "story-telling" is particularly promising, just because it depicts the creation of... meaning as occurring right there before us as a character tells her story, which invites us to imagine the needs and interests that feed into it' (*Narrating Reality*, p.133).

<sup>86</sup> 'Jane Austen and the Position of Women', p.66.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, pp.67-8.

With regard to Austen's thinking on the education of women, Barbara Horowitz offers insight into its historical roots and probable general character. '[C]onduct books', she relates, were 'enormously popular during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'. Because the 'only universally accepted reason' at the time 'for educating women... was to train them to be good mothers', these books gave advice oriented to the accomplishment of that goal, basing their approach largely on 'the educational theories of John Locke and the moral teachings of the Evangelicals'. While Locke's educational essays (1690 and 1693) were 'originally meant for young gentlemen' and were only later adapted for use with 'young ladies', Horowitz notes that Abbé Fénelon's treatise on education (1687) was written for women specifically. The latter, she notes, 'remained so influential that James Boswell consulted it for advice over a 100 years after it first appeared'. Many 'widely disseminated works based on... Locke and Fénelon' were written by Austen's contemporaries, including Madame De Genlis, Hannah More, Jane West, Clara Reeve, Samuel Richardson, Maria Edgeworth, and Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>88</sup> Regarding the more conservative members of this group, Horowitz notes:

Jane Austen was familiar with all or most of them. Madame De Genlis' *Adelaide and Théodore* is alluded to in *Emma* (p.461); and she, Hannah More, and Jane West are explicitly mentioned in the *Letters* numbers 25, 48, 125, and 101. Also, these ideas were shared by most writers and thinkers of the time. Jane Austen agrees in many respects but her tone is never rigidly moralistic as theirs tends to be, possibly because she understands that the mind cannot, and indeed should not, always control the heart.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Barbara Horowitz, 'Lady Susan: The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 70-79 (pp.70-1).

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p.71

Horowitz further states that Austen's beliefs about education were shaped by more than just the goal to 'produce good mothers', for she (Austen) also viewed it as a means to 'achieve self-knowledge, just as it [was that] for men'.<sup>90</sup>

According to the conduct books, the first object of a good education is 'the inculcation of virtue' in a young lady, which is to be accomplished through a course 'insisting on absolute obedience'. Horowitz cites passages from More, Reeve, Richardson, and Wollstonecraft that are 'adamant' on this point; to indulge a girl's whims, to tolerate anything but a submissive temper, or to be lax with regard to obedience was to 'ruin not only one's children, but the nation, and even mankind'. In Locke's theory, teaching virtue required that 'the child's tutor... study his character and know him really well'; Locke was therefore critical of boarding schools because, Horowitz notes, 'the masters had such large numbers of boys to supervise' that they could not address individual character defects. On the other hand, the conduct writers 'did not object' to 'small establishments in which the students [were] well supervised', relates Horowitz, 'and neither did Jane Austen'; 'Indeed, her father kept such a "school" and, for a short time, she and her sister Cassandra attended another such school'. An idea that also 'gained particular currency' in Austen's time 'through the influence of Rousseau' was that the country was the preferred setting for a young lady's education; there she was to learn, in addition to 'virtue and fortitude', other 'useful social and domestic skills'. Horowitz sees a general espousal of these educational views and attitudes surfacing in all of Austen's mature novels.<sup>91</sup>

With respect to Austen's views on male and female roles in courtship, we have some historical information with which to make cautious assessments. Horowitz notes in her discussion of the conduct writers that girls approaching the courtship years were 'more carefully supervised' to prevent any compromise to their sexual purity, a reputation for which was considered to be 'a woman's most important

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, pp.73-8.



attribute'. It was also, according to the conduct writers, 'wrong for a woman to fall in love with a man before he fell in love with her'.<sup>92</sup> Regarding this idea, John Mullan points out that all of Austen's narratives rely on the 'convention' of her day 'that a man must propose; a woman must wait to be proposed to'. In Austen's culture, he states, 'an actual proposal..., though it might take just a few words, is a kind of magic. Without it all intimacies are apparently meaningless'. In that time, it was considered unwise for a woman to demonstrate tenderness to a man who had not declared his love to her, and it was deemed a deception for a man to display devotion publicly to a woman to whom he had declared no love, since doing so incorrectly implied an engagement. Mullan asserts that for Austen, it was a given that 'a man's declaration of love is... the same as a proposal of marriage'. Furthermore, convention dictated that the man formalize his declaration of love by an application to the woman's parents, preferably to the father, for permission to marry her.<sup>93</sup>

Although these assertions of Mullan rely in large measure on his interpretation of Austen's fictional world, there is historical evidence in Austen's letters that she did embrace this code of conduct for courtship. 'You certainly *have* encouraged him to such a point as to make him feel almost secure of you', she writes to her niece Fanny Knight in 1814 regarding the latter's near-engagement to a Mr. John Plumptre. Because Austen knew that Fanny did not really love the young man, however, she urges:

I shall... entreat you not to commit yourself farther.... [I]f his deficiencies of Manner &c &c strike you more than all his good qualities, if you continue to think strongly of them, give him up at once.—Things are now in such a state, that you must resolve upon one or the other, either to allow him to go on as he has done, or

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, pp.74,76.

<sup>93</sup> John Mullan, *What Matters in Jane Austen?: Twenty Crucial Puzzles Solved* (London, New York, Berlin and Sydney: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), Kindle Edition, Locations 4498-9, 4510-1, 4521-2, 4539-43.

whenever you are together behave with a coldness which may convince him that he has been deceiving himself. (*Letters*, pp.292-3)

This advice is clearly grounded in the social mores that required a woman always to wait for the man to declare himself and to initiate action. While the tone of Austen's letters with respect to this male prerogative is occasionally arch (and her novels are sometimes playful with readers' expectations of the same in romance plots<sup>94</sup>), she nonetheless seems to find a certain relish in the uniquely feminine place which her culture had carved out for women in the affairs of courtship and marriage. Shields notes that although the acceptance of an offer of marriage may have been 'the only pledge a young woman was capable of giving', Austen nonetheless 'invariably' chooses to conclude her stories with 'a projection of future happiness in the form of marriage'.<sup>95</sup> A happy ending may have been desirable for novelistic closure, but Austen's relative consistency compared to her contemporaries in rewarding her heroines with happy marriage suggests that she may have seen the institution in a positive light overall.<sup>96</sup> Warren Roberts notes that Austen's earlier letters sometimes reflect negative feelings about a woman's traditional role in marriage, especially with respect to the risks of child-bearing, but that her views seem to have grown more conservative over time.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps we might not be far from the mark to suppose that Austen's ideals for marriage included a greater parity for men and women than the conduct writers generally allowed, but that she felt their respective

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<sup>94</sup> Hinnant notes that Austen's emphasis on 'genuine dialogue' between lovers over the 'ceremonial forms and courtesies of amatory gallantry' is something of an innovation for the romance plot in her time ('Romance and the Courtship Plot', p.303).

<sup>95</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.25.

<sup>96</sup> Even Mary Poovey, who characterizes marriage practices of the period as holding women virtually 'bound and gagged... prisoners', admits that Austen's 'narrative privileging of marriage [in her novels] seems to ratify the bourgeois institution'; see 'Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 15.2 (1982), pp.111-26 (p.125).

<sup>97</sup> *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp.169-202.

roles should remain distinct—the man retaining the duty to preside, provide, and protect, and the woman holding to the role of ensuring tranquility and morality at home—with the two parties engaging, as rational equals, in complementary interplay in the discharge of these duties.

### *Personal Compatibility*

Although they may also be difficult to ascertain, we can get an approximate notion of Austen's ideas about what makes a couple mutually compatible on a personal level—that is, in terms of such things as age, looks, personality, nativity, manners, habits, education, tastes, and social style. Mullan calls Austen's fictional world very 'age-sensitive': she 'provides the facts of her characters' ages as primary information—rather like newspapers of today', a practice that is 'unusual' for 'novels of the period', at least to the extent that Austen engages in it.<sup>98</sup> We know from her letters that Austen felt it ideal for a woman to marry by her early twenties, and for the man to be the older of the two. For example, in a closing line to Cassandra in 1800, she informs her sister that 'Mrs. Estwick is married again to a Mr. Sloane, a young Man under age—without the Knowledge of either family'. Perhaps an awareness of the expectation that the woman be younger than the man played a part in this couple's concealment of their wedding from their families; in any event, the comment also suggests that it was ideal for a marriage to be known to, and accepted by, both families. Interestingly, Austen postscripts her comment about this under-age man with 'He bears a good character however', suggesting that maturity of character might in her view be a mitigating factor in such cases (*Letters*, p.66). Writing to Cassandra seven years later she relates that 'Miss Jackson is married to young Mr. Gunthorpe, & is to be very unhappy. He swears, drinks, is cross, jealous, selfish & Brutal' (*Letters*, p.126). In this case, character is instead an exacerbating factor to the youthfulness of the man. And in 1811, again writing to Cassandra, she

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<sup>98</sup> *What Matters in Jane Austen*, loc.239,299-302.

quips that 'Miss H. is an elegant, pleasing, pretty looking girl, about 19 I suppose, or 19 & ½, or 19 & ¼, with flowers in her head, & Music at her fingers ends' (*Letters*, p.197). As Mullan notes, this letter seems to acknowledge 'that nineteen is indeed thought to be the prime age for a young woman', and that the 'appeal' of Miss H. 'rather depends on her not yet being twenty'—that is, in Austen's culture there was a clear 'brevity [to] a young woman's maximum allure'.<sup>99</sup>

Austen knew that youth and inexperience could be drawbacks for women as well. In a continuation of her correspondence with Fanny Knight in 1814, she expresses fear about the possible detriments to her niece of a premature engagement:

I am at present more impressed with the possible Evil that may arise to *You* from engaging yourself to him—in word or mind—than with anything else.—When I consider how few young Men you have yet seen much of—how capable you are... of being really in love—and how full of temptation the next 6 or 7 years of your Life will probably be—(it is the very period of Life for the *strongest* attachments to be formed)—I cannot wish you with your present very cool feelings to devote yourself in honour to him. (*Letters*, p.298)

She seems to be acknowledging the good and bad of young love: the possibility on the one hand of forming the strongest bonds, and the potential evil on the other hand of a 'tacit engagement' that is strung out for years awaiting the realization of a requisite financial condition (as seems to have been the case with Fanny's suitor), during which time the very significant advantages of a diverse social experience might be lost. '[A]nd nothing', she warns Fanny, 'can be compared to the misery of being bound *without* Love, bound to one, & preferring another' (*Letters*, pp.298-9).

Despite the potential drawbacks of immaturity, inexperience, and intemperate habits in marriage, Austen did not seem to feel in general that the shortcomings brought by two individuals to a marriage need doom the enterprise to failure. She often expresses in one way or another the optimism that in marriage the sum of the

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<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, loc.259-65.

parts is greater than the whole. 'Marriage is a great Improver', she writes to Cassandra in 1808 (*Letters*, p.159). She believed that looks, and the eyes especially, are important to the chemistry of the relationship. 'You will not expect to hear that I was asked to dance', she writes to Cassandra at the age of thirty-three, 'but I was'. Having 'kept up a Bowing acquaintance' with a certain gentleman, and 'being pleased with his black eyes, I spoke to him at the Ball, which brought on me this civility'. Thus she describes the physical attraction that may, in her thinking, spark a relationship. She continues, however, by noting that 'he seems so little at home in the English Language that I beleive his black eyes may be the best of him' (*Letters*, pp.163-4). As with other aspects of her values, these remarks speak as much to the 'proportions and limits' of physical attraction in her view of romance as they do to its importance; they may suggest that what she often calls 'parity of mind' is an equally important element of personal compatibility.

In the first of Austen's two letters to Fanny in 1814, she extols the personal attributes of Fanny's young gentleman—'his uncommonly amiable mind, strict principles, just notions, good habits'—as being not only 'of the first importance' but also as being 'all that you know so well how to value'. The words she underlines may indicate that Austen felt the particular value of this young man to lie not only in his goodness generally but also in the particular suitability of his character attributes to Fanny. Similarly, when she praises the young man's accomplishment and activity, she frames these characteristics in terms of their compatibility with Fanny specifically:

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, 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. (*Letters*, p.292)

It is evident that Austen did not feel it sufficient for two people to be compatible in terms of general social class and life circumstances alone, but that ideally they

should also fit together well in their individual ways of thinking, their values, their tendencies and habits, their place of nativity, and even in their relationship to specific friends and family members.

In her biography of Austen, Shields notes Austen's personal preference for 'men of letters' when she retells the story of Jane's encounter, at age twenty, with Tom Lefroy. Tom was a relative of a family in the Steventon neighborhood<sup>100</sup> who was visiting from Ireland:

He was young, pleasant, good-looking, and had already taken a degree in Dublin. (All the heroes of Jane Austen's mature novels are reading men, men of the book, and clever Tom Lefroy is no exception.) He and Jane Austen met only a few times, but they seemed to enjoy the same high spirits and sense of irony. Jane's letters to Cassandra at this time show her to be thoroughly smitten, unable to restrain herself from repeated references to her "Irish friend".<sup>101</sup>

Besides the 'effervescent' spirit of her letters to Cassandra, and her self-described 'profligate' dancing and flirtation with him, Shields notes other signs of the attraction that Austen felt. 'She intended to correct', she relates, his 'one fault' of wearing too light of a morning coat, 'in exactly the lighthearted way by which women were permitted to bring men to a state of excellence'. It is almost as if the intention to 'improve' the young man signaled the intimate nature of her thinking about him. Shields suggests further that 'their open discussion of the novel *Tom Jones* gives a sense of the ease they felt together'—an ease based on shared literary interests and a 'willingness to go beyond flirtation into an... exploration' of themes that would have been considered highly sensitive for private discussion between a young man and woman.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Butler's biography of Austen says Tom was 'the Irish nephew of (Isaac Peter) George Lefroy, rector of Ashe', whom Austen 'flirted with' '[b]etween 1795 and 1796' ('Austen, Jane', p.8 of PDF version).

<sup>101</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.49.

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, pp.49-50.

Monaghan's reference to the pedagogic relationship of the lovers in Austen's novels, which he sees as evidence that Austen did not subscribe to ideas of rational inferiority in women, builds on McMaster's discussion of love and pedagogy in Austen's work.<sup>103</sup> McMaster views pedagogy as part of Austen's overall chemistry for romance—the acting and reacting on a personal level that yields mutual growth and understanding; the 'symbiotic' relationship that leads to 'integration of head and heart'.<sup>104</sup> All of Austen's heroines and heroes, she notes, exhibit this chemistry. It is particularly in the 'giving and taking of moral knowledge' during courtship that these fictional couples 'created their love', and their future 'happiness in marriage is... seen as a continuation of this process'.<sup>105</sup> Austen apparently did not believe that such mutual improvement need come from the joining of two individuals with similar strengths and weaknesses, but rather by the pairing of two whose respective strengths lead to the betterment of the couple as a whole. As Edmund advises Fanny in *Mansfield Park*, 'Some opposition [of temper] is, I am thoroughly convinced, friendly to matrimonial happiness' (*MP*, p.403). Thus, we might suppose that Austen's view of personal compatibility in a couple does not rest upon mere *commonality* of character and upbringing any more than her ideal for gender roles boils down to strict *equality* in the modern Western sense; rather, as McMaster observes, she seems to have felt that good married couples 'form a new amalgam, something that is more than the sum of its parts'.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen on Love* (British Columbia: University of Victoria, 1978). Her chapter on 'Love and Pedagogy' also builds on ideas from Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>105</sup> *ibid.*, p.79.

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p.78.

### *Property, Social Class, and Labor*

We can also make an educated guess at Austen's opinion about the proper attitude for a couple to have towards property, social status, and personal industry. Regarding property, Shields relates that the need for a woman to be financially and materially provided for was real enough to make Austen, as she approached age twenty-seven, accept a marriage proposal from Harris Bigg-Wither, who was six years her junior and relatively awkward and unschooled, but who was heir to Manydown Park in her beloved Steventon countryside. Although Jane retracted her decision the next morning,<sup>107</sup> the fact that she was 'living in rented rooms with her parents in Bath' and knew that the marriage 'would ease the worry and financial strain of the Austen family' surely played a part in her initial acceptance of the young man's offer.<sup>108</sup>

John Gornall observes that 'marriage, at that time and in that class, was not only a matter of mutual affection and social compatibility, but also an institution through which the landed gentry maintained and increased its financial position'. He describes briefly the economic practices that were entangled with marriage, including the entailment of the family estate to the eldest son, jointure to provide for the widow, the financial portion contributed by the bride, restrictions on the professions of the younger sons, and the expectation of balanced economic

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<sup>107</sup> Shields quips that 'the reality, when represented in the bumptious form of Harris Bigg-Wither himself, was untenable' (*Jane Austen: A Life*, pp.106-7). Butler also notes that the 'worst outcome' of such a marriage for Austen 'would probably have been separation from her sister' ('Austen, Jane', p.14 of PDF version).

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, pp.107-8. Butler notes, 'If she had gone through with [this] marriage', she 'could have housed and provided for her parents, who were facing a fairly straitened old age in lodgings at Bath, and Cassandra too if she wished it' ('Austen, Jane', p.13 of PDF version).



contributions by both families.<sup>109</sup> After describing these factors, however, he makes this observation:

It might be thought that a class of people who regarded marriage as a matter of arranging an equal alliance between families could not at the same time also see it as a romantic encounter between two individuals. This is not so. Jane Austen's novels are concerned quite as much with romance as with settlements. It is clear that both aspects of marriage had an equally strong grip on the mind, and often the result was conflict.<sup>110</sup>

Hazel Jones describes at length these same economic factors and the tensions they created for couples. She makes a similar summary observation:

All of [Austen's] fiction highlights the very real tensions between marrying for love and marrying for social or economic advantage, the moral obligation of resisting a loveless marriage, while never ignoring the necessity of a good income.<sup>111</sup>

Whether or not we conclude, as Margaret Kirkham does, that Austen 'abhorred' the 'cash nexus' of marriage in her day,<sup>112</sup> we clearly must acknowledge the reality of its 'grip' on her society. And to acknowledge this reality is also to concede Karen Newman's insight that 'no woman who is economically dependent... is unmoved by property'.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> John F. G. Gornall, 'Marriage and Property in Jane Austen's Novels', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, II, 46-53 (pp.46-50).

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, p.50. Barthes et al might argue that the romance aspect was (and is) largely culturally constructed, with the novel playing a major part in the construction. No doubt the debate will continue over the degree to which romance (and any other factor in marriage) arises 'naturally' or is culturally conditioned, but there is arguably little difference to the individual upon whom the factor bears—the influence is real in either case.

<sup>111</sup> Hazel Jones, *Jane Austen and Marriage* (London and New York: Continuum, 2009), p.138.

<sup>112</sup> *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p.174.

<sup>113</sup> Karen Newman, 'Can This Marriage Be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 382-97 (p.387).

Dorothy Van Ghent observes that the competition among poorly dowered 'girls in a family like that of the Bennets' for 'solvent young men' sometimes caused 'the word "property" [to] become a metaphor for the young [men]' themselves.<sup>114</sup> She cites the second sentence in *Pride and Prejudice*:

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth [that a rich man is in want of a wife] is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered the rightful *property* of some one or other of their daughters. (*PP*, p.3, my emphasis)

Of particular concern to a young lady was the house that the young man would provide for her, since this house and the surrounding property would largely define her future sphere of activity. Berglund points out that the availability of a place of private resort within the home was a female need that was especially important at this time, due to the relatively 'high degree of conformity and restraint' required in public. Women needed the liberty of resorting to places where they could 'give vent to feelings... that cannot be shown in company and that need an outlet if they are to be overcome'. Berglund cites architectural and cultural histories that indicate an increasing attention to these female needs in the house designs of the period.<sup>115</sup> Francis Hart notes that various comments in Austen's letters also reflect this female need for private space.<sup>116</sup>

Austen's letters also reveal other facets of her attitude towards property and the comforts afforded by wealth. For example, her description to Cassandra in 1800 of the 'young lady whom it is suspected that Sir Thomas is to marry' characterizes the woman as 'handsome, accomplished, amiable, & everything but rich' (*Letters*, p.64). From these remarks, we might surmise that Austen viewed wealth as part of an ideal

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<sup>114</sup> 'On *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 294-98 (p.296).

<sup>115</sup> *Woman's Whole Existence*, pp.219-21.

<sup>116</sup> Francis R. Hart, 'The Spaces of Privacy: Jane Austen', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 30 (1975), pp.317-18, cited in Birgitta Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence*, p.219.

marriage—in her society’s view, at least, if not wholly in her own. At a minimum, the expectation of the times was for an upper middle- or genteel-class man to achieve some level of financial security before marrying. In the Austen family record, William and Richard Austen-Leigh relate that Jane’s brother Francis waited more than two years after falling in love with Mary Gibson to marry her, due to lack of financial independence, which rendered immediate marriage ‘out of the question’.<sup>117</sup> And Cassandra’s fiancé, Tom Fowle, who died on his return journey from the West Indies, was already the Rector in Allington before he set forth seeking the financial ‘advancement’ requisite to marrying her.<sup>118</sup> When writing to her brother Francis of the nuptials of a former love interest (Samuel Blackall, that ‘piece of... noisy Perfection... which I always recollect with regard’), Austen similarly registers that gentleman’s rite of passage to the married state:

We had noticed a few months before his succeeding to a College Living, the very Living which we remembered his talking of & wishing for; an exceeding good one, Great Cadbury in Somersetshire. (*Letters*, p.225)

There is other evidence that Austen subscribed to the idea of a financial prerequisite to marriage. Her advice to Fanny (mentioned earlier, about not encouraging her young suitor prematurely) clearly presumes it:

I have no scruple. —I am perfectly convinced that your present feelings, supposing you were to marry *now*, would be sufficient for his happiness; but when I think how very, very far it is from a *Now*.... Years may pass, before he is Independent. (*Letters*, p.298)

Austen was also aware of the potentially mitigating effects of wealth where other ideals might be lacking in a marital arrangement. For example, when writing to Cassandra about a widow of their acquaintance who was to marry a man

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<sup>117</sup> *A Family Record*, p.192.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p.79. Butler notes that ‘the income’ from the ‘living at Allington’ likely ‘could not support a wife and family’ (‘Austen, Jane’, p.8 of PDF version).

‘considerably older than herself & with three little children’, she softens the apparent drawbacks of the situation with the information that he is ‘a banker in Gloucester’ and ‘of very good fortune’ (*Letters*, p.73).<sup>119</sup> As one not so blessed personally, however, Austen felt all too keenly the difficulties of the average unmarried woman of her class, especially as she grew older. ‘Single Women have a dreadful propensity for being poor’, she warns her young Fanny, ‘which is one very strong argument in favour of Matrimony’ (*Letters*, p.347).

The legal and cultural realities which dictated genteel-class women’s concern for property are not the only forces that shaped Austen’s ideas. Sarah Emsley, in describing the philosophical and theological roots of Austen’s ideas about personal virtue, asserts that Austen inherited a cultural tradition that is ‘consistent with the approaches to ethics proposed by Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas’.<sup>120</sup> She suggests that Austen considered prosperity in some measure to be a ‘precondition’ to the effectual exercise of virtue. She emphasizes, however, that this tradition does not suppose virtue to flow from wealth or rank itself; rather, it is a philosophy that ‘stresses character and action’, that requires virtue to be ‘cultivated’ (Aristotle’s word) through right action, and through choosing which actions to develop into habits.<sup>121</sup> Thus, wealth and rank provide what Aristotle calls ‘potentiality for virtue’, but actual virtue is realized (to quote Richard Simpson) through ‘continual struggles

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<sup>119</sup> In another note to Cassandra years later, she comments on how an independent fortune may allow a woman latitude in setting aside parental wishes: ‘You certainly must have heard, before I can tell you, that Col. Orde has married our cousin, Margaret Beckford, the Marchess of Douglas’s sister. The Papers say that her Father disinherits her, but I think too well of an Orde, to suppose that she has not a handsome Independance of her own’ (*Letters*, pp.195-6).

<sup>120</sup> She quotes Aristotle to the effect that it is ‘impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment’ or ‘external goods’; see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1100 B.C.), pp.12-17, cited in Sarah Baxter Emsley, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy of the Virtues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp.3-4 (p.26).

<sup>121</sup> *Jane Austen’s Philosophy*, pp.18,26. ‘It is not the habit itself that is good or bad’, explains Emsley, ‘but the kind of habit that is chosen’ (p.27).

and conquests' which yield 'progressive states of mind, advancing and repulsing their contraries, or losing ground by being overcome'.<sup>122</sup> Emsley suggests that Austen felt rank and property to be valuable only when combined with the exercise of just principles, responsible stewardship, and a tendency to action—a disposition like Mrs. Smith's in *Persuasion* 'of finding employment which carried her out of herself' (*P*, p.167). 'Both Austen and Chaucer', Emsley concludes, 'suggest that it is behavior rather than the accident of birth that makes for a noble character'.<sup>123</sup>

Edward Copeland adds some interesting historical detail to our understanding of the fiscal practices of the families among whom Austen grew up in Steventon. Citing purchase records and account balances from Ring Brother's furniture store in Steventon during the years when Austen lived in the neighborhood, he describes purchases reflecting a wide spectrum of tastes and spending habits, ranging from young gentlemen who purchased on credit lavish furniture valued far beyond their means (to outfit homes for their new brides), to families of limited means who purchased more functional pieces at far less cost without the use of credit.<sup>124</sup> He sees such habits and attitudes reflected in many of Austen's fictional characters. For example, 'the industrious and economical Captain Harville' in *Persuasion*, he suggests, 'is far more respectable [to Austen] than the debt-hounded Sir Walter Elliot'.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Richard Simpson, 'Review of Austen-Leigh's *Memoir*', in *North British Review*, 52 (1870), 129-52, in *Jane Austen: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by B. C. Southam (London: Routledge, 1968), I, 241-65 (pp.249-50), quoted in Sarah Baxter Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.25.

<sup>123</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.156.

<sup>124</sup> Edward Copeland, 'The Austens and the Elliots: A Consumer's Guide to *Persuasion*', in *Jane Austen's Business: Her World and Her Profession*, ed. by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel (Houndmills and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp.136-53.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p.142.

Butler's analysis of historical sources suggests that Austen's experience with her younger brothers' naval careers influenced her outlook on wealth and personal industry:

The qualities [she] admired in [men]... include vigor and effectiveness, the qualities of those who rise by talent; the qualities [she] reprobated are laziness, dullness, and frivolity, especially in high places. ...[H]er values resemble those of her younger professional brothers, the sailors, who had to advance by two means—gentility, meaning the right personal characteristics as well as the right influential backing, and “merit,” or competence.<sup>126</sup>

Other critics, such as Monaghan<sup>127</sup> and Kenneth Moler,<sup>128</sup> disagree about Austen's attitude towards the rising navy class, with its emphasis on performance-based worth, and the declining landowner class, with its emphasis on inherited worth. But they and Butler seem to agree with McMaster that an ‘ethic of energy’—including a valuation of activity and industry—runs through all her works.<sup>129</sup> It is possible that Austen saw, on the one hand, the good of inherited property and rank when coupled with disciplined stewardship and charitable action, and on the other hand the evils of property and rank when used capriciously for personal interest alone. She also seems to have seen the good of thrift and labor, along with the evils of idleness and

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<sup>126</sup> Marilyn Butler, ‘History, Politics, and Religion’, *The Jane Austen Handbook*, ed. by J. David Grey et al (London: Athlone, 1986), pp.190-207, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), II, 151-68 (p.159).

<sup>127</sup> David Monaghan, ‘The Decline of the Gentry: A Study of Jane Austen's Attitude to Formality in *Persuasion*’, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, IV, 497-510.

<sup>128</sup> Kenneth L. Moler, ‘*Persuasion* and “Modern Philosophy”’, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, IV, 187-218.

<sup>129</sup> Juliet McMaster, ‘The Juvenilia: Energy Versus Sympathy’, in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.173-190 (p.181). Ruderman also sees ‘[i]ndustriousness [a]s a standard quality for Austen's praiseworthy characters, whereas the vanity of the villains is always blamed on idleness’ (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.45).

excess, in all ranks of society. Perhaps a safe provisional statement of her ideals in this regard is that she believed a 'mutually improving' marriage relationship to be one that advances the tendency of the two parties toward the responsible, virtuous, and charitable use of property and rank and away from the intemperate, selfish, or abusive employment of them.

### *Affection, Honesty, and Integrity*

Notwithstanding the demands of property and economics, the importance of honest and sincere affection in a marriage relationship (and of genuine intent and integrity in human relations generally) is a value that readers have often associated with Austen.<sup>130</sup> Her sentiments on this subject may well be expressed by Fanny Price (though wryly exaggerated to reflect the youthful intensity of her heroine) when Fanny hopes that Sir Thomas Bertram, 'as he considered the matter' of Henry Crawford's marriage proposal to her 'with more impartiality', would feel, 'as a good man must feel, how wretched and how unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked, it was to marry without affection' (*MP*, p.374). That Austen believed this to be true not just in the world of love stories, is evident both in her rejection of Harris Big-Wither's proposal of marriage and in the following comments to Cassandra in 1808:

Lady Sondes' match surprises, but does not offend me;—had her first marriage been of affection, or had there been a grown-up single daughter, I should not have forgiven her; but I consider everybody as

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<sup>130</sup> As mentioned, Jones characterizes Austen's marriage ideal as including both 'the necessity of a good income' and 'the moral obligation of resisting a loveless marriage' (*Jane Austen and Marriage*, p.138). Charles J. McCann likewise sees the importance to Austen of genuine affection in the relationship by her characterization of Darcy and Elizabeth; he notes: 'the fact that love does work upon Darcy further keeps him from being pasteboard, and further helps keep him as human enough for the nothing-if-not-human Elizabeth'; see 'Setting and Character in *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 317-25 (p.322).

having a right to marry once in their lives for love, if they can....  
(*Letters*, p.166)

Likewise, her cautions to Fanny Knight against encouraging the affections of her young suitor, include the counsel 'not to think of accepting him unless you *really do like him*' (my italics); for despite the particular compatibility of his character, manners, and situation with Fanny's, Austen asserts that '[a]nything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without Affection' (*Letters*, p.292).

One might wonder why, as the product of a society that valued so highly the economics of marital arrangements, Austen had such strong convictions about the importance of genuine affection in the relationship. Her persistence in an unmarried state could be considered proof of the strength of her feelings on this point<sup>131</sup>; it also eliminates the possibility that her feelings arose from personal experience with an unaffectionate marriage of her own. We can only speculate about the degree to which her convictions arose from observing the fruits of affection, or the fall-out of the lack of it, in the marriages of those around her. Such observations were no doubt a significant factor, but we may suppose that she suppressed commentary on the same in her letters, or that any letters in which she was less scrupulous about doing so were destroyed by Cassandra.

One source of her ideas about love is alluded to in a letter to Martha Lloyd in 1800. Here, Austen informs her friend that a rumor about the imminent marriage of a certain naval officer must be true, despite its having been 'reported indeed twenty times before', because her brother Charles indicates 'they hardly ever see him on board, & he *looks very much like a Lover*' (*Letters*, p.62, my italics). McMaster explains that Austen inherited a well-developed, classical notion of love from Renaissance literature—one that was largely codified in Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and was being recycled in the wider romantic context of which

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<sup>131</sup> Other factors, such as unavailability of men, could have played a significant part as well.



Austen was a part.<sup>132</sup> McMaster notes the facility with which Austen uses classic love symptoms in her novels, as well as classic cures for lovesickness. However, Austen consistently departs from traditional melancholy cures for lovesickness with her main characters, ultimately 'prescrib[ing] the treatment of marriage' as the cure. In doing so, McMaster argues, Austen 'celebrates joy and consummation' as a reward for the 'true affection' that she prizes so highly in the man-woman relationship.<sup>133</sup>

As mentioned earlier, one of the general challenges of British society during Austen's lifetime was the 'high degree of conformity and restraint' required in daily social interactions.<sup>134</sup> The heavy emphasis on formality and decorum created an environment in which it was very difficult to ascertain people's true intentions and feelings. This presented challenges on several fronts but especially for the delicate process of courtship. Many critics have noted in Austen's courtship tales an emphasis on the value of openness and sincerity as character attributes. Monaghan goes so far as to suggest that her later work (*Persuasion* especially) reflects her doubts as to whether the system of genteel manners was compatible with happy and sincere human relations.<sup>135</sup> While she does not go that far, Carol Shields asserts that Austen was interested from the start in exploring the problem of duplicity between the outward form and inner substance of character. With respect to the juvenilia, Shields states:

Though [Austen] had not yet found her true expression, she concerned herself from the beginning with the sins of pretentiousness, pomposity, and sentimentality, a thematic line that established itself in all her work.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> *Jane Austen on Love*, p.9.

<sup>133</sup> *ibid.*, pp.15-26.

<sup>134</sup> Birgitta Berglund, *Woman's Whole Existence*, p.219.

<sup>135</sup> 'The Decline of the Gentry', p.510.

<sup>136</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.33.

Austen was not unusual in prizing sincerity, Shields maintains, for it was generally part of what '[d]ecency in Austen's time meant, for men and women alike'.<sup>137</sup>

Austen's attitude about sincerity, according to Inger Thomsen, is reflected in how she 'profoundly distrusted words' and 'sought to instill a similar distrust in her readers'.<sup>138</sup> She observes that 'Austen was aware from a very early age of the way words can be manipulated and made to supplant reality', for:

Who needs virtue if you have mastered the forms of virtuous rhetoric? This is one prevalent danger of words in general: they give the speaker the sensation of having actually accomplished what he has, in fact, only named.<sup>139</sup>

Thomsen's enumeration of the virtues that Austen deems essential to a happy life agrees generally with that of Emsley. Their lists include both the classical (Aristotelian) virtues—temperance, prudence, courage, and justice—and the theological (Christian) virtues—faith, hope, and charity.<sup>140</sup> Perhaps just as important as the contents of this list is the view, common to Thomsen, Emsley, and others, that Austen was concerned with finding balance *among* different virtues. 'The reader must work alongside the characters [in her novels]', says Thomsen, 'to find the mean, a form of virtue that is appropriate to the context'.<sup>141</sup> The Aristotelian concept of the *mean* among competing virtues is central to Austen's conception of integrity—that perfect balance in good character toward which she sees the ideal marital union leading its participants. This concept of integrity entails both the word's sense of *wholeness*—meaning that no important virtue is missing from one's character—and its sense of *singleness*—meaning that there is no duplicity between

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<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*, p.181.

<sup>138</sup> Inger Sigrun Thomsen, 'Words "Half-Dethroned": Jane Austen's Art of the Unspoken', in *Jane Austen's Business*, pp.95-106 (pp.95-6).

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>140</sup> Sarah Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.3.

<sup>141</sup> 'Words "Half-Dethroned"', p.103.

the outward form and the inner substance of one's character. This latter sense in particular links integrity with honesty, since it requires one's speech and actions to reflect one's feelings and intentions faithfully.

The ideals of honesty and integrity have special relevance to the marriage state, particularly since in Austen's time marriage was widely considered to be a sacred covenant before God, especially by those holding religious convictions. That Austen was a religious woman is not much contested. As Elton Smith notes, her father and two of her brothers were clergymen, along with her mother's father, grandfather, and several cousins; her sister Cassandra was engaged to a clergyman, and Jane herself was once in love with a clergyman according to family accounts. Smith indicates that her three published prayers express a Christian faith using language that reflects a combination of the sterner 'deistic' view of the Church of England with the then-emerging 'theistic' view of a more personal God.<sup>142</sup> Emsley asserts that 'Christian faith' is 'fundamental' to Austen's idea of the virtues.<sup>143</sup> We may also take the information from Henry Austen that his sister's favorite writers were Richardson, Johnson, and Cowper as a reflection on her religious inclinations.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Elton E. Smith, 'Jane Austen's Prayers: Deism Becoming Theism' in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.283-290 (p.283-8). Warren Roberts sees evidence that Austen became more deeply religious over time, arguing that her dying words to Cassandra 'are indeed the utterances of a sincere, devout Christian'. He sees a correlation between Austen's deeper religiosity and the general progress of Evangelicalism in England during the period; see *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979), pp.109-54.

<sup>143</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, pp.15,40-41. Alistair Duckworth also argues that Austen embraced 'a traditional morality whose roots are ultimately religious'; see *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1971), p.29.

<sup>144</sup> Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author', preface to *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* (1818), in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 37-41 (p.40). Many critics who read Austen as being more subversive do not take these outward tokens of religiosity at face value, as I discuss

If we accept Austen's deeply religious nature, it is also reasonable to suppose, as does Shields, that Austen was 'conventional' in her views about 'marriage and fidelity'.<sup>145</sup> Such a supposition is consistent with a belief in the importance of inward honesty and sincerity with respect to outward professions, especially with respect to that ceremonial vow and covenant by which families were organized. Julia Brown argues that marriage was undergoing a shift during Austen's time from a primarily 'public' institution to more of a 'private' relationship.<sup>146</sup> Austen seems to have envisioned a happy medium for marriage that encompasses both the public elements and the genuinely warm, private elements that, as Jones argues, are essential to 'real-life wives and husbands... find[ing] their ultimate fulfilment in marriage' and making the relationship a 'true contract of mutual agreeableness'.<sup>147</sup>

### *Family, Legal, and Religious Sanction*

Although she may have felt that a good marriage must, at its heart, be a personal relationship of true warmth and regard, Austen is known for the particular emphasis that she gives to sisterly or brotherly affection for the siblings of one's spouse, and to respectful treatment of the parents of the spouse. Perhaps this emphasis reflects her unique perspective as a sister-in-law to the wives of her five brothers, and as an aunt to their several children.<sup>148</sup> Her niece, Caroline Austen, recalls Chawton cottage

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further hereafter. That her Christian convictions were the anchor of her sense of morality and of her views about human happiness is nonetheless an essential part of my reading of her novels.

<sup>145</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.176.

<sup>146</sup> Julia Prewitt Brown, 'Private and Public in *Persuasion*', in *Jane Austen's Business*, pp.168-77 (p.169).

<sup>147</sup> *Jane Austen and Marriage*, p.137.

<sup>148</sup> Some critics have seen Austen's special attention to sibling affection as evidence of possible homosexual leanings; see, for example, Claudia Johnson, 'The Divine Miss Jane: Jane Austen, Janeites, and the Discipline of Novel Studies', *boundary 2*, 23.3 (Autumn 1996), 143-163 (258-9,163), who also cites Marvin Mudrick's earlier work, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Berkeley: University

being 'a cheerful house', with Aunt Jane and her brothers and their wives enjoying 'pleasant... family talk... of spirit and vivacity... never troubled by disagreements'. As a youth Caroline did not think this especially remarkable, but later when she saw 'more of other households' she realized that a commitment to 'firm family union' and efforts at cultivating 'a spirit of forbearance and generosity' produced these fruits in the Austen family.<sup>149</sup> Martha Lloyd, who lived with the Austens as a close friend during the Bath, Southampton, and Chawton years, 'must have seemed to Jane and Cassandra another sister', Shields suggests. When Martha became Francis Austen's second wife some years after Jane died, 'it is almost certain', Shields concludes, that Jane 'would have blessed the new arrangement and welcomed her old friend as a true Austen sister'.<sup>150</sup> These family experiences and others of Austen's youth surely informed her convictions about the significant part played by extended family in married life, with its contributions to both the happiness of, and the vicissitudes experienced by, those who enter the married state.

Austen evidently thought it ideal to marry a person closely connected with one's own family or locality (or both), and certainly to marry one whose thinking and habits reflect shared values. These ideals were also held by her father, who is reported in a letter of a family friend to have been 'much concerned at the

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of California Press, 1952), pp.193,203. I think this unlikely given Austen's religious views as presented above; rather, she seems to have believed deeply in the important role of family in society. Roberts argues that, in responding to the 'debate over the position of women and [the] discussion on marriage and the family' that occurred in her lifetime in England, Austen contributed to 'a set of attitudes' that ultimately became 'an important feature of the Victorian era'—namely, the conviction of the 'the primacy of the family'. She '[threw] her weight behind the family', he suggests, because 'she valued an institution capable of maintaining order and stability and furthering social continuity'—characteristics that were highly valued in Britain during the social upheaval attendant to the French Revolution (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.11).

<sup>149</sup> Caroline Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 42-54 (p.46).

<sup>150</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.128.

connexion' of his beloved niece, Eliza Hancock, with a French Comte, a marriage 'which he says is giving up all their friends, their country, and he fears their religion'.<sup>151</sup> It is evident in Austen's novels that she saw potential good in receiving guidance in the affairs of courtship from parents and others when the affection of these individuals is known to be genuine. Likewise, she seems to have felt that family in general might have legitimate claims of interest in the marriages of family members. Her judgment stated to Cassandra that Lady Sondes be allowed to 'marry for love', for example, includes the caveat that there be no 'grown-up single daughter' involved in the arrangement (*Letters*, p.166). A much earlier letter to Cassandra (1798) expresses similar sentiments about the legitimacy of family claims:

Earle Harwood has been to Deane lately, as I think Mary wrote us word; & his family then told him that they would receive his wife, if she continued to behave well for another Year.—He was very grateful, as well he might; their behaviour throughout the whole affair has been particularly kind. (*Letters*, p.18)

And her matter-of-fact report to Cassandra a few months later that 'Dr. Gardiner was married yesterday to Mrs. Percy & her three daughters' seems almost a Freudian slip on her view of marriage as a family affair (*Letters*, p.47).

Gornall, in describing the 'equal grip' of romance and economics on courtship in Austen's day, explains that young people had the prerogative to make their 'initial selection' of a mate 'based on personal preference'. Thus, the first step—the engagement—was a private agreement. However, it 'could have little public validity until each party had received parental consent to the marriage'; this consent was needed because 'only the parents... could provide the necessary finance for the marriage settlement'.<sup>152</sup> These two elements of the affair, Gornall suggests, operated as checks and balances to ensure that both the romantic feelings of the couple and the legal, economic, and other interests of the parents were considered.

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<sup>151</sup> William and Richard Austen-Leigh, *A Family Record*, pp.37-8.

<sup>152</sup> 'Marriage and Property', p.52.

While Austen's novels suggest that she did not feel parental 'persuasion' to be a sure guide to marital happiness in every case, she seems to have recognized the wisdom of the family having influence in the affair when such influence is unselfishly motivated. Perhaps she felt, for example, that Miss Jackson and the 'young Mr. Gunthorpe' (who 'swears, drinks, is cross, jealous, selfish & Brutal') of whom she wrote to Cassandra would have done well to consider their families' counsel before rushing into marriage, for in her letter she reports (with no sign of compassion for the couple) that 'the match makes *her* family miserable, & has occasioned *his* being disinherited' (*Letters*, p.126).

Mullan notes that all of Austen's heroes ask the parents of the heroine for their sanction of the proposed marriage:

As soon as Mr Bingley has proposed to Jane Bennet he whispers something to her and leaves the room (III. xiii). Later we find that it has been for a "conference with her father". The day after successfully proposing to Elizabeth, Mr Darcy comes back to Longbourn to see her father.<sup>153</sup>

Such an application was the first public act in the process of moving a private engagement towards legitimate marriage—a process without which, Mullan argues, 'all intimacies [were]... meaningless'.<sup>154</sup> The final public acts in the process were the wedding ceremony itself—performed before a wider audience of family and friends, and solemnized by priestly authority in a legally recognized church—and a public notice printed in one or more newspapers to an even wider audience. This last notice—one of the few public recognitions allowed a woman in the times—was manifestly relished by Austen; she writes light-heartedly to her niece Anna that she has received 'word that Miss Blachford *is* married, but I have never seen it in the Papers. And one may as well be single if the Wedding is not to be in print' (*Letters*, p.302).

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<sup>153</sup> *What Matters in Jane Austen*, loc.4541-3.

<sup>154</sup> *ibid.*, loc.4510-1.

In summary, one could venture the opinion that Austen's conception of an ideal marriage includes not only a warm, private relationship with true affection and mutually-improving interaction, conducted more or less within the bounds of established gender roles, but also a performance of the ceremonies and transactions that express publicly the couple's commitment to each other, to their families, to society, and to God.<sup>155</sup>

### *Austen's Ideals and the Universal Categories*

As provisionally set forth above, Austen's ideals for marital love have some interesting correlations with Peirce's universal categories, quite apart from any consideration of the literary devices she may have used to represent her ideals. For example, affection as an aspect of marital love might be categorized as Firstness, given its essential nature as a *quality of feeling*. Gender roles might be categorized as Thirdness because they exist primarily as *concepts in the mind*, and they *govern marital behavior generally*. Individual acts of marital love conforming to one's role, however, would of themselves be Secondness because they are *occurrences in the real world*. Examples of such acts might include a wife correcting wrong behavior in a child, a husband making a transaction to secure the family estate, a woman writing to a lonely sister-in-law, or a man arranging for some comfort of his wife or her father. Perhaps the quintessential Secondness, or real-world act of marital love, is sexual intimacy—that unspoken physical part of Austen's marriage ideal.

In a way similar to gender roles, virtues like honesty, integrity, and temperance are Thirdness because they are *unseen governors of behavior*, while the *individual*

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<sup>155</sup> As I mentioned, this conception of Austen's ideals is clearly more conservative than that proposed by many modern critics, such as Poovey and Johnson. It is, however, largely supported by other modern critics, such as Duckworth, Butler, Ruderman, and Emsley. Hereafter, I discuss both the liberal and conservative arguments of these and other critics with respect to specific episodes in the novels; in doing so, my intention is not to trivialize any valid arguments for more liberal positions than the ones I hold.



*instances of practice* that turn them into habits are Secondness. Such acts might include a woman taking time to read a good book or to walk in nature, a man listening to the views of his wife or her brother, or a couple sacrificing a night of social entertainment to visit a friend in need. As Emsley points out, it is not random acts that make virtue but the intentional cultivation of certain *kinds* of acts.<sup>156</sup> In their repetition these acts become habits, which then might be called *character qualities*, and so virtue also has an element of Firstness. Thus, we might classify virtues as Firstness of Thirdness, and the individual acts that contribute to their development Secondness.

Perhaps the most obvious Thirdness in my proposed Austenian marriage ideal is the public wedding ceremony itself: it expresses a *lawful* contract between the man, the woman, and society, legitimizing their union and declaring it to be a suitable setting for physical intimacy and the begetting of progeny. As an *event*, the wedding ceremony has Secondness, but it is a *prescribed type* of event—a speech act performed in a proper place by one holding recognized religious and civil authority—an act that is largely *representational* of society's views about the proper form for such unions.

In summary, we could argue that a Peircean analysis of marital love at the broadest level might divide it into:

- (1) Its qualitative or 'feeling' elements (Firstness), such as affection, attraction, and esteem;
- (2) Its real-world interactional elements (Secondness), such as acts of mutual service, constructive conversation, and physical intimacy; and
- (3) Its lawful and conventional elements (Thirdness), such as society's prescribed ceremonies, settlements, and gender roles for marriage.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.27.

<sup>157</sup> This classification accords generally with the informal Peircean analysis of man-woman love made by the linguist John S. Robertson of Brigham Young University; see 'Seven Kinds of Love', an

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unpublished electronic document (February 1998), reproduced in full in the *Appendix*, received by email 27 April 2013.

## CHAPTER 1: MARITAL LOVE IN *LADY SUSAN*

. . . before I could be aware of it, everything that you could wish to be concealed, was known to him . . . !—What could I do!—Facts are such horrid things!

Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan (*LM*, p.67)<sup>158</sup>

Most critics agree that *Lady Susan* holds, at best, a sort of intermediate position between Austen's juvenilia and her later novels. Jay Levine, in summarizing the criticism up to 1961, suggests that the highest status granted the story up to that time is that of a prototype of *Mansfield Park* (by Q. D. Leavis in 1941), while he himself believes it ought to be 'regarded as the culmination of the earlier phase of literary burlesque'.<sup>159</sup> McMaster, as noted earlier, sees in the story an 'ethic of energy' that continues in all of the later novels, albeit in a tempered form.<sup>160</sup> During the 1980s, critical attention to *Lady Susan* became more widespread,<sup>161</sup> while at the same time feminist readings of Austen began to emerge. Barbara Seeber, for example, thinks the story manifests a distrust of patriarchal authority that also runs

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<sup>158</sup> Page references for *Lady Susan* are from *Later Manuscripts*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen, ed. by Janet Todd and Linda Bree (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>159</sup> Jay Arnold Levine, 'Lady Susan: Jane Austen's Character of the Merry Widow', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, III, 59-69 (pp.59-60).

<sup>160</sup> 'The Juvenilia', p.181. Poovey also sees 'female energy' or 'individual desire' as an important focus in *Lady Susan*; see *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp.172-207.

<sup>161</sup> Stimulated in part by the ninth annual meeting (in 1987) of the Jane Austen Society of North America (JASNA), which focused on the juvenilia as a subject; see Deborah Knuth, 'Lady Susan: A Bibliographical Essay', in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.215-224 (p.219).

through the mature novels.<sup>162</sup> Margaret Drabble believes that the ‘excessive wickedness’ of the main character and the story’s use of ‘stock features’ of eighteenth-century novels, along with its lack of counter-balancing positive characters, may have convinced Austen that it was unfit for publication.<sup>163</sup> Emsley feels that the epistolary exercise served an important developmental purpose: it enabled Austen to learn ‘ways to improve the dramatization of virtue and vice in fiction’—ways that she would not fully realize until her later novels.<sup>164</sup> Though *Lady Susan* may represent only an early literary experiment, it nonetheless develops several character couples that offer insightful representations of marital love that may be explored in Peircean terms.

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<sup>162</sup> Barbara Karolina Seeber, *General Consent in Jane Austen: A Study of Dialogism* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), pp.127-131. Seeber builds on Poovey, who sees Austen’s purpose to be the illustration of how the ‘propriety’ prescribed by patriarchal society, in ‘its attempt to control [female] desire has served only to distort [and] drive it into artful wiles and stratagems that are often both socially destructive and personally debilitating’. However, unlike Seeber, Poovey does not think Austen tries to subvert patriarchal authority and institutions so much as ‘expand the capacity of such institutions to accommodate educated [female] desires’ (*The Proper Lady*, pp.177-9). Countering this view, Ruderman suggests that Austen’s perspective is neither ‘submissive to society, nor... subversive of it’; rather, her stories prescribes ‘an unmodern middle ground in which humans do not have to choose complete selfishness (radical individuality) or complete sociability to avoid being split between the two’ (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.188). Even more conservatively, Duckworth argues that such characters as Lady Susan warn against ‘the possibly destructive effects of excessive freedom’, or ‘of the dangers posed to the social fabric by the strongly subjective self’ (*The Improvement of the Estate*, p.32). Butler similarly reads Austen’s narratives as reflecting the essentially ‘anti-jacobin’ views of the period’s conservatives (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp.122-3).

<sup>163</sup> Margaret Drabble, ‘Introduction’, in *Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon*, by Jane Austen (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp.7-31 (pp.8-15).

<sup>164</sup> *Jane Austen’s Philosophy*, p.50.

## FREDERICA AND REGINALD

Many critics have noted the relative underdevelopment of Frederica Vernon and Reginald De Courcy as characters in *Lady Susan*. For example, Emsley remarks that Frederica's story gets 'short shrift',<sup>165</sup> and McMaster calls Reginald a mere 'bag of goods contested over by the women'.<sup>166</sup> Drabble notes that Frederica 'is allowed... only one letter' of the forty-one that comprise the narrative, and she sees Reginald as a 'gullible' pawn compared to the 'strong stuff' of Lady Susan's character.<sup>167</sup> While these views may represent the critical consensus, as a secondary character couple Frederica and Reginald make a significant contribution to Austen's picture of marital love, particularly when considered in a Peircean light.

As I proposed earlier, one aspect of Austen's possible ideal for romantic relationships is openness and sincerity between a couple. Although this aspect is linked with the general cultural preoccupation of the period with *genuineness* and *earnestness*, Austen gives unique and consistent expression to this theme in her novels.<sup>168</sup> While we, with Drabble, might complain that Reginald is too gullible—he

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<sup>165</sup> *ibid.*, p.49.

<sup>166</sup> 'The Juvenilia', p.184.

<sup>167</sup> 'Introduction', pp.11-15. Poovey takes a very similar view of these characters (*The Proper Lady*, p.177).

<sup>168</sup> The culture of sensibility and its preoccupation with genuineness are often parodied and even mocked by writers of the late eighteenth century. The sensibility movement is characterized by Janet Todd in *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen & Co., 1986) and by Jerome McGann in *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp.1-9, both of whom build upon Trilling's earlier (1972) treatment in *Sincerity and Authenticity*. That Austen uniquely addresses the genuineness theme, at least in the context of the romance plot, may be considered one of Hinnant's main arguments in 'Romance and the Courtship Plot'. Perhaps Austen's general thoughts on the subject are reflected in Anne Elliot's famous ruminations on the character of her suitor-cousin, William Walter Elliot: 'Mr Elliot was rational, discreet, polished,—but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection.... She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the

takes everyone at face value, which can be dangerous with characters like Lady Susan—Austen seems to be more forgiving of the risks associated with an open and trusting personality. From the outset, she alludes to Reginald's eager and trusting nature.

For example, in Mrs. Vernon's first letter to her mother, the former writes at length of her apprehensions about Lady Susan's impending residence with her, and then as an aside when concluding the letter, she mentions that 'Reginald has long wished... to see this captivating Lady Susan, and we shall depend on his joining our party soon' (*LM*, p.7). Besides this second-hand remark on his eagerness, we have four letters from Reginald himself (Letters 4, 14, 34, and 36) that generally manifest an energetic confidence and inquisitiveness, along with a good command of language. We learn of his *trusting* nature, however, only incidentally by the small ill consequences of it to which we are made privy. For example, in Reginald's first letter to his sister, he dwells mostly on the notorious impropriety of Lady Susan while she stayed at Langford with the Manwaring family, which he has learned from a Mr. Smith who witnessed it. We also learn, however, that he believes Mr. Smith's report that Frederica 'has not even manners to recommend her, &... is equally dull & proud' (p.8)—an opinion that we later learn not to be well founded. Austen's inclusion of this tidbit about Reginald's trust in Mr. Smith's word is aimed at building the conflict of the story, and yet it also leaves open the idea that Reginald may be a character who is willing to believe in the truthfulness of others as a general rule in personal communications. At this point in the story, such an attribute would seem only to pose risks to him in the portended encounters with Lady Susan, but one could also see in it the *positive potential* for him to enjoy an open and sincere relationship with the right kind of woman at some future time. In Peircean terms,

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eager character beyond all others.... She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped' (*P*, p.175).

Reginald has a character *quality* which, with respect to marital love, is generally *positive* but a *mere potentiality* at this point, *without any realization*. In other words, his trusting nature could be considered a Firstness of marital love. From a Peircean semiotic viewpoint, this character quality, as a Sign, relates to an Austenian ideal for sincere relationships, as its Object, by simple *likeness*. Hence, Reginald's image here could be considered a simple picture, or Icon, of that ideal.

The openness, eagerness, and sincerity of Reginald are indirectly suggested again when Lady Susan, in one of her early letters to Mrs. Johnson, compares him with Mr. Manwaring:

Reginald has a good figure... but is still greatly inferior to our friend at Langford.—He is less polished, less insinuating than Manwaring, & is comparatively deficient in the power of saying those delightful things which put one in good humour with oneself & all the world. (p.19)

This list of Reginald's deficiencies corresponds very nearly with the set of qualities that Anne Elliot distrusts in her cousin William Elliot (*P*, p.175). We might see in this passage, besides the labeling of Reginald as unsophisticated compared to Mr. Manwaring, the implication that Reginald lacks that brand of polished insincerity and flattery which is counter-productive to genuine relationships. One could even see Reginald's trusting nature 'as a potential blessing in love' (to use Emsley's phrase<sup>169</sup>) as much as it might be a liability to him in his dealings with Lady Susan. Thus, in Peircean terms, this *quality* of Reginald appears to hold, at this point in the story, *positive potential* (Firstness) for the development of a love relationship that is Iconic of the Austenian genuineness ideal. At the same time, however, the quality also holds the potential to lead him into a *negative love experience* (Secondness) with a scheming woman—an occurrence that would be Indexical to the ideal of a genuine relationship (because it *pushes against and reacts with* that ideal). Showing a hero's potential for love alongside his susceptibility to deception or other pitfalls is a

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<sup>169</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.49.

standard tension-building device in Austenian romance, as in romance plots generally.<sup>170</sup> Nonetheless, in Peircean terms, what is most prominent in Reginald's image at this point is the *potentiality* of his qualities (Firstness), not any particular *realization* or *result* (Secondness).<sup>171</sup>

Parallel to the exchanges between Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson, we learn from Mrs. Vernon's correspondence with her mother that Reginald has become, in a few short days' social intercourse with Lady Susan, disposed to 'excuse' the past conduct of that lady, or to 'forget it in the warmth of admiration' (p.17). Within just a few more days, the degree of 'intimacy' reported by Mrs. Vernon between the two (p.20) prompts a letter from Reginald's father asking him how he could be so 'blinded by a sort of fascination' with Lady Susan as to 'doubt of [the] authenticity' of 'Mr Smith's intelligence' received only a month earlier (pp.21,23). Reginald's response adds to the image of his lively and open manner:

My dear Sir

I have this moment received your Letter, which has given me more astonishment than I ever felt before. I am to thank my Sister, I suppose, for having represented me in such a light as to injure me in your opinion, & give you all this alarm. (p.24)

These words qualify as the kind of 'burst of feeling or indignation' (*P*, p.175) that we may consider part of Austen's ideal for genuineness of character. We know from the

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<sup>170</sup> Hinnant observes that 'whenever one identifies a passion as love in a novel by Austen, a non-assurance, a risk of misunderstanding is initially supposed.' Indeed, '[s]everal of Austen's story-romances rest on this... basic uncertainty' as to the outcome of the hero or heroine's romantic endeavors ('Romance and the Courtship Plot', pp.306-7).

<sup>171</sup> With regard to the nature of qualities (Firstness) and how they differ from occurrences (Secondness), Peirce emphasizes: 'qualities, in so far as they are general, are somewhat vague and potential. But an occurrence is perfectly individual. It happens here and now'; see *The Philosophy of Peirce*, ed. by J. Buchler, 3rd edn (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1956), p.77. The image of Reginald's 'love qualities' here shows a vague potential, but there are as yet no particular 'love occurrences' to embody or 'make real' those qualities.



tenor of Reginald's words and deeds as reported in the rest of the story that he is very fond of his sister, but here he does not hide his gut reaction that it was her report that triggered his father's concern. The letter is an open and full account of his mind on the subject, which he lays out for his father as requested. The exchange suggests a relationship of trust and candor between the two, one that perhaps reflects Austen's ideals for open human relations generally, and that holds *positive potential* for marital relations specifically. Semiotically, the instance could be considered Iconic of a marriage ideal in which honesty and openness factor highly. At the same time, because the exchange is also an actual occurrence in the 'world of fact' (within the fictional world, of course<sup>172</sup>), it falls under the general category of Sinsign, making the overall classification an Iconic Sinsign. By employing this kind of sign, which is more idiosyncratic and less conventional, Austen avoids invoking sentimental stereotypes in Reginald's character.

Reginald's propensity to listen to women, to understand their needs, and to feel compassion for them is likewise a positive trait of which Austen at first only reveals the ill consequences. His explanation to his father of his feelings for Lady Susan represents a defense of her which, given his knowledge of her infamy among his family for having tried to obstruct his sister's marriage, displays some courage:

Lady Susan had heard something so materially to the disadvantage of my Sister, as to persuade her that the happiness of Mr. Vernon... would be wholly destroyed by the Marriage. And this circumstance, while it explains the true motives of Lady Susan's conduct, & removes all the blame which has been so lavished on her, may also convince us how little the general report of anyone ought to be credited, since no character however upright, can escape the malevolence of slander. If my sister in the security of retirement, with as little opportunity as inclination to do Evil, could not avoid Censure, we must not rashly condemn those who living in the World & surrounded with

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<sup>172</sup> Because *all* the instances that we are considering 'occur' in Austen's fictional world, we may factor out this commonality when trying to give each instance a relative placement within the Peircean paradigm, since that paradigm is by nature a comparative system.

temptation, should be accused of Errors which they are known to have the power of committing. (p.25)

This passage certainly advances the storyline of Reginald as a dupe of Lady Susan,<sup>173</sup> but it could also be seen to suggest that he exercises open-minded and disinterested listening skills. His gullibility seems to stem from erring on the side of compassion: he assumes the truth of Lady Susan's explanation of past events and takes the same stance that he would wish to take were his own sister maligned as Lady Susan claims to have been. Thus, although one could lament his willing ignorance of facts about Lady Susan, one could also see in this scene his *potential* to be understanding and protective of a woman in need, with all that this might imply should he direct it to a more honest woman. This point may seem small to some modern readers, but to women of Austen's time, who were generally more dependent on men, such a quality might rather be prized as holding forth the promise of relative security and freedom within a marriage relationship. Reginald's character thus exhibits *qualities* that Austen may have considered ideal in a husband, showing both *positive potential* (Firstness) and a disposition to *act* (Secondness) on behalf of the women for whom he cares. In these characteristics, one could see him as the male half of a subtle, emerging image of ideal marriage—an ideal for romance novels to be sure, but perhaps also one for the real world to an extent. The exchange between Reginald and his father may have the effect for some readers of creating a *brief mental enactment* of an ideal kind of husband—one who is both compassionate in relation to the needs of his wife and proactive in defending her from the maligning of others. Such a mental enactment is like the pantomime of a bird (Iconic Sinsign): it is a fleeting *action* (Secondness) that signals a general idea roughly by *resemblance* (Firstness).

It is true that Austen invests Reginald with the conventional trappings of a man of privilege (he is the heir of a valuable estate and baronetcy—the so-called 'bag of

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<sup>173</sup> As developed, for example, by Poovey (*The Proper Lady*, p.177).

goods' referenced by McMaster<sup>174</sup>). Austen's mode of representing him, however, does not emphasize an oppressive patriarchal stereotype. He is consistently portrayed within the epistolary convention as very *real* and *human*—even rash and naive in most of the story—rather than as cold, manipulative, or self-interested. As Harry Shaw argues for Henry Tilney, he 'does not univocally (and monotonously) embody the forces of a male privilege', but seems rather to be cast as one 'facing powerful codes and norms with which he feels hardly identical, though in which he is implicated and from which he ineluctably draws privilege'.<sup>175</sup> Perhaps it is possible to see Reginald as an early version of the Austenian hero who, like Darcy, has conventional male power but exercises it in line with an innate sense of woman's worth. Such an 'ideal gentleman', suggests Tauchert, fulfills the 'daydream' that may have been the 'common desire' of women in Austen's time and situation 'to be *somehow*... rescued from "all this" [confinement and male domination]'.<sup>176</sup> Seen in this female wish-fulfillment light, Reginald's image signals the *feeling* aspects of marital love (Firstness) more strongly than it does the conventional, privileged-class male aspects (Thirdness), although an element of the conventional is still present. A *real-world action* element (Secondness) of marital love is also detectable in his image by the trace of the 'male rescues female' theme. Thus, Reginald's character, though perhaps underdeveloped and merely prototypical of Austen's later heroes, seems to signal all three elements (Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness) of marital love, while Austen's *mode* of representing these elements, in the instances that we have considered so far, is to create *fleeting active likenesses* of them (Iconic Sinsigns). Again, this mode may tend to suppress readers' invocation of sentimental stereotypes with respect to Reginald's character.

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<sup>174</sup> 'The Juvenilia', p.184.

<sup>175</sup> *Narrating Reality*, pp.156-7.

<sup>176</sup> *Romancing Jane Austen*, p.xiii.

As with Reginald, Austen suggests positive qualities in Frederica Vernon mostly anecdotally, while ostensibly relating matters about other characters. In fact, we receive very little information about Frederica, other than the cursory opinion of Mr. Smith and a few contemptuous remarks by Lady Susan in her letters to Mrs. Johnson, until the sixth letter of Mrs. Vernon. Writing again to her mother, Mrs. Vernon relates that Frederica has been expelled from her London boarding school for attempting to run away, an act that seems to Mrs. Vernon to deserve punishment. Nonetheless, after witnessing Lady Susan's severe reception of Frederica at Churchill, she writes that 'Frederica does not seem to have the sort of temper to make severity necessary'. She also comments that Frederica is 'very pretty', with a 'delicate' complexion and 'peculiar sweetness in her look when she speaks either to her uncle or me, for as we behave kindly to her we have of course engaged her gratitude'. These few words about Frederica are woven into Mrs. Vernon's main narration of Lady Susan's 'ostentatious and artful... display' of emotion at the time, which she sees as designed to prejudice Reginald against Frederica (p.32). Although her comments are cast as incidental, they may very well have the subtle effect of beginning to suggest an alternative image of feminine attractiveness to the 'strong stuff' of Lady Susan. If so, the image would seem to be *vague and potential*, more a Qualisign than a Sinsign or Legisign.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Other critics read Frederica, and Austen's intentions with respect to her, differently. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for example, see her image as 'vapid and weak', as 'more *socialized* into passivity than a fit representative of nature'; see *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p.156 (my italics). Poovey also sees Frederica as but a 'pawn' of her mother, whose machinations she escapes only by 'conspir[ing]' with Lady Susan's other 'victims' (*The Proper Lady*, pp.175,177). Terry Castle follows suit, calling Frederica a 'put-upon heroin[e]' the likes of Samuel Richardson's delicate Pamela. Castle groups Frederica with the many 'other cloddish victims' of Lady Susan; see 'Introduction', in *Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons, and Sanditon*, ed. John Davie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp.vii-xxxii (pp.xxvi-xxvii). However, I hope to show here that Frederica's passive and weak appearance masks considerable inner strength of character.

The first suggestion of a pairing between Reginald and Frederica comes in Mrs. Vernon's next letter. She observes to her mother:

I cannot help fancying that [Frederica] is growing partial to my brother, I so very often see *her eyes fixed on his face* with a remarkable expression of pensive admiration!—He is certainly very handsome—& yet more—there is an *openness* in his manner that must be highly prepossessing, & I am sure *she feels it so*. (p.34, emphasis added)

Here again is language expressing an active listening ability, this time in Frederica. And the idea that a man's *open manner* might be as appealing as polished manners or handsome appearance is not only implied here, but it is suggested that Frederica 'feels it so'. It is consistent with Austen's approach that such primal, positive qualities are attributed to her protagonists by other characters rather than by direct narration. Whether Austen always did this consciously or not, its effect is to 'background' the character's imagery to a degree, making it less prominent to readers.

The subtlety of Austen's approach here suggests that the story deserves more critical attention than a dismissal as 'early work'; indeed, her subtlety in this case has interesting correlations with the Peircean notion of an Icon. Anne Freadman observes that, compared to Indices and Symbols, 'icons are so completely substituted for their objects as hardly to be distinguished from them'.<sup>178</sup> In other words, while all signs serve to mediate between a person's mind and an object (in that they call that object to mind), icons are the 'thinnest' mediator of the three Peircean types. They are relatively transparent,<sup>179</sup> such that when we view them, we often do not notice the sign itself. Austen may have intuitively understood that to

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<sup>178</sup> 'The Classifications of Signs (I): 1867 – 1885', *The Digital Encyclopedia of Charles S. Peirce* (FAPESP, February 2001), <<http://www.digitalpeirce.fee.unicamp.br/home.htm>>, accessed 1 May 2009, par.77.

<sup>179</sup> I emphasize *relatively* here, keeping in mind Fish's qualification that *all* signs are shaped by the cultural context in which they appear (*Is There a Text?*, pp.322-37).

convey the tender and sincere feelings that she felt should exist between an ideal couple, she needed to do it in a very subtle way, so that only brief and suggestive images of her object would come to readers' minds, never jarring incidences or overt references.<sup>180</sup> In semiotic terms, such images are iconic because they do not draw attention to themselves, but rather direct the mind immediately—through *qualitative* perception, without the mediation of *conscious, logical* process—to their Objects. *Lady Susan* is replete with instances of this mode of representation in Austen's development of Frederica and Reginald as a couple.

For example, in the same letter of Mrs. Vernon to her mother, she describes Frederica's initial impressions of, and responses to, Reginald:

*Thoughtful & pensive* in general her countenance always *brightens into a smile* when Reginald says anything amusing; & let the subject be ever so serious that he may be conversing on, I am much mistaken *if a syllable of his uttering, escape her.*—

I want to make him sensible of all this, for we know the power of *gratitude* on such a heart as his; & could Frederica's *artless affection* detach him from her Mother, we might bless the day which brought her to Churchhill. (p.34, my italics)

This description seems to carry with it certain background imagery, such as that of Frederica watching Reginald intently, and her facial expressions as she reacts to his speech. The phrases that I have italicized above call out affective elements of the imagery: pensiveness, spontaneity, eager listening, gratitude, artless affection. For a reader who is attuned to Austen's notion of the prized 'open and eager character', these qualities might be seen as natural extensions of this character.

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<sup>180</sup> Reginald Farrer notes that 'because emotion is not vehemently expressed by Jane Austen', many readers 'fail to realize with what profound effect it is implied. She does not expound feeling; she conveys it. With her artist's instinct, she knows that exposition by the writer destroys conviction in the reader'; see 'Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), II, 177-98 (p.181).

Regarding pensiveness as an attribute, I suggested earlier that Austen seems to have held a belief in the importance of mental parity in a couple.<sup>181</sup> In the developing report of interactions between Frederica and Reginald, the potential for such a parity (despite the relative youth of Frederica) is gradually and gently hinted at. For example, in describing the general state of affairs at Churchhill after Frederica's arrival, Mrs. Vernon shares the following (seemingly incidental) detail with her mother:

The small Pianoforte has been removed within these few days at Lady Susan's request, into her Dressing room, & Frederica spends great part of the day there;—*practising* it is called, but I seldom hear any noise when I pass that way.—What she does with herself there I do not know, there are plenty of books in the room, but it is not every girl who has been running wild the first fifteen years of her life, that can or will read. (pp.32-3)

From this account we do not *know* that Frederica is spending her time reading, but the possibility is suggested. We do know from previous comments of Mrs. Vernon and Lady Susan that Frederica's education has been neither thorough nor consistent—a contrast with the solid education implied by the style of Reginald's letters. A few more days' experience with Frederica, however, prompts Mrs. Vernon to affirm to her mother that Frederica is 'by no means so ignorant as one might expect to find her, being fond of books & spending the chief of her time in reading' (p.35).<sup>182</sup> Thus, mental refinement as a quality in Frederica, though nascent (*without much realization* yet), is shown to be promising, and her *positive potential* for mental parity with Reginald is suggested. Again, though the image of the young couple is

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<sup>181</sup> As Berglund suggests, she may have been influenced by Wollstonecraft's arguments (*Vindication*, ch.9) about the commensurate rational faculties of men and women (*Woman's Whole Existence*, pp.212-13).

<sup>182</sup> Here Frederica's character reflects Austen's expressed ideal, reported by her niece, 'that she had herself often wished she had read more, and written less, in the [pre-16] years of her own life'; see Caroline Austen, 'My Aunt Jane Austen: A Memoir', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 42-54 (p.49).

only *vague and potential* at this point (a Qualisign), it would seem to be a *likeness*, or Icon, of the Austenian ideal for mental parity in spouses.

With respect to the attributes of spontaneity and affection, the concluding lines of the same letter of Mrs. Vernon to her mother contain relevant traces. She notes Frederica's 'gentle, affectionate heart' and 'obliging manners', and mentions that her own children have become 'very fond of her' in just a few days' time (p.35). These remarks on Frederica's relationship with her 'little cousins' tend to produce a gentle image which possibly reflects Austen's ideals in several ways. For example, we may note that children are often fond of adults who possess a certain *spontaneity* that enables them to see things from the child's point of view; Frederica's endearment to her cousins might imply an element of such character.<sup>183</sup> In addition, although the actual comments of Mrs. Vernon speak of her *children's* feelings for Frederica, the real but unstated signification (typical of Austen) may be *Frederica's* feelings for them—and more importantly, by extension, her feelings for their mother and for their *uncle*. The image of the couple may suggest the *potential* for a realization of that kind of mutual concern that Austen feels a couple should ideally have for each other's siblings and their families. If so, the image seems again, in this aspect, to be a *simple resemblance*, or Icon, of my proposed Austenian ideal.

Artless affection is another character quality of Frederica to which Austen gives nuanced treatment. Frederica's artless nature has been noted by various critics, but the observation typically arises only in conjunction with some discussion of Lady Susan's *artful* nature. For example, Barbara Horowitz comments on how 'compelling

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<sup>183</sup> McMaster suggests that children in Austen's novels play a role 'as moral tests for the adults around them', provoking responses that reveal the true character of the latter; see 'Jane Austen's Children', *Persuasions On-line*, 31.1 (Winter 2010), <<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol31no1/mcmaster.html>>, par.2. She argues that Austen is calling out as favorable those characters whom she depicts as paying attention, and responding sensitively, to children—a conspicuous attribute also of the culture of sensibility of the period.



a character' Lady Susan is because of her skill at 'using the language of the conduct books' to mask her 'less-than-moral' ends.<sup>184</sup> She observes:

It is no accident that [Lady Susan] is so often referred to as "artful" *in contrast to her daughter who is described as "artless."* She is an artist who, like her creator, is adept at using language. It may be that because we admire Jane Austen's artistry with language we... [find] it difficult to hate Lady Susan.<sup>185</sup>

While Horowitz's attention is focused on Lady Susan's character, the portion of her words that I have italicized suggests the necessity of there being a positive backdrop against which Lady Susan's artful character may be contrasted. This positive backdrop is, to a considerable degree, the understated image of Frederica. While Lady Susan's artfulness reflects her ever-vigilant consciousness of the *means* that her language represents to her (Thirdness),<sup>186</sup> Frederica's artlessness reflects a consciousness only of her own *free and spontaneous feelings*. This characteristic can be read as Firstness as described by Peirce:

The idea of First is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, freedom. The free is *that which has not another behind it, determining its actions....* The first is predominant in *feeling*, as distinct from objective perception, will, and thought.<sup>187</sup>

Thus, artful behavior is always crafted with a consciousness of it being a means to some end (and is like William Elliot's tongue that never slips [*P*, p.175]), whereas artless behavior is barely conscious of anything but the genuine feelings that prompt it.<sup>188</sup> Austen was certainly aware of her culture's preoccupation with *genuine*

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<sup>184</sup> 'The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', pp.70,78.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, pp.78-9 (my emphasis).

<sup>186</sup> A more detailed Peircean analysis of Lady Susan's character follows in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>187</sup> *CP*, I, 302 (emphasis added).

<sup>188</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft complains that 'spontaneous feeling' had become one of many exaggerated and largely affected sensibilities displayed by English women due to their inculcation

*feeling*—she often parodies it in her novels, *Sense and Sensibility* in particular<sup>189</sup>—and so we might expect her to approach the development of the positive form of this trait with great care, so as to avoid a hackneyed response. But from a purely Peircean point of view, artlessness should be classified as a Firstness of romantic love because it suggests that the lover acts *without constraint* (that is, without Secondness) and *without a consciousness of means* (that is, without Thirdness). As a mode of communication, artlessness is highly *transparent* of the lover's feelings and is therefore Iconic. Again, in making these classifications, we should bear in mind that the Peircean categories represent the three extreme *theoretical poles* in human experience, and so almost all actual experience lies at some intermediate point between these poles. Behavioral psychology might very well argue, for example, that *nothing* is ever done wholly without a consciousness of means.<sup>190</sup> A given human behavior will, however, always be *relatively* closer to one of the three Peircean poles than another, and perhaps farther from the other two. Thus, while Peirce's categories do not give us an *absolute* characterization of a character's

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under Rousseau and various conduct writers. She argues that the whole system of female education needed to be stripped of this superfluous element so that genuine and natural affection could flourish; see especially Chapter 12 in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Janet Todd suggests that Austen also held a negative view of excessive sentimentality ('Jane Austen, Politics and Sensibility', pp.71-87). However, it is evident that Austen (like Wollstonecraft) still believed in a genuine and natural kind of spontaneous affection. Part of my argument in this thesis is that phenomena like spontaneous feeling may have both a natural *and* a cultural basis, and the operation of the cultural does not erase that of the natural. Both elements are constantly operative, though admittedly it is often difficult to tell where one ends and the other begins (as Barthes and others have argued).

<sup>189</sup> As Arthur Berger notes, parody may 'draw upon important themes that many people are familiar with' and can even be a 'manipulation' of a 'creative style' (*Cultural Criticism*, p.92).

<sup>190</sup> This idea might be considered the broad argument of B. F. Skinner in *Contingencies of Reinforcement* (East Norwalk, CT: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971) and related works.

behavior in an event or scene, they do allow us to characterize it *relative* to other *comparable* instances—and herein lies some analytic value.<sup>191</sup>

Austen does not have any characters directly narrate major events involving Frederica until about midway through the story, when Mrs. Vernon describes to her mother the unexpected visit of Sir James Martin to Churchill. Interestingly, although the undisguised subject of this letter is Frederica's pained reaction to the visit, the actual *doings* and *sayings* of Frederica (Secondness) are manifestly *compressed* and marked by an emphasis on their *emotional* aspect (Firstness):

I heard a carriage at the door as I was sitting with my Children while they dined, & supposing I should be wanted left the Nursery soon afterwards & was half way downstairs, when Frederica *as pale as ashes* came running up, & rushed by me into her own room.—I instantly followed, & asked her what was the matter.—“Oh! cried she, he is come, Sir James is come—& what am I to do?”—This was no explanation; I begged her to tell me what she meant. At that moment we were interrupted by a knock at the door,—it was Reginald, who came by Lady Susan's direction to call Frederica down.—“It is Mr. De Courcy, said she, *colouring violently*, Mamma has sent for me, & I *must go.*” (p.37, my italics)

Here, Austen imparts the action—the words exchanged and the deeds performed—in a compressed fashion, with visible indicators of Frederica's *feelings* (e.g., she ran *as pale as ashes* from Sir James, and she *colored violently* upon seeing Reginald at her door). Referring to similarly compressed passages in *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*, Mullan notes: ‘Such impressionistic effects were new to fiction and are hardly

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<sup>191</sup> One could argue that all the ‘actions’ of fictional characters are the intentional and artful creation of their authors, but if we factor out this commonality and compare and contrast the characters within a given novel purely with respect to each other, their *relative* ‘artful’ and ‘artless’ traits are apparent. This exercise, of course, is complicated by the fact that the author expresses an idea from one cultural frame of mind and each reader interprets it from another, with varying degrees of cultural overlap in the parties to the communication (reflecting the difficulty discussed by Burns in ‘Determining Authorial Intention’, par.1-4, as mentioned earlier).

paralleled before the twentieth century'.<sup>192</sup> Austen appears not to want to sully Frederica's image with too much *overt action in the real world* (Secondness), while the few incidents she does choose to relate are *transparent* of Frederica's *feelings* (Firstness). The imagery of the scene might be classified as an Iconic Sinsign: like the bird pantomime, it is a *brief enactment* that *faintly resembles* a general kind of Object. In this case, the brief enactment (the Sign) is Frederica's blushes, rush, and broken speeches. The faintly resembled Object is her abhorrence of silly and shallow character (she runs *as pale as ashes* from Sir James), her passion for sincere and intelligent manhood (she *colors violently* when Reginald appears), and her fear of being forced in love by the hand of authority (she *must go* when her mother summons).

As McMaster and Barthes suggest, one cannot take a character's blushes and broken speeches in a love story merely as idiosyncratic events (Sinsigns) or as pristinely natural signifiers (Qualisigns), because these elements have been culturally encoded in the genre.<sup>193</sup> They are *conventional* love tokens, or Legisigns. Austen was certainly aware of these love conventions and makes full use of them. However, as Peirce suggests, conventional signs (Legisigns) can include degenerate forms in which the convention is not so strictly arbitrary and man-made but rather relies on an element of *real-world occurrence* (Indexical Legisign) or of *qualitative likeness* (Iconic Legisign) to have effect.<sup>194</sup> In this scene, the culturally constructed love tokens (blushes and confused speech) are activated, but not in an obvious way. Rather, their connection with the love convention may seem to come as an after-

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<sup>192</sup> *What Matters in Jane Austen*, loc.5107. As a classic example of the technique, he cites Fanny Price turning her blushing face away from Edmund when he pays her a compliment. Regarding that instance, he notes: 'Austen's... narrative technique allows Fanny's feelings to be the undercurrent of the narrative, *without becoming its subject*. Any novelist can tell us what a character feels; *Austen developed a means of declining to tell us*' (loc.5198-5200, my emphasis).

<sup>193</sup> Juliet McMaster, *Jane Austen on Love*, pp.15-25; Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, pp.3-9.

<sup>194</sup> *CP*, II, 258-60,262.

thought to the affective impression of the scene. Thus, while Austen uses Sinsign and Legisign elements in her depiction of Frederica's actions with respect to Reginald, she does so in a nuanced way. By compressing her description of Frederica's actions, the Sinsign element is fleeting, which in turn makes any mental activation of the Legisign element less prominent.<sup>195</sup> Furthermore, the *logic* of the scene (also a Legisign element) emerges very gently after the fact: because Frederica evidently is not attracted to Sir James *even though he has wealth and social position*, we are allowed to deduce that her attraction to Reginald is not based *solely on his rank or privilege* either. This logic prevents the nascent image of Frederica and Reginald from 'monotonously embodying'<sup>196</sup> the cultural conventions surrounding property in marriage. Thus, while the image of the couple has faint Sinsign and Legisign elements, its Qualisign elements are most prominent. An overall classification of Iconic Sinsign or Iconic Legisign might be fitting for the scene of Frederica's embarrassed retreat from Sir James.

Once Austen has established the nominal subject of Mrs. Vernon's letter to be Frederica's pained reaction to Sir James' visit, she quietly adds to the development of Reginald's image in the background. Describing their descent from Frederica's room to the parlor to greet Sir James, Mrs. Vernon recounts that her brother is all the while 'examining the terrified face of Frederica with surprise' (p.37). This side note suggests that Reginald's attentive compassion may be starting to extend beyond Lady Susan to Frederica—that he may perceive the latter to be worthy of notice. After describing the awkward meeting and conversation with Sir James, Mrs. Vernon comments that Frederica's eyes were 'cast down' throughout, '*her colour varying every instant, while Reginald observed all that passed, in perfect silence*' (p.38, my italics). In the letter's conclusion, she reflects on the incident and remarks:

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<sup>195</sup> As Peirce says, Legisigns rely on Sinsigns, in that they are invoked through a Sinsign that is a replica of an agreed-upon type (*CP*, II, 246). Here the agreed-upon type would be a blush, a confused speech, or another of Barthes' love tokens.

<sup>196</sup> Harry Shaw, *Narrating Reality*, p.156.

As for Reginald, I believe he does not know what to make of the matter.—When Sir James first came, he appeared all *astonishment & perplexity*. The folly of the young Man, & the confusion of Frederica *entirely engrossed him*; & tho' a little private discourse with Lady Susan has since had it's effect, he *is still hurt* I am sure at her allowing of such a Man's attentions to her daughter. (p.40, my italics)

This description of Reginald's behavior, though brief, suggests that he has begun to see facts contradicting Lady Susan's characterization of Frederica. It also gives the impression of his having momentarily stepped into Frederica's shoes and felt her pain and embarrassment at being thrust by her mother like a piece of property into the hands of this rich and obsequious young man. Again, Reginald's capacity for compassion and understanding, when coupled with the tender character of Frederica, contributes to an image of a couple with the *potential* for the type of genuinely sensitive relationship that is iconic of my proposed Austenian ideal.

Although Frederica's image may develop gradually and gently, by the time we 'witness' (through Mrs. Vernon's narration) her distress at Sir James' visit, some readers (modern ones perhaps more so than contemporaries of Austen) might feel frustrated at her unwillingness to speak up for herself, and could sympathize with Lady Susan's statement that Frederica seems to lack that 'vigour of Mind which will force itself forward' (p.52). In the course of the narrative, Austen provides sixteen epistles from Lady Susan (in which the latter 'actively manages her public image'<sup>197</sup>) but only one brief letter from Frederica. Frederica's letter is a simple plea to Reginald to intercede with her mother to send Sir James away. Although it is a single paragraph signed only with her initials (*diminutive*, as usual), the letter imparts a sense of her honesty and respect for authority. She deems it a 'liberty' to 'trouble' Reginald about the matter, knowing that her act of writing may be little more than an 'equivocation', attending only to 'the letter & not the spirit of Mama's

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<sup>197</sup> Scott Simpkins, 'Scarlet Letters: Austen's *Lady Susan* and the Stigmatized Self', *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis*, 10, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 75-101 (p.90).

commands' to refrain from speaking about Sir James to the Vernons (p.41). Mary Poovey suggests that in Austen's time the tendency of a woman to constantly narrate her own behavior to others (as Lady Susan does) would be seen as an attempt to hide something unseemly, whereas 'the silence of the Proper Lady can presumably be read like an open book; she is (or should be) quite simply what she seems to be'.<sup>198</sup> These comments suggest not only that Lady Susan's self-narrations might have been taken by Austen's contemporaries as an indicator of dissimulation, but also that Frederica's relative silence might have been taken as a reflection on her truthful nature. They also highlight the iconic properties of Frederica's letter: it is a brief, transparent, and faithful reproduction of her intent.

McMaster's view of Reginald as 'less an autonomous character than a bag of goods contested over by the women',<sup>199</sup> and Drabble's lumping him in with that 'dull' lot comprising Lady Susan's 'opposition',<sup>200</sup> suggest that he is a relatively blank character. However, his interference on behalf of Frederica, as narrated by Lady Susan in Letter 22 (to Mrs. Johnson), shows him to have more fortitude than Drabble or McMaster give him credit for:

Everything however was going on calmly & quietly; &... my mind was entirely satisfied with the posture of affairs.—Guess, then, what I must feel at the sudden disturbance of all my schemes, & that too from a quarter, whence I had least reason to apprehend it.—Reginald came this morning into my Dressing room, with a very unusual solemnity of countenance, & after some preface informed me in so many words, that he wished to reason with me on the Impropriety & Unkindness of allowing Sir James Martin to address my Daughter, contrary to *her* inclination.—I was all amazement.—When I found that *he was not to be laughed out of his design*, I calmly required an explanation.... (pp.43-4, emphasis added)

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<sup>198</sup> *The Proper Lady*, p.24.

<sup>199</sup> 'The Juvenilia', p.184.

<sup>200</sup> 'Introduction', p.14.

The willingness to confront Lady Susan in person on such a delicate family matter, and to hold steady to the purpose, bespeaks a kind of fortitude in Reginald that arises in one who values the truth highly—who deems it worth addressing and defending. (It was so earlier when Reginald confronted his father, when he thought he had found and was defending the truth about Lady Susan, as mentioned.) Lady Susan is incensed at his '[c]redulity' of Frederica's story: 'How dared he believe what she told him in my disfavor!' (p.44). One might wonder, rather, how she could expect Reginald to believe her own story, in the face of so much counter-evidence, and *not* believe the story of one as artless as Frederica after just witnessing facts in support of her story. His actions evidently stem from his compassionate nature, a point alluded to by Mrs. Vernon shortly afterward when she asks Lady Susan, 'why should your Ladyship... quarrel with my brother for an interference which you must know, *it was not in his nature to refuse, when urged in such a manner?*' (p.53, my emphasis). Here Austen takes the opportunity of Lady Susan's tantrum over Reginald's interference (which she knows will 'run the show' in this scene) to quietly advance the image of Reginald as one possessing an element of personal fortitude. She also illustrates how fortitude, as a virtue, is related to the virtues of truth and compassion: it is Reginald's possession of additional truth about Frederica, and his compassion for her circumstances, that prompt his defense of her to Lady Susan. The scene adds to his 'rescue' imagery, moving him closer to the typical image of the Austenian gentleman who, though wielding male privilege, also respects a woman's privilege—in this case, Frederica's right to choose her own suitor. From a Peircean viewpoint, the scene is an *individual act* by Reginald (Sinsign) that faintly resembles the 'male rescues female' love *convention* (Legisign), but it may also leave some readers with a sense of Reginald's *qualities* of truth and fortitude and their *positive potential* (Qualisign) for future engagement in a love relationship. In the scene, the Sinsign element (the confrontation) is perhaps most prominent, with the Legisign



element (the rescue theme) secondary and the Qualisign element (the fortitude quality) least prominent, relatively speaking.<sup>201</sup> An overall semiotic classification of Indexical Legisign might be appropriate for the scene.

If we follow Eisenstein's principle that a montage accumulates in the mind over time,<sup>202</sup> and we overlay the Indexical Legisign image of Reginald in this scene onto the Iconic Legisign image of Frederica from the previous scene, the combined image of Frederica and Reginald acquires semiotic balance: the faint Legisign elements of the two characters match, while Frederica's Qualisign elements are augmented by Reginald's Sinsign elements, so that all three Peircean categories of sign are activated. Thus, not only can we begin to see this couple as having the potential in marriage to 'form a new amalgam, something that is more than the sum of its parts',<sup>203</sup> we may also note that Austen's *mode* of representing the young pair takes on greater variety and balance as the story progresses. Again, though Austen could not have been conscious of semiotic categories in Peircean terms, her novelistic skill may be highlighted in a more measurable way when analyzed in such terms.

Related to the character attributes of eagerness and fortitude is *liveliness*—another quality that Austen often represents as conducive to romantic relations, and which she associates with Reginald's character.<sup>204</sup> We find hints to this effect in the

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<sup>201</sup> We should also note that while fortitude may be considered a *quality* (Firstness), it involves *resistance or opposition to others* and so also has a Secondness aspect.

<sup>202</sup> *The Film Sense*, p.32.

<sup>203</sup> McMaster, *Jane Austen on Love*, p.78.

<sup>204</sup> Like fortitude, liveliness involves *interaction with others* and so is not purely a quality (Firstness) but also has an element of Secondness. Poovey frequently references the 'energy' and 'exuberance' of Austen's heroines, but in *Lady Susan* she links this trait more to Lady Susan than to Reginald (*The Proper Lady*, p.177). Darcy's admission to Elizabeth, near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, that he fell in love with her over 'the liveliness of [her] mind' may be one of the classic statements of Austen's estimation of the value of this character quality (*PP*, p.421). It is worth noting that Austen's reference here is to liveliness *of mind*, which she views as a positive trait in both men and women, whereas Wollstonecraft (in *Vindication*) more often applies the term 'lively' pejoratively

remainder of Lady Susan's letter and in the two follow-on letters by Mrs. Vernon. Lady Susan privately and profusely vents her anger to Mrs. Johnson about Reginald's interference in the matter of Frederica, while to his face she endeavors to conceal her anger. He, on the other hand, sensing her displeasure, tries patiently to 'soften [her] resentment' but eventually takes leave of her, feeling 'deeply provoked' at her behavior (p.45). Lady Susan relates that, compared to her:

he shewed his anger *more*.—I was quite cool, but he gave way to the most violent indignation.—I may therefore expect it will the sooner subside; & perhaps his may be vanished for ever, while mine will be found still fresh & implacable. (p.45)

Here again we have a narrative, the overt substance of which is Lady Susan's venting about Reginald's interference in her private affairs, but which also creates a subtle, contrasting image of the two characters. On Lady Susan's side is duplicity: she feigns humility and cool rationality to his face, but to a private third party shows her anger to be vengeful and enduring. On Reginald's side are sincere but lively feelings: he attempts to conciliate her, but then freely shows his indignation at her wrongs against Frederica. As Lady Susan admits in so many words, his anger is only an uncalculated *burst of indignation* and thus is likely to subside quickly. Moreover, his feelings are not coupled with the duplicity of being displayed in the fullness of their negative aspect only to a private third party. This fact is evident in Mrs. Vernon's report to her mother of her conversation with him immediately afterward:

I was sitting about half an hour ago with Sir James in the Breakfast parlour, when my Brother called me out of the room.—*I instantly saw that something was the matter;—his complexion was raised, & he*

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when referring to the exaggerated emotions and fancies associated with an excessive female sensibility. Tony Tanner notes that Austen's positive notion of liveliness 'is the main quality that Elizabeth will bring to the marriage', while Darcy (for his part) will bring a greater level of 'understanding' to the union; see *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.135. A positive intellectual liveliness in women is a quality that is compatible with Wollstonecraft's vision of women and men participating as rational equals in marriage.

*spoke with great emotion.—You know his eager manner, my dear Madam, when his mind is interested.—*

“Catherine, said he, I am going home to-day. I am sorry to leave you, but I must go.—It is a great while since I have seen my Father and Mother.... But before I leave you, he continued, speaking in a lower voice & with still greater energy, I must warn you of one thing.—Do not let Frederica Vernon be made unhappy by that Martin.—He wants to marry her—her Mother promotes the Match—but she cannot endure the idea of it.... Send him away immediately. He is only a fool—but *what her Mother can mean, Heaven only knows!*” (p.46, italics added)

While Reginald is incapable of concealing his feelings (like Frederica’s, they are written all over his face), he does not disclose the private or negative details of his conversation with Lady Susan to his sister, despite the fact that he knows he might find a sympathetic ear in her on such a subject. In fact, he says almost nothing about Lady Susan, and what he does say seems deliberately vague and nonjudgmental—a marked contrast to the frank words which he speaks to Lady Susan in person about her impropriety in the matter. In these characteristics, it could be argued that he embodies Austen’s ideal for both lively feeling and personal integrity. The image is both qualitative and active—an Iconic Sinsign again.

Despite Reginald’s fearlessness in confronting Lady Susan, his ardor in doing so is tempered by *consideration* for her feelings—a trait which Austen seems to make implicit in all the events involving Reginald.<sup>205</sup> His lack of self-importance—his

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<sup>205</sup> We have seen, for example, that even though he felt Lady Susan’s treatment of Frederica was improper, he ‘endeavoured, long endeavoured’ (according to Lady Susan) to soften her resentment over his attempt to correct her, before he lost his temper with her (*LM*, p.45). Likewise, before leaving Churchhill, when he is about to deliver the urgent charge to his sister to send Sir James away, he does not forget to see to his sister’s personal affairs: ‘I am going to send James forward with my Hunters immediately, *if you have any Letter therefore he can take it*’ (*LM*, p.46, my italics). The inclusion of this detail by Austen might seem to have little point, but it leaves open the idea that Reginald is mindful, even during times of pressing personal preoccupation, of the needs and wants of the women around him, and is not too self-important to concern himself with even small matters for

*humility*—manifests itself in a certain teachable quality that is characteristic of most of Austen’s more admirable male protagonists.<sup>206</sup> Austen first suggests this quality in Reginald by relating a circumstance that appears on the face of it only to reinforce our sense of Lady Susan’s power to deceive him. Recognizing that she is about to lose her hold on him after their quarrel, Lady Susan dispatches a servant to delay his departure and ask him for a private parley. She relates to Mrs. Johnsons that ‘[h]e came immediately’—note the humility of this act for a man freshly offended—and that he ‘looked as if half wishing & half fearing to be softened by what I might say’ (p.56). Seeing that he is not fully hardened against her, Lady Susan delivers a speech of feigned contrition, the results of which she describes to Mrs. Johnson thus:

It’s effect on Reginald justifies some portion of vanity, for it was no less favourable than instantaneous.—Oh! how delightful it was, to watch the variations of his Countenance while I spoke, to see the struggle between returning Tenderness & the remains of Displeasure.—There is something agreeable in feelings so easily worked on. (p.57)

In this exchange, Austen may intend Lady Susan’s deceit to be center stage, but she also suggests a certain *malleability* in Reginald’s character. That is, his capacity to

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their convenience. This is one of many minor incidents that keeps Reginald’s image from ‘univocally and monotonously’ taking on negative stereotypes associated with male privilege. And although Reginald is serving his sister in this case, some readers—Austen’s female contemporaries especially—might see by extension his *potential* to consider the needs of a wife, whose relative confinement he understands. If so, the quality would be iconic of an Austenian ideal for a sensitive and balanced implementation of the gender roles associated with marriage in her culture.

<sup>206</sup> Monaghan and others have pointed this out. For example, Monaghan notes that Edmund Bertram is guided by Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, that Captain Wentworth is taught to balance fortitude with self-restraint by Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, and that Mr. Darcy learns to temper pride with other qualities in *Pride and Prejudice* (‘Jane Austen and the Position of Women’, p.64). A similar observation about Darcy is made as early as 1813 by an anonymous reviewer; namely, that Elizabeth is able to ‘teach the man of Family-Pride to know himself’; see ‘Review of *Pride and Prejudice*’, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, I, 271-74 (p.274).

*attend to* and *be corrected by* a woman are implied, such that one might see the possibility of his engaging this capacity in other, more fruitful circumstances. The phenomenon of *spouses teaching one another* might be classified in general as a Secondness of Thirdness of marital love, because it consists of *mutual interaction* to the improvement of their *minds*. However, Reginald's image in this instance, as a mode of signaling this kind of ideal pedagogic relationship, seems to be a *vague representation of potentiality* (Qualisign) more than an *overt invocation of a conventional type* (Legisign). In addition, his potential is made evident only through an *interaction* with Lady Susan. Accordingly, his image, as a signifier of an Austenian ideal for constructive pedagogy in marriage, might be classified as an Iconic Sinsign—a *brief enactment* that bears a *vague resemblance* to its Object.

The letters of Mrs. Vernon and others that take us through the crisis and resolution to the Lady Susan story make further incidental reference to Frederica's positive qualities. Besides affirming her honesty and moral circumspection, they continue to develop her refinement of mind and her capacity for romantic love that is relatively unencumbered by designs on wealth.<sup>207</sup> I have already noted Mrs. Vernon's off-hand remark about Frederica's love of reading and her surprising degree of information for one so young.<sup>208</sup> In Mrs. Vernon's letter to her mother

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<sup>207</sup> I say *relatively* unencumbered because, as Robert Hume reminds us, a 'foundational reality' of the social class of which Austen writes is the 'painfully simple' fact that a woman '*must either have money or marry money*' if she is to remain 'genteel'. A consciousness of this reality would not have escaped even the innocent Frederica; see 'Money in Jane Austen', *Review of English Studies*, 64.264 (2013), 289-311 (293). This quality of Frederica is discussed further hereafter.

<sup>208</sup> Austen's high valuation of mental refinement as a character attribute is expressed well in her introduction of Anne Elliot (in *Persuasion*) as a woman possessing 'an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding' (*P*, p.6). As a product of an educated family, it is not surprising that Austen valued mental refinement. James E. Austen-Leigh indicates that her clergyman father studied at St. John's in Oxford and her mother's family was scholarly and witty; her mother's uncle was Master of Balliol College for half a century. He suggests that in those times a clergyman who happened to be better educated than his parishioners

about Reginald's interference with Lady Susan, she records his revised assessment of Frederica as a 'sweet girl' with 'a very superior Mind to what we have ever given her credit for' (p.46). These words are very similar to Austen's description of Anne Elliot; for any of Austen's contemporaries who shared Wollstonecraft's view of the rational equality of the genders, these words might reinforce the suggestion that Frederica has the *potential* for enjoying a relationship of mental parity with Reginald.

A brief Peircean analysis of *mental parity* as an aspect of marital love is worth undertaking here. Because the notion has to do with the condition of the *minds* of marriage partners, it has Thirdness. In addition, since parity suggests, as it were, *two equal parties facing each other on opposite sides of a balance*, it has Secondness as well. Note the parallel with Peirce's description of Secondness:

You get this kind of consciousness in some approach to purity when you put your shoulder against a door and try to force it open. You have a sense of resistance and at the same time a sense of effort. There can be no resistance without effort; there can be no effort without resistance. They are only two ways of describing the same experience. It is a double consciousness. We become aware of ourself in becoming aware of the not-self.... And this notion, of being such as other things make us, is such a prominent part of our life that we conceive other things also to exist by virtue of their reactions against each other. The idea of other, of *not*, becomes a very pivot of thought. To this element I give the name of Secondness.<sup>209</sup>

This description harmonizes with McMaster's characterization of how the mutual 'giving and taking of moral knowledge' in Austen's stories creates and sustains

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'became a sort of centre of refinement and politeness' for the community; and so it may have been with Jane's father. He prepared two sons for the University, educated his daughters, and took other pupils to supplement his income. Jane's oldest brother (Austen-Leigh's father) was ten years her senior and had 'a large share in directing her reading and forming her taste'. This brother was 'well read in English literature, had a correct taste, and wrote readily and happily, both in prose and verse'. Additionally, there were within her small circle of society a few other 'persons of good taste and cultivated minds' who had, Austen-Leigh believes, an influence in forming Jane's intellectual sensibilities; see *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, pp.57-63.

<sup>209</sup> CP, I, 324.

marital love.<sup>210</sup> Mental parity also has Firstness because it is a *quality* of a couple. It might be seen as the prerequisite raw material that a couple must bring to a relationship in order for Austen's pedagogy-driven kind of love to occur. Thus, while mental parity as an Object in itself involves all three Peircean aspects of marital love (knowledge, interaction, and quality), any simple suggestions in the story to the effect that Frederica and Reginald have the *potential* for this kind of love will operate as Qualisigns.<sup>211</sup>

Reginald's reactions to the revelation of Lady Susan's gross duplicity, which he receives through a face-to-face conversation with Mrs. Manwaring, enhance his image as one of positive potential to realize various aspects of Austen's marriage ideals. With the 'mortifying' reality fresh in his mind, he writes to Lady Susan to make 'an immediate & eternal separation' from her (p.68). In reply, she enjoins him to come to her 'immediately' and explain how his mind could be so radically altered by just one conversation (p.69). Unlike the last time she summoned him, however, the now wiser Reginald does not comply. Instead, he writes from his hotel, the name and location of which he omits, and asks, 'Why do you require particulars?'. In a spirit of fairness, he nonetheless lays out for her what he has learned: that she has had an ongoing affair with Mr. Manwaring since leaving Langford, 'that he now visits you every day', and that 'all this' was done 'at the time when I was an encouraged, an accepted Lover!' (p.70). His *warmth of indignation* at this juncture is certainly

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<sup>210</sup> *Jane Austen on Love*, p.79.

<sup>211</sup> Wollstonecraft promotes this kind of parity in *Vindication* but, unlike Austen, finds it problematic to fictionalize in her novels. Perhaps her difficulty reflects her sense (as Poovey argues in 'The Gender of Genres', pp.122-4) that marriage in the patriarchal tradition does not provide enough workable space in which to construct a complementary male-female relationship—a sense that Austen does not seem to wholly share. In any case, the romance plot does not traditionally include much detail on the hero and heroine's actual doings after marriage, for such might sully the idealism of romantic endings.

understandable, but what is perhaps less expected is the turn of feelings reflected in his next words:

From what have I not escaped!—I have only to be grateful.—Far from me be all Complaint, & every sigh of regret. My own Folly had endangered me, my Preservation I owe to the kindness, the Integrity of another.—But the unfortunate Mrs. Manwaring, whose agonies while she related the past, seem'd to threaten her reason—how is *she* to be consoled? (p.70)

His self-pity is short-lived and is quickly replaced by better sentiments: gratitude to others who kept him from a full downfall, humility at his own 'folly', and compassion for Mrs. Manwaring, whom he recognizes as the greater victim, and whose pain he chooses to focus on. His qualities of humility and compassion, demonstrated previously only through negative experiences, begin here to take on greater focus as they are directed toward more productive ends: to the consolation of Mrs. Manwaring on the one hand, and to the correction of his and Lady Susan's course on the other. His image accordingly moves closer to the active nature of Sinsign representation. Because his image still bears a *likeness* to Austen's ideal 'open and eager' character rather than *opposing* it, it is not a pure (Indexical) Sinsign but rather is an Iconic Sinsign as before.

Reginald's ability to learn from his mistakes and to be taught and corrected by others—especially by women (Mrs. Manwaring, in this last case)—is reinforced by his parting words to Lady Susan:

My Understanding is at length restored, & *teaches* me no less to abhor the Artifices which had subdued me, than to despise myself for the weakness, on which their strength was founded. (p.70, my italics)

This language emphasizes both his teachability and his humility: he is finally able to distinguish between 'artifice' and fact, and recognizes that it was *his weakness*, not any inherent strength in artifice, that subverted his proper understanding. It is interesting that when he returns home and tells his mother that he and Lady Susan 'are parted forever', his mother is '[un]able to learn particulars' from him (p.73).



This suggests once more that even when Reginald is experiencing intense personal disappointment, he does not stoop to speak ill of an intimate acquaintance, even when that acquaintance is one by whom he has been wronged. His integrity and principles are evidently well rooted—a reflection of his moral strength that again could be considered iconic of Austen's ideal for a virtue-graced relationship.

From the story's concluding lines by the omniscient narrator, a reader might assume that Reginald will continue to be instructed by the women in his life while retaining the lessons he has learned from the experience with Lady Susan:

Frederica was therefore fixed in the family of her Uncle & Aunt, till such time as Reginald De Courcy could be talked, flattered & finessed into an affection for her—which, allowing leisure for the conquest of his attachment to her Mother, for his abjuring all future attachments & detesting the Sex, might be reasonably looked for in the course of a Twelvemonth. Three Months might have done it in general, but Reginald's feelings were no less lasting than lively. (p.77)

The wry humor of these lines does not lessen their effect in adding a certain character balance to the picture of Reginald: on the one hand he is susceptible to being molded by female influence, but on the other he is incapable of being moved from sound principles once he has learned them, and perhaps is a little less apt than before to be manipulated by deceitful means. In keeping with her avoidance of references to an actual union between Reginald and Frederica, Austen waits until this final paragraph to mention any timeframe for its occurrence, and even then she speaks only of 'such time' as he 'could be' talked into it, which 'might be' within a 'twelvemonth'. Thus, she resists moving the couple into a Sinsign category by refusing to name an exact time and place for their union, which Peirce notes are the quintessential characteristics of every Fact of occurrence.<sup>212</sup> The couple therefore remains largely in that vague and potential realm of the Qualisign: being a representation of positive potential in the *feeling* aspects of marital love, and

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<sup>212</sup> *The Philosophy of Peirce*, p.77.

possessing the open and eager character, honest affection, moral fortitude, and mental parity that arguably comprise the essential human elements of Austen's ideal for the marriage relationship. The *real-world interactional* elements of marital love—the direct conversations, dances, outings, and intimacies—and the *lawful* elements—the financial settlements, ceremonies, and printed notices—are left to be represented largely by other characters.<sup>213</sup>

### LADY SUSAN AND FRIENDS

By contrast, there is nothing *vague or potential* about the conversations, outings, intimacies, and financial objects of Lady Susan Vernon and her illegitimate lover Mr. Manwaring, or of their cohort Mrs. Alicia Johnson. Austen reveals the thoughts and actions of these characters in all their *cold factuality*, emphasizing their duplicitous nature through the epistolary form. The narration relative to these characters, as with the juvenilia generally, 'contain[s] more unabashed expressions of heartless sentiments and shocking actions than all the rest of Austen's novels... put together', observes Deborah Knuth.<sup>214</sup> Farrer remarks the 'cold unpleasantness' of the story, calling it a 'youthful exaggeration' of that 'irreconcilable judgment' for which Austen is famous, 'harshly evident in this first book'.<sup>215</sup> R. W. Chapman comments that the 'brilliant... central figure' of the story is rendered with a 'hard polish', which 'creates a vivid illusion'.<sup>216</sup> And, as mentioned, Drabble believes the 'excessive wickedness' of Lady Susan to be one reason why Austen decided not to publish the short

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<sup>213</sup> Hinnant notes that Austen contributes to the development of the romance plot by finding new ways to keep readers from 'presuppos[ing] an assumption about what the future will bring' in the story's ending—a perceived shortcoming of the romance plot as it generally existed up until Austen's time ('Romance and the Courtship Plot', p.307).

<sup>214</sup> 'Lady Susan: A Bibliographical Essay', p.216.

<sup>215</sup> 'Jane Austen, ob. July 18, 1817', p.187.

<sup>216</sup> *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p.52, cited in Deborah Knuth, 'Lady Susan: A Bibliographical Essay', p.216.

novel.<sup>217</sup> Given such assessments, it is not surprising that most of the criticism of *Lady Susan* focuses on the title character. The Susan-Manwaring couple, and the associated character of Mrs. Johnson, communicate much about Austen's ideals for marital love, but they do so in a manner that is very distinct, semiotically, from that of the Frederica-Reginald couple.

Many of the words cited in the forgoing critical summary of Lady Susan's character emphasize Secondness: *cold, heartless, wicked, excessive, harsh, hard, brilliant, vivid, shocking*. Whereas a monadic quality (Firstness) is a primal *positive* state, a dyadic fact (Secondness) exists only in and through its *opposition* to such a state.<sup>218</sup> Thus, a 'cold' woman is so known for her lack of human warmth; a 'heartless' woman is so called for being devoid of compassion; a 'wicked' woman is an enemy to virtue; 'excessive' or 'harsh' discipline is discipline outside of reasonable bounds; a 'hard' fact is one that stubbornly resists us; a 'brilliant' figure shines out distinctly from the usual ones; and a 'vivid' or 'shocking' occurrence stands in sudden and sharp relief from what was expected. Many of these characteristics align with the general ostentation and heartlessness of the stock 'coquette' figure of the period fiction.<sup>219</sup> However, as a collection, these characteristics also align very closely with Peirce's description of how one experiences Secondness phenomena:

Your mind was filled with an imaginary object that was expected. At the moment when it was expected the vividness of the representation is exalted, and suddenly, when it should come, something quite different comes instead. I ask you whether at that instant of surprise

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<sup>217</sup> 'Introduction', p.11.

<sup>218</sup> *CP*, I, 324.

<sup>219</sup> Though, oddly, neither Tamara Wagner nor Herbert Klein reference Lady Susan in their respective analyses of Austen's coquettish characters; see Wagner 'The Decaying Coquette: Refashioning Highlife in Early Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing, 1801-1831', in *Refiguring the Coquette: Essays on Culture and Coquetry*, ed. By Shelley King and Yael Schlick (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), pp.83-102 (90-6), and Klein 'The Reform'd Male: Coquets and Gentlemen', also in *Refiguring the Coquette*, pp.143-163 (154-6).

there is not a double consciousness, on the one hand of an Ego, which is simply the expected idea suddenly broken off, on the other hand of the Non-Ego, which is the strange intruder, in his abrupt entrance.<sup>220</sup>

Shocking, surprising, or provoking incidents are extreme cases of Secondness in which the sense of a double consciousness is strong, where the phenomenon is largely known 'by force of something to which it is second'.<sup>221</sup> All genuine Secondness signs, or Indexical Sinsigns, serve to bring our attention to something by virtue of their real (and often reverse) reaction to that thing. In many cases, the realities that they call out may not otherwise be visible or apparent until the 'abrupt entrance' of the Index upon our consciousness. Even as a juvenile writer, Austen seems to have understood the power of such *oppositional* signs: they bring to our attention the real nature of our internally held ideals by creating provoking instances that violate them. And when it comes to ideals about love and marriage, Lady Susan and her friends provide many such provoking instances.

It is reasonable to suppose that Austen and her contemporaneous social class generally held vows of spousal fidelity to be sacred and fundamental to the marriage contract.<sup>222</sup> In a Peircean view of marital love, such vows, publicly taken and sealed by recognized priestly authority, are arguably the *lawful* pillar (Thirdness) of the relationship. In *Lady Susan*, Austen wastes no time in revealing her anti-heroine's disregard for marital vows. In the opening letter of the story, when Lady Susan tells

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<sup>220</sup> CP, V, 53.

<sup>221</sup> *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, ed. by C. J. W. Kloesel, 6 vols (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), vol.5, p.304. The idea is that a genuine Secondness *disrupts* or *modifies* some pre-existing state, or Firstness. Classic examples of signs that fall into this category include a weathervane, which catches our attention by its swinging reaction to the wind; a thermometer, whose mercury rises or falls in reaction to external temperature; a footprint, which is the modification of the earth made by a person's foot; and a finger-pointing action, which catches our attention by a sudden gesture toward an object in the external world.

<sup>222</sup> Or at the very least, as Langdon Elsbree suggests in 'Jane Austen and the Dance of Fidelity and Complaisance', they would wish so to appear; see *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 15.2 (1960), 113-36.

her brother-in-law, Mr. Vernon, that the 'hospitable & chearful dispositions' of the Manwaring family 'lead them too much into society' for her 'present situation & state of mind', she insinuates that her devotion to the memory of her husband prompts her to forsake the sociality of Langford for a 'delightful retirement' at Churchhill with her brother- and sister-in-law (p.3). In the next letter, however, she informs Mrs. Johnson of the real reasons why she must leave Langford: she has made Mrs. Manwaring 'insupportably jealous' and 'enraged' by courting Mr. Manwaring's attentions; she has 'incensed' Miss Maria Manwaring by 'bestow[ing] a little notice' on her suitor, Sir James Martin; and 'the whole party are [now] at war' in the house (pp.4-5). This second report of Lady Susan's state of affairs would not be so provoking were it not for its utter contrast with her first report to Mr. Vernon. Ironically, the verbal picture that she creates in that first report—invented to suggest her reverence for her late husband—reflects the kind of feeling and sociality that *could have* prevailed at Langford had she in fact behaved in line with a respect for the Manwarings' marital vows. In Peircean semiotic terms, this (pretended) scene of pleasant sociality at Langford is a Firstness that is shattered by the 'abrupt entrance' of the actual facts of the situation (Secondness), the emotional fall-out for which Lady Susan betrays not the slightest shame. This second report may induce a kind of mental *recoil* that is the result of one's value of marital vows being offended. Such an experience may serve to draw the reader's attention to his or her personal values, the nature and reality of which he or she may have been less conscious before.<sup>223</sup> That is, a reader may be made more aware of his or her own unseen value of marital fidelity by Lady Susan's acts in violation of the same, though the incidents be but fictional ones.

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<sup>223</sup> In this regard, the incident functions like a weathercock—although the wind is unseen, one is made more aware of it by the sudden swings of the weathercock, which is placed in opposition to the wind.

For readers who share Austen's sense of the value within marriage of having a sincere friendship with the family members of one's spouse, Lady Susan's behavior may have a similar Indexical effect. 'I shall hope within a few days to be introduced to a sister, whom I have so long desired to be acquainted with', Lady Susan writes to her 'dear Brother' (Mr. Vernon) in the opening paragraph. She professes a proper attachment to her brother- and sister-in-law, and further asserts that 'I long to be made known to your dear little Children, in whose hearts I shall be very eager to secure an interest.—I shall soon have occasion for all my fortitude, as I am on the point of separation from my own daughter' (p.3). The separation from Frederica, she explains, is necessary given the importance of securing a proper education for her. Notwithstanding the professed concern for her daughter, Lady Susan's first letter to Mrs. Johnson calls Frederica 'the greatest simpleton on Earth' and 'the torment of my life'; her third letter describes the young lady as a 'stupid girl' who 'has nothing to recommend her', and reveals that 'I do not mean... that Frederica's [educational] acquirements should be more than superficial' (pp.5,13). Clearly Lady Susan's motives for placing her daughter in a boarding school have more to do with her own convenience than with a concern for her education. The supposed dearness of her brother-in-law, likewise, is reduced in her letter to Mrs. Johnson to be just this: 'Charles Vernon is my aversion'; and her 'delight' in Churchhill turns out to consist rather in its being 'that unsupportable spot' in 'a Country Village' to which she now resorts only as a 'last resource' (p.5). To round out her professed fondness for the family, after being received into their home at Churchhill she writes again to Mrs. Johnson that her sister-in-law 'shows an illiberal & vindictive spirit' for not having forgotten her attempt 'six years ago' to prevent the couple from marrying, and cites the fact of their now having 'Children in abundance' as just reason, in hindsight, for having refused to sell them the family estate (Vernon Castle) at the time of their marriage, even though she and her husband were 'obliged' to sell it at the time. Continuing her report to Mrs. Johnson, she notes that the Vernons now live finely in their own estate at Churchhill: 'Charles is very rich I am sure.... But they do not know what to do with their fortune, keep very little company, & never go to

Town but on business'. Thus, her real opinion about a 'delightful retirement' at Churchhill with Mr. and Mrs. Vernon is that '[w]e shall be as stupid as possible' (pp.9-10). And far from having a genuine interest in the children, she reveals in her closing lines to Mrs. Johnson her real intent with respect to them:

I mean to win my Sister-in-law's heart through her Children; I know all their names already, & am going to attach myself with the greatest sensibility to one in particular, a young Frederic, whom I take on my lap & sigh over for his dear Uncle's sake. (p.10)

Lady Susan's disregard for the relationship between another married man and woman, and her lack of natural affection for her own daughter and for the children of her brother-in-law, may of themselves be provoking, but further wonder accrues to the picture of a woman who does these things while maintaining a perfect outward semblance of propriety (the 'hard polish' to which Chapman alludes<sup>224</sup>). Austen's evident intention in her juvenilia is to present instances of characters whose words and appearance embody the conduct-book definition of propriety while being anything but virtuous in reality.<sup>225</sup> As Horowitz notes, it is Lady Susan's skill at 'using the language of the conduct books' to mask her 'less-than-moral' ends that makes her image so 'compelling'<sup>226</sup>—that is, *shocking* to an audience that has been conditioned by conduct books,<sup>227</sup> perhaps even humorously so to some. But

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<sup>224</sup> *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems*, p.52.

<sup>225</sup> To parody conduct-book morals was not uncommon literary practice for the time—a prominent early example being Henry Fielding's *Shamela*. It is perhaps not surprising that the oft-repeated strains of conduct advice had become a subject of parody given that the reading public had been saturated with them for several decades by Austen's time (a process well chronicled in Hunter's *Before Novels*).

<sup>226</sup> 'The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', pp.70,78.

<sup>227</sup> Jane Donawerth argues that the values of middle-class women in Austen's time had been particularly shaped by the reading of conduct literature; see *Conversational Rhetoric: The Rise and Fall of a Woman's Tradition, 1600-1900* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), pp.41-72.

even to readers who are not so conditioned, the contemplation of such scenes, in which words are ‘manipulated and made to supplant reality’,<sup>228</sup> still compels the mind to acknowledge the great difference between one who has ‘mastered the forms of virtuous rhetoric’ and one who actually practices virtue. As a young lady raised in a society hyper-attentive to decorum, Austen seems ‘from the beginning’ to have relished the opportunity afforded by fictional narrative to explore such ‘sins of pretentiousness’.<sup>229</sup> Although she begins her exploration with exaggerated cases like Lady Susan, her interest in the project never flags, progressing from these early incarnations to ever more subtle dramatizations in her quest to express a ‘nothing-if-not-human’ character ideal.<sup>230</sup>

Lady Susan’s stated desire to win her sister-in-law’s heart through her children not only reveals her lack of genuine care for the children—she sees them only as a means to an end—but it also builds the conflict of the story by raising the question of what she hopes to gain from winning Mrs. Vernon’s heart. A mercenary motive of some kind would answer the expectations of the romance plot novel, and Austen fulfills this expectation. In her first letter to Mrs. Johnson, Lady Susan jokes that she has ‘more than once repented’ that she did not herself marry Sir James for his money rather than earmark him for her daughter. She mentions in the same letter that the price of Frederica’s new boarding school is ‘much beyond what I can ever attempt to pay’, and Mrs. Vernon relates in her first letter to her mother that Mr. Vernon has ‘render[ed]... pecuniary assistance’ to Lady Susan recently due to her ‘narrow circumstances’ (pp.5-7). From Lady Susan’s comments about the potential devaluation to Vernon Castle of having it become the residence of ‘Children in abundance’, we know that she values estate property—both for the prestige it affords (she ‘could not endure’ that her ‘Husband’s Dignity should be lessened by his

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<sup>228</sup> Thomsen, ‘Words “Half-Dethroned”’, p.99.

<sup>229</sup> Shields, *Jane Austen: A Life*, p.33.

<sup>230</sup> McCann, ‘Setting and Character’, p.322.



younger brother's having possession of the Family Estate') and for its material comforts ('could we have lived with Charles [in Vernon Castle] & kept him single, I should have been very far from persuading my husband to dispose of it elsewhere') (p.10). Ingratiating herself to her sister- and brother-in-law is requisite with the object of her desires at this juncture, one of which is to continue an expensive lifestyle:

[A]s to money-matters, [selling Vernon Castle elsewhere] has not with-held [Mr. Vernon] from being very useful to me. I really have a regard for him, he is so easily imposed on!

The house [Churchhill] is a good one, the Furniture fashionable, & everything announces plenty & elegance. (p.10)

Thus, a relationship with her brother- and sister-in-law, as with their children, is utilitarian to Lady Susan rather than a thing of intrinsic value.<sup>231</sup> While, again, this fact may not surprise readers who have come to expect mercenary motives in the characters of romance novels, Lady Susan's approach to family relations still has strong Secondness due to its obvious *duplicity*. As the story progresses, the *contrast* between her calculated approach and the open and artless kind of familial affection exhibited by Frederica and Reginald becomes more pronounced. While the latter kind is not overtly *described* in the narrative (as I argue in the previous section, it seems rather to be only briefly and occasionally 'pictured'), Lady Susan's provocative

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<sup>231</sup> It could be argued that the dependent state of women in Austen's time naturally engendered utilitarian motives at many levels. Poovey suggests that 'Austen's contemporary readers would... have been all too familiar with the facts and pressures that made' women grasp for leverage: the 'specters of spinsterhood, dependence, and compromise', to be specific. Such realities were 'the psychological toll exacted by patriarchal society from women' in the period (*The Proper Lady*, pp.203,206). Perhaps the interest of such a character as Lady Susan to readers both then and now relies on our ability to identify with our human susceptibility to utilitarian motives. At the same time, I submit that a character whose evident motivation for building relationships includes not even a trace of genuine affection or goodness will trigger unease in most readers, whether they are contemporaries of Austen or modern readers.

*lack of any real feeling* for family members serves to highlight the value of sincere affection. Semiotically, therefore, Lady Susan's image is Indexical of my proposed Austenian ideal for affection for the family members of one's spouse, in that it serves to indicate the ideal by *pressing against and reacting with it*. At the same time, her image at this point also has some Legisign traits: it appears to invoke both the mercenary lover and the mercenary mother stereotypes that are common to the fiction of the period (and which Austen herself develops further in her later novels, especially *Pride and Prejudice*).<sup>232</sup>

Lady Susan's joke about marrying Sir James herself hints at another object of her residence at Churchhill—one that tends to resist the mercenary lover stereotype. '[W]ere he but one degree less contemptibly weak', she quips to Mrs. Johnson, 'I certainly should [marry Sir James], but I must own myself rather romantic in that respect, & that Riches only, will not satisfy me' (p.5). To attract her, it seems a man must be malleable enough to bend to her will but not so weak as to be contemptible to her. That is, in the *struggles of will* (Secondness) that occur in relationships, Lady Susan enjoys a victory only when there is a real contest. Thus, while it may be convenient for the moment that Mr. Vernon 'is so easily imposed on', his apparent weakness of will may be one of the reasons for her 'aversion' to him. (Later she references the 'insipid talk' of Mr. Vernon, and Frederica's seeming possession of 'all the Vernon Milkiness'—an epithet that could apply to both her late husband and to Charles [pp.19,29].) Interestingly, in the same breath that she speaks of her aversion to Mr. Vernon, she admits to Mrs. Johnson that 'I am afraid of his wife' (p.6). For a woman as confident as Lady Susan, 'afraid' is a strong word; and yet we learn, from her next letter to Mrs. Johnson, that in an earlier contest of influence between the two women, Lady Susan came out the loser: 'I *did* take some pains to prevent my Brother-in-law's marrying her, ...a project which... never succeeded at last' (p.9).

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<sup>232</sup> These stereotypes are discussed, for example, in Marilyn Francus, "'Where Does Discretion End, and Avarice Begin?' The Mercenary and the Prudent in Austen', *Persuasions* 34 (2012), 57-70.

When Reginald arrives at Churchhill, not only does Lady Susan see a new challenge in winning his good opinion, but she also sees a chance to even the score with Mrs.

Vernon:

Mrs. Vernon's brother... promises me some amusement. *There is something about him that rather interests me, a sort of sauciness, of familiarity which I shall teach him to correct. He is lively & seems clever, & when I have inspired him with greater respect for me than his sister's kind offices have implanted, he may be an agreeable Flirt.—There is exquisite pleasure in subduing an insolent spirit, in making a person pre-determined to dislike, acknowledge one's superiority.*—I have disconcerted him already by my calm reserve; & it shall be my endeavour to humble the Pride of these self-important De Courcies still lower, to convince Mrs. Vernon that her sisterly cautions have been bestowed in vain, & to persuade Reginald that she has scandalously belied me. (pp.14-5, my italics)

For Lady Susan, the pleasure in this new 'project' derives from the level of challenge it presents: Reginald's *saucy, lively, and clever*<sup>233</sup> character stands out from the insipid milkiness of the Vernon brothers and the contemptible weakness of Sir James. The new project also holds potential to satisfy her lust for dominance. 'I have made him sensible of my power', she writes of Reginald to Mrs. Johnson a fortnight later, '& can now enjoy the pleasure of triumphing over a Mind prepared to dislike me, & prejudiced against all my past actions' (p.18). To obtain Reginald's

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<sup>233</sup> In Peircean terms, *liveliness* is a Secondness (active) aspect of character that Austen values highly, as mentioned previously. *Cleverness* could be considered a Thirdness (intelligent) aspect, which, as Shields reminds us, Austen has always shown a preference for in men. Besides intelligence, it includes a touch of creativity (Firstness), and so could be classified overall as Firstness of Thirdness (or a 'qualitative' Thirdness). *Sauciness*, on the other hand, includes both liveliness (Secondness) and a willingness to playfully push against established boundaries of conduct (which are Thirdness); it could therefore be classified as Secondness of Thirdness (or what Peirce calls a 'reactional' Thirdness). For Austen, it is never enough to blindly accept conduct rules; one must probe their boundaries to discover their true essence and apply them correctly in a situation. Reginald's *sauciness* reflects his unpolished, open, and (initially) cocky manner toward Lady Susan, but, as that lady soon finds, it also reflects his 'troublesome' tendency to moral probing.

hand in marriage is not, however (as she corrects Mrs. Johnson in the same letter), her aim at this point. Rather, her object is to enjoy a sense of superiority over him and of revenge on Mrs. Vernon:

His sister too, is I hope convinced how little the ungenerous representations of any one to the disadvantage of another will avail, when *opposed to the immediate influence of Intellect & Manner*.—I see plainly that she is uneasy at my progress in the good opinion of her Brother...;—but having once made him doubt the justice of her opinion of me, I think I may defy her.... I never behaved less like a Coquette in the whole course of my Life, tho' perhaps *my desire of dominion was never more decided*. I have *subdued* him entirely by sentiment & serious conversation, & *made* him I may venture to say at least half in Love with me.... Mrs. Vernon's consciousness of deserving every sort of *revenge* that it can be in my *power to inflict*, for her ill-offices, could alone enable her to perceive that I am actuated by any design.... (pp.18-9, italics added)

This passage could be seen as an offense against the Austenian ideal of *mental parity*. Here Lady Susan enjoys the mental challenge posed by Reginald, but she takes pleasure only in having *greater* powers than he, and in 'inflicting revenge' upon his sister. Her ill feelings for Mrs. Vernon stem from her recognition that in some matters the only thing standing in the way of her dominance is the equal and opposite influence of her sister-in-law. We catch a sense of her resentment in a snide remark that she later makes to Mrs. Johnson: '[Frederica] is exactly the companion for Mrs. Vernon, who dearly loves to be first, & to have all the sense and all the wit of the Conversation to herself;—Frederica will never eclipse her' (p.36). As the story continues, Lady Susan's proud and stingy attitude increasingly contrasts with the humble and generous attitude of Reginald and Frederica. Lady Susan's pride in her 'Intellect & Manner' and her lust for dominance are barriers to a constructive relationship: she is unable to enjoy a situation of parity but takes pleasure only in a consciousness of superiority.

As I suggested in the previous section, mental parity as an aspect of marital love actuates all three of Peirce's universal categories: Firstness because it is a *quality* of a couple, Secondness because it involves *equal and opposite forces*, and Thirdness

because it has to do with their *minds*. Thus, in a general Peircean categorial analysis of marital love, it is far-reaching. But the expressed desires and schemes of Lady Susan are, as a Sign of marital love and of the ideal of mental parity specifically, Indexical—they highlight the value of mental parity by embodying what it is *not*.<sup>234</sup> Lady Susan, by lusting for dominance in matters of will, provokes the thought that true marital love respects the will of one's partner as an equal; by taking inordinate pride in her own intellect, she highlights the need for partners to be humble enough to learn from each other. That a man should adopt such an attitude towards his wife is perhaps one of the 'unsayable' things of Austen's day,<sup>235</sup> but as Mullan points out, Austen finds ways to suggest things while 'declining to tell us'.<sup>236</sup> Her thoughts on the parity of men and women seem near to those of Wollstonecraft,<sup>237</sup> but her manner of expressing them is sufficiently indirect to pass in her society.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Again, this is how a weathervane works: in swerving *away* from the wind or assuming a position where the wind is *not*, the weathervane ends up indicating the direction of the wind.

<sup>235</sup> Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p.162.

<sup>236</sup> *What Matters in Jane Austen*, loc.5200.

<sup>237</sup> In this same vein, Johnson notes that Mr. Knightley (in *Emma*) exhibits a progressive attitude with respect to parity of the genders, though Austen tries to 'make [him] seem traditional'; see *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s--Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp.196-7 and 201-2. It is conceivable, however, (as Butler, Ruderman, and Monaghan suggest) that Austen shared Wollstonecraft's views about the mental and moral parity of men and women without subscribing to the idea that fundamental institutional and societal changes were required to realize more balance and cooperative engagement between the genders (Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp.1-2; Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.140,143; Monaghan, 'Jane Austen and the Position of Women', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, II, 62-70).

<sup>238</sup> Poovey, like Kirkham, observes that 'the distance irony affords enables Austen to explore her characters' "romantic expectations"—and delusions—without committing herself definitively to the same desires'. Therefore, her 'relationship to bourgeois assumptions remains protectively opaque—implicitly critical in isolated phrases at the same time that the narrative privileging of marriage seems to ratify the central bourgeois institution' ('Mary Wollstonecraft: The Gender of Genres', p.125).

If the wedding ceremony and vows are the *lawful* pillar (Thirdness) of marital love in an Austenian ideal, perhaps openness and honesty could be considered among the *qualitative* pillars (Firstness) of the relationship. With respect to these aspects of Austen's ideal, the Susan-Manwaring couple is provokingly Indexical as well. Despite her professions, in the opening letter of the narrative, of devotion to the memory of her husband, Lady Susan exclaims in her next letter to Mrs. Johnson:

Poor Mainwaring!—I need not tell you how much I miss him—how *perpetually he is in my Thoughts*.—I found a dismal Letter from him on my arrival here [in Churchhill], full of complaints of his wife & sister, & lamentations on the cruelty of his fate. *I passed off the letter as his wife's, to the Vernons, & when I write to him, it must be under cover to you.* (pp.10-1, emphasis added)

Besides the mental infidelity of Lady Susan and of Mr. Manwaring, this report highlights the covert nature of their communications, and Mrs. Johnson's complicity in the secrecy. We know that this covert communication is ongoing from Mrs. Vernon's report to Reginald in the next epistle that Lady Susan 'corresponds regularly with Mrs. Manwaring' (p.12). Later, Lady Susan informs Mrs. Johnson that Mr. Manwaring 'has been teizing me to allow of his coming into this country, & lodging somewhere near me *incog*' (p.30). Lady Susan's meetings with Mrs. Johnson in London are likewise covert. Upon arriving at Churchhill, Lady Susan writes to Mrs. Johnson, 'I... rejoice to be assured that Mr. Johnson suspected nothing of your engagement [with me] the evening before; it is undoubtedly better to deceive him entirely;—since he will be stubborn, he must be tricked' (p.9). While modern readers might question the justice of Mr. Johnson controlling the engagements of his wife,<sup>239</sup> the use of deception and secrecy by Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson as a

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Here, Poovey suggests that Austen may not have shared the same values for institutional marriage that her contemporaneous readers generally did. One could as easily argue, however, that Austen wishes to criticize points of individual marital *practice* without subverting the institution as a whole.

<sup>239</sup> A wife's obedience to her husband was, in the conduct books of the day, the expectation. Thomas Marriott, for example, versifies the rule: 'Hence ev'ry Wife her Husband must obey'; see

means to circumvent his decisions contrasts with the open and honest approach taken by Frederica and Reginald in comparable circumstances. For example, when Lady Susan first recommends Sir James to Frederica as a suitor, she relates to Mrs. Johnson that her daughter 'set herself so violently against the match, that I thought it better to lay aside the scheme for the present' (p.5). Frederica's open reaction is consistent with the transparent way in which she displays her feelings throughout the story. Likewise, we have seen that when Reginald's father objects to his involvement with Lady Susan, he replies directly to his father with a full and open account of his feelings. The covert, deceptive, and manipulative approach to romantic relationships taken by Lady Susan and her friends increasingly contrasts with the open, sincere, and direct approach of Reginald and Frederica. In Peircean terms, these qualities of the Frederica-Reginald couple constitute a Firstness against which the Susan-Manwaring affair becomes a provoking Secondness. Therefore, as a Sign of the Austenian ideal for open and sincere relationships, the covert exploits of Lady Susan, Mr. Manwaring, and Mrs. Johnson fall into the category of Indexical Sinsign.

Austen's marriage ideals seem to encompass a balance between a woman's need to be materially provided for and the requirement that she have true affection for her husband, independent of his possessions. The aims of Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson in developing relationships with men clearly include the element of their own material provision, but notably lack the element of real affection. When Mrs.

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*Female Conduct: being an essay on the art of pleasing. To be practiced by the fair sex, before, and after marriage. A poem in two books* (London, 1759), p.18. See also Hazel Jone, *Jane Austen and Marriage*, p.119. Johnson describes how the French revolution triggered a conservative, anti-jacobin backlash in Austen's time, which sought to reinforce the duty of women to obey their husbands, in order to guard against libertine tendencies that might destabilize families and society. However, she suggests that Austen held a more 'progressive' view that favors a woman's exercise of independent reason in conjunction with her discharge of wifely duty (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp.14-27).

Johnson learns that Reginald has joined the party at Churchhill, she opens her next letter to Lady Susan summarily as follows:

I congratulate you on Mr. De Courcy's arrival, & advise you by all means to marry him; his Father's Estate is we know considerable, & I believe certainly entailed.—Sir Reginald is very infirm, & not likely to stand in your way long. (p.17)

The idea that marriage is nothing more than an economic maneuver—laughingly loud in Mrs. Johnson's words—is interestingly qualified by Lady Susan in her reply. She acknowledges the 'expediency' of the match, and avers her delight in 'see[ing] plainly that [Mrs. Vernon] is uneasy at my progress in [Reginald's] good opinion', but maintains that 'I cannot easily resolve on anything so serious as Marriage' with Reginald (p.18). 'On my side, you may be sure of [the relationship] never being more' than 'a kind of platonic friendship', she continues, 'for if I were not already as much attached to another person as I can be to anyone, I should make a point of not bestowing my *affection* on a Man who had dared to think so *meanly* of me' (p.19, my emphasis). Here it is evident that Lady Susan holds the view that a woman must have a certain 'affection' for a man to consider marrying him, and that Manwaring qualifies for such affection while Reginald does not. Reginald has dared to think of her as *lower* than himself and thus is disqualified. Manwaring, on the other hand, is qualified because his tongue never slips in 'saying those delightful things which *put one in good humour with oneself & all the world*' (p.19, italics added). The apparent measure of a man's worthiness for her affections has less to do with *his* character per se and more to do with his ability to speak and act in ways that invariably cast *her* in a flattering position in her own eyes and in the eyes of the world. It is true that Reginald's good figure, cleverness, and liveliness are 'agreeable enough... to afford' her 'amusement', but they do not merit the bestowal of her *affection* (p.19). Here, the contrast between Lady Susan's inward-directed kind of affection and Reginald's outward-directed kind is accentuated by the cold polish of the Susan-Manwaring image. The image is beautifully sleek but empty of real human caring, and so may trigger a natural recoil in readers who value the human element. Thus,



without actually 'saying' it, Austen suggests the need for a marital relationship to entail more than just an outward form that is pleasing to society.

In Lady Susan's report to Mrs. Johnson of the surprising visit of Sir James to Churchill to court Frederica, she laments the apparent 'rapid increase of [Frederica's] affection for Reginald', and remarks how 'contemptible' Reginald's regard for her daughter is, since it is 'founded only on compassion' (p.42). As a form of love, *compassion* is directed outwardly and so is distasteful to Lady Susan, who knows only the self-serving passions. In the same paragraph she also complains that Reginald recently mentioned Frederica 'spontaneously and unnecessarily', and 'once... said something in praise of her person' (p.43). Reginald's *spontaneous* praise of Frederica is particularly offensive because Lady Susan has obtained Reginald's regard only by careful manipulation, while she knows his regard for Frederica to have arisen from no artful effort on Frederica's part. Moreover, as Reginald nominally is still (at this point in the story) the romantic suitor only of Lady Susan, his words about Frederica qualify as the kind of tongue-slip that Austen might call eager sincerity but that Lady Susan finds contemptibly weak. Reginald's *unnecessary* praise of Frederica is likewise offensive because it is not motivated by any utilitarian end, whereas Lady Susan knows her own praise of her lovers always to be so motivated. (As mentioned, even her praise of Mr. Manwaring focuses on his *instrumentality* in preserving her image of preeminence.) Her proclamation a few paragraphs later seems to affirm the idea that she respects only utilitarian passions: 'I shall ever despise the Man who can be gratified by the Passion, *which he never wished to inspire, nor solicited the avowal of*' (p.44, my italics). These invectives are part of the 'strong stuff' that makes up her loud character, but the loudness of her character is due in part to its contrast with what we might call the 'quiet stuff' (Firstness) of Reginald's manner, to which it is Second in the Peircean sense. Thus, with respect to an Austenian ideal of unencumbered love, Lady Susan's instrumental kind of affection may be deemed an Indexical Sinsign.

In a similar fashion, the narrative sets forth Lady Susan's interests in men in a way that contrasts with Frederica's romantic interests. Previously, I observed how

Federica's feelings for Reginald are readily apparent to both Mrs. Vernon and Lady Susan. As I suggest above, Lady Susan's contempt for her daughter's romantic feelings stems, at least in part, from her observation that they are unconnected with designs on money or property—a claim that she cannot make for her own endeavors with respect to Reginald or Sir James. That Federica should desire a relationship freely on the basis of romantic feeling, with little thought for the potential gain in property or status to herself or her mother, is juvenile in Lady Susan's view.<sup>240</sup> As Gornal argues, the 'equally strong grip on the mind' of romantic and economic considerations in courtship often produced conflict in Austen's day.<sup>241</sup> One could argue that Austen's view that a woman must have honest and free romantic feelings for the man she marries, regardless of all other practical considerations, finds indirect expression in the following rant of Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson:

I beleive I owe it to my own Character, to complete the match between my daughter & Sir James, after having so long intended it.... Flexibility of Mind... is an attribute which you know I am not very desirous of obtaining;—nor has Federica any claim to the *indulgence of her whims, at the expense of her Mother's inclination*.—Her *idle Love* for Reginald too;—it is surely my duty to discourage such *romantic nonsense*.—All things considered therefore, it seems incumbent on me to take her to Town, & marry her immediately to Sir James. (p.58, emphasis added )

Lady Susan's language pits *her inclination as a mother*—which is to secure the advantages of a rich son-in-law while reserving Reginald for herself—against *her daughter's love for Reginald*, which she deems by comparison to be an *idle whim of romantic nonsense*, unworthy of *indulgence*. Again, the importance to Lady Susan of

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<sup>240</sup> In this view, Lady Susan was perhaps not very unusual for the times, as both Hume and Francus argue. 'That finances must be taken into consideration in courtship', states Francus, 'is a given throughout the Austen canon' ('The Mercenary and the Prudent', 60). As I mentioned earlier, Austen does not necessarily suggest that Federica is naïve to these realities but rather that she keeps such considerations in proper balance—a point that she makes indirectly later in the narrative.

<sup>241</sup> 'Marriage and Property', p.50.

the financial transaction involved in her daughter's marriage, and of maintaining the supremacy of her own will, are accentuated by the relative absence in Frederica of self-interested motives: her love for Reginald is 'idle' (unconnected with a scheme), 'whimsical' (emotionally tender), 'romantic' (pure and idealistic), and such as may only be 'indulged' in (sweet and irrational). Mrs. Johnson's letter of reply exhibits a similar attitude to Lady Susan's. She advises the latter to 'think more of yourself, & less of your Daughter', since Frederica 'is not of a disposition to *do you credit in the World*'; she urges Lady Susan therefore to leave Frederica to '*indulg[e] that romantic tender-heartedness* which will always ensure her misery' (p.59, my italics). While these statements suggest that Mrs. Johnson views marriage as little more than a means of gaining credit and position, they also imply the converse: that Frederica's feelings for Reginald are relatively unencumbered by these considerations. If we account unencumbered love as one of the 'competing goods' in Austen's marriage ideal, Frederica's qualities in this scene, like Reginald's in the previous one, are a Firstness (an Icon of the ideal), whereas Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson's expressions are a provoking Secondness (Index of the ideal).

Mrs. Johnson's letter also provides some interesting insights into her own marital circumstances. She enjoins Lady Susan to visit her in London 'without loss of time' because:

[Mr. Johnson] is going for his health to Bath, where if the waters are favourable to his constitution & my wishes, he will be laid up with the Gout many weeks.—During his absence we shall be able to chuse our own society, & have true enjoyment.—I would ask you to Edward St. but that he once forced from me a kind of promise never to invite you to my house. Nothing but my being in the utmost distress for Money, could have extorted it from me.—I can get you however a very nice Drawing room-apartment in Upper Seymour St., & we may be always together, there or here, for I consider my promise to Mr. Johnson as comprehending only (at least in his absence) your not sleeping in the House. (pp.59-60)

Having married Mr. Johnson evidently for his money, Mrs. Johnson now finds enjoyment only in his absence, when she may choose her own company and

engagements. Far from having voluntary fidelity to him based on love, she now makes promises to him only when absolutely necessary to obtain money, and she keeps those promises as minimally as possible. Here, while the image of the couple is a Sinsign of marriage because it comprises actual instances of their marital affairs, it is also highly Indexical (reactional) to the ideal of honest affection. With little or no affection in her own marriage, Mrs. Johnson seems to live vicariously in the scandalous love affairs of others while she becomes ever more cynical about the possibility of true love. One could argue that her character illustrates the end result of a relationship devoid of affection, and sadly highlights the connection of honest affection with fidelity, and of mercenary motives with cheating and secrecy.

As I mentioned, the communicative power of an Index often relies on an element of surprise, shock, or vivid contrast. In her first letter to Mrs. Johnson after returning to London, Lady Susan relates that she must 'put off' Reginald's joining her in town 'under some pretence or other' because Mr. Manwaring has resumed his private encounters with her (p.63). While this development may not come as a shock to readers, the character of the events that follow might. After she writes to delay Reginald, he nonetheless shows up at her apartment just half an hour before one of Manwaring's appointed visits. Accordingly, Lady Susan feigns illness and hurries him off to visit Mrs. Johnson, where he happens to enter the home just minutes after Mrs. Manwaring has arrived to beg Mr. Johnson's help in stopping her husband's affair. Mrs. Johnson relates to Lady Susan what ensues:

[B]efore I could be aware of it, everything that you could wish to be concealed, was known to him...!—What could I do!—*Facts are such horrid things! ...That detestable Mrs Manwaring, who for your comfort, has fretted herself thinner & uglier than ever*, is still here, & they have been all closeted together. (p.67, my emphasis)

This passage, besides reminding us of the stubborn power of facts over words, highlights the cold indifference of Mrs. Johnson to the emotional toll that Mr. Manwaring's love affair has taken on his wife. Mrs. Johnson's unfeeling words, together with Lady Susan's flippant reply—'Silly Woman! what does she expect by

such manoeuvres?’ (pp.67-8)—bring to new depths the reckless self-absorption of these two women. Their utter lack of concern for the harm they inflict is only made darker next to the compassion that Reginald shows to Mrs. Manwaring. This contrast becomes even more vivid when Mrs. Johnson, in her final letter, matter-of-factly reports:

You have heard of course that the Manwarings are to part; I am afraid Mrs. M. will come home to us again. But she is still so fond of her Husband & frets so much about him that perhaps she may not live long. (p.71)

Lady Susan responds:

Manwaring is more devoted to me than ever; & were he at liberty, I doubt if I could resist even Matrimony offered by *him*. This Event, if his wife live with you, it may be in your power to hasten. The violence of her feelings, which must wear her out, may be easily kept in irritation.—I rely on your friendship for this. (p.72)

Here the image of their self-centered, hardened machinations stands in stark relief from the wholesome and compassionate image of Reginald and other characters. From a Peircean semiotic viewpoint, the image of these two conspiring women is a provoking Secondness (Indexical Sinsign) juxtaposed with the image of Reginald’s warmly human qualities, which comprise the Firstness of these scenes.

Finally, if we consider marital vows to be the *lawful* pillar (Thirdness) of romantic love in an Austenian ideal, and honest affection to be one of its *qualitative* pillars (Firstness), we might consider industry, fortitude, and self-denial among the *active* pillars (Secondness) of the relationship. Such an idea is consistent with Emsley’s view of an Austenian virtue system emphasizing activity, and McMaster’s view of an Austenian ethic of energy.<sup>242</sup> With respect to these ideals, the behavior of Lady

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<sup>242</sup> Emsley, *Jane Austen’s Philosophy*, p.18; McMaster, ‘The Juvenilia’, p.181. It is also consistent with the general societal concern during the period about the dangers of idleness. Hunter observes that a broad spectrum of the guide literature in the period leading up to Austen’s writing contains

Susan and her friends also has relevance. For example, in her comments to Mrs. Johnson about Frederica's education, Lady Susan indicates that she wants her daughter to 'play & sing with some portion of Taste' without 'throwing time away' to be 'Mistress of French, Italian, German, Music, Singing, Drawing &c'. To her, the arduous effort required to *master* ('be Mistress of') such subjects may 'gain a Woman some applause, but will not add one Lover to her list'; rather, in the female game of love, Lady Susan believes 'Grace & Manner... are of the greatest importance' (p.13). Her attitude seems to pose the question: why should a woman perform the hard work to improve the inner self when her outward charms and appearance may secure a man?<sup>243</sup> From a purely utilitarian perspective, the question is valid, but it begs the further question as to what *kind* of man such an approach might succeed with. On this point the Lady Susan story arguably has something to say (as I discuss below), though we might well expect Austen to make the point without actually saying it.

In a previous explanation of Secondness, I noted that the category has to do with *struggles of will*, or with *opposing forces*. Of the many character attributes that Austen promotes as being conducive to marital happiness, fortitude is the one that has the most Secondness, since it always involves an element of struggle. Whether it is pushing forward through opposition or standing firmly against it, the element of struggle in fortitude is the same—as Peirce says, these 'are only two ways of

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'warnings about idleness as a threat to both individual self-realization and the integrity of the social fabric', reflecting a common 'concern about the ethical dangers in contemporary patterns of leisure, recreation, and play' (*Before Novels*, p.274).

<sup>243</sup> Wollstonecraft points out that it is natural for 'women [to] avail themselves of the power which they attain with the least exertion', and if society has 'gratuitously granted them [certain gender-based privileges and pseudo-powers], few will ever think of works of supererogation, to obtain the esteem of a small number of superior people' (*Vindication*, ch.4, paras. 12 and 21). Poovey argues along similar lines, as mentioned earlier, that patriarchal prescriptions of femininity essentially 'distort[ed]' the 'powerful force' of female energy into 'debilitating' forms (*The Proper Lady*, p.177).

describing the same experience'.<sup>244</sup> As we have seen, Lady Susan enjoys struggles of will when they entail real challenge for her. When Frederica succeeds in getting Reginald and the Vernons to dismiss Sir James from Churchhill, the ire that Lady Susan expresses to Mrs. Johnson reflects her sense of competition; she warns her friend, 'do not imagine that... I have for a moment given up my plan of [Frederica's] marriage [to Sir James];—No; I am *unalterably fixed* on that point' (p.37, my italics). Here, the strength of her will is pitted against Frederica's, and she is confident that her own is greater. Later, when she has had to concede defeat in the larger battle with Mrs. Vernon and the De Courcys for Reginald's loyalties, she declares to Mrs. Johnson her renewed determination to dominate Frederica:

I am now satisfied that I never could have brought myself to marry Reginald; & am equally determined that Frederica never *shall*. Tomorrow I shall fetch her from Churchhill, & let Maria Mainwaring tremble for the consequence. Frederica shall be Sir James's wife before she quits my house. *She* may whimper & the Vernons may storm;—I regard them not. (p.72)

Determination is certainly part of fortitude, but fortitude implies a *sustained* effort that arises from one's commitment to a person or object that is highly esteemed. Frederica is committed to marrying a man for whom she has real esteem; she resists her mother's efforts to force Sir James on her because, as she expresses to Reginald, she has 'always thought him silly & impertinent & disagreeable', to the point that 'I would rather work for my bread than marry him' (p.42).<sup>245</sup> Lady Susan holds few objects in real esteem: she likes property, preeminence, and Mr. Manwaring, but even him she esteems only as an instrument for maintaining her preeminence.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> CP, I, 324.

<sup>245</sup> This incidental statement nicely shows that Frederica is aware of the economic considerations attendant to her choice of a marriage partner, and suggests perhaps that her romantic intentions with respect to Reginald likewise are more than just naïve daydreamings.

<sup>246</sup> Preeminence suggests a consciousness of superiority to others. James Mulvihill alludes to Lady Susan's lust for such a relation with others when he notes that 'the role of petitioner' suits her

One could even argue that property is also instrumental to maintaining her sense of preeminence, and so her list of esteemed objects could be reduced to preeminence. Indeed, her redoubled determination to dominate Frederica after losing Reginald seems to reflect anger over her *decrease in leverage and power compared to others*:

I am tired of submitting my will to the Caprices of others—of resigning my own Judgement in deference to those, to whom I owe no Duty, & for whom I feel no respect.—I have given up too much—have been too easily worked on; but Frederica shall now find the difference.  
(p.72)

The resolutions associated with selfishly motivated anger, however, last about as long as the anger does, and perhaps are not a basis for the kind of sustained, self-sacrificing effort that Austen usually associates with fortitude—or at least so the story's compressed conclusion seems to imply. The narrator informs us that shortly after Lady Susan's rupture with Reginald, Mrs. Vernon goes to visit her and Frederica in London and finds, oddly, that '[p]ersecution on the subject of Sir James was entirely at an end' (p.76). This alteration seems mystifying until three weeks after Frederica has returned to Churchhill, when the narrator reports that Lady Susan herself marries Sir James. Here it is not stated, but is evident, that without Reginald as a prospect, Lady Susan has determined her next best move to be to continue her affair with the penniless Manwaring while supplied with an ample cash flow from a rich husband whom she can manipulate and deceive to her heart's content. Although she will despise Sir James for his weakness, her unchanged priorities dictate such a course, and this ending to the story provides a symbolic answer to the question as to what sort of man a shallow approach to character development will succeed with.

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only 'at given moments' of expediency, whereas she 'ultimately views her relations with others' as avenues of 'power... to reward or punish those over whom she exercises her prerogatives'; see 'Lady Susan: Jane Austen's Machiavellian Moment', *Studies in Romanticism*, 50.4 (2011), 619-638 (632).



It is notable that Lady Susan's determination to have Frederica marry Sir James evaporates as soon as the latter becomes instrumental to her *own* desires. This fact reinforces what her words have masked: that in reality she cares little about what happens to Frederica one way or the other. When Mrs. Vernon coaxes Lady Susan to let Frederica return to Churchhill, the narrator informs us that

Frederica's visit was nominally for six weeks;—but her Mother, tho' inviting her to return in one or two affectionate Letters, was very ready to oblige the whole Party by consenting to a prolongation of her stay, & in the course of two months ceased to write of her absence, & in the course of two more, to write to her at all. (p.77)

Lady Susan's behavior demonstrates that she lacks the will and commitment to provide care for her daughter for longer than a few weeks, and is unable even to keep up a correspondence with her for four months together. As with 'affection', Lady Susan's brand of 'fortitude' is focused on herself. Fortitude, as I suggest above, involves standing firmly to resist opposition, and this includes cases where the opposition originates within oneself—where one desire rises up to compete with the original object of desire. In other words, fortitude includes not only a self-assertive element but also an element of *self-denial*.<sup>247</sup> Lady Susan's fortitude lacks this element and so is weaker. This lesson is implicit in the outcome of the story, wherein the honesty, affection, and fortitude of the seemingly weak and tender Frederica are seen to withstand the machinations of the mighty Lady Susan ('I had not a notion of her [Frederica] being such a little Devil before', Lady Susan admits at one point [LM, p.29]); and the truth, compassion, and teachability of the seemingly gullible Reginald are seen ultimately to overcome the notoriously bewitching power of the same lady.<sup>248</sup> The contrast of the relative strengths of Frederica and Reginald

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<sup>247</sup> A theme that Austen explores more fully in *Persuasion*.

<sup>248</sup> Counter to this view, Poovey asserts that 'society fails to provide any power adequate to Lady Susan', to either 'engage or resist her irrepressible energy', especially among the male characters. However, Poovey admits that 'timid Frederica three times defies her mother; Mrs. Manwaring finally

compared to Lady Susan, which again is never stated but emerges gently and naturally from the story's conclusion, is a communicative effect that perhaps is explainable in terms of Austen's use of both Icons (Frederica and Reginald) and Indices (Lady Susan and her friends) to represent her ideals. In the case of the latter, we should bear in mind that Indices tend to rely on the elements of contrast and surprise, which can be difficult to keep fresh for very long using the same set of characters, since the reader will soon come to *expect* shocking or surprising behavior from certain characters. Perhaps Austen sensed this intuitively when she decided to break off the epistolary form at the point when she did, and to take up, for the

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overthrows Susan by pursuing her husband to London; and Mrs. Vernon consistently proves herself capable not only of understanding Susan's art but of matching it' (*The Proper Lady*, p.177). Here, in arguing that it is Mrs. Manwaring who ultimately saves Reginald from Lady Susan's clutches, Poovey speaks truly but does not acknowledge Reginald's power of fortitude, humility, and attentiveness to women in the outcome of the affair. Were a morally weaker man—Sir James, for example—to hear Mrs. Manwaring's story, it is doubtful he would be able to resist Lady Susan's advances any differently. Like Poovey, Mulvihill also sees the story's conclusion as a sign of Lady Susan's superior powers. While he admits that her approach to relationships seems to result only in transitory success ('Lady Susan lives wholly in the moment, her plans changing with each new circumstance'; and 'as suddenly as she appears to come out on top, Lady Susan is brought low'), he is ambivalent about Austen's attitude toward the power of such characters compared to those who possess traditional virtue like Frederica and Reginald. He concedes that the story's 'outcome is morally desirable' to 'Austen's readers (and *perhaps* to Austen herself)', but suggests that the unusual 'complacency' of Lady Susan at the story's end reflects Austen's doubt as to whether, judging 'from probabilities', Machiavellian characters like Lady Susan might not truly be able to overturn virtuous and stable families or communities under some circumstances ('Jane Austen's Machiavellian Moment', pp.632-3, my italics). The story clearly does imaginatively explore the possibilities of an 'active display of female sexuality' in genteel society (Simpkins, 'Scarlet Letters', p.90), and Austen likely saw real moral danger in such a character. However, to take the view that she believes such power ultimately to be as strong as traditional virtue, one must either ignore the 'probabilities' suggested by the story's progression of events (in which Lady Susan's influence grows narrower over time), or believe that Austen crafts the story primarily to please an audience whose views she does not share—an argument that runs counter to her decision *not* to publish the story.

story's hurried conclusion, a narrative style that is more typical of her later, full-length novels.

#### THE VERNONS AND DE COURCY

As with Frederica and Reginald, the character couples of Mr. Charles and Mrs. Catherine Vernon, and of Sir Reginald and Lady De Courcy, have received relatively little critical attention compared to Lady Susan. McMaster refers to Mrs. Vernon as the 'goody-goody' 'female adversary' of Lady Susan who occasionally 'outsmarts' the latter.<sup>249</sup> Simpkins and Seeber cast the Vernons and De Courcys as combining against Reginald to coerce him back into a patriarchal family order<sup>250</sup>—a much darker interpretation of Austen's views on the family than the 'healing and curative' view of Hudson.<sup>251</sup> Regardless of how one interprets Austen's ideological intentions with respect to the Vernon and De Courcy character couples, it is evident that she has chosen to invest them with attributes and values that are *conventional* for the period, particularly in regards to the institution of marriage and the roles and structure of the family. Therefore, as an overall category of representation, these two couples fall into the Legisign type—a classification that is broad enough to encompass conventional marriages generally (Symbolic Legisigns) as well as marriages that, while being conventional, seem to *oppose* Austen's ideals in some respect (Indexical Legisigns) or to bear a notable *resemblance* to one or more of her ideals (Iconic Legisigns).

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<sup>249</sup> 'The Juvinilia', p.184.

<sup>250</sup> Scott Simpkins, 'The Agon for the Male Signifier: Austen's Lady Susan', *Semiotics* (1997), 375-86; and Barbara Seeber, *General Consent*, pp.127-31. Simpkins and Seeber's interpretations of Austen's views of patriarchy follow on those of Gilbert and Gubar, who call the patriarchal family a 'bankrupt and coercive institution' (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.137), and on Mary Burgan's similar earlier assessment; see 'Mr. Bennet and the Failures of Fatherhood in Jane Austen's Novels', *Journal of English and German Philology* (Fall 1975), 536-52.

<sup>251</sup> 'Consolidated Communities', p.109.

In contrast to Lady Susan, whose powers for marital love lie chiefly in her beauty and sex appeal (the *feeling* and *physical* aspects of marital love, or Firstness and Secondness, which correlate roughly with the 'coquette' figure of the period), Mrs. Vernon possesses the moral and intellectual faculties necessary to engage in a mutually-improving relationship (reflecting mainly the *knowledge-based* aspects of marital love, or Thirdness). Austen develops these characteristics in Mrs. Vernon as she unfolds the story. For example, despite Lady Susan's professions of familial affection in her opening letter to Mr. Vernon, Mrs. Vernon sees that her impending visit 'is in all probability merely an affair of convenience', and that her 'gracious mention of my children' and professed desire to be 'attached' to them cannot be substantive for 'a woman who has behaved with inattention if not unkindness to her own child' (pp.6-7). Here, Mrs. Vernon (writing to her mother) exhibits both perceptiveness about human nature and the habit of weighing professions against facts. She does not forget facts about Lady Susan in the 'warmth of admiration' or the 'immediate influence of manner and intellect' as Reginald does initially. She has had the benefit of more personal experience with the 'attractive Powers' of the lady, and so tries 'to guard... against their influence' when they are 'not accompanied by something more substantial' than mere words (p.7). Moreover, as the lawfully wedded wife of a wealthy landowner, she is an apt representative of conventional marriage ideals for Austen's time and social class; her image is therefore a Legisign of marriage for the period. In addition, the information that we obtain about her is conveyed directly by her own letters (she is the second-most frequent letter writer in the story), and the truth of her professions is generally corroborated by other letter writers, including Lady Susan. Thus, not only does Austen convey a conventional *character* for Mrs. Vernon, but she does so using a more conventional *mode* than she does with Frederica or Lady Susan. Whereas with Frederica she uses anecdotal comments of other characters to create a subtle, background image of character, and with Lady Susan she uses the stark contrast between her letters to Mrs. Johnson and those to other characters to create a duplicitous representation of character, with Mrs. Vernon she uses her direct discourse with other characters to create a

normal, straightforward representation of character. In Peircean terms, this is Symbolic because it relies more purely on our *logical system of language* to convey meaning, in contrast to the Iconic mode used with Frederica and the Indexical mode used with Lady Susan, which rely more heavily on qualitative perceptions of *likeness* and *contrast*, respectively.

We have relatively less information about Mr. Vernon—he is, as McMaster observes, ‘hardly present’ in the story.<sup>252</sup> All the information we glean about him comes through the letters of other characters, and most of it is anecdotal. Besides Lady Susan’s comments on his ‘milky’ character, for example, we have Mrs. Vernon’s opening report to her mother about Lady Susan’s upcoming visit, which includes anecdotes about Mr. Vernon’s role in inviting Lady Susan to Churchhill:

Mr. Vernon I think was a great deal too *kind* to her, when he was in Staffordshire. Her behaviour to him, independent of her general Character, has been so inexcusably artful & ungenerous since our marriage was first in agitation, that *no one less amiable & mild than himself could have overlooked it all*; & tho’ as *his Brother’s widow & in narrow circumstances* it was proper to *render her pecuniary assistance*, I cannot help thinking his pressing *invitation to her to visit us at Churchhill perfectly unnecessary*.—Disposed however as he always is to *think the best of every one*, her display of Greif, & professions of regret, & general resolutions of prudence were sufficient to *soften his heart*, & make him really *confide in her sincerity*. (pp.6-7, my emphasis)

Here Mr. Vernon is shown to be mild and pliable—an easy dupe for Lady Susan. However, like Reginald, his susceptibility to her manipulation clearly stems from compassion and other Christian virtues named in his wife’s description: kindness; readiness to think well of and to forgive others; willingness to assist the widowed, to take in the needy, to go the extra mile (his ‘pecuniary assistance’ to her was ‘proper’ but his inviting her to come stay in their home was ‘unnecessary’—that is, above the

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<sup>252</sup> ‘The Juvenilia’, p.184.

call of duty).<sup>253</sup> These qualities are affirmed by anecdotal remarks of Sir Reginald as well, who observes to his son that Lady Susan ‘has always been represented [to our family] in softened colours by the *benevolence* of Mr. Charles Vernon; & yet in spite of *his generous endeavours to excuse her*, we know that she did, from the most selfish motives, take all possible pains to prevent his marrying Catherine’ (p.22, my emphasis).<sup>254</sup> Charles Vernon apparently is a man of generous *feeling* and benevolent *action* (Firstness and Secondness), but he may lack other virtues like justice and prudence (Thirdness) that would counteract the tendency of others to take advantage of him. Of course, Austen does not *say* this of him, but she allows the background *picture of his actions* (anecdotally reported) to suggest it; his image is therefore an Iconic Sinsign. On the other hand, the consistent and overt presence of Mrs. Vernon’s narrative voice (Legisign) in the story reminds us that Mr. Vernon is united with a wife who possesses some of the qualities that he may be lacking, so the couple working together presents instructive instances of how marriage can be ‘a great Improver’ of individuals (*Letters*, p.159).

Indeed, Mrs. Vernon’s letter to Reginald shortly after Lady Susan arrives at Churchhill provides a sideways glance into the give-and-take of the relationship between her and Charles. She describes how Lady Susan ‘speaks... with so much

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<sup>253</sup> One might argue that Mrs. Vernon wishes to paint her husband in a positive light, and so her remarks will tend in that direction by design. However, given the level of candor and intimacy otherwise evident in the letters between her and her mother, there seems to be little motivation for sugar-coating the truth in this context. She certainly does not sugar-coat her criticisms of Reginald’s unwise behavior in the same letters.

<sup>254</sup> Austen’s choice of character traits here for Mr. Vernon closely resembles Saint Paul’s teachings on charity: ‘Charity suffereth long, and is kind; ...is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ...Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things’ (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, King James Version). Mr. Vernon’s willingness to shelter and provide for Lady Susan in her time of need also indirectly reflects Christ’s parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) and the teaching of Saint James that ‘Pure religion... is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction’ (James 1:27, KJV).

tenderness & anxiety' about Frederica, 'lamenting so bitterly the neglect of her education', that she (Mrs. Vernon) would surely have been 'persuaded... of her being warmly attached to her daughter' had she not 'recollect[ed] how many successive Springs her Ladyship spent in Town, while her daughter was left in Staffordshire to the care of servants or a Governess very little better' (p.12). Mrs. Vernon's thoughts on Lady Susan's motives—always weighed against the facts she knows—evidently have been discussed with her husband, as the ensuing section of her letter implies:

If her manners have so great an influence on my resentful heart, you may guess how much more strongly they operate on Mr. Vernon's generous temper.—*I wish I could be as well satisfied as he is, that it was really her choice to leave Langford for Churchhill; & if she had not staid three months there before she discovered that her friends' manner of Living did not suit her situation or feelings, I might have believed that concern for the loss of such a Husband as Mr. Vernon... might for a time make her wish for retirement. But I cannot forget the length of her visit to the Manwarings, & when I reflect on the different mode of Life which she led with them, from that to which she must now submit, I can only suppose that the wish of establishing her reputation by following, tho' late, the path of propriety, occasioned her removal from a family where she must in reality have been particularly happy.* (p.12, emphasis added )

This brief implied discourse between Mr. and Mrs. Vernon shows that he has drawn more generous conclusions about Lady Susan's intentions than she has. She cannot get past certain facts that are incongruous with his assessment, but she nonetheless stops short of forming a wholly unfavorable opinion and instead admits that something nearer to his opinion may be plausible given the sum of the facts so far known. By his exercise of faith and hope in Lady Susan, Mrs. Vernon's justice is tempered and she is spared the burden of harboring negative feelings prematurely. Likewise, by her exercise of objectivity with respect to facts (that is, by her sense of justice), he is kept to a prudent course that lessens the degree to which Lady Susan might impose upon him. Together, the couple enjoys the fruits of their combined virtue, enabling them to deal with challenges like those presented by Lady Susan more effectively than they would as individuals. The image of the couple faintly

resembles the Austenian ideal for mutually-improving interaction (making it overall an Iconic Legisign of her marriage ideals), though perhaps the husband is not as strong a partner as could be wished for. Still, there is no revolting sense that he is far below his wife in understanding (as one might feel, for example, were Elizabeth Bennet to marry Mr. Collins), and so the couple's image is not an Indexical Legisign. Nor is the image wholly neutral with respect to Austen's ideal for a mutually-improving relationship, and so it is not a purely Symbolic Legisign either.<sup>255</sup>

Although Mrs. Vernon is aware of her husband's susceptibility to scheming individuals, she emphasizes in her letters to her mother the positive qualities from which his susceptibility stems, and she is on the alert to protect him against abuses of his generosity. Her perceptiveness of the motives, strengths, and weaknesses of others—especially of her closest family members—often prompts her to exert her influence in their defense and support. Her powers of influence, like Lady Susan's, lie primarily in the use of language. Whereas Lady Susan uses language artfully to deceive, Mrs. Vernon uses it with equal facility to elucidate the truth through factual reasoning, and to share affection and moral support. For example, a fortnight after Reginald joins them at Churchhill, she observes to her mother, 'I am persuaded that [Reginald's] continuing here beyond the time originally fixed... is occasioned as much by a degree of fascination towards [Lady Susan], as by the wish of hunting with Mr. Vernon' (p.15). She weighs her brother's professed reasons for staying longer against her observation of facts in his behavior, and alerts her mother to his potential pitfalls in the hopes that the latter might be able to assist in checking his course. Here, her language consists of both *sober thought* and *preventive action*,

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<sup>255</sup> By lumping the Vernons and De Courcys into the lot of conventional and coercive patriarchy, Simpkins and Seeber's analyses (*Semiotics*, pp.375-86; and *General Consent*, pp.127-31) tend to argue for an Indexical Legisign classification at worst or a Symbolic Legisign one at best with respect to Austen's marriage and family ideals. To adopt such a view, however, one must be willing to overlook Austen's subtle yet careful development of positive details in these characters, which I discuss further below.



representing Thirdness and Secondness aspects of sibling love, or what modern readers might call 'tough love'.<sup>256</sup>

Like Reginald's exchange of letters with his father, Mrs. Vernon's correspondence with her mother reflects an open exchange of feelings and familial affection. 'I will not disguise my sentiments on this change [in Reginald] from you my dear Madam', she writes in the same letter, 'tho' I think you had better not communicate them to my Father, whose excessive anxiety about Reginald would subject him to an alarm which might seriously affect his health & spirits' (p.15). These words betray a concern for her father, whose physical and emotional condition she is plainly familiar with. Lady De Courcy's reply shows similar sympathy and warmth (her closing lines are 'How provoking it is my dear Catherine, that this unwelcome Guest of yours, should... prevent our meeting this Christmas', and 'Kiss the dear Children for me' [p.24]), but her letter also provides hints about the kind of relationship she enjoys with Sir Reginald:

Unluckily I was confined to my room when your last letter came, by a cold which affected my eyes so much as to prevent my reading it myself, so I could not refuse your Father when he offered to read it to me, by which means he became acquainted to my great vexation with all your fears about your Brother. (p.23)

It may be that Austen invented the circumstance of Lady De Courcy's cold here merely to insert Sir Reginald into the plot, and yet the incident suggests an attentiveness on the part of Sir Reginald to the needs of his wife, and perhaps also his awareness of the enjoyment that she takes in her correspondence with their daughter. In any case, Lady De Courcy clearly shares her daughter's concern over Sir

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<sup>256</sup> Some modern readers might consider her actions meddlesome tattling of her brother's private affairs more than it is any kind of love. However, the conduct literature and novels of Austen's time reflect a general societal view that one's duty entails admonishing family members and close friends against a perceived reckless course, and that to neglect this duty is to show apathy to the potential harm that might otherwise result for the loved one.

Reginald's health; she is 'excessively vexed that Sir Reginald should know anything of a matter which... would make him so uneasy'. She knows him to be a man of attentive compassion; she notes that 'He caught all your fears the moment he had read your Letter, & I am sure he has not had the business out of his head since;—he wrote by the same post to Reginald, a long letter full of it all' (pp.23-4). These anecdotal details create an image of a husband and father who is inclined to act swiftly when he sees that a family member is in need; like his son Reginald who steps in to help the beleaguered Frederica, and his son-in-law Mr. Vernon who acts generously to assist his brother's widow, his is an image that faintly reflects Austen's ideals for a gentleman—one who is sensitive to a woman's needs and willing to act on her behalf, who is refined and educated, and who enjoys privilege and resources but does not use them coercively. The image is active (a Sinsign) but in a quiet, steady (Iconic) way rather than in a provocative (Indexical) way; nor is the activeness (Secondness) of his image in this instance idiosyncratic as much as it is representative of a general *type* of man (Legisign). Consequently, Sir Reginald's image fits a classification as an Iconic Legisign of my proposed Austenian ideal.

Lady De Courcy's communication with her daughter is very open, to the point that she encloses Reginald's letter of reply to his father, in its entirety, with her first letter to Catherine (Letter 13). We have only two short letters from Lady De Courcy in the course of the story, neither of which reports any striking action or self-assertiveness. In fact, what is noteworthy is how very little *self* is expressed in the letters. She seems to see life from the perspective of her and her husband *together*, as evidenced by her frequent use of 'we' and 'us' in her prose. Her second letter, for instance, announces to Catherine the 'charming news' that 'Reginald is returned [from London], not to ask *our* consent to his marrying Lady Susan, but to tell *us* that they are parted forever!' (pp.72-3, my emphasis). She empathizes with Reginald's 'very low' emotional state—'I have not the heart to ask questions' of him (during his first hour at home)—but 'I hope *we* shall soon know all'. Her interest in Reginald's thoughts, and her expressions in the rest of the letter, bespeak a woman whose thoughts are wrapped up in her family:

This is the most joyful hour he has ever given us, since the day of his birth. Nothing is wanting but to have you here, & it is our particular wish & entreaty that you would come to us as soon as you can. You have owed us a visit many long weeks.—I hope nothing will make it inconvenient to Mr. Vernon, & pray bring all my Grand Children, & and your dear Neice is included of course; I long to see her.—It has been a sad heavy winter hitherto, without Reginald, & seeing nobody from Churchhill; I never found the season so dreary before, but this happy meeting will make us young again.—Frederica runs much in my thoughts, & when Reginald has recovered his usual good spirits, (as I trust he soon will) we will try to rob him of his heart once more, & I am full of hopes of seeing their hands joined at no great distance. (p.73)

Besides her frequent reference to the 'we' of her husband and herself, she speaks of her son, her daughter, her son-in-law, her grandchildren, and her daughter's niece, but not of herself. Hers is the image of selfless domesticity and maternity that is conventional for the period (Legisign), which is portrayed here favorably as a picture of joy, happiness, and hopes for loved ones (Iconic Legisign). Though an image of conventional maternity, she is not one preoccupied with self-centered meddling or scheming (such as Mrs. Johnson), which would be an Indexical Legisign image.

Sir Reginald's image is more imposing than that of his wife, generally. His title and name alone announce a regal character; he is proud of the 'ancient Family' from which he descends, and reminds his son that the 'credit of your name' is 'at stake' in 'the very important concern of Marriage' (p.21). His estate is, as Mrs. Johnson has noted, 'considerable' (p.17). Austen knows that readers will immediately see in Sir Reginald a symbol of land-owning, patriarchal power, with all its potential for good and evil within family and neighborhood circles. His letter to Reginald, written in a flowing, articulate style, not only suggests good breeding and education but also much about his attitude toward his wife and children. Though his purpose in writing is to warn and persuade Reginald against attaching himself romantically to Lady Susan, he does not threaten him with sanctions as we might expect from an oppressive patriarchal type. Instead, we find him 'hop[ing]' that Reginald 'will be superior to such [young men] as allow nothing for a Father's anxiety' when they 'do

not admit of any enquiry' from him 'into affairs of the heart' and 'refuse him their confidence & slight his advice' in such matters (p.21). What he asks, ahead of any specific decision from Reginald about Lady Susan, is admittance into his son's confidence in the affair, and the chance to discuss it. While he does appeal to the credit of the family name, he makes clear the order of priority of that claim: 'In... Marriage... everything [is] at stake; your own happiness, that of your Parents, & the credit of your name' (p.21). This language recognizes his son's primacy in the decision and the secondary nature of other claims. He does not refer to the credit of 'our family name' but of '*your* name'—recognized here as an entity of value in its own right. He affirms his confidence in his son's good sense: 'I do not suppose that you would deliberately form an absolute engagement... without acquainting your Mother & myself, or at least without being convinced that we should approve your choice'. Nonetheless, he wants to hear from him why he now chooses to overlook 'the instances of great misconduct on [Lady Susan's] side, so very generally known'—that is, he wants to know why Reginald still seeks a 'Match, which deep Art only could render possible' and which Sir Reginald fears would 'in the end make wretched' (pp.21-2). Like his daughter, Sir Reginald uses reasoning and facts to help his son see the truth more clearly. He does not, however, simply bombard him with unpleasant facts but attempts to explain the reason they are important—namely, because they signal a want of *character* in Lady Susan, which, he asserts, compared to her lack of fortune or difference in age, is a factor to which he cannot under any circumstance afford to be 'indifferent'. His further observation that 'her behaviour may arise only from Vanity, or a wish of gaining the admiration of a Man... particularly prejudiced against her', or that she 'more likely... aim[s] at something further'—that is, to 'an alliance which must be advantageous to herself'—may imply that he has discussed these matters with his wife and has listened to the good sense that she has learned from Catherine's reports. (At least Reginald so judges the case to be when he responds to his father's letter, as we have seen.) With regard to Lady Susan's aiming at the family inheritance, Sir Reginald assures his son that 'I should hardly stoop under any circumstances' to 'distressing you during my Life' over such

matters. These expressions are calculated to reinforce for Reginald the knowledge that his father respects his agency and choice in this affair, and that he wishes to appeal only to his 'Sense & Affection' and not to any 'Fears' of reprisal from him as the head of the family (p.22). His image in this scene reflects Austenian ideals for family affection, for gentle fatherhood, and for that humble state of mind which is necessary for mutually-improving pedagogy to occur in a relationship. If Sir Reginald is willing to take such an attitude with his son, one might plausibly infer that he also does so with his wife. His image in these instances is a *likeness* of a conservative vision of Austen's ideals, couched in a *conventional character*; it is thus an Iconic Legisign of that Object.

As Reginald was toward Lady Susan, Sir Reginald is not afraid to be honest and forthright toward Reginald about his feelings, even when they are uncomfortable to hear. With a conviction that the stakes are high for his son, he states his feelings in terms of the sobering, personal reality that will result should Reginald continue his present course:

It would destroy every comfort of my Life, to know that you were married to Lady Susan Vernon. It would be the death of that honest Pride with which I have hitherto considered my son, I should blush to see him, to hear of him, to think of him. (p.22)

Having described this painful possibility (in which he marks his son's emotional separation by using third-person pronouns—'I should blush to see *him*, to hear of *him*, to think of *him*'), he renews his plea for Reginald not to exclude him so, but rather to admit him into his thought process with regard to Lady Susan:

I should be glad to hear your reasons for disbelieving Mr. Smith's intelligence;—you had no doubt of it's authenticity a month ago.—

If you can give me your assurance of having no design beyond enjoying the conversation of a clever woman for a short period, & of yielding admiration only to her Beauty and Abilities without being blinded by them to her faults, you will restore me to happiness; but if you cannot do this, explain to me at least what has occasioned so great an alteration in your opinion of her. (p.23)

These requests seem calculated, again, to assure Reginald that he believes there could be reasonable explanations for his behavior toward Lady Susan, that he does not *want* to be disappointed with him, and that he wishes to understand his mind on the matter more than anything else. His feelings and judgments will not be hastily or illiberally formed on appearances or the reports of others, but do await the valued, personal exchange with his son. Interestingly, Lady De Courcy reports that Reginald's words of reply do immediately make his father 'less uneasy' about him, but they 'do not set my heart at ease' (p.24). Sir Reginald, like his son and son-in-law, is more apt than his wife or daughter to take personal communications at face value, and to think the best of others whenever he can. His character, however, seems to exemplify a more balanced mixture of compassion, listening, and factual reasoning—a state possibly achieved through instructive interaction with his wife over the years. The dialogue between Catherine, her mother, Sir Reginald, and his son could be considered one of Austen's early case studies in how a good marriage can be created (or a bad marriage prevented) through a balance of both private and family counseling. In all these respects, the De Courcy family is an Iconic Legisign of a conservative Austenian ideal, inasmuch as it presents a *series of interactions* that both *subtly resembles* and *conventionally embodies* that ideal. By using this kind of sign, Austen invokes normative romantic stereotypes that are acceptable to her contemporaries while suggesting how marriage and family relationships may be softened and enlivened by open and compassionate dialogue.

Mrs. Vernon's positive qualities, and to a lesser extent those of her husband, continue to be developed in the letters that comprise the balance of the narrative following Sir Reginald's letter. Having seen Reginald's reply to his father, Mrs. Vernon remarks to her mother that '[h]e gives a very plausible account of [Lady Susan's] behaviour at Langford, I wish it may be true, but his intelligence must come from herself, & I am less disposed to believe it'. She would like to believe the best about Lady Susan, but rather than taking all information about her at face value, she carefully considers the source and evaluates the possible motives behind it. Perhaps she is representative of Austen's thoughts on the need to balance charity, which

leads one to believe and forgive others as Reginald does, with justice and prudence, which require an objective consideration of facts when forming one's opinion. Mrs. Vernon's more methodical approach incurs some 'displeasure' from Reginald, but she realizes she 'can expect nothing better while he is so very eager in Lady Susan's justification'. This exchange illustrates how the exercise of fortitude may require some personal sacrifice and self-denial; one may need to endure disfavor from others, even loved ones, for a time when holding forth a hard truth.

Mrs. Vernon's fortitude is nonetheless tempered with humility; she allows Reginald's charitable viewpoint of Lady Susan to check her judgmental tendency: 'I hope I have not been hasty in my judgment of her' (p.27). She tries to keep an open mind. When Frederica is caught attempting to run away from the boarding school, Mrs. Vernon accepts Lady Susan's assignment of general obstinacy as the cause, but recalls the fact that Frederica 'has been sadly neglected', and so withholds the formation of a hasty opinion about the young lady (p.28). She thinks Lady Susan's distress over the incident is warranted; her observations to her mother about Lady Susan's behavior on the occasion manifest some of her own admirable character qualities:

Her Ladyship is comforting herself meanwhile by strolling along the Shrubbery with Reginald, calling forth all his tender feelings I suppose on this distressing occasion. She has been talking a great deal about it to me, she talks vastly well, I am afraid of being ungenerous or I should say she talks *too* well to feel so very deeply. But I will not look for Faults. She may be Reginald's Wife...! (p.28)

She wants to think kindly of Lady Susan but she knows it is not human nature to speak so smoothly and articulately when one is truly distressed. Reginald is too enthralled with her 'manner and intellect' to consider such an inconsistency, but as a detached observer Mrs. Vernon sees it. Not only does the insight reinforce her astuteness with respect to human nature, but it reflects Austen's value for the 'open and eager' character that occasionally has a 'tongue slip' when deeply provoked—here, Lady Susan's smoothness exemplifies the *opposite* of such character.

Despite Mrs. Vernon's keen perceptiveness, she does not consider her own abilities as superior to those of her husband. She asks her mother, rhetorically, 'why should I be quicker-sighted than... Mr. Vernon', who 'declares that he never saw deeper distress' than Lady Susan's on the occasion; 'is his Judgement inferior to mine?' (p.28). Perhaps her judgment *is* keener than his, but unlike Lady Susan, she does not allow this strength to become a point of pride that obstructs her from participating with him as an equal in the exchange of moral knowledge; rather, she allows his viewpoint along with that of her brother and mother (which she tacitly solicits in her letter) to play a part in the formation of her judgments. In these instances, the image of her and Mr. Vernon as a couple faintly resembles what I argue to be Austen's ideals for mutual affection, for instructive interaction, and for a balancing of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity with the classical virtues of temperance, prudence, courage, and justice. Thus, while the Vernon and De Courcy families are quite conventional for the period in terms of their marriage and family structure (they are Legisigns of the ideal), Austen also shows them to have human warmth and mutually 'improving' interaction, which keeps their image in the Iconic Legisign category overall rather than in the neutral Symbolic Legisign category. As mentioned, this enables Austen to forward her ideals without departing from what might be seen as acceptable social conventions.

As the story progresses, Mrs. Vernon continues to see (while Reginald continues to miss) the subtle inconsistencies in Lady Susan's behavior. '[W]hen a person is always to deceive', she observes to her mother, 'it is impossible to be consistent'. She believes that Reginald, in expressing his opinion about Frederica, for example, 'is only repeating after her Ladyship' when '[s]ometimes he is sure she is deficient in Understanding, & at others that her temper only is in fault' (pp.33-4). Mrs. Vernon shares her observations with her husband, and together they form resolutions, as is implied by the following segment of her letter to her mother about Sir James' visit to Churchhill:



The poor girl however I am sure dislikes him; & tho' his person and address are very well he appears *both to Mr. Vernon & me* a very weak young Man....

But something must be done for this poor Girl, if her feelings are such as *both her Uncle & I* believe them to be. She must not be sacrificed to Policy or Ambition, she must not be even left to suffer from the dread of it. (pp.38,40, my emphasis )

The kind of counseling that one may infer has gone on here between Mr. and Mrs. Vernon is just the sort of thing Lady Susan had hoped to avoid in the matter of Frederica and Sir James: 'I should not chuse to have the business brought forward [at Churchhill]', she had informed Mrs. Johnson prior to the event, '& canvassed by the wise heads of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon' (p.37). One wonders whether Mr. Vernon would have been as naïve about the matter as Reginald proves to be had he been without the benefit of his wife's observations and thoughts. After Reginald parleys with Lady Susan about her treatment of Frederica, Mrs. Vernon relates to her mother the sad outcome that the 'quarrel between [them] is made up, & we are all as we were before' except for the one 'point... gained'; namely, that 'Sir James... is dismissed' from Churchhill. She recounts that immediately afterwards, 'I went to Mr. Vernon & *sat with him in his room, talking over the whole matter*' (p.48, my italics). Here, the image is one of a married couple who have an ongoing open dialogue, with the wife perhaps being the more proactive of the two. Again, Austen does not *state* the desirability of such an arrangement—the idea that a woman might lead out in this regard may have been too progressive for some of her contemporaneous readers—but she creates a scene that suggests it.<sup>257</sup> Her approach allows us to witness the improvement of the 'milky' Mr. Vernon by a sensible wife, and to sense by contrast

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<sup>257</sup> Spencer argues that only 'radical thinkers' of the 1790s used novels to promote the exercise of women's rational faculties—a group that, for her, would not have included Austen (*The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, p.129). Johnson, however, posits Austen's views on such female practice as lying somewhere between the rigidly doctrinaire anti-jacobin conservatives and the 'progressive' reformists of the times, perhaps closer to the latter (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp.1-27).

Reginald's lack of a similar counter-balancing influence in his life. We are left to consider, perhaps, how much more Reginald, with his compassionate but more 'lively' character, might become party to a strong marriage if paired with a wife who is as sensible as his sister. From a semiotic viewpoint, the images of the two men play off each other: Reginald's raw potential (an Icon of the Austenian ideal) comes to representative fruition in the married Mr. Vernon (a Symbol of the Austenian ideal), and the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Vernon (an Iconic Legisign of the ideal) is shown to fall shy of the greater fullness that might be achieved should a woman like Mrs. Vernon be paired with a more proactive husband like Reginald. As a couple, Sir Reginald and Lady De Courcy reflect a similar ideal but with the roles reversed: in their case, the husband is more proactive and the wife more passive. This makes their image more conventional for the period, but in both marriages the respective strengths and weaknesses of the husband and wife are complementary.<sup>258</sup> Both images have enough imperfection to prevent them from becoming fairy tale, but their *likeness* to some of Austen's ideals is still apparent. Perhaps a perfect signifier of Austen's ideals would not only *resemble* and *symbolize* them but would also *strikingly exemplify* them in one or more instances, thus activating all three Peircean modes of signification in good balance.<sup>259</sup>

The strength of Mrs. Vernon's moral and intellectual faculties is developed further by the scene that opens with Reginald's reconciliation with Lady Susan after their first quarrel. He relates the outcome of their quarrel to his sister as follows:

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<sup>258</sup> Through such episodes, Ruderman argues, Austen suggests that '[m]en and women have different and complementary duties in life, ...which make them *generally* interested in marriage with each other'. Ruderman acknowledges that this 'point [is] disputed by many recent critics'—Poovey and Johnson, for example—'who wish to defend love as allowing for separateness' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.53,143).

<sup>259</sup> Such a sign, incidentally, would be a Rhematic Indexical Legisign, or Firstness of Secondness of Thirdness (123) category of sign, which is only found in a third-order (ten-category) Peircean sign system, occupying the middle position of that paradigm (*CP*, II, 254-64).

There has been some very great mistake—we have been all mistaken I fancy.—Frederica does not know her Mother.—Lady Susan means nothing but her Good—but Frederica will not make a friend of her.—Lady Susan therefore does not always know what will make her daughter happy.—Besides I could have no right to interfere—Miss Vernon was mistaken in applying to me.—In short Catherine, every thing has gone wrong—but it is now all happily settled. (p.50)

By the rote style of these utterances, Mrs. Vernon perceives that her brother is only parroting Lady Susan, and she can only 'deeply [sigh] at the recital of so lame a story' (p.50). Her growing anxiety over his blindness in the matter, and her rising impatience with Lady Susan's behavior, stir her courage. An invitation from Lady Susan to speak with her sets the stage for a showdown between the two women. Their conversation is recounted by Mrs. Vernon to her mother in Letter 24 (pp.51-4). One could view this exchange as an indirect commentary by Austen on the proper use of linguistic power. 'The case was this', begins Lady Susan. 'Frederica had set herself violently against marrying Sir James.' Mrs. Vernon, 'with some warmth', immediately retorts, 'And can your Ladyship wonder that she should? ...Frederica has an excellent Understanding, & Sir James has none.' This remark is a 'burst of indignation' at the thought that Lady Susan should aim to secure an economically advantageous marriage for Frederica without considering her need to marry a man who is mentally her equal. Lady Susan concedes that 'Sir James is certainly under par' mentally, and makes a circuitous rationalization of her actions: his mental powers are not really so poor, but 'his boyish manners... make him appear the worse'; she would not have pursued the match 'had Frederica possessed the penetration, the abilities, which I could have wished in my daughter'; and, finally, 'I should not have been anxious for the match' 'had I even known her to possess so much [penetration and abilities] as she does'. Her story, in other words, is that she has only recently come to see the greater extent of her daughter's mental powers. For one as quick as Lady Susan, 'It is odd', replies Mrs. Vernon, 'that you should alone be ignorant of your Daughter's sense'. This statement is equally rational and hard to counter: how likely is it that Mrs. Vernon, her husband, and Reginald, with

whom Frederica has lived only two weeks, should readily see her mental abilities, while her mother should not? Lady Susan again talks in circles when replying: she has not seen Frederica's powers because the latter is 'shy &... afraid of me', which has kept her abilities hidden; Frederica is afraid of her mother due to 'the severity which it has... been necessary for me to shew' to correct the effects of her father's spoiling of her; and finally (returning to her starting point) Frederica 'has [not] any of that Brilliancy of Intellect' or 'Genius, or vigour of Mind which will force itself forward.' To these arguments, Mrs. Vernon counters that Frederica has no native lack of intelligence but 'rather... has been unfortunate in her Education'. Mrs. Vernon's image in this scene is more charitable and hopeful with respect to Frederica than is Lady Susan's image, but it is also more frank and firm with respect to Lady Susan than is the image of, say, Mr. Vernon. Her image has a strong *likeness* (Iconicity) to Austen's ideals for the balanced exercise of the classical and Christian virtues, while the overall scene exhibits a striking image of *struggle and contrast* between the two ladies (Indexicality) that demonstrates the greater strength of factual language compared with artful expressions. At the same time, because this battle scene is fought with words, which are standard tools of *cultural convention*, it also employs a Symbolic mode of signification. Mrs. Vernon's image in this exchange is therefore a well-balanced Peircean signifier (having Iconic, Indexical, and Symbolic properties) of the mutually-improving moral and intellectual faculties that can contribute to a constructive relationship.

When Mrs. Vernon raises the point of Frederica's poor education, Lady Susan sees an opportunity to make a sentimental play: 'Heaven knows my dearest Mrs. Vernon, how fully I am aware of *that*; but I would wish to forget every circumstance that might throw blame on the memory of one, whose name is sacred with me', and she pretends to cry. Reginald and Mr. Vernon, perhaps, would have been moved to compassion, but Mrs. Vernon (like her creator) has little patience with affected sensibilities, and immediately brings the conversation back to the facts by asking what Lady Susan was going to relate about her disagreement with Reginald. When informed that '[i]t originated in an action of my Daughter's', namely, that '[s]he

wrote to Mr. De Courcy', Mrs. Vernon replies with directness and candor: 'I know she did.—You had forbidden her speaking to Mr. Vernon or to me on the cause of her distress:—what could she do therefore but apply to my Brother?' Because she believes the welfare of Frederica and Reginald is directly at stake, Mrs. Vernon has the courage to state the naked facts, uncomfortable as they are. Cranking up her sentimentality play, Lady Susan feigns shock that her sister-in-law could 'possibly suppose' that she was 'aware of [Federica's] unhappiness', that she had formed 'the Diabolical scheme' of forcing Sir James on her daughter, thus 'consigning *her* to everlasting Misery, whose welfare it is my first Earthly Duty to promote'.<sup>260</sup> Mrs. Vernon ignores this bating and continues to pursue the facts: 'What then was your intention when you insisted on her silence?' Lady Susan can only concede that she was 'mistaken', though still holding it was innocently so. Her sister-in-law does not give an inch, but queries, 'From whence arose so astonishing a misapprehension of your Daughter's feelings?—Did not you know that she disliked Sir James?' Here Lady Susan again starts into a shallow defense, but quickly tries another artful dodge by 'taking [Mrs. Vernon] affectionately by the hand' and 'honestly own[ing] that there is something to conceal': namely, that Frederica's application to Reginald 'hurt' her by signifying a closeness between them of which she is jealous. Mrs. Vernon makes the moral observation that Frederica's objection to Sir James 'could not less deserve to be attended to' by her mother whether it arises from a preference for Reginald or a dislike of Sir James. Against such reasoning, there is little for Lady Susan to do but agree to 'instantly inform [Sir James] that he must give up all hope for [Frederica]', and she wisely excuses herself from further discussion of the matter with Mrs.

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<sup>260</sup> Mulvihill, citing Bharat Tandon's observation that Lady Susan has mastered the 'tone and diction of conduct literature' (*Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation*, London: Anthem Press, 2003, pp.133-34, 143) notes that, in this scene particularly, 'Lady Susan deftly fight[s] back with all the sentimental *topoi* at her command' ('Jane Austen's Machiavellian Moment', pp.626, 629).

Vernon.<sup>261</sup> Here, the smooth but circuitous language of Lady Susan contrasts with the direct and forthright language of Mrs. Vernon, creating for the latter an image of moral and intellectual strength<sup>262</sup> that at once *resembles, exemplifies, and conventionally embodies* Austen's ideals. Mrs. Vernon's image thus continues to show balance and completeness as a Peircean signifier of an Austenian ideal for virtues and character traits that promote 'mutual improvement' in family relationships.

A common thread in Austen's fiction is the idea that a woman's devotion to children and family are essential to her happiness in married life.<sup>263</sup> Of Austen's convictions about the family, Shields writes:

Out of her young, questioning self came the grave certainty that the family was the source of art, just as every novel is in a sense about the fate of a child. It might be argued that all literature is ultimately about

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<sup>261</sup> As mentioned, the imagery of this scene is battle-like, with its blows and counter-blows.

Although both women possess comparable intellect and command of language, it is evident that Mrs. Vernon wields greater power because she operates on a basis of truth and generous motives. It is her concern for Frederica and Reginald that fuel her fortitude, while Lady Susan must waste some of her energy in covering up the ugly self-interest that underlies her behavior. Mrs. Vernon's pursuit of fact and truth directly command her language, while Lady Susan must carry the mental overhead of ensuring that her words create the desired pretense without being inconsistent with any real facts that her hearer may have already learned. (She can manage this for a time with a single person like Reginald or Mr. Vernon, but not long against the combined wisdom and observations of a couple like Mr. and Mrs. Vernon or of a family like the De Courcys.)

<sup>262</sup> Horowitz observes that Mrs. Vernon wields 'considerable moral authority' in the story, especially in the motherly concern for the proper upbringing of Frederica ('The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', p.73).

<sup>263</sup> This idea is highly contested by feminist critics like Poovey and Johnson. Poovey, for example, decries the 'duties of a wife and mother' that Wollstonecraft's heroine Maria seeks to fulfill in her second marriage (in *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman*); see 'The Gender of Genres', p.122.

family..., what families do to us and how they can be reimagined or transcended.<sup>264</sup>

Austen chose to write stories that 'reimagine' families not only because she felt more qualified and experienced to write about such things than other worldly subjects, but also because it was her particular interest.<sup>265</sup> If indeed, as Austen-Leigh asserts, '[h]er own family were so much, and the rest of the world so little' to Austen, we should not be surprised at her imbuing her heroines with a like sense of priority to home and family.<sup>266</sup> In the case of Mrs. Vernon, this value is manifest not only in the fact that she has several children of her own (whereas Lady Susan has only one), but also in the several instances in which Mrs. Vernon encourages Frederica to develop domestic virtues. She perceives early on that the young lady has received little guidance from her own mother in this respect, and yet the rapid endearment of her own children to Frederica suggests to her that Frederica has considerable potential to develop motherly qualities. When Lady Susan departs Churchill to visit Mrs. Johnson in London, Mrs. Vernon writes to her mother about how she hopes to make the best of the sad state of affairs (with Reginald soon to go home—as much in love with Lady Susan as ever—and with Frederica pining away over him). She relates that she and Mr. Vernon are only narrowly able to 'over-rule'

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<sup>264</sup> *Jane Austen: A Life*, pp.8-9.

<sup>265</sup> Austen-Leigh relates that in 1815 the Prince Regent's librarian endeavored twice to persuade her to write on other subjects that he felt would be more interesting to the public, but she declined both times. The first time she responded that his recommended subject would require her to write about 'science and philosophy, of which I know nothing'; the second time she declined because, while his suggested subject 'might be much more to the purpose of profit or popularity than such pictures of domestic life... as I deal in', she could not see herself doing it. 'No', she countered, 'I must keep to my own style and go on in my own way' (*A Family Record*, pp.109-110).

<sup>266</sup> *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, p.60. Roberts, though seeing Austen as supportive of the family generally, does read some of the comments in her letters as reflecting negatively on the risks to women of child-bearing duties (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, pp.169-73).

Lady Susan's plan to take Frederica with her to London; had Frederica gone, not only would she have been 'at the mercy of her Mother', but

I should have feared too for her health, & for everything in short but her Principles; *there* I believe she is not to be injured, even by her Mother, or all her Mother's friends;—but with those friends (a very bad set I doubt not) she must have mixed, or have been left in total solitude, & I can hardly tell which would have been worse for her.  
(pp.60-1)

This passage reflects Mrs. Vernon's concern to nurture the emotional and social health of Frederica: she fears the ill effects of a city environment that may be devoid of caring family influences.<sup>267</sup> By having Frederica enveloped in her own family circle for a time, she hopes to strengthen several as-yet nascent qualities that she deems important to a woman's happiness:

Here, we shall in time be at peace.—Our regular employments, our Books & conversations, with Exercise, the Children, & every domestic pleasure in my power to procure her, will, I trust, gradually overcome this youthful attachment [to Reginald]. (p.61)

Mrs. Vernon believes that domestic employments like daily housework, reading, family conversation, and interaction with her children will have a salutary effect on Frederica. The domestic values reflected in these statements are conventional for the period (and so add to Mrs. Vernon's Legisign imagery), but they may also reflect Austen's feelings about the importance of the family as the moral fabric of

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<sup>267</sup> Like Horowitz, Berglund notes that generally 'in Austen's novels, ... the country is valued more highly than the city'. This notion, she explains, is 'in accordance with a traditional image of the city as a place of corruption and vice, and the country as the home of innocence and virtue' (*Woman's Whole Existence*, p.213). Roger Sales, in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (New York: Routledge, 1994), associates Austen with an emerging suburban elite of the Regency period who thought it enjoyable to visit the countryside but really preferred to live in town; Austen's consistent preference for country living in all her novels, however, and her greater personal experience with the same, seem to minimize the applicability of this argument to Austen.



society.<sup>268</sup> However, as with all of Austen's values (as assumed here from documentary and contextual evidence), the outward form of the convention alone will not do: a family must possess real substance and character to properly weave a moral fabric for an individual or society. Here, Mrs. Vernon's focus on the sociality, domestic work, and child-rearing activities associated with family life—activities that will carry Frederica outside of herself and so promote her social and emotional well-being—contrasts with Lady Susan's inward-focused choice to escape to London for 'a little Dissipation' (p.58).<sup>269</sup> The images of Frederica, Lady Susan, and Mrs. Vernon in this scene all signify Austen's ideal, but in different ways: Frederica's by picturing raw *potential* for the ideal (Iconicity), Lady Susan's by demonstrating what the ideal is *not* (Indexicality), and Mrs. Vernon's by *conventionally embodying* the ideal (Symbolism).

In the preceding passage, Mrs. Vernon lists 'Exercise' as one of the practices that will be conducive to Frederica's well-being at Churchhill. Austen's opinion that physical activity, such as regular walking in the countryside, is beneficial to a woman's health and happiness runs counter to the Rousseauian ideal of the delicately frail female who never asserts independence from men—a notion that

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<sup>268</sup> Hudson argues: 'Faced with the loss of spiritual values and the turmoil of public life during her time, Austen suggests that a retreat to family life is appropriate and necessary to solidify moral standards' ('Consolidated Communities', pp.108-9). This view echoes that of Roberts—namely, that Austen 'valued [the family as] an institution capable of maintaining order and stability and furthering social continuity' during Britain's period of social turmoil attending the Napoleonic Wars (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.11). Poovey acknowledges that the 'notion of the family' that served as Austen's 'model' for social stability 'was essentially patriarchal, supportive of, and supported by, the allegiances and hierarchy that feminine propriety implied' (*The Proper Lady*, p.203); however, she and Johnson argue that Austen's view of the family as a just governor was highly qualified, as discussed further hereafter.

<sup>269</sup> Ruderman notes that Austen frequently uses such contrasting scenes to suggest, 'in the way of Aristotle, that the pleasures of self-control are deeper than those of self indulgence' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.71).

permeates the thinking of the period. As I noted earlier, Austen seems to share Wollstonecraft's view of the value of good health in a woman.<sup>270</sup> In Mrs. Vernon's case, Austen creates no overt instances of this propensity, but gives us the preceding statement of the lady's belief that regular exercise will, in conjunction with other domestic practices, have a salutary effect on Frederica. The exchange suggests both that Mrs. Vernon has personal experience with the practice, and that Frederica has the potential to benefit from it. We might note that had Austen developed this characteristic more overtly in Mrs. Vernon, it would have made her image *less conventional* for the times and *more active* in an idiosyncratic way, thus moving it away from Legisign and toward Sinsign representation. In like manner, had she shown overt instances of outdoor exercise in Frederica, the portrayal would have moved her image away from *potentiality* and toward *actualization* of the ideal—that is, from Qualisign to Sinsign representation. In either case, the change would have made the image of the respective character less consistent internally with respect to its Peircean semiotic type. Again, I do not suggest that Austen was consciously aware of semiotic categories but rather that she was skilled in the art of representation, and this accounts for the observed balance in her use of the different Peircean sign categories. In the case of Frederica and Mrs. Vernon here,

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<sup>270</sup> '[M]ust a wife', asks Wollstonecraft, 'who by the exercise of her mind and body... has allowed her constitution to retain its natural strength, and her nerves a healthy tone, is she, I say, to... feign a sickly delicacy in order to secure her husband's affection?' (*Vindication*, p.113). Austen's classic representation of this virtue is Elizabeth Bennet's 'energetic three-mile walk to see her sister' in *Pride and Prejudice*, which, Berglund observes, 'instead of sinking her in Darcy's opinion (as Miss Bingley expects it will) brings a glow to her cheeks and a luster to her eyes that actually heightens his admiration for her' (*Woman's Whole Existence*, p.213). Robin Jarvis suggests that a genteel-class woman's propensity for outdoor walking likely would have been perceived as pushing into the masculine realm, since the rising pedestrianism of the period was dominated by educated men of science and leisure; see Robin Jarvis, *Romantic Writing and Pedestrian Travel* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1997), pp.155-76.

Austen's use of only the Iconic Qualisign and Iconic Legisign modes softens her portrayal of unconventional ideals for female exercise and vigor.

#### SYNTHESIS AND SUMMARY

In *Lady Susan*, Austen has created characters who represent all three Peircean aspects of marital love, including feeling or quality (Firstness), physical interaction (Secondness), and law or convention (Thirdness). Frederica and Reginald do not directly interact much; theirs is an image primarily of *marital potential*. Through their dealings with other characters, we are allowed to see that they have the tender affection, warm feeling, honest expression, moral fortitude, and mental refinement that are the essential building blocks of a good marriage relationship, although they need more experience and practice to bring these nascent qualities to fruition.<sup>271</sup> On the other hand, Lady Susan and Mr. Manwaring, along with the Johnsons, give us instances of what ideal marriage is *not*: they act coldly, selfishly, proudly, deceptively, and unfaithfully; by exemplifying what is harmful and destructive to love and marriage, they help us see more clearly what is constructive and salutary. Finally, the Vernons and De Courcys are representative of conventional and lawful marriage inasmuch as they are couples who are established in society and have successfully maintained relationships with each other and with their families for years. Their marriages, however, are not merely neutral with respect to Austen's

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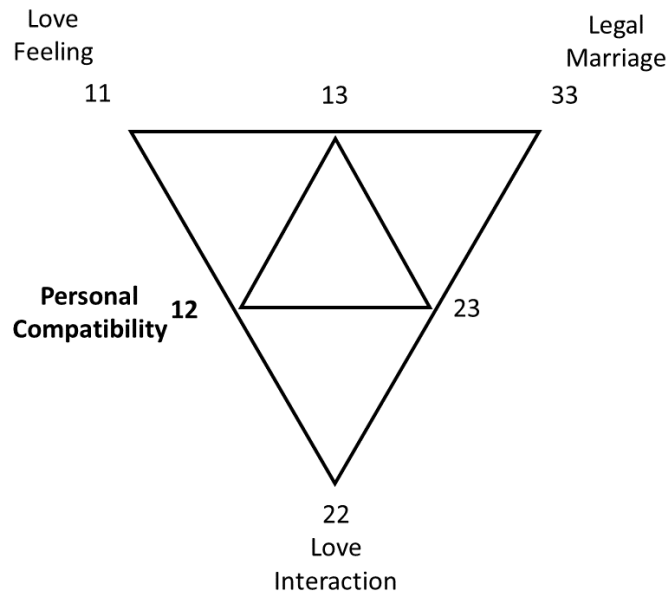
<sup>271</sup> Emsley notes that Frederica in particular 'has natural virtue, not yet molded by either propriety or impropriety'; she represents 'the almost blank slate of human nature—not yet educated in the ways of the world, either for good or bad.' In this regard, she is much like several other of Austen's young heroines who are 'at a starting point in their moral education, and need to engage with the social world and even the world of ideas in order to develop their potential' (*Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.49). Reginald is depicted in much the same way. These characters show only the *bare essence* or *potential* (Firstness) of love, prudence, and other important virtues, but it is apparent that further *interaction in the real world* (Secondness) and on-going education in *moral principles* (Thirdness) will yield a greater fullness of these virtues in their lives.

ideals; rather, they exemplify the positive fruits within marriage and family of mutual affection, forthright communication, constructive pedagogy, and some level of gender-role differentiation, flexibly and cooperatively implemented.

The picture of marital love presented in *Lady Susan*, then, seems quite complete in the universal Peircean sense, although my conception of Austen's marriage ideals is likely a point of contestation for critics who see Austen as being more subversive. Not only does the story represent the feelings, real-world interactions, and lawful or conventional practices that make up marital love in a three-category Peircean paradigm, it also begins to call out the subcategories that are predicted to appear in an expanded, six-category system. For example, from Frederica and Reginald's character qualities and feelings (which are a Firstness of marital love)—her timidity and sweetness, and his warmth and liveliness; her affection for his nieces and nephews, and his compassion for her oppression under her mother; her penchant for reading, and his educated and articulate writing style; her respect for her mother's authority, and his courage to brook that authority—and from the events narrated about these two characters (which are Secondness)—her artless attention to his conversations, and his small acts of service for his sister; her blushes at his appearance, and his intercession with her mother on her behalf—readers might get a sense of their personal *compatibility* as a couple. As I argued in the introduction, compatibility is one of Austen's ideals for marriage that is a *qualitative fit between two individuals*, and so should be classified as a Firstness of Secondness of marital love. Whereas actual interactions between a couple are genuine Secondness because they occur in the external world, a semblance of compatibility in a couple is degenerate Secondness because, as Peirce says, it is a 'pairing' that occurs 'only in thought'.<sup>272</sup> As a mixture of Firstness and Secondness, the category resides between those two categories in an expanded, six-category Peircean system:

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<sup>272</sup> *Writings of Charles S. Peirce*, V, 307.



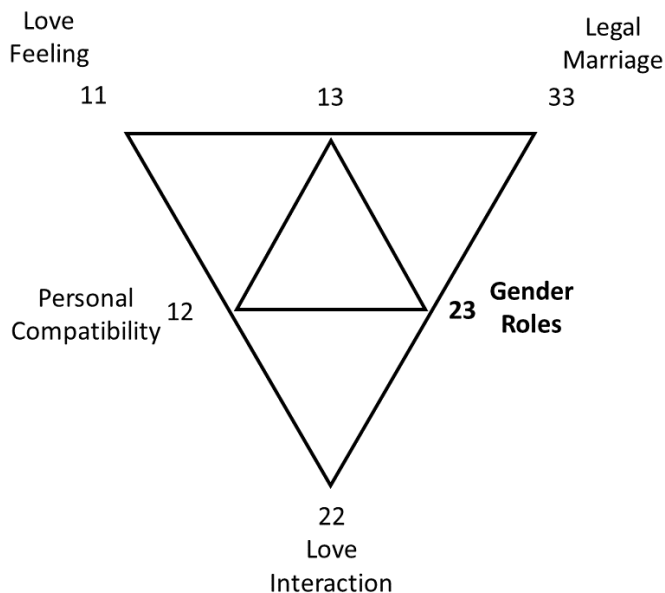
Personal compatibility is also closely related to the Austenian ideal for parity of mind—a condition that Frederica and Reginald are suggested to have the *potential* to achieve, but that Lady Susan and Reginald do *not* enjoy (since she is not satisfied with parity but requires preeminence), and that the Vernons and De Courcys regularly exemplify. Interestingly, the reason Frederica feels that Sir James is incompatible with her is that he is ‘silly’ (p.42), which suggests (as discussed earlier) that he is *not* on a par with her mentally. As a result, the Frederica-Sir James couple is Indexical of the ideal of mental parity (as is the Lady Susan-Reginald couple), while the Frederica-Reginald couple is Iconic of this ideal, and the Vernons and De Courcys are Symbolic of it (since they *regularly* present enactments that one could argue are *replicas* of the ideal).

As rendered above, the expanded Peircean classification of marital love is still missing two categories: what Peirce calls the ‘reactionally’ degenerate Thirdness (23) category, and the ‘qualitatively’ degenerate Thirdness (13) category.<sup>273</sup> With regard to the former, Peircean theory predicts that it should be some kind of degenerate marital law or convention that arises in reaction to the Secondness of

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<sup>273</sup> CP, V, 72.

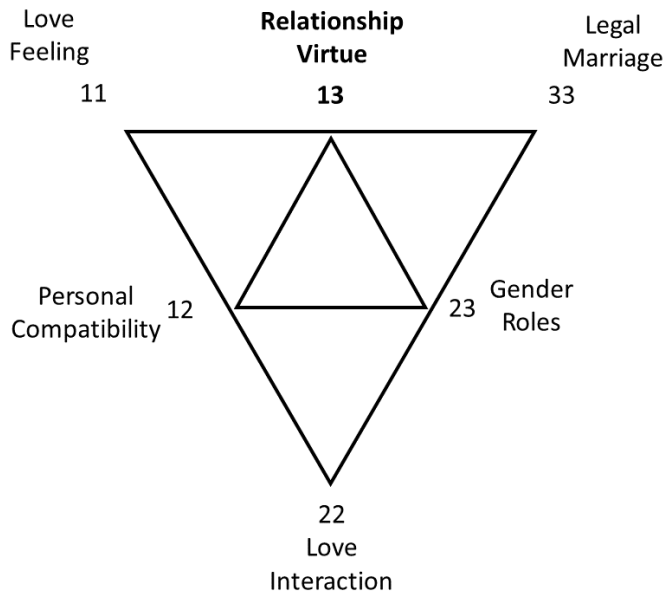
marital love. In its quintessential form, the Secondness of marital love is sexual relations, and given that sexual relations are the reproductive intercourse of male and female, the cultural conventions that prescribe different roles for the biological sexes in marriage (and in the rearing of their offspring) may be seen as arising *in reaction* to marital Secondness. Thus, gender-based roles, though they vary across cultural time and space, fit into the category of Secondness of Thirdness:



As mentioned, Sir Reginald and Lady De Courcy in particular symbolize the marital roles and family structure that are traditional for the period. The couple represents the positive fulfilment of culturally accepted gender roles, not only in outward form but in deed. Unlike Lady Susan, who neglects her daughter and provides only superficial training for her under the charge of others, Sir Reginald, with the aid of his wife's information, personally and eagerly responds to his son's need for guidance in his dealings with Lady Susan, by reasoning with him warmly and directly on principle. Likewise, he humbly and personally attends to the needs of his wife (such as when her eyes are unwell and he reads their daughter's letter to her), showing not only the letter but the spirit of a husband's protective duty to his wife. As mentioned, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon are slightly less conventional in this regard, in that the wife is more proactive than the husband generally (wherein they exemplify

a more flexible implementation of traditional gender roles), but as a couple they still illustrate the exercise of conventional familial duties. Considering Frederica and Reginald as a married couple *in potentia*, we see faint whisperings of the gender roles: Reginald will inherit a generous property with which to provide for his wife and offspring; he protects Frederica from Sir James by interceding with her mother; he defends Lady Susan (his lover at the time) from perceived slander; he serves his sister by delivering her letters; he attempts to correct his lover (Lady Susan) in her selfish and misguided acts against her daughter and Mrs. Manwaring; he listens compassionately in turn to Lady Susan, Frederica, and Mrs. Manwaring, and learns from each. (Here, as mentioned, he expands the traditional male role by adding the humility to be taught by women.) Frederica submits to her mother's authority and keeps her confidences to the degree possible; she asks the protection of Reginald against Sir James, showing conventional deference to his male authority; she shows natural affection for Reginald's family members; and she exhibits the potential to adapt herself to domestic duties. In all these gender-based roles, Lady Susan shows marked negligence and lack. As mentioned, by showing a violation of the received gender-based roles for a woman, she brings into sharper focus the nature and value of those roles, at least for readers who share these values.

As for the 'qualitatively' degenerate Thirdness (13) category, Peircean theory would predict it to be an even more degenerate law or convention about marital love, with a prominent qualitative (Firstness) aspect. As discussed earlier, character virtues fall generally into the Firstness of Thirdness category because they are *habits* or *character qualities* that show one's compliance with *moral laws*. Moreover, the virtues that bear most directly upon the marriage contract—commitment, loyalty, devotion, fidelity, faithfulness, constancy—entail a particular *singleness of mind* toward one's spouse. In the sense that each of these virtues reduces the *law* of marital relations to a *single quality*, they fit the description of Firstness of Thirdness (13) as a qualitatively degenerate Thirdness. In the expanded six-category Peircean paradigm, I call these qualities 'relationship virtue' because of their special relevance to the marriage relationship and to all the other attendant relationships:



Frederica and Reginald show the essence of relationship virtue: she has the integrity to keep her word not to speak of Sir James even when it reflects negatively on her behavior, and he refrains from divulging negative details of his conversations with Lady Susan even after she has wronged him; Frederica displays constancy and devotion of feeling for Reginald despite her mother's pressure to accept a moneyed marriage from Sir James, and Reginald shows the charity and temperance to attribute honest and generous motives to Lady Susan's past behavior until he has received irrefutable evidence to the contrary. Lady Susan and Manwaring, on the other hand, are unfaithful to their spouses in thought and deed. Lady Susan is duplicitous and inconsistent in all her dealings with Reginald and her in-laws; shows only selfishly motivated willpower (as opposed to fortitude) on behalf of her daughter; thinks Mrs. Manwaring is silly to maneuver for her husband's loyalty; and plots with Mrs. Johnson to hasten Mrs. Manwaring's death. Likewise, Mrs. Johnson is faithful to her husband only when necessary to get money or favors; thinks that Lady Susan should marry Reginald for his inheritance regardless of whether she loves him; conceals and facilitates Lady Susan's cheating; and hopes Mrs. Manwaring will die from prolonged vexation. By their uncharitable and duplicitous behavior, and the destabilizing and sorrowful effects of it, the two women highlight the need for



virtue in any happy relationship, and in essence are representations of the antithesis of relationship virtue, which is arguably embodied in Mr. and Mrs. Vernon. Similarly, Sir Reginald is trusting and generous, loyal to his family, and truthful and courageous to confront Reginald, although without being coercive. Lady De Courcy is the epitome of single-minded devotion to her family: she thinks so much of them and so little of herself that she seldom uses the singular pronoun 'I' in her communications.

While *Lady Susan* reflects a fairly complete and balanced set of ideals for marital love as measured by Peirce's universal categories, the story may be less complete in terms of the *modes* that Austen uses to signify those ideals—that is, in terms of her use of Peirce's various *semiotic* categories. It is true that all three basic types of Peircean sign are employed: Frederica and Reginald could be considered a vague resemblance of her ideals (Qualisign); Lady Susan and friends seem to be active instances in opposition to her ideals (Sinsigns); and the Vernons and De Courcys are arguably conventional portrayals of her ideals (Legisigns). However, as mentioned, Sinsigns should naturally subdivide into genuine (Indexical Sinsign) and degenerate (Iconic Sinsign) categories, and Legisigns should naturally subdivide into genuine (Symbolic Legisign), reactionally degenerate (Indexical Legisign), and qualitatively degenerate (Iconic Legisign) categories. The story's level of semiotic balance and completeness can be measured by how fully these predicted subcategories appear (or not) as representational modes in the novel.

I have already noted that Mr. and Mrs. Vernon seem to fit an Iconic Legisign classification overall because their image is largely a *conventional resemblance* of my proposed Austenian ideals. However, Austen's tone is sometimes ambivalent toward Mr. Vernon's character. There is, perhaps, a tension between the positive side of his mildness and readiness to assist the women, and the negative side which sometimes shows a paucity of initiative and courage. For example, when Frederica flees her boarding school, Mr. Vernon is immediately dispatched (and readily goes) to London to deal with the situation. Here, his willingness to act for the women could be viewed as positive, but Mrs. Vernon's description of the event emphasizes only his *instrumentality*, while giving no sign of volition or intelligence on his part:

Mr. Vernon set off for Town as soon as [Lady Susan] had determined what should be done. He is if possible to prevail on Miss Summers to let Frederica continue with her, & if he cannot succeed, to bring her to Churchhill for the present, till some other situation can be found for her. (p.28)

The imperative verbs used in this passage emphasize that his actions are wholly commanded by the women, who are the real agents of the business. On his return to Churchhill with Frederica, Mrs. Vernon reports to her mother that Frederica's 'kind hearted Uncle' was 'too fearful of distressing her, to ask many questions as they travelled'; she wishes 'it had been possible for me to fetch her instead of him', as 'I should have discovered the truth [about why Frederica fled the boarding school] in the course of a Thirty miles Journey' (p.32). This dialogue again invites us to explore the proper balance between kindness and gentleness (as represented by Mr. Vernon on the one hand), and truth, candor, and courage (as represented by Mrs. Vernon on the other)—a balance that Mr. Vernon evidently has not yet achieved. His character is not weak enough to make the image of his marriage with Mrs. Vernon an Indexical Legisign (a provoking *opposition* to the ideal), and yet the image of the couple is not as favorable as, say, an Elizabeth-Darcy image. If the story were to include a markedly negative Legisign husband to contrast with Mr. Vernon—such as Mr. Johnson might have been had his character been developed further through specific instances—Mr. Vernon might then appear better by comparison. However, the story's conclusion is as ambivalent about him as ever. The omniscient narrator wryly observes that, 'as it must already have appeared, [Mr. Vernon] lived only to do whatever he was desired' (p.75). Thus, the image of the Vernons is a slightly awkward mix of mostly Iconic Legisign traits with hints of Indexical Legisign traits, while the Johnsons (the more obviously Indexical Legisign couple) are not developed enough to emerge as a clear, comparative contrast. The presence and operation of the Indexical Legisign category in the story is thus weak at best.

The genuine Symbolic Legisign category is likewise under-utilized in the story. Such a sign would be a married couple who represent marriage ideals using familiar

cultural conventions, but with neither a notable qualitative likeness to, nor a shocking violation against, Austen's specific ideals. The De Courcys come closest to being this kind of sign, but their development in the story is also limited. Lady De Courcy seems to be created largely as someone for Mrs. Vernon to write to. Nonetheless, she and Sir Reginald exhibit many positive marital qualities, the specific demonstration of which is essential to a delineation of Austen's ideals. Their image is warm and feeling enough to be an Iconic Legisign, but not formal or regularized enough to be a pure Symbolic Legisign. Were the story to include a Symbolic Legisign couple, their image would perhaps operate to make the Iconic Legisigns in the story (the Vernons and De Courcys) seem by comparison to be more alive, warm, and substantive with respect to Austen's ideals. The different Legisign subtypes would interplay with one another semiotically in the way described by Ryle (referring to Austen's more mature novels), where each desirable character trait is matched 'against the same quality in different degrees, against simulations of that quality, against deficiencies of it, and against qualities which, though different, are brothers or cousins of that selected quality'.<sup>274</sup>

As I mentioned previously, many have noted the relative underdevelopment of Frederica and Reginald as characters in the story. To be a Qualisign of marital love, however, a couple need not be well developed, especially if they are to represent primarily the *feeling* aspects of such love. In *A Lover's Discourse*, Barthes asserts that some 'figures' of amorous speech are mere 'hypostases of the whole of the lover's discourse, hav[ing] just the rarity—the poverty—of essences'.<sup>275</sup> Peirce maintains that a sign need not represent its object in every respect but only in those respects that are necessary to give us the *basic idea* of the object.<sup>276</sup> Accordingly, it is not a

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<sup>274</sup> 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', p.92.

<sup>275</sup> p.4.

<sup>276</sup> *CP*, II, 228. Recalling the modern example of a male icon on a restroom door, we may note that the image typically omits much of the detail of a real man; as a drawing, it includes only the 'large strokes' that suggest the essential masculine qualities that distinguish it from a female. (In contrast, a

semiotic omission for a Qualisign image of ideal marriage to be simple like the image of Frederica and Reginald. The couple need not even be married, since it is only what Peirce calls the 'positive qualitative possibility' of happy marriage that is essential.<sup>277</sup> McMaster's comment that Reginald is 'less an autonomous character than a bag of goods contested over by the women', and Chapman's observation that the secondary characters in *Lady Susan* 'are not very well individualized',<sup>278</sup> fall in line with Peirce's description of how *qualities* (Firstness) differ from *reactions* (Secondness):

[A] reaction has individuality. It happens only once. If it is repeated, the repetition is another occurrence, no matter how like the first it may be. It is anti-general. A quality, on the other hand, has no individuality. Two qualities are different only so far as they are unlike. Individuality is an aggressive unity.... This a quality cannot have since it is utterly irrespective of anything else....<sup>279</sup>

Thus, McMaster's and Chapman's observations about Frederica and Reginald's lack of individuality rather reinforce a Qualisign classification for the couple. Whatever we may conjecture as to how the novel might have been different had Austen developed these characters further, we may observe from a Peircean semiotic standpoint that such changes would move their images away from Qualisign and toward Sinsign representation. Culler reasons, in contradiction to Saussure's idea

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Sinsign of a man might be an actual man, or someone pointing at an actual man, to signify the idea of a male, and a Legisign might be the word 'man' in English or 'homme' in French.) As the simplest and most *immediate* type of sign, a Qualisign suggests only the bare essence of an idea without explicitly defining, exemplifying, or developing it in any detail.

<sup>277</sup> With respect to Qualisigns, Peirce notes that a 'quality of feeling can be imagined to be without any occurrence.... Its mere may-being gets along without any realization at all' (*CP*, I, 394).

<sup>278</sup> McMaster, 'The Juvenilia', p.184; and Chapman, *Jane Austen: Facts and Problems*, p.52.

<sup>279</sup> *CP*, 7, 538.

that all signs hold meaning only *relative* to other signs,<sup>280</sup> that there must exist at least a few *self-defining* signs to anchor the others.<sup>281</sup> This agrees with Peirce's doctrine that there is a First class of signs (Qualisigns) which innately communicate *primal positive qualities*, and that all other signs produce meaning either by instantiating some *difference* from one of these qualities (Sinigns), or by attaching a *conventional association* to such an instance (Legisigns).

I have noted that in some cases Reginald's image is active enough to be considered an Iconic Sinign, a fact that reflects his progression toward greater experience and self-awareness. Shaw, in discussing the relation of Austen's work to real life, asks rhetorically: 'Don't Austen's novels get us into the habit of thinking that we can solve the underlying problems of our society by improving our selves?'<sup>282</sup> Even in her juvenile work, Austen exhibits a tendency toward this kind of moralizing about the effects of self-improvement upon society. Reginald is perhaps an early example of one of her characters who reforms himself. By the end of the story, he no longer accepts things just because they have the society-prescribed appearance of suitability, but insists on real virtue backing up the appearance. Perhaps a subtle message of the story's ending is that when a person reforms himself as Reginald does, individuals like Lady Susan, who use deception to take advantage of others, are relegated to positions of less influence in society—she ends up being confined to a circle inhabited by weaker-minded people like Sir James.<sup>283</sup> The effect of Reginald's

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<sup>280</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *A Course in General Linguistics*, trans. by W. Baskin (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), p.117.

<sup>281</sup> 'Semiotics and Deconstruction', p.139. Culler does not state this directly—and some might dispute my interpretation of his meaning here—but I think he suggests it in so many words.

<sup>282</sup> *Narrating Reality*, p.166. He asks the question with apparent doubt as to whether individual reform really *can* solve societal problems, but his observation that Austen believes such to be the case is, in my opinion, accurate.

<sup>283</sup> In contrast, Gibling and Gubar see Lady Susan's end as a covert illustration by Austen of the kind of 'social ostracism' that 'wilful sorts of women' like Lady Susan 'must inevitably incur' for trying 'to destroy or transcend' the 'inescapable femininity' prescribed for them by patriarchy (*The*

image in this regard illustrates the important function of Iconic Sinsigns in relation to Indexical Sinsigns: without a complete picture of both the positive (Iconic) *and* negative (Indexical) results of action (Sinsigns), our ability as readers to see clearly the operation of moral laws in life is arguably diminished, and the goals of didactic fiction are not as fully realized.

Not only is Reginald the only Iconic Sinsign of happy marriage in the story, Lady Susan and her friends are such extreme Indexical Sinsigns that they nearly drown out the positive characters.<sup>284</sup> Perhaps Austen grew weary of depicting Lady Susan's efforts to continually do damage-control on her own reputation, moving from one fact of her behavior to another and disclaiming the appearances: 'I did *not* try to prevent Mrs. Vernon's marriage'; 'I am *not* trying to force my daughter into an unwanted marriage'; 'I did *not* court the married Mr. Manwaring in his own home'. Such self-narrations, which must follow the lady's every move like an index finger pointing at a bird in flight, ultimately serve to compel the mind to the very facts that she tries to hide. But the mind grows dull when too many of such signs are given too crudely, with only simplistic pictures of goodness shown in contradistinction. Emsley believes Austen abandoned the Lady Susan story because of this overly simplistic dualism, a view that harmonizes with other recent criticism of the 'good versus evil' theme in Austen.<sup>285</sup> Nonetheless, from the exercise of creating her extreme anti-

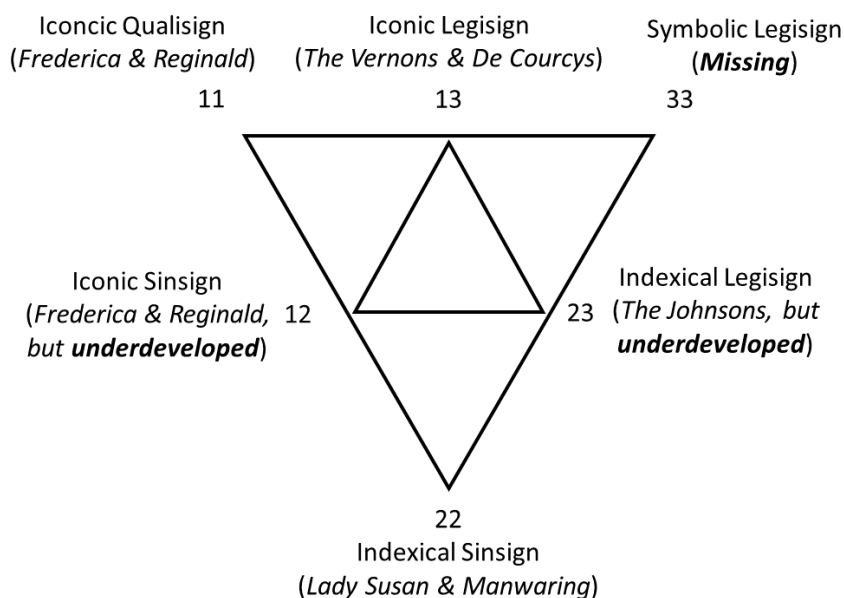
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*Madwoman in the Attic*, p.156). Poovey also suggests that '[b]ecause Susan's energy exceeds the capacity of the world she inhabits, it is necessarily destructive'; it nonetheless 'remains... attractive' at some level to Austen, Poovey believes (*The Proper Lady*, p.177).

<sup>284</sup> As Drabble points out, Austen may have decided against publishing the story because of this imbalance ('Introduction', p.11).

<sup>285</sup> Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.55. As an example of other recent criticism, Paula Buck argues that 'dualistic thinking' has 'outlived its usefulness' as a philosophical framework for understanding the good-versus-evil theme in Austen. She thinks that Nel Noddings' view, which recognizes that we all 'live daily with evil—it is part of us', to be a more fruitful critical framework; see 'Tender Toes, Bow-wows, Meow-meows and the Devil: Jane Austen and the Nature of Evil', in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin

heroine, Austen learned ‘what she was capable of doing before she “knuckled under” and confined her works to subjects of which she had certain knowledge’.<sup>286</sup> From a Peircean viewpoint, one could argue that the Object she wished to signify—her particular formula for marital bliss—is startlingly mature, balanced, and subtle for one so young (as illustrated by its filling out of the six-category universal Peircean paradigm), but she had not yet found the best *modes* (semiotics) to convey it. This point is reflected in the less complete state of the six-category *semiotic* Peircean paradigm, which we might render as follows for *Lady Susan*:



From the Lady Susan experiment, Austen learned the limits of using stark, oppositional signs (Indexical Sinsigns) in contrast with only simple pictures of positive marital feeling and convention (Iconic Qualisigns and Iconic Legisigns). That is, she learned that it is not enough to represent what true romantic feeling, courtship, and marriage absolutely *are not*, along with what they vaguely *might be*. One must move

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(Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.199-214 (p.202). I might note here that Peircean theory, instead of being dualistic, is *triadic* and thus is anti-nominalist by nature.

<sup>286</sup> McMaster, ‘The Juvenilia’, p.174. One could take this to mean, by extension, that Austen recognized the need for a more moderate realism in her fictional representations.

on to the more difficult business of showing details of what marital love *really is* (Iconic Sinsigns) and what it *shall be* given various different approaches to the relationship (Iconic Legisigns, Indexical Legisigns, and Symbolic Legisigns). While many critics have recognized the overall lack of representational balance in *Lady Susan*, the six-category semiotic Peircean paradigm, arguably, gives us a tool for *measuring* the story's level of representational balance or completeness, and for *identifying* what specifically is missing. This in turn enables us to compare the story with Austen's later, mature novels.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> The Peircean paradigm is all the more suitable for this task, I would argue, because it has arisen independently through empirical observation, and has been proven useful in other fields. For example, the linguist Robertson found that it predicts the behavior of specific English inflectional morphemes; see, 'A Peircean Categorical Analysis of the English Inflectional Morphemes *-ing*, *-ed*, and *-s*', *Semiotica* 102.3-4 (Jan. 1994), 179-223. Other researchers have used it effectively for purposes as diverse as sociological prediction, pharmacological discovery, analysis of industrial production processes, programming of multi-track radar, and analysis of terrorist social networks; see 'Charles Sanders Peirce', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2014), sec.15, <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/peirce/>>, accessed 28 Jan. 2020.



## CHAPTER 2: MARITAL LOVE IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

You are joking, Lizzy. This cannot be!—engaged to Mr. Darcy! No, no, you shall not deceive me. I know it to be impossible.

Jane to Elizabeth (*PP*, p.413)

The tale of how Miss Elizabeth Bennet's first impressions of Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy come to change so radically is perhaps Austen's most enduringly popular novel.<sup>288</sup> Written in Steventon at the age of twenty, the work was still 'rather too light & bright & sparkling' for Austen (*Letters*, p.212) even after she revised it for publication some seventeen years later, when at age thirty-seven she was, perhaps, a little more sober and a touch less idealistic.<sup>289</sup> Nonetheless, the romantic storyline continues to have appeal. Critics cite several reasons for this continuing popularity. The splendor of the mansions held forth as potential rewards to the heroines in the story feeds into the wish-fulfilment needs of today's readers as surely as it did to those of her

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<sup>288</sup> Fifty-seven years after its publication, Austen-Leigh asserts that 'some consider [it] the most brilliant of her novels'; one hundred eight-five years from its publication, Elizabeth Fay argues that 'critical consensus' places it as 'one of Austen's most masterful novels'; two hundred years from its publication, Hume calls it 'Austen's most famous and popular novel'; and two hundred ten years from its publication, Butler comments that all the novels 'feature prominently in polls of favourite fiction, with a special attachment to *Pride and Prejudice*'. See, respectively, Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen*, p.78; Fay, *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p.40; Hume, 'Money in Jane Austen', p.305; and Butler, 'Austen, Jane', p.29 of PDF version.

<sup>289</sup> Roberts suggests that Austen, in her later years, 'was different in both the personal and religious sense' than she was in her early twenties; 'especially it seems between 1801 and 1805, there had been a marked change in outlook, one that made Austen more reflective and self-aware' (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, pp.117-8). Butler also chronicles Austen's increasing self-scrutiny and sobriety about religion ('History, Politics, and Religion', pp.163-7). Both she and Roberts point to a combination of cultural-historical and personal factors as causes of this change.

time—a reflection on the universal human tendency to feel, as Johnson puts it, that ‘happiness is something’ we ‘have a basic right to’.<sup>290</sup>

Regarding the mansions in the story, McCann points out that Austen uses them as a tension-building device: for over half the narrative, we are given views of Netherfield and Rosings but none of Pemberley, which creates a ‘certain mystery about Darcy’—a kind of ‘suspense which amplifies, parallels, and resolves with, the Elizabeth-Darcy story’.<sup>291</sup> Van Ghent holds that an important element of the story’s suspense arises from the evident challenge faced by both Elizabeth and Jane Bennet to marry men for whom they have true affection and regard, under ‘crudely threatening social pressures’ to marry only for money and social privilege. This ordeal, she suggests, requires the ‘sensitively developed individual’ to employ ‘emotional intelligence’.<sup>292</sup> Lesley Willis suggests that this rare faculty of ‘harmonizing... feeling with judgment’, of uniting ‘reason and affection’, is symbolized in the novel by the eyes and the imagery of sight.<sup>293</sup> It is indeed Elizabeth’s eyes that capture Darcy’s notice. He seems to sense the power of the judgment and feeling behind them. Emsley points out, however, that Elizabeth does not exercise her rational powers in isolation; rather, she learns to make judgments

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<sup>290</sup> *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.81. Johnson closely links happiness with material security and personal privilege. While the human tendency to do so is strong, the degree to which these factors are actually linked with happiness is an interesting and debatable question, and is indeed one that Austen invites us to explore through this novel. Ruderman argues, counter to Johnson, that Austen’s ‘best characters... achieve happiness, not by... insisting on their right to it’ but by attaining to the kind of ‘attachment’ that is possible only with the ‘virtue and intelligence’ that come of ‘acting in a way that benefits others and perfects themselves’ (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.14).

<sup>291</sup> ‘Setting and Character’, pp.317-8.

<sup>292</sup> ‘On *Pride and Prejudice*’, pp.295-8. Van Ghent notes that this term was coined by Henry James.

<sup>293</sup> Lesley H. Willis, ‘Eyes and the Imagery of Sight in *Pride and Prejudice*’, *English Studies in Canada*, 2.2 (Summer 1976), 156-62 (161-2).

and decisions by counseling with trusted family and friends—by talking things over with Jane, with Mr. and Mrs. Gardner, and (later) with Darcy himself.<sup>294</sup>

Newman sees the story of Elizabeth's successful navigating of the precarious waters of her social environment as an attempt by Austen to explore the true nature and potential of feminine power:

What is powerful and pleasurable about Austen's... novels is that their heroines live powerfully within the limits imposed by [their society's] ideology. In doing so, they redefine what we think of as power, helping us to avoid the trap that traditional male definitions of power present, arguing that a woman's freedom is not simply a freedom to parody male models of action'.<sup>295</sup>

Instead, the novels 'suggest that... ideology... [is] understandable and controllable, that power is in self-mastery, internal not external'. Austen is 'determin[ed] to change our ideal of what power is by arguing that women cannot be excused from power by the limits society imposes on them'; her novels show that 'those who succeed are larger than their circumstances'.<sup>296</sup> Here, Newman's thoughts represent an emerging feminist view of Austen, one that has been developed further (and differently) by Poovey, Kirkham, Auerbach, Johnson, and others during the last four decades.<sup>297</sup> For example, Johanna Smith suggests that modern feminist readers

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<sup>294</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.2.

<sup>295</sup> 'Can This Marriage Be Saved', p.392.

<sup>296</sup> *ibid.*, p.393. This idea reflects Wollstonecraft's point, mentioned earlier, that although women will generally make use of the *easiest* means of influence available to them—that of the outward charms—they occasionally will, through 'acts of supererogation', rise above the shaping forces of their social environment (*Vindication*, ch.4, paras. 12 and 21).

<sup>297</sup> Feminist critics since Newman have focused more on critiquing societal limitations on women than on how women may exercise power within those limits. For example, Poovey argues that Austen, by the time she wrote *Pride and Prejudice*, 'was beginning to see' that she needed to depict acceptable ways for 'reforming the social practices that... helped to frustrate female self-expression and fulfillment'. Her heroines could 'show how bourgeois ideology' might be made to 'accommodate female feeling without driving a woman's energy into self-destructive or anarchic forms' (*The Proper*

whose values respecting women and marriage might seem to fundamentally oppose those held by Austen, may create meaning from (quoting Michel de Certeau) the 'system of verbal and iconic signs' employed in the novels—a meaning that may be 'quite different from what [the author] intended'. As a case in point, she observes that some modern readers might see Lydia Bennet and Charlotte Lucas as 'contenders' for Elizabeth's status as heroines in the story, insofar as they illustrate reasonable alternatives for how to respond to oppressive societal institutions and expectations surrounding female conduct.<sup>298</sup>

Considering the diversity in the critical responses to *Pride and Prejudice*, it is 'astonishing and gratifying', Elizabeth Langland observes, 'the extent to which the novel resists any final assessment'. It 'opens itself anew to the varied methodologies and perspectives that inform the critical and theoretical literature from year to year', and 'continues to speak eloquently to a broad audience'. Langland feels this characteristic of the story reflects a 'quintessential congruence between the

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*Lady*, p.212). Kirkham argues that Austen attempts to counter the cultural conventions of her time that cast women as creatures of emotion: 'her individual heroines' are designed to 'show that women [are] no less capable of rational judgment than men'; her silly men (like the 'asinine clergyman' Mr. Collins) 'moc[k] sexist pride and prejudice as it is enshrined in legal customs' (*Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp.xvi-xvii). Nina Auerbach argues that Austen subtly contributes to the body of female novelists who depict women as marginalized 'outcasts' in stories of 'romantic imprisonment'; see *Romantic Imprisonment: Women and Other Glorified Outcasts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Johnson asserts that Austen's novels exhibit a progressive vision of female individualism that counters the 'conservative ideology' of her patriarchal society and 'wrests' the endeared values of that society from their 'moral elevation' at the time (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.166).

<sup>298</sup> Johanna M. Smith, 'The Oppositional Reader and *Pride and Prejudice*', in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.27-40 (pp.30-1). As mentioned, both Peircean semiotic theory and reader-response research hold that individual interpretations of a given signifier (literary object) vary based on differences in the cultural conventions (Thirdness) and personal experiences (Secondness) that inform the reader.

concerns of [Austen's] world and ours'.<sup>299</sup> In other words, the novel's continuing popularity may reflect its treatment of more-or-less universal aspects of the human experience—including, I might argue, heterosexual love and the tensions that exist between its natural and conventional elements, between its free and constrained expression, between the ideal union and the pragmatic one. These elements, and the relationship of tension and balance in which they stand, are brought into sharper focus when considered in terms of Peirce's universal categories. Additionally, Peirce's semiotic categories provide a new lens for considering how the various character couples in *Pride and Prejudice* signify Austen's marriage ideals.

### JANE AND BINGLEY

In much the same way that Frederica and Reginald are generally treated in the critical literature as ancillary to the analysis of Lady Susan's character, Jane Bennet and Charles Bingley are often discussed only in terms of how they contribute to our understanding of Elizabeth and Darcy. For example, Mudrick describes Jane's 'gentle, sweet, forbearing' nature as mere 'simplicity' compared to Elizabeth's faculties of 'conscious, reasoned, perpetual examination into motive'. He argues that Elizabeth represents an 'altogether different [order] of mind' from Jane. He places Bingley into the same class of 'simple' characters as Jane, observing that the 'extent of his charms' amounts to his being 'handsome, very amiable and courteous, [and] lively', whereas Darcy 'leads him about by the nose' to drop or resume his addresses to Jane at Darcy's own will.<sup>300</sup> Mark Schorer suggests that we might

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<sup>299</sup> Elizabeth Langland, 'Pride and Prejudice: Jane Austen and Her Readers', in *A Companion to Jane Austen Studies*, ed. by Laura Cooner Lambdin and Robert Thomas Lambdin (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), pp.41-56 (p.53). This claim might be less defensible for *Lady Susan* as a novel—an evidence, perhaps, of Austen's maturation as a writer during the period intervening her writing of the two works.

<sup>300</sup> 'Irony as Discrimination: *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), III, 269-93 (pp.277-8).

‘dismiss’ Jane and Bingley as ‘stereotypes’ from ‘sentimental novels’ used by Austen to fill certain roles of ‘social and moral passivity’ that are needed for the plot.<sup>301</sup> The tenor of Mudrick and Schorer’s remarks is redolent of Drabble’s comments about Frederica and Reginald. While they clearly are secondary characters, Jane and Bingley are not, I want to argue, mere props. They form essential elements of Austen’s tapestry for marital happiness, especially when studied in a Peircean light.

The first scenes involving Bingley demonstrate that he has the open, sincere character that Austen consistently holds forth as beneficial to marital relations. On his appearance at the Meryton assembly, he is said to be ‘good looking and gentlemanlike’, with ‘a pleasant countenance’ and ‘easy, unaffected manners’—quite a contrast to the ‘forbidding, disagreeable’ demeanor of Darcy (*PP*, pp.10-1). Bingley is apt from the start to mingle with and think well of others. He comes away from this assembly convinced that he ‘had never met with more pleasant people or prettier girls in his life’, and that ‘everybody had been most kind and attentive to him’. Though he knew none of the locals there, he had felt ‘no formality, no stiffness’ with them, and ‘had soon felt acquainted with all the room’ (pp.17-8). His image is one of free and natural warmth of feeling (Firstness), of social activity (Secondness) unencumbered by any sense of prideful decorum. In other words, his actions (Secondness) are not wholly governed by the formalities and conventions (Thirdness) of his socio-economic class.<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Mark Schorer, ‘Pride Unprejudiced’, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), III, 299-312 (p.309).

<sup>302</sup> Some critics have argued that since his social circle is relatively limited in terms of class, Bingley’s character is not so ‘natural’ as Austen makes it seem. For example, Newman suggests that ‘[e]ach member of the Netherfield party, though seemingly rated according to his or her “natural” attributes, is actually rated according to his fortune’ (‘Can This Marriage Be Saved’, p.697). As my Peircean analysis is by nature one of *relative* comparisons between characters in a closely related set, the absolute absence of economic considerations is neither necessary nor implied by my judgments about the ‘naturalness’ of Bingley or another character. The comparison is always relative.

Bingley's natural modesty is contrasted by the clear lack of this quality in his sisters, who were used to 'associating with people of rank; and were therefore in every respect entitled to think well of themselves, and meanly of others'. The 'circumstance' of their having descended from a 'respectable family in the north of England' was 'more deeply impressed on their memories than that their brother's fortune and their own had been acquired by trade'. Bingley's father had amassed 'nearly a hundred thousand pounds', and 'had intended to purchase an estate', but died before doing so, leaving his wealth to his son.<sup>303</sup> Bingley's sisters 'were anxious for [their brother's] having an estate of his own', as this would be a clear emblem of rank, but since 'he was now provided with a good house and the liberty of a manor, it was doubtful... whether he might not spend the remainder of his days at Netherfield, and leave the next generation to purchase' an estate (pp.16-7). Austen allows us to see that Bingley does not think grandly of himself; he seems, rather, to enjoy and appreciate others for their intrinsic value. Jane sees the value of his wholesome character right away:

When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had been cautious in her praise of Mr. Bingley before, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him.

"He is just what a young man ought to be," said she, "sensible, good-humoured, lively; and I never saw such happy manners!—so much ease, with such perfect good breeding!" (p.15)

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<sup>303</sup> Schorer points out that Bingley is representative of self-made prosperity and the rising 'mercantile order', while Darcy represents inherited wealth and the declining 'feudalistic order' ('Pride Unprejudiced', p.309). Austen's choice to equip Bingley in this way is compatible with his relatively 'natural' character compared to that of Darcy, inasmuch as the link between labor and wealth is causal (natural) whereas that between birth and wealth is arbitrary. For her contemporary readers, this choice would not have made Bingley more favorable than Darcy, as inherited wealth was still generally favored over that proceeding from mercantile activity (see Shannon Chamberlain, 'The Economics of Jane Austen', *The Atlantic* (August 2014), <<http://goo.gl/qMITaJ>>, par.6, accessed 26 Dec. 2017). However, it clearly would have made him less *conventional* than Darcy.

Bingley's qualities, and Jane's valuation of them, suggest the *potential* for the couple to enjoy an open relationship with mutual *feeling and regard*, despite their economic inequality. The image of the couple, even in this early scene, is arguably iconic of Austen's ideals for genuine affection and mutual esteem.

Jane is clearly beautiful in the outward person. At the Meryton assembly, Bingley exclaims to Darcy, 'Oh! she is the most beautiful creature I ever beheld!' (p.12). But Austen allows us to see that Jane also has inner beauty. In their sisterly exchange after the assembly, Elizabeth playfully endorses Jane's admiration of Bingley ('You have liked many a stupider person') and, on Jane's remonstrance, needles her: 'Oh! you are a great deal too apt you know, to like people in general. You never see a fault in any body. All the world are good and agreeable in your eyes. I never heard you speak ill of a human being in my life'. Jane's response that she 'would not wish to be hasty in censuring any one', and nevertheless that 'I always speak what I think', could easily be seen as sentimental cliché were it a remark made in public (p.15). But in the retirement and ease of their bedchamber, these two sisters are not putting on airs, as Austen knows her readers will understand. The intimacy of the situation also lends credence to Elizabeth's reply:

"I know you do; and it is *that* which makes the wonder. With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough;—one meets with it every where. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of every body's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone." (p.16)

Jane's generous and optimistic view of the character and conduct of others (the Bingley sisters being their particular topic of conversation in this case) is reminiscent of Reginald and Mr. Vernon's generous attitude with respect to Lady Susan. While Austen here again builds tension by showing Jane's potential to be deceived by the designing Miss Bingley, she also simultaneously shows Jane to have formed the habit of seeing the best in others, of withholding hasty judgment, and of looking past faults. These virtues are not accidental choices. They correspond directly (as mentioned earlier) to Christian teachings on *charity*, the 'greatest' of the three



theological virtues—scriptural doctrine in which Austen was well versed.<sup>304</sup> Just as Mr. Vernon’s charitable thinking is balanced by the justice and prudence of his wife, here Jane’s charitable tendencies are balanced by Elizabeth’s keen sense of justice. But perhaps more significantly, Jane’s habit of resisting ‘hasty censure’ of others—of resisting *prejudice* (against the Bingley sisters, in this case)—proves to be a key virtue that Elizabeth lacks and must learn. By showing first a *simple picture* (Icon) of this *positive quality* (Firstness) in Jane, Austen subtly conditions us to witness events that will *oppose* this quality (Indexical signs), including Elizabeth’s prejudices against Darcy and for Wickham.<sup>305</sup>

After Elizabeth hears Wickham’s account of his mistreatment at Darcy’s hands, she discusses it in private with Jane. The latter responds with ‘astonishment and concern’ to think that ‘Mr. Darcy could be so unworthy of Mr. Bingley’s regard’. The incongruence of the two apparent facts (Bingley’s great confidence in Darcy, and Darcy’s purported unworthy behavior to Wickham) strikes her, and yet it is ‘not in her nature’, as one who generally trusts the professions of others, ‘to question the

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<sup>304</sup> Emsley, as mentioned, suggests that the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity are ‘fundamental’ to Austen’s ideals (*Jane Austen’s Philosophy*, pp.15,40-41). The teachings of Saint Paul place charity highest among the three: ‘And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity’ (1 Cor. 13:13, KJV). In her third published prayer, Austen implores God to ‘[g]ive us Grace to endeavour after a truly christian Spirit to seek to attain that temper of Forbearance & Patience, of which our Blessed Saviour has set us the highest Example’, and to ‘[i]ncline us... to think humbly of ourselves, to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct, to consider our fellow-creatures with kindness, & to judge of all they say & do with that Charity which we would desire from them ourselves’ (*LM*, p.575). Mudrick gives little weight to Austen’s religious convictions when he suggests that the ‘gentle, sweet, forbearing’ nature of Jane, and the ‘modest’ character of Bingley, are merely Austen’s euphemisms for weakness (‘Irony as Discrimination’, pp.278-9).

<sup>305</sup> Melina Moe notes that ‘Jane’s willfully generous interpretive habits are more than comic; they contrast with the tendencies of other more sharp-tongued, detached critics whose predictive accuracy, it turns out, is not more reliable’, and she goes on to discuss Elizabeth’s failures in judgment. See ‘Charlotte and Elizabeth: Multiple Modernities in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*’, *English Literary History*, 83.4 (Winter 2016), 1075-1103 (1083).

veracity of a young man of such amiable appearance as Wickham'; she can only 'throw into the account of accident or mistake' the disparity in these two reports. Without more access to the facts, she asserts to Elizabeth that 'we can form no idea' of the reasons for the disparity, and that it is 'impossible for us to conjecture the causes or circumstances which may have alienated them' (p.95). Elizabeth laughs at her willingness to clear everyone of blame—to avoid 'think[ing] ill' of anyone—but Jane invites her sister to consider Wickham's claims more rationally:

"My dearest Lizzy, do but consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Darcy, to be treating his father's favourite in such a manner,—one, whom his father had promised to provide for.—It is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? oh! no." (pp.95-6)

Jane knows that intimate friends of many years (like Bingley and Darcy) are less likely to be deceived in one another's character than casual acquaintances (like Elizabeth and Wickham). Nonetheless, Elizabeth finds it easier to believe that Bingley has been 'imposed on' by Darcy than that Wickham 'should invent such a history of himself', in which he states 'names, facts, every thing... without ceremony', doing so moreover with 'truth in his looks'. Jane admits that '[i]t is difficult indeed.... One does not know what to think'. 'I beg your pardon', Elizabeth retorts, 'one knows exactly what to think' (p.96). Here, Austen allows us to see that Elizabeth is influenced in the formation of her opinion mostly by the outward appearances of Darcy (with his 'forbidding countenance') and Wickham (with 'truth in his looks')—that is, she follows the common human tendency to interpret reports in the way that best agrees with our own perception of things. Darcy looks snobbish and has snubbed her once; Wickham looks honest and has shown attention to her. She accordingly wants to believe the latter. Jane, on the other hand, wants to give everyone the same allowance that we wish for ourselves—that of being judged by our real intents rather than by the appearance of our behavior only. She exercises the rare virtue of withholding 'censure' when the facts are not known well enough to give a fair judgment. Her image is one of charitable thinking and self-discipline. At

the same time, this scene shows her to be open and communicative with her sister, but holding uncompromisingly to virtuous principles. The scene is a *brief enactment* that gives a *semblance* (Iconic Sinsign) of how sibling relations can be mutually improving.<sup>306</sup>

In the continued unfolding of the Wickham mystery, Austen develops Jane's charitable character further. During the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth recalls that Jane 'had undertaken to make inquiries... of Bingley' for her into Darcy's affairs with Wickham, and so she seeks out her sister to ascertain what she has learned. 'Jane met her with a smile of such sweet complacency, a glow of such happy expression, as sufficiently marked how well she was satisfied' with Bingley's attentions during the evening. Not wanting to spoil her bliss, but anxious for news about Wickham, Elizabeth asks her about the subject, emphasizing that if she has 'been too pleasantly engaged to think of any third person... you may be sure of my pardon'. Jane assures her, however, that she has not forgotten to inquire about Wickham, and shares what little information she has learned—namely, that Bingley and his sisters believe the late Mr. Darcy to have only 'conditionally' offered Wickham a church living; that Wickham 'is by no means a respectable young man'; and that he 'has been very imprudent, and has deserved to lose Mr. Darcy's regard' (p.107). While Austen's primary purpose here may be to increase suspense over whether Elizabeth will learn the truth about Wickham or be further prejudiced against Darcy, the scene also speaks to Jane's ability to think outside of herself. Like Reginald, who attends to his sister's small requests even when very preoccupied personally, Jane evidently cares enough about Elizabeth to attend to this inquiry when she herself is in the thick of falling in love with, and being courted by, Bingley at the ball. The ability to think

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<sup>306</sup> Hudson observes that 'the moral and intellectual educative interplay between siblings' in Austen's novels 'defines their progress as individuals'; see "'Precious Remains of the Earliest Attachment': Sibling Love in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*", *Persuasions*, 11 (1989), 125-31 (par.4), <<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number11/hudson.htm>>, accessed 22 November 2017.

outside one's self in the interest of a loved one is a sure Austenian sign of virtuous character. In terms of the Peircean sign types, Jane's image in this scene falls into the Iconic Sinsign category because it is a *brief enactment* of the Austenian ideal for sibling loyalty and for outward thinking in general.

Jane's patience, self-denial, and resistance to provocation are apparent in the event of Bingley's sudden removal to London. Shortly after his departure, Caroline Bingley writes to Jane to inform her that her brother has no plans anytime soon to return to Netherfield, and to insinuate that he goes to London to court the attentions of Georgiana Darcy. Elizabeth is irked by what she clearly sees as a scheme of Miss Bingley and Darcy to detach Bingley from Jane. She is also vexed by Bingley's apparent persuadability—his 'want of resolution' in the matter (p.154). Jane, on the other hand, surmises that Bingley's attachment to her may in fact have 'not been more than an error of fancy on my side' (p.152). She 'cannot believe' that Bingley's sisters and closest friend would try to 'influence him' against his own inclinations; they could 'only wish his happiness'. Elizabeth counters that they may indeed 'wish many things besides his happiness; they may wish his increase of wealth and consequence; they may wish him to marry a girl who has all the importance of money, great connections, and pride'. Jane concedes that they could wish him to marry Georgiana, 'but this may be from better feelings than you are supposing': they 'have known her much longer than they have known me; no wonder if they love her better'. She observes to Elizabeth: 'By supposing such an affection' for her (Jane) to exist in Bingley, and by supposing his preference to be apparent to his sisters and friend, 'you make every body acting unnaturally and wrong'; she begs Elizabeth to '[l]et me take it in the best light... in which it may be understood' (p.155). The give and take of moral reason between the sisters in this scene, as they attempt to find a proper balance between charitable thinking and just realism, is similar to Mr. and Mrs. Vernon's counseling together. Both parties are the better for the exchange, but Jane clearly illustrates the virtue of resisting the tendencies to self-pity and to nurturing the wrongs of others against oneself, and of forbearing from rushed conclusions. The practice takes effort and may require one

to swim against popular opinion, but Austen allows us to see the fruits of such effort in Jane's relative steadiness of temper compared to other characters. Indeed, at the close of the same chapter, we are informed that when Wickham's story 'was openly acknowledged and publicly canvassed' in the neighborhood, 'every body was pleased to think how much they had always disliked Mr. Darcy' (p.156); and yet:

Miss Bennet was the only creature who could suppose there might be any extenuating circumstances in the case, unknown to the society of Hertfordshire; her mild and steady candour always pleaded for allowances, and urged the possibility of mistakes—but by everybody else Mr. Darcy was condemned as the worst of men. (p.157)

The description here has the constant Jane quietly holding to reason and virtue, whilst the swells of gossip and opinion toss about the rest of the neighborhood in their willingness to suppose the worst about Darcy. The image of the 'mild and steady' Jane is a Firstness—given here by Austen as a *positive qualitative possibility* for our consideration—against which the swirling, self-interested gossip of the neighborhood *contrasts*, as a Secondness. As a sign of the charitable thinking that may grace and improve a relationship, therefore, Jane's image is Iconic, while that of the neighborhood in this case is Indexical, in that it provokes a realization of how such behavior disturbs and undermines harmonious relations.

The view of Jane as a simpleton—as a lower order of mind than Elizabeth<sup>307</sup>—might suggest mere naiveté to be at the root of her tendency to see the best in others. An examination of her early dealings with the Bingleys, however, might challenge this reading of her. Her singleness of mind seems rather to flow from a sound understanding of the basis for happy human relations—a condition of mind that Austen often calls 'good sense'. After the Meryton assembly, Elizabeth muses on Jane's increasing 'preference' for Bingley and on the 'superciliousness' of his sisters, and considers that Jane's 'strength of feeling' for Bingley might not be widely suspect due to her general 'composure of temper' and 'uniform cheerfulness of

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<sup>307</sup> Mark Schorer, 'Pride Unprejudiced', p.309.

manner' (p.23). Both 'composure' and 'uniformity' express the idea that Jane's feelings are inwardly regulated. The 'simpleton' view of Jane might hold that she merely conforms her outward manner to socially prescribed, desirable appearances for a young lady seeking to attract a respectable husband. However, Elizabeth's conversation with Charlotte about Jane's reserved manner suggests otherwise. Charlotte notes that excessive reserve can be a 'disadvantage', for if 'a woman conceals her affection... from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him.... Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on' (p.24). Here, Charlotte's assumption is that Jane's whole aim is to secure a wealthy husband, and since Bingley fits the bill, she should act swiftly to 'fix' him. Elizabeth asserts that this is not the case with Jane:

"Your plan is a good one," replied Elizabeth, "where nothing is in question but the desire of being well married; and if I were determined to get a rich husband, or any husband, I dare say I should adopt it. But these are not Jane's feelings; she is not acting by design. As yet, she cannot even be certain of the degree of her own regard, nor of its reasonableness. She has known him only a fortnight. She danced four dances with him at Meryton; she saw him one morning at his own house, and has since dined in company with him four times. This is not quite enough to make her understand his character."  
(pp.24-5)

Elizabeth's argument is that Jane has the sense to know that marriage to just any man, wealthy or not, cannot assure happiness. Despite Jane's feelings of attraction to Bingley, she must take the time to ascertain whether his character and situation in life can reasonably be combined with her own to produce a *durably* happy state of marriage. That Jane is not focused on superficialities in the courtship process is borne out by ensuing events. When she receives an invitation from Caroline to spend the evening at Netherfield, her mother insists that she go on horseback, since the sky threatens rain and she will likely get wet and thus be asked to stay overnight with her guests. Jane is not interested in a scheme; she responds that 'I had much rather go in the coach' as her father has sensibly suggested (p.34). Later, when the Bingleys have left for London and Caroline has written to inform Jane of their

intention not to return, Jane asks Elizabeth the hypothetical question, 'can I be happy... in accepting a man whose sisters and friends are all wishing him to marry elsewhere?' Elizabeth's sensible answer, that she should 'refuse him' if she finds that 'the misery of disobliging his two sisters is more than equivalent to the happiness of being his wife', draws a faint smile from Jane, and she acknowledges that 'I could not hesitate' to accept him, even though 'I should be exceedingly grieved at their disapprobation' (p.134). It is clear that Jane is not thinking only superficially about 'getting a husband', but understands that marriage has many facets. Of the two under consideration, mutual affection is the more important, but friendship with the spouse's siblings is not a factor to be overlooked. When Jane stays with the Gardiners several weeks in London and Miss Bingley makes only one brief and frigid visit to her, Jane accepts the reality of Miss Bingley's 'duplicity' with her (about which Elizabeth had warned her), but still counts the realization a 'painful thought'—one on which she will not dwell. Her mental strategy for dealing with this painful fact is to 'think only of what will make me happy, your [Elizabeth's] affection, and the invariable kindness of my dear uncle and aunt' (p.168). She resists the natural tendency to nurture a wrong, and instead makes a conscious choice to think outside of herself with gratitude about her dearest relations. Elizabeth, on the other hand, allows the same circumstance to prompt another unfavorable mental review of Bingley, leading her to wish for him the 'punishment' of 'really soon marry[ing] Mr. Darcy's sister, as, by Wickham's account, she would make him abundantly regret what he had thrown away' (pp.168-9). Her anger at Darcy for his part in separating Bingley from Jane eventually grows to such a high pitch that, just before Darcy makes his first offer of marriage to her, she gets a violent headache and has to withdraw from the company of her friends. Ironically, at this moment of extreme vexation, she exclaims to herself that 'there could be no possibility of objection' on Darcy's part '[t]o Jane herself', she being all 'loveliness and goodness', her 'understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating' (p.209). Perhaps Austen wishes her readers to see here how Jane's 'uniform cheerfulness' is the fruit of her mental discipline, and by subtle contrast to also perceive that

Elizabeth's illness and vexation are partly the fruits of her continued harboring of prejudiced thoughts. In these scenes, Jane might be considered an Iconic Sinsign (faint enactment) of good sense. Elizabeth, however, presents an image that is an Indexical Sinsign (oppositional instance) of the same ideal, in that her prejudiced thinking yields bitter fruit that counteracts the formation of a happy and healthy relationship with Darcy.<sup>308</sup>

These scenes imply that Jane, in addition to having *honest affection* for her man (Firstness) and the *fortitude to defend* his party against rash censure (Secondness), also has an understanding of how *virtuous thinking* (Thirdness) engenders happy marital relations. She is quite aware of her own need to marry someone who can provide for her materially (awareness of marriage as a *means* of material provision is another Thirdness), but she does not allow this factor to be the sole dictator of her behavior and choices.<sup>309</sup> By her evident consideration of all three universal Peircean

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<sup>308</sup> Ruderman's observation that 'Austen stresses... the way in which virtue is good for the doer', and her comment that '[v]irtue and self-control are... desirable for their own sake', are certainly relevant to this episode (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.117). Also relevant, but in a very different way, are John Wiltshire's observations about medical and psychology research findings. He notes that today's researchers generally believe headaches to be 'signs of social tension' or 'stress'. He suggests that Austen and her contemporary novelists commonly used instances of such ailments (whether consciously or not) to dramatize 'the result of [a person's] lack of power', 'both within the family, and in the larger community'; see *Jane Austen and the Body: 'The Picture of Health'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p.19. In this scene, Elizabeth is indeed frustrated over Jane's social powerlessness compared to Darcy and Bingley's sisters, and so her headache can be seen as the internalization of this stress. It is difficult to say whether Austen consciously wishes her readers to connect this stress with general injustices of the prevailing social order, or merely to see it as the consequence of Elizabeth's rash and uncharitable thinking.

<sup>309</sup> Patrick Parrinder notes that many of Austen's heroines play a role similar to the daughters of Tory clergymen of her time: they gain material security by marrying into aristocratic-leaning families, while the latter are simultaneously 'revitalized by an infusion of social responsibility and Christian virtue—the typical dowry, as it were, of a clergyman's daughter'. Austen takes care, however, to show that her heroines 'disregard material considerations, so that their ability to contract a wealthy



categories of marital love (feelings, actions, and conventions) as factors in her selection of a husband, her values reflect a balanced view—one that is arguably more complete than competing conceptions held by other characters, such as Charlotte Lucas.<sup>310</sup>

As with Jane, Austen characterizes Bingley's modesty and generosity of thought with respect to others not so much by overtly describing these qualities in him, but by relating minor incidents that allow us to 'picture' them. For example, when Elizabeth tramps three miles through mud to visit her sick sister at Netherfield, Bingley's sisters take to 'abusing her as soon as she was out of the room', laughing over her 'almost wild' appearance, with '[h]er hair, so untidy, so blowsy' and 'her

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marriage is a tribute to their integrity alone'; see *Nation and Novel: The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.184-5,189. That a positive give-and-take could exist in such marital arrangements is contested by many feminist critics—Poovey, for example, argues that 'social and economic factors' virtually dictated 'the opportunities for, even the forms of, happiness available' to women of that class and time ('The Gender of Genres', p.123). Laura Dabundo takes what might be considered a more moderate feminist view, arguing that proactive women (fictionalized by characters like Elizabeth) were then, for the first time in Western history, in a position to 'relinquish hold of what had been seemingly unchanging verities, such as the place of women', and to 'learn to change and adapt' through self-education. However, Dabundo classes Jane in the camp of 'passive' women like Mary and Kitty who 'follow inherited cultural models and established paths' of courtship simply because '[t]hat is how eighteenth-century women were expected to behave'; see 'The Feminist Critique and Five Styles of Women's Roles in *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Critical Insights: Jane Austen*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2011), pp.39-53 (pp.42-3). Parrinder's and Dabundo's readings (and Newman's, as mentioned earlier) leave more room than Poovey's for the exercise of a woman's agency in the determination of her marital happiness. It is conceivable that Austen, by creating characters like Jane and Elizabeth, wished to underscore the importance of individual agency in the affair (Jane illustrating the self-control side of agency, and Elizabeth the proactive side) while allowing her fictionalizations to raise, as a byproduct, her readers' awareness of elements of what Poovey calls the 'systemic oppression' of women in the 'legal and economic institution of eighteenth-century marriage' ('The Gender of Genres', p.123).

<sup>310</sup> Charlotte's conception of marriage is discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

petticoat, six inches deep in mud'. Darcy confirms, when asked by Miss Bingley whether he would wish his own sister to 'make such an exhibition', that he would not; and Caroline charges Elizabeth with behavior showing 'conceited independence' and a 'country town indifference to decorum'. Bingley, on the other hand, states that '[h]er dirty petticoat quite escaped my notice' and that Elizabeth's effort to visit 'shews an affection for her sister that is very pleasing' (pp.38-9).<sup>311</sup> His sisters proceed to mock Jane and Elizabeth's 'vulgar relations', who include an uncle employed as 'an attorney in Meryton', and another uncle who lives 'somewhere near Cheapside'—a 'capital' fact about which 'they both laughed heartily'. Bingley points out that were Jane and Elizabeth to have 'uncles enough to fill *all* Cheapside... it would not make them one jot less agreeable' (p.40). Here, his assertion is that Jane and Elizabeth have intrinsic value from their character, independent of any social advantage or disadvantage that their acquaintance might offer. Though Bingley's social circle may tend generally to practice prideful self-comparison, he is sensible enough to know that such an attitude does not promote happiness. It is evident that his interactions here with his sisters and friends tend to check their prideful tendencies, just as Jane's counsel with Elizabeth exerts a similar influence, though in neither case is the influence exerted in a self-righteous way. Bingley's image is an iconic Sinsign, or subtle pantomime, of Austen's ideals for modest and charitable thinking—*qualities* that show him to have the *potential* to participate in a mutually improving relationship with a wife whose value attaches to her character as much as to her status in society.

Other minor incidents at Netherfield affirm Bingley's view of himself and others as fellow creatures and equals. When Elizabeth looks for a book to read from his library, he readily admits to being 'an idle fellow' in scholarly matters, and wishes his

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<sup>311</sup> It is evident that Bingley's sisters are looking for faults in Elizabeth and are focused primarily on genteel *appearances*, while Bingley is looking mostly at the *intents and feelings* behind Elizabeth's actions; he is less concerned with breaches of 'decorum'. Considerations of decorum, as analyzed by Jane Nardin, are discussed later in this chapter in conjunction with the character of Mr. Collins.

book 'collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit'; but small as his library is, it contains 'more than I ever look into' (p.41). He is quite aware of how unfavorably he compares with Darcy in this regard, whose library at Pemberley 'has been the work of many generations', and who asserts 'the improvement of [the] mind by extensive reading' to be the duty of both men *and* women (p.43). In these exchanges, Austen's main purpose may be to highlight the greater scholarly stature of Darcy, but she simultaneously allows us to see that Bingley acknowledges the strengths and accomplishments of others even when he compares unfavorably with them. He simply is who he is, and reveals the same consistent self to everyone. When Mrs. Bennet and her younger daughters visit Jane at her sick bed, Mrs. Bennet comments to Bingley on the pleasant view from the bedchamber window, and hopes that he 'will not think of quitting [Netherfield] in a hurry' when his 'short lease' expires. Bingley admits, 'Whatever I do is done in a hurry, ...and therefore if I should resolve to quit Netherfield, I should probably be off in five minutes' (p.46). Elizabeth and he banter about the transparency of his character:

"That is exactly what I should have supposed of you," said Elizabeth.

"You begin to comprehend me, do you?" cried he, turning towards her.

"Oh! yes—I understand you perfectly."

"I wish I might take this for a compliment; but to be so easily seen through I am afraid is pitiful." (p.46)

Bingley's openness and familiarity with Elizabeth here show both his increasing affection for her as Jane's sister, and also his general freedom from the tendency to maintain a prideful 'distance' from others of a lower economic status. Just as Jane presents a faint picture (Icon) of virtuous thinking against which Elizabeth's prejudice is contrasted (as an Index), here Bingley creates a simple picture (Icon) of modesty and accessibility against which the pride and aloofness of his sisters and Darcy are contrasted (also as an Index).

In the test of interacting with socially awkward characters like Lydia and Mr. Collins, Bingley proves to be genuine. As with Jane, however, Austen keeps the narration of these details anecdotal, so that they form more of a background image than the overt focus of the story. For example, when the visit of Mrs. Bennet and her two younger daughters to Netherfield is wrapping up, the narrator relates that Lydia suddenly 'put herself forward' to 'tax Mr. Bingley with having promised... to give a ball at Netherfield'. The 'natural self-consequence' of this fifteen-year-old girl, who feels herself 'very equal... to address Mr. Bingley on the subject' and to suggest 'that it would be the most shameful thing in the world if he did not keep' his promise, does not ruffle Bingley. 'I am perfectly ready, I assure you, to keep my engagement', he responds, and adds that 'when your sister is recovered, you shall if you please name the very day of the ball'. Here, he does not take offense at Lydia's brashness, nor does he ignore or trivialize her request, but willingly shows himself accountable for the promise, though it be to the youngest member of the Bennet family that he gives account. He stands gently in the office of an older brother when he further suggests, '[b]ut you would not wish to be dancing when she is ill'—a reminder which draws forth her acknowledgment that 'Oh! yes—it would be much better to wait till Jane [is] well' (pp.49-50). The suggestion as to the higher priority of Jane's health compared to the ball subtly illustrates the improving effect of his charitable thinking upon those with whom he interacts, down to the least family member.

At the ball, we get another indication of the modesty and grace with which Bingley bears impertinent behavior. After describing Elizabeth's humiliation at the unseemly conduct of her younger sisters, mother, and even her father, the narrator relates the incident of her cousin's (Mr. Collins's) clumsy self-introduction to Mr. Darcy and of his subsequent extemporaneous speech, 'spoken so loud as to be heard by half the room', about his 'preferment' by Lady de Bourgh and the pious nature of his duties as the rector of her parish. Elizabeth reflects that 'had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success'.

The only mitigating factor to her is that 'some of the exhibition had escaped [Bingley's] notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed'. She knows that Bingley is not the overly critical sort to disdain her by association, whereas 'she could not determine whether the silent contempt of [Mr. Darcy], or the insolent smiles of [Bingley's sisters], were more intolerable' (pp.113-4). It is evident that Elizabeth's pain and humiliation are not a consequence of her family's poor behavior alone, but of her consciousness of how that behavior is perceived by others. Darcy's contempt, and the Bingley sisters' disdain, add to her pain, whereas Bingley's freedom from personal judgment ameliorates it. In the context of marriage, Bingley's image is iconic of the kind of relationship that is grounded in affection for, and a sense of the intrinsic worth of, one's spouse and her family members, as opposed to the kind that values a spouse and her family only for the social or economic advantage to be gained through the connection.

Closely linked with Bingley's humility is his willingness to take counsel from those he trusts. Early in the story, in explaining the basis for the 'very steady friendship' that exists between Bingley and Darcy, the narrator relates that Bingley has 'the highest opinion' of Darcy's 'judgment' and 'the firmest reliance' on 'the strength of [his] regard'. Darcy, on the other hand, is 'endeared... by the easiness, openness, and ductility of [Bingley's] temper'. Despite 'great opposition of character', the two enjoy an almost sibling-like relationship of trust, comparable to that enjoyed by Jane and Elizabeth (p.17). After the Meryton assembly, the two young men and Bingley's sisters discuss the evening's events. To Bingley's avowal that 'he could not conceive an angel more beautiful' than Jane, Darcy 'acknowledged [her] to be pretty', and his two sisters 'admired her and liked her, and pronounced her to be a sweet girl, and one whom they should not object to know more of'. The narrator informs us that Bingley 'felt authorized by such commendation to think of her as he chose' (p.18). It is evident that even in this most personal matter of feeling and preference, Bingley considers the opinions of his close family and friends. Austen may wish us to sense here that his open and malleable character makes him susceptible to manipulation

by Darcy and his sisters, much as Reginald is susceptible to the schemes of Lady Susan. At the same time, however, she allows us to see that Bingley places great *faith* in his intimate family and friends, takes *hope* from their encouragement, and does not act without the benefit of their opinions. By this habit, he yields some power to them but also engenders in them a sense of his trust—which may inspire them to good behavior—and gains the balancing effect of their viewpoints. This practice shows that he has an essential prerequisite for engaging in mutual pedagogy.<sup>312</sup> His behavior in this and similar scenes creates an image that is iconic of these relationship virtues.

For much of the novel, it appears that the influence of Darcy and the designs of Bingley's sisters will keep Bingley from renewing his courtship with Jane, by which circumstance Austen invites us to explore the right 'limits and proportions' of one's being *persuadable* in matters of love. When Bingley fails to return to Netherfield or to visit Jane when she is in London, Elizabeth takes a dimmer view of his persuadability. She begins to fear that the 'united efforts of his two unfeeling sisters and of his overpowering friend... might be too much... for the strength of his attachment'. Although she hates to 'admit an idea... so dishonorable to the stability of [Jane's] lover', by the time she hears Caroline's letter about the Bingleys' intention to stay the winter in London, 'she could not think without anger, hardly without contempt, on that easiness of temper, that want of proper resolution which now made [Bingley] the slave of his designing friends' (pp.145,151). She weighs his characteristic 'easiness of temper' against her conception of 'proper resolution' in matters of love. On the positive side of the scale, Bingley's ductility, as mentioned, flows both from humility and from trust and confidence in his siblings and friends—attributes that roughly correlate with the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. On the negative side of the scale is his lack of 'proper resolution', which correlates

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<sup>312</sup> In the kind of relationship where men and women are acknowledged as rational equals, as generally advocated by Wollstonecraft in *Vindication*.

with the classical virtue of courage—or fortitude, as it is more often termed by Austen. While all four of these virtues reside, as a group, in the Firstness of Thirdness category in our six-point Peircean paradigm of marital love (as illustrated previously), we can further break them down relative to one another. Faith, hope, and charity have slightly more Firstness (*quality of feeling*) than does fortitude, while fortitude has slightly more Secondness (*resistance to others*) than do faith, hope, and charity: the former are essentially inner qualities, while the latter involves external exertion. All four virtues seem to have a common Thirdness element—that of *thoughtfulness*. With faith, one’s thoughts are exerted to trust in the goodness of another person or of God; with hope, one’s mind focusses on a positive or desired outcome for one’s self or for another person; with charity, one’s thoughts focus on another person’s needs or feelings; and with fortitude, one’s mind fixes firmly to defend a person or principle. Thus, while the three Christian virtues and fortitude share a similar *thoughtfulness* element (Thirdness), they differ in their respective admixtures of the *feeling* and *resistance* elements (Firstness and Secondness). Consequently, where the Christian virtues are well developed but fortitude is weak, love as a whole is paradigmatically incomplete because Firstness and Thirdness are present but Secondness is lacking. Likewise, where fortitude is strong but the Christian virtues are underdeveloped, love is incomplete because Secondness and Thirdness are present but Firstness is lacking. When Elizabeth later learns, from Darcy’s post-proposal letter, that Bingley did not know of Jane’s visit to London, she considers him ‘cleared of all blame’ because she sees that his apparent lack of fortitude was really only a lack of information; she feels that if any fault remains in him, it is on the side of ‘the implicitness of his confidence in his friend’ (p.236)—what we might call an excess of faith and hope in Darcy’s wisdom and goodness. Whether Austen shares this opinion about Bingley, or whether she wishes her readers to do so, is difficult to say (the story does tend to ‘resist any final assessment’<sup>313</sup>), but the

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<sup>313</sup> Elizabeth Langland, ‘*Pride and Prejudice*’, p.53.

denouement, along with her future novels (especially *Persuasion*), give further material with which readers can venture interpretations. What the early scenes involving Bingley do show, is an understated image of a man who deems others to be on a par with himself, who thinks generously of people as a rule, who gives consideration to their opinions, and who places firm trust in those who care about him. The image is neither strongly *active* (Sinsign) nor *authoritative* (Legisign) but is *qualitative* and thus is a Qualisign of Austen's ideals. In the events considered so far, the ideals of which the image is representative are primarily those of the *feeling* (Firstness) and *sociality* (Secondness) aspects of marital love.

Austen often uses a character's affection for siblings as a portender of the ability to love selflessly in marriage.<sup>314</sup> Bingley certainly has indications of this quality if one considers Darcy to stand in the place of a brother, and we have seen similar hints in Reginald's treatment of his sister. But Austen's models of sibling affection are clearly Jane and Elizabeth.<sup>315</sup> Their personalities are quite different: the narrator informs us early on that Elizabeth has 'a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous', while Jane has 'a quieter way'; Elizabeth has 'more quickness of observation' and Jane more 'pliancy of temper' (pp.12,16). Nonetheless, they are very close and confer with one another frequently and candidly. When Jane is very low with a fever at Netherfield, she 'longed for... a visit' from Elizabeth, and is 'delighted' when the latter does come, though Jane is 'not equal... to much conversation, and... could attempt little besides expressions of gratitude'. After some hours at her bedside, Elizabeth feels she ought to go, so as not to overstay her welcome, but 'Jane testified such concern in parting with her' that the Bingleys invite Elizabeth to stay longer to tend to her sister (pp.36-7). Later, when Elizabeth

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<sup>314</sup> Hudson suggests Austen believes that 'conjugal love should be patterned after fraternal love, that the perfect marriage should be like the ideal sibling relationship with its mutual trust and understanding, love and esteem, respect and loyalty' ('Sibling Love in *Pride and Prejudice*', par.7).

<sup>315</sup> 'In many respects', Hudson argues, 'the model marriages in Austen's novels—Elizabeth and Darcy, Jane and Bingley...—mirror the model sister relationships—Elizabeth and Jane' (*ibid.*, par.13).



expresses disillusionment over the 'inconsistency of all human characters' and their lack of 'merit or sense' (as instanced to her by Charlotte's 'unaccountable' decision to marry Mr. Collins), Jane urges her not to 'give way to such feelings as these'. She counsels her to make more 'allowance' for Charlotte's 'difference of situation and temper'—to consider that Charlotte has a 'prudent, steady character' (the self-professed 'unromantic' nature) and 'is one of a large family; that as to fortune', Mr. Collins's offer 'is a most eligible match'. Elizabeth replies that Jane well knows Mr. Collins to be 'a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man', and that in marrying him just for an establishment, Charlotte sacrifices 'principle and integrity' and gains no real 'security for happiness'. Jane does not disagree, but suggests that her sister's 'language [is] too strong in speaking of both' parties, and hopes that Elizabeth 'will be convinced of it, by seeing them happy together' in the future (pp.153-4). Here, Jane is again pleading for more generous 'allowances' (*charitable* thinking) and is exercising *faith* and *hope* in the best possible outcome; she does not refute Elizabeth's insight but urges greater *temperance* in its application. Elizabeth, on the other hand, is probing the *justice* of Charlotte's motives and is being realistic (*prudent*) about the likelihood of her choices bringing happiness in marriage. It is evident that neither sister exercises all the virtues fully, but as a pair in this scene they exercise most of them: faith, hope, charity, and temperance by Jane, and justice and prudence by Elizabeth. (Of the Christian and classical virtues, only fortitude is missing, but that has been treated in the other scenes mentioned.) Regarding the value of such sisterly interchanges, Hudson observes:

Austen draws our attention to the loyalty and mutual exchange between complementary sisters; they benefit from each other's contrasting attributes and responses to situations. This reciprocity contributes to the sisters' success in their apprenticeship to life. As

they mature, they discover the usefulness and value of each other's point of view and course of action.<sup>316</sup>

When Elizabeth realizes, from Darcy's letter about his dealings with Wickham, that she has rashly misjudged both men, she better sees the 'usefulness and value' of Jane's more cautious approach to assessing character. And yet, when she discloses to Jane the events (learned from Darcy's letter) that led to this realization, the latter takes no joy in the discovery of Wickham's bad character, in Elizabeth's having been proven rash, or in Darcy's marriage proposal having been rejected. On all three counts, Jane's reaction is not to relish that justice has been served to the individuals but rather it is to empathize with their suffering. Like Reginald, she has the admirable capacity of stepping into the shoes of others and feeling their pain or disappointment, though the pain may have come as a just consequence of poor choices. This reinforces her sibling affection and her outward-directed feelings—both Firstness elements of love. As usual, however, Austen invests these qualities in her character by giving subtle details that are incidental to the narration about other characters (Elizabeth, Wickham, and Darcy, in this case). Jane's image, therefore, has the understated character of Qualisign representation overall. As with Frederica, this technique enables Austen to avoid invocation of sentimental stereotypes in her

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<sup>316</sup> *ibid.*, par.14. The idea is inescapable that Austen's characterization of Jane and Elizabeth draws from her own experience with her older sister Cassandra to some degree. James Austen-Leigh reports that Cassandra (like the fictional Jane) was the more handsome of the two, and had a cooler, calmer disposition, while Jane (like Elizabeth) was more lively, demonstrative, and sunny in temperament; but the two were inseparably close throughout life (*A Memoir of Jane Austen*, p.63). Butler concurs: 'Jane Bennet... fits all the stereotyped features of the classic sentimental heroine: beautiful, virtuous, domestic, and reticent. Like so many heroines, she appears to have lost her lover, Bingley.... When Jane thinks Bingley has gone, she stoically performs her domestic duties, as Cassandra did in Kent through her early adulthood' (after her fiancé, Tom Fowle, died). 'Family relationships and above all sisterhood are regular features of Austen's novels' ('Austen, Jane', p.11 of PDF version).

contemporaneous readers, so that Jane's compassionate character is seen as more 'natural' than conventional.

Although Bingley is not a strongly assertive character in general, Austen does give brief glimpses into his attentiveness and serviceability to the women for whom he cares. When Jane's fever takes a turn for the worse, both Bingley and his sisters express concern. The latter, however, are light-hearted enough to pass the evening playing duets, while Bingley 'could find no better relief to his feelings than by giving his housekeeper directions that every attention might be paid to the sick lady and her sister' (p.44). Likewise, when Jane is recovered enough to join the party for the first time in the drawing room, Darcy gives her a 'polite congratulation' and Mr. Hurst a 'slight bow', but Bingley is 'full of joy and attention':

The first half-hour was spent in piling up the fire, lest she should suffer from the change of room; and she removed at his desire to the other side of the fire-place, that she might be further from the door. He then sat down by her, and talked scarcely to anyone else. (p.59)

Here, Bingley's image is reminiscent of Reginald's in its proactivity and attentiveness to the needs of a woman for whom he cares. These are whisperings again of the positive fulfillment of Austenian gender-based roles for a husband (which fall into the Secondness of Thirdness category of marital love). Austen allows us to see the genuineness of Bingley's professions, compared to those of the other characters, by the fact that they are accompanied by *action* on Jane's behalf. As with Reginald, not only does this add Secondness to his image (moving it from a pure Icon to an Iconic Sinsign of the ideal), it also hints at the integrity of his character.

A few paragraphs later, Austen adds another subtle brushstroke to Bingley's image of integrity when his sister Caroline questions him, in the presence of Darcy and others, about his recent promise to Lydia respecting a ball:

"By the bye, Charles, are you really serious in meditating a dance at Netherfield?—I would advise you, before you determine on it, to consult the wishes of the present party; I am much mistaken if there are not some among us to whom a ball would be rather a punishment than a pleasure."

“If you mean Darcy,” cried her brother, “he may go to bed, if he chuses, before it begins—but as for the ball, it is quite a settled thing; and as soon as Nicholls has made white soup enough, I shall send round my cards.” (p.60)

By sporting with Darcy here, Bingley shows his words and intentions to be the same whether expressed publicly to Lydia or privately to Darcy and his intimate friends. There is no difference between his public and private self, between his expressions to a silly, impertinent teenager and those to an eminent and powerful gentleman. His image is a mix of modesty, forthrightness, and serviceability, all of which are qualities that highlight his *potential* and *capacity* to engage in candid and constructive communications, and to exercise true gallantry as a husband, free from superficial or ceremonious airs. He is, thus, in these scenes, again, an Iconic Sinsign—a vaguely suggestive enactment—of Austen’s ideals for both the feeling (Firstness) and activity (Secondness) elements of marital love, as well as for the degenerate Thirdness elements (gender roles and relationship virtue).

Hudson suggests that Austen’s value for sibling solidarity is part of her larger ‘belief in the primacy of the home and family’ in society.<sup>317</sup> Bingley’s accessibility to young people like Lydia, as Frederica’s ability to relate well with Reginald’s young nieces and nephews, is an understated example (Iconic Sinsign) of this ideal.<sup>318</sup> As mentioned, McMaster sees children in Austen’s fiction as special signs, or ‘moral tests’, of character in adults.<sup>319</sup> For Jane’s part, it is significant that when the Gardiners invite Elizabeth to travel with them to Derbyshire for several weeks, they ask Jane to watch their children:

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<sup>317</sup> ‘Sibling Love in *Pride and Prejudice*’, par.10.

<sup>318</sup> Here Bingley may reflect something of the character of Austen’s third oldest brother, Edward Knight, who James Austen-Leigh reports to have been very kind to Jane when she was growing up, and who ‘possessed also a spirit of fun and liveliness, which made him especially delightful to all young people’ (*A Memoir of Jane Austen*, p.61).

<sup>319</sup> ‘Jane Austen’s Children’, par.2.

The children, two girls of six and eight years old, and two younger boys, were to be left under the particular care of their cousin Jane, who was the general favourite, and whose steady sense and sweetness of temper exactly adapted her for attending to them in every way—teaching them, playing with them, and loving them. (p.266)

This suggests a gentle, maternal character for Jane that is iconic of Austen's ideals for facility with children. As stated by the narrator, Jane's approach with the children includes elements from all three Peircean categories: she *teaches* them (Thirdness), she *plays with* them (Secondness), and she *loves* them (Firstness). That these three elements should define the character that is 'adapted in every way' for relating to children is a measure of the maturity and completeness of Austen's notion of the same. Jane's possession of such character allows us to see her *positive potential* for motherhood vicariously through the care of her young cousins—an important token of her capacity to fulfill that gender role. Though some feminist readers may contest a view of Austen that sees motherhood as an important part of marriage, it is difficult to read Jane's character negatively here; the scene argues in favor of Hudson's view of the primacy of the family to Austen, and of a favorable view of Jane's character in general.<sup>320</sup> Such an iconic sign is not a mere prop placed on the page to fill a role of 'social or moral passivity'.<sup>321</sup> Without Jane's background image of positive fulfillment of the maternal role, readers would not as clearly see the lack of maternal affection and sense in other characters. Why, for example, have

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<sup>320</sup> Although Fay lists 'maternity' as one of the 'general and ahistorical interests' of feminism, she observes that the movement has traditionally aligned with a revolutionary spirit that emphasizes 'fraternity and equality' over 'powerful parents', thus deemphasizing the importance of the maternal role (*A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, pp.44-5). The feminist educator Nel Noddings sees potential good and evil in cultural expectations for the motherly role, but argues for the innate goodness of motherly instinct—a view with which I think Austen would concur; see *Women and Evil* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), pp.107-16.

<sup>321</sup> Mark Schorer, 'Pride Unprejudiced', p.309.

not the Gardiners' children been left in the care of Mrs. Bennet? Austen does not *state* a value judgment about this here, but she creates imagery that allows us to see the contrast between ideal and less-than-ideal motherly behavior, and to see the effects of the same on the happiness of the marriages and families involved.<sup>322</sup>

The family and sibling affections exhibited by Jane and Bingley do not dilute the strength or purity of their romantic feelings for one another, though their brotherly consideration for Darcy's opinion does delay the public expression of their feelings. The narrative unfolds the budding, blossoming, and consummation of their romantic feelings in a gradual and, I would argue, natural way.<sup>323</sup> In the opening scenes, Lady Lucas circulates the report that Bingley intends to join the next Meryton assembly with his friends, and the neighborhood hopes this is an omen of romantic inclination, for '[t]o be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love' (p.8). After that first assembly, Mrs. Bennet reports how Bingley was 'struck with Jane', and 'enquired who she was, and got introduced, and asked her for the next two' dances; then, after dancing with several other partners, he returned to ask her again—she being 'the only creature in the room that he asked a second time' (p.13). In their private conversations with their siblings after the assembly, Jane and Bingley each express their admiration for the other, and are 'given leave' to court the relationship. The narrator relates that it was 'generally evident' at this point 'that he *did* admire her', and to Elizabeth 'it was equally evident that Jane was yielding to the preference which she had begun to entertain for him from the first'. Charlotte suggests that Jane should make her feelings more obvious, 'to help him on' (pp.23-

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<sup>322</sup> This idea is developed further in the next section, wherein the marriages of the Bennets and the Gardiners are explored and contrasted.

<sup>323</sup> Acknowledging, again, the counter-argument of other critics like Newman who suggest that Austen makes these characters seem 'natural' while intimating that they actually follow economic conventions much of the time ('Can This Marriage Be Saved', p.697). As I mentioned previously, my analysis follows the Peircean practice of emphasizing the *relative* qualities of closely related members of a set more than the overall qualities of that set. I believe Austen's focus to have been similar.

4). Darcy finds Jane's family objectionable, and indeed sees in her behavior no evidence of strong attachment to Bingley, even after her week-long sick stay at Netherfield; he persuades Bingley to cool the relationship by staying in London longer than originally planned. Despite this separation, there are clear signs that Jane and Bingley's feelings for one another do not abate. As mentioned earlier, when Jane considers Elizabeth's assertion that Bingley's sisters oppose the match, and wonders whether their opposition might render a marriage with him unhappy for her, Elizabeth suggests that she 'refuse' his hand if her fears about his sisters are 'more than equivalent' to her love for him. This suggestion draws from Jane the knee-jerk reaction that Elizabeth knows it will: 'How can you talk so? ... you must know that... I could not hesitate' (p.134). As a *reactional* sign, this instance is an Index of Jane's feelings for Bingley, which, though largely unspoken during this period of separation, are shown here to be alive and well. Shortly after receiving Caroline's second letter (confirming Bingley's decision not to return for the winter), Jane has a similar reaction to her mother's repeated expressions of 'irritation' over Bingley's decision; Jane 'could not help' lamenting to Elizabeth, 'Oh! that my dear mother had more command over herself; she can have no idea of the pain she gives me by her continual reflections on him' (p.152). Jane's pain is again a reactional index to her feelings for Bingley, which are like an internal wound that is not apparent until one pokes the area.<sup>324</sup> Bingley's feelings during the same period are also unspoken but are shown to be as strong as ever by the fact that both Caroline and Darcy deem it necessary to conceal from him the news of Jane's presence in London during her visit to the Gardiners. As his closest family and friends, they know better than others that Jane's presence would be irresistible to him. Though

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<sup>324</sup> Here, pain as an indicator of love-longing makes a good addition to Leicht's list of examples of indices as 'causal' signifiers: 'dark clouds mean rain; smoke denotes fire; sobbing signifies sorrow' (*Deconstructive Criticism*, p.9). Pain is also a subtle example of the 'somatic symptoms' that Wiltshire notes appear in the novels of Austen and her contemporaries, which 'use the body as their vehicle' to enact 'dramas of interpersonal tension' (*Jane Austen and the Body*, p.22).

Caroline tries to represent in her letter to Jane that her brother has no special feelings for Jane, her deliberate *act* of concealment *contradicts* this claim for us. (The circumstance calls to mind Mrs. Johnson's lamentation that, when one is trying to conceal the truth, '[f]acts are such horrid things!' [p.67].) In this case, the fact of Caroline and Darcy's actions to conceal Jane's proximity is an Index of Bingley's warm and vibrant feelings for Jane.

Just as Austen uses the actions of Bingley's most intimate relations as reliable indicators of his feelings, so she uses the observations of Elizabeth to provide reliable information about Jane. Through Elizabeth's eyes, we learn that the passage of several more weeks has only increased Jane's longing for Bingley. The narrator relates Elizabeth's thoughts upon returning from her trip to Derbyshire:

[Elizabeth] was now, on being settled at home, at leisure to observe the real state of her sister's spirits. Jane was not happy. She still cherished a very tender affection for Bingley. Having never even fancied herself in love before, her regard had all the warmth of first attachment, and from her age and disposition, greater steadiness than most first attachments often boast; and so fervently did she value his remembrance, and prefer him to every other man, that all her good sense, and all her attention to the feelings of her friends, were requisite to check the indulgence of those regrets, which must have been injurious to her own health and their tranquility. (p.252)

Jane's image in this scene invokes the traditional love token of melancholy and self-abandonment described by McMaster,<sup>325</sup> though moderated by self-control. Her steadiness notwithstanding, the description gives us a sense of the depth of the impression that her 'first attachment' has made—an impression that is now painful but also 'cherished'. Though the image is largely qualitative (Iconic), it is also slightly Indexical due to the *imprinting* on her memory that is evident in the imagery.<sup>326</sup> Thus, the image has traces of all three Peircean sign types—*conventional* (the

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<sup>325</sup> *Jane Austen on Love*, pp.12,15.

<sup>326</sup> Many indices, such as footprints, are created by an act of *pressing* or *imprinting* one thing upon another, wherein the *opposition* of the phenomenon is evident.



melancholy love token), *oppositional* (the memory imprint), and *qualitative* (her cherished feelings)—although the feelings are perhaps the more prominent aspect of the image.<sup>327</sup> Earlier, when Jane reacted painfully to her mother’s repeated reminders of Bingley’s decision to leave Netherfield, Jane insisted:

“But I will not repine. It cannot last long. He will be forgot, and we shall all be as we were before.”

Elizabeth looked at her sister with incredulous solicitude, but said nothing.

“You doubt me,” cried Jane slightly colouring; “indeed, you have no reason. He may *live in my memory* as the most amiable man of my acquaintance, but that is all.” (p.152, emphasis added)

Jane will *not* be as before, because her memory has been vividly imprinted by Bingley, and the imprint will live on. Interestingly, when Elizabeth has a brief encounter with Bingley on her trip to Derbyshire, we pick up similar signals about his feelings for Jane. In the scene at Lambton Inn, Darcy introduces Georgiana to Elizabeth and to the Gardiners, and then Bingley makes an appearance. To Elizabeth, ‘at a moment when the others were talking together’, Bingley observes with ‘real regret’ that it has been ‘above eight months’ since he has seen her family: ‘We have not met since the 26th of November, when we were all dancing together at Netherfield’. Evidently Jane is not alone in having had the events of that evening vividly impressed on her memory, and here Elizabeth notes the significance of ‘his memory [being] so exact’. His subsequent query to Elizabeth, ‘when unattended to

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<sup>327</sup> Technically, because the image has all three Peircean elements, it is a Rhematic Indexical Legisign—a degenerate Legisign that occupies the central (123) position in a ten-category Peircean paradigm. Such a sign makes use of the conventions of sentimental literature (as described, for example, by Todd in *Sensibility: An Introduction*) while at the same time using ‘natural’ (Iconic and Indexical) modes of signification as well—again, ‘natural’ here meaning, as I argue throughout, that these modes rely *relatively* less on our schooled responses and *relatively* more on our in-built sensory responses (our perceptions of qualitative likenesses and differences).

by any of the rest, whether *all* her sisters' were still at home, and the accompanying 'look and... manner which gave [it] meaning', confirm to Elizabeth the continued strength of his feelings for Jane (pp.289-90). The brevity and discreetness of this exchange, requisite with the public setting, make it as much an Iconic Sinsign (qualitative enactment) as an Indexical one. Austen's *object* of signification in these separation scenes is her ideal for the *constancy* of romantic feeling (which is related to the relationship virtues of devotion and fidelity), but it is evident that when she wants to attribute this quality to Jane and Bingley, she uses their *actions*, their *reactions*, and the *reactions* of other characters as the most effective *modes* of signification. She chooses to use Iconic Sinsigns (brief enactments) and Indexical Sinsigns (knee-jerk reactions) to occasionally bring them forth from the narrative background. Austen's choices here perhaps reflect an awareness that people generally assign greater truth value to facts of behavior than to mere words and professions. Showing brief enactments of Jane and Bingley's feelings for each other, and automatic reactions from them and other characters that reveal these feelings, also emphasizes the *natural* aspects of Jane and Bingley's love over the *codified* ones. In Peircean terms, the couple (again) represents mainly the feeling (Firstness) and sociality (Secondness) elements of marital love, with only a whisper of the lawful (Thirdness) elements—and in the case of Thirdness, it is mainly relationship virtues like fidelity and devotion that are hinted, as opposed to social conventions like economic parity.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Although some critics argue that economics are more of a driving force behind Jane's feelings and attractions to Bingley than I do here (as mentioned, Newman suggests that Austen's early statement of the incomes of Bingley and Darcy subtly cues readers to 'the way in which wealth determines point of view', even Jane's and Elizabeth's, about the 'character' and 'appearance' of their suitors; see 'Can This Marriage Be Saved', p.697), my reading of Jane is closer to that of Ruderman: she argues that 'Austen always shows how it is possible to work within a convention while not having one's behavior defined by it' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.41).

The higher value, in Jane's estimation, of feeling over convention in marriage is apparent when Elizabeth announces to her that she has agreed to marry Darcy. As Gornall points out,<sup>329</sup> Jane 'thinks [Elizabeth] is marrying Darcy only for his money' when she says to her, 'Oh, Lizzy! do anything rather than marry without affection. Are you quite sure that you feel what you ought to do?' (p.414). Though these are Jane's own words, they are presented here as an inquiry about Elizabeth, and so Austen maintains some level of *indirection* in her characterization of Jane, which keeps her image more of a background picture (Icon) than a deliberate focus (Legisign). Again, this minimizes romantic sentimentality in her image. Bingley's feelings are more open and visible to the reader but are also largely conveyed in an Iconic or Iconic Sinsign way. As we have seen, their feelings for one another are only professed once (in private to their confidants), and the continuation of those feelings during the 'separation' episodes is only occasionally indicated. The continued strength of their feelings as the closing scenes approach is shown in a similar manner. When Bingley finally returns to Netherfield with Darcy, the narrator informs us that 'Miss Bennet had not been able to hear of his coming, without changing colour'. Likewise, through Elizabeth we have this observation:

In spite of what her sister declared, and really believed to be her feelings, in the expectation of his arrival, Elizabeth could easily perceive that her spirits were affected by it. They were more disturbed, more unequal, than she had often seen them. (p.367)

Both of these signs are actual *occurrences* (blushes and visible disturbances of spirit), but they also have the prominent *qualitative* aspects of color and mood, and so could be classified as Iconic Sinsigns of Jane's feelings for Bingley. At the same time, they are well-known *love tokens* for the period and so also have a Legisign element, making them again a well-balanced (Type 123) Peircean signifier on the whole.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>329</sup> 'Marriage and Property in Jane Austen's Novels', p.51.

<sup>330</sup> Katie Halsey sees the codified (Legisign) elements of Jane's image as being more prominent than what I argue for here. Following on Poovey and Johnson, she argues that Austen's use of

When Bingley and Darcy finally arrive at the doorstep of Longbourn for the first time after their long absence, Jane endeavors to compose herself but 'looked a little paler than usual'; when Bingley steps into the room, the narrator reports that 'her colour increased'. Watching on, Elizabeth sees Bingley 'looking both pleased and embarrassed' (pp.370-1). When the pair gets a chance to converse, Elizabeth sees 'how much the beauty of her sister re-kindled the admiration of her former lover', and that 'every five minutes seemed to be giving her more of his attention' (p.373). It is notable that even at her moment of greatest anticipation, when Bingley is about to walk in the room, Jane is able to think outside herself. The fact that Darcy had come along with Bingley makes her look 'with surprise and concern' at Elizabeth 'for the awkwardness which must attend her sister, in seeing him almost for the first time after receiving his explanatory letter' (p.369). Austen makes Jane's empathy remarkable by situating it in this moment.

In the winding-up scenes that bring Jane and Bingley's feelings into the open and consummate them in marriage, Austen continues to highlight the consideration that they give to their family and close friends. The process they follow in bringing about the marriage itself is worthy of notice. Bingley first visits the family together with his friend a couple times, to set Jane and everyone else at ease. He then comes alone twice more, but spends his time agreeably with the whole family, managing Mrs. Bennet's scheming ways naturally and gracefully. Next, he befriends Mr. Bennet by spending a morning shooting with him, in which he finds the latter to be better company than expected. Finally, after another visit with the family, he proposes to Jane in private across the family hearth, and goes to Mr. Bennet to ask permission, while Jane shares her joy first with Elizabeth and then with her mother. Although

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blushes as indicators extends a well-established literary device of the period (a *Legisign*); see 'The Blush of Modesty or the Blush of Shame? Reading Jane Austen's Blushes', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 42.3 (June 2006), 226-38. I do not dispute this; Jane's image certainly has elements of the sentimental tradition, but Austen has taken pains to make it less so encumbered, and more natural, than comparable characters like Miss Bingley, Lady Catherine, and Charlotte Lucas.

this open, natural, and gentle mode of approaching marriage may seem to some a mere adherence to prescribed forms (a reflection of 'social or moral passivity'<sup>331</sup>), it also creates a wholesome and positive backdrop (Icon) without which the courtship approach of Mr. Collins, for example, might not seem so ceremonious and inconsiderate, or that of Wickham and Lydia might not seem as secretive, deceptive, and demanding upon the family. The indirect comparisons that are set up by this narrative structure also condition us to expect the level of marital happiness enjoyed by these couples to differ correspondingly.<sup>332</sup>

Jane and Bingley's moments of ecstasy underscore their habit of thinking outwardly, and suggest that the practice will enhance, rather than detract from, their happiness together. When Jane shares her joy privately with Elizabeth at receiving Bingley's offer of marriage, she follows it with the exclamation, 'Oh! Lizzy, to know that what I have to relate will give such pleasure to all my dear family! how shall I bear so much happiness!' Her great joy here is a co-mingling of her love for Bingley and her thoughts about the welfare of her family. When Elizabeth sees Bingley right after his proposal to Jane, 'she had to listen to all he had to say, of his own happiness, and of Jane's perfections' (pp.384-5). When Jane learns from Bingley that 'he really loved me' when 'he went to town last November', and that 'nothing but a persuasion of *my* being indifferent, would have prevented his coming' back sooner, Elizabeth suggests this 'little mistake' was only 'modesty', and Jane agrees that he puts 'too little value... on this own good qualities' (p.387). Jane's reflection in this instance can be seen to prefigure how she will deal with Bingley's weaknesses when they are married: she may recognize them, but she will look for and dwell on the good qualities that are behind them, knowing that she is not marrying a perfect man but a good one. Upon declaring herself to be 'the most

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<sup>331</sup> Mark Schorer, 'Pride Unprejudiced', p.309.

<sup>332</sup> The contrasting marriages of Wickham and Lydia, and of Mr. Collins and Charlotte, are explored in more detail in the next two sections of this chapter.

fortunate creature that ever existed', her thoughts jump directly to the one thing that could make her joy greater: 'If I could but see *you* [Elizabeth] as happy! If there *were* but such another man for you!' (p.388). A few days later, when Elizabeth informs her that there *is* such a man, and that it is Mr. Darcy, we are told that 'Miss Bennet had nothing further to wish', for her sister 'will be as happy as myself', and Darcy 'now, as Bingley's friend and your husband', will be even 'more dear to me' than before. She and Elizabeth talk 'half the night' about the events surrounding their engagements (p.415). The image of the two sisters, engaged to two men who are themselves best friends, is one of strong bonds of affection (Firstness) and constructive sociality (Secondness), soon to be reinforced by the bonds of lawful marriage (Thirdness). 'Such a [sibling] relationship', argues Hudson, 'will not jeopardize the marriages... but will strengthen them'.<sup>333</sup> The broader implication is that Jane and Bingley's consideration for their family members will continue to enhance their happiness in married life. Indeed, when Miss Bingley writes to Jane 'to express her delight' at their engagement and to 'repeat all her former professions of regard', although Jane is 'not deceived' by her this time, she 'could not help writing her a much kinder answer than... was deserved' (p.425). Consistent with her previous behavior, we see that Jane does not nurture wrongs, but chooses to focus on the good in others, and by so doing maintains her own 'uniform cheerfulness', which in turn spreads to others.<sup>334</sup>

When Mudrick characterizes Jane and Bingley as 'simple' characters who are immediately perceived, without 'surprises' or 'doubt' as to 'what they are, and why

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<sup>333</sup> 'Sibling Love in *Pride and Prejudice*', par.15.

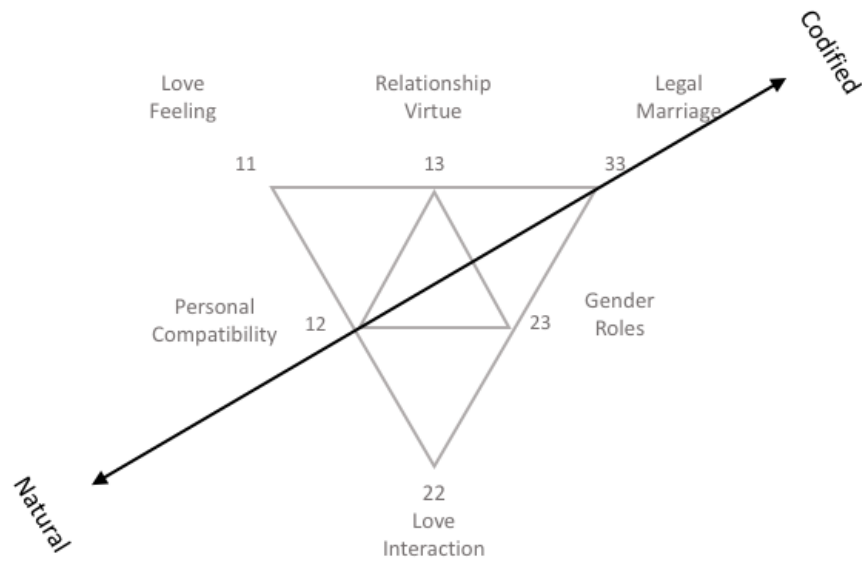
<sup>334</sup> Even Kitty, whose image heretofore has been one of general sourness, shows 'material... improvement' after Jane's marriage, because she is 'removed from the influence of Lydia's example' and allowed to spend 'the chief of her time with her two elder sisters'. The narrator informs us that Jane and Elizabeth help Kitty, 'by proper attention and management', to become 'less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid' (pp.427-8). Thus, the improving influence of Jane's virtuous character on those around her continues to have effect after she is married.

they act as they do',<sup>335</sup> he haply captures how an Iconic (qualitative) image differs from an Indexical (surprise-based) image and from a Symbolic (reason-based) image. Likewise, when he describes Elizabeth's 'conscious, reasoned, perpetual examination into motive' in terms of its contrast with Jane's 'natural, uncomplex, ... almost unseeing goodness', he haply acknowledges the importance of Firstness in the cognition of Secondness and Thirdness. When Ronald Paulson characterizes *Pride and Prejudice* as an exploration of the 'relationship between two sets of values, one ideal and the other real, one free and natural and the other overcodified and unnatural',<sup>336</sup> he haply captures the differences between Firstness (the ideal and free), Secondness (the natural and real), and Thirdness (the codified and unnatural). Jane and Bingley certainly are, in a sense, a simple image (Icon) of the free and natural *feelings* and *sociality* that are so vital to marital love. As framed earlier in the six-category Peircean paradigm, love feelings are pure Firstness (11), and love interactions are pure Secondness (22), where the latter includes, besides physical expressions of love, various forms of sociality. As Paulson suggests, the *natural* love feelings and interactions can be placed on a spectrum of marital love opposite the *codified* forms. This natural-versus-codified spectrum maps onto the Peircean paradigm as follows:

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<sup>335</sup> 'Irony as Discrimination', p.270.

<sup>336</sup> Ronald Paulson, 'Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*', in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), III, 326-40 (p.334).



Thus, the feelings, mental pairing, and actual pairing (interactions) of lovers lie on the natural end of the spectrum, while the relationship takes on successively more codification as we incorporate relationship virtue, gender-role fulfillment, and, finally, the legal marriage contract and settlement.<sup>337</sup> This progression parallels

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<sup>337</sup> Newman's view that the 'fundamental conflict' of the story is between a woman's need to marry for material security and her desire to marry for love and companionship ('Can This Marriage Be Saved', p.387) is congruent with this paradigm—it sees these as opposing elements to be balanced in the relationship (the former being codified, and the latter natural), but neither element precluding the possibility of marital happiness. The view of Poovey and Johnson that the codifications of marital love created by patriarchal society (which largely include the romantic literature of the period) essentially dictated both the terms of a woman's obtaining material security and her sense of what constitute romance and compatibility, is less congruent with this paradigm. It sees the codified elements as encompassing the whole of marital love as practiced in the period, rather than just one category of its elements. It questions whether such a thing as purely 'natural' love can exist under a marital 'tradition' and on this basis rightly doubts the possibility of female happiness. Peirce's pragmatic contention is that all phenomena really do have purely 'natural' elements (Firstness and Secondness), but in most cases, especially cases of social phenomena like marriage, the natural elements are intermingled with 'man-made' elements (Thirdness) according to observable, universal patterns of category mixture and subdivision.



Austen's representation of Jane and Bingley as a couple: they clearly depict all the natural elements of romantic love, and also faintly the codified elements of relationship virtue and gender roles. Their image includes, finally, a brief allusion to their legal marriage and one or two events in their wedded life, but this last, most codified element receives the least emphasis, and there is a marked *lack* of any over-codification in their image, such as rigid adherence to decorum or insistence upon class distinctions.

Because Jane and Bingley's image is mild and unprovocative, there is a tendency to underestimate its importance. However, semiotically speaking, without their image of natural romance, the marriage of Mr. Collins and Charlotte would not by contrast seem so unnatural. Jane and Bingley's image of humility, modesty, and charitable thinking is iconic of the relationship virtue that enables a couple to enjoy mutually-improving interaction and harmonious relations with one another's family members.<sup>338</sup> Without this image as an idealistic backdrop, the condescending images of the Bingley sisters, Darcy (initially), and Lady Catherine, and the early images of rash censure in Elizabeth and the Meryton neighborhood, would not be as provoking (Indexical). Without Jane's selfless, outward focus, Lydia's vanity and thoughtlessness toward her sisters would not be as striking (Indexical). Without Jane and Bingley's facility with children and younger siblings, wherein they are iconic of the positive fulfillment of gender-based roles, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's ineffectuality as parents would not be as pronounced (Indexical). Finally, without Jane and Bingley's image of sincerity, integrity, and lawfulness (wherein they are iconic of both relationship virtue and legal marriage), Wickham and Lydia's deceptive and secretive illegitimacy would not be as stark (Indexical). In some ways, the couple is a more developed version of Frederica and Reginald. Still, Jane and Bingley do not actually marry until the winding-up scenes of the story, and thus their image remains, like

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<sup>338</sup> Ruderman notes the consistent 'connection between virtue and happiness' that Austen makes, emphasizing that 'the two can and must be intertwined' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.1).

Frederica and Reginald's, largely in the realm of Qualisign representation with respect to Austen's marriage ideals, though the image also occasionally operates in Sinsign and Legisign representational modes as well.

#### THE GARDINERS, BENNETS, AND WICKHAMS

While Austen's representation of Jane and Bingley consists largely of simple depictions (Qualisigns) of ideal and natural pre-marital feeling and interaction, her representation of several other characters includes narration of actual instances of the affairs of their marital relations, and so should be broadly classed as Sinsign representation. Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, for example, show interactions that are generally cast *positively* with respect to various marriage ideals, suggesting an Iconic Sinsign classification for the couple. We are also shown many instances of the interaction of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet with each other and with their children, relatives, and neighbors. These instances are less positive, generally; they seem calculated to provoke our sense of the couple's *incompatibility*, creating a marriage image that certainly is not ideal but is comically believable. The Bennets might thus be classed as an Indexical Sinsign—an *opposition* to Austenian ideals—although a light-hearted one that is alloyed with occasional positive (Iconic Sinsign) elements. Lydia Bennet and George Wickham are married for a significant part of the story and provide some examples of marital and familial interaction; their image is thus a Sinsign as well. Their interactions, however, are more purely Indexical, since they seem categorically to *violate* Austen's ideals.

#### *Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner*

Critical consensus holds the Gardiners to be one of Austen's most positive portrayals of wholesome marriage. Paulson calls the couple the 'one ideal marriage by which to judge the rest' of the 'established marriages' in *Pride and Prejudice*, 'almost all' of which are satirical enactments of 'false relationships' like that of the

Bennets.<sup>339</sup> Fay observes that Mrs. Gardiner's character, in particular, exhibits 'rather a wise prudence, positively based on moral precepts and moderation'.<sup>340</sup> Francus, likewise, sums up Austen's lesson on how to walk the line between prudent and mercenary motives in marriage as, simply, 'Be Mrs. Gardiner'.<sup>341</sup> Emsley notes how well the couple illustrates the balancing of the virtues of justice and charity: 'They are respectful to all in the hopes that those who... appear unjust may turn out better than they appear (like Darcy)'; nonetheless, 'when a person has demonstrated unworthy behavior... (Wickham)', their 'indignation' prompts them to 'take action', but always action 'tempered by charity', making them 'examples of the ethical mean of amiability'.<sup>342</sup> These readings emphasize the well balanced character of the Gardiners, and their suitability to each other as marriage partners—attributes that ought to be 'measurable' in Peircean terms.

Mr. Gardiner is introduced as 'a sensible, gentleman-like man, greatly superior to his sister, as well by *nature* as *education*' (p.158, italics added). His superiority to Mrs. Bennet runs the spectrum of the *natural* and the *codified*—that is, both his natural behavior (Firstness of Secondness) and his learned behavior (Secondness of Thirdness) are admirable. On the codified side of his character, we are informed that even the 'Netherfield ladies would have had difficulty in believing that a man who lived by trade... could have been so well bred and agreeable'. On the natural side, his house is situated 'within view of his own warehouses'—a detail that adds earthy realism to his image and resists the codifications of any sort of nobility (p.158).<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> *Satire and the English Novel*, p.335.

<sup>340</sup> *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p.46.

<sup>341</sup> 'The Mercenary and the Prudent in Austen', p.68.

<sup>342</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, pp.90-1.

<sup>343</sup> By 'natural' in this case, I refer to Mr. Gardiner's solid, 'real-world' quality, which correlates with Peircean Firstness and Secondness, and is quite distinct from the meaning of 'natural' as codified in the culture of sensibility of Austen's time. As a man of trade, Mr. Gardiner could be classed with what Copeland calls 'the active, hard-working and prosperous pseudo-gentry... who work for their

Mrs. Gardiner is introduced as ‘an amiable, intelligent, elegant woman’, so that she and Mr. Gardiner are suggested not only to be on a par mentally but also to have a natural sociality that could make for *compatible* marital relations. We are further informed that ‘there subsisted a very particular regard’ between Mrs. Gardiner and her ‘two eldest’ Bennet nieces—a point that reinforces her mental sensibilities—but that she was ‘a great favourite with *all* her Longbourn nieces’ (p.158, my italics). The fact that she is loved by Lydia, Kitty, and Mary as well as by Elizabeth and Jane indicates a facility with younger family members that extends, as Bingley’s, to even the more difficult characters among them. The fact that Elizabeth and Jane ‘had frequently been staying with her in town’ (p.158) indicates she is an aunt who is intimately involved in her nieces’ lives—perhaps having a mother-like influence with them. When Elizabeth visits Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner on her way to Hunsford, we find that the couple has their own ‘troop of little boys and girls’ who greet Elizabeth with a mixture of ‘eagerness’ and ‘shyness’ after a ‘twelvemonth’ separation; a scene of ‘joy and kindness’ ensues (p.172). We later learn that this Gardiner ‘troop’ includes ‘two girls of six and eight years old, and two younger boys’ (p.266). Thus, their happy children and general amiability suggest that *feelings of affection* exist between them (pure Firstness); their mental parity is an evident aspect of their *personal compatibility* (Firstness of Secondness); their begetting of four children in an eight-year span proves that *physical love* has indeed occurred (pure Secondness); Mrs. Gardiner’s motherly influence with her nieces suggests the fulfillment of *gender-based roles* (Secondness of Thirdness); the use of ‘Mr’ and ‘Mrs’ for their titles announces their *legal marriage* (pure Thirdness); and their intelligence and good breeding (wherein ‘nature’ and ‘education’ come together) suggest the likelihood that *virtues grace their relationship* (Firstness of Thirdness). In a few brief

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living and know how to live within their means’; see ‘Money’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. by Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.131-48 (p.144). Austen’s inclusion of characters from this social class in her narrative marks one difference from the *Lady Susan* narrative.

scenes, Austen has created for the Gardiners a simple picture (Icon) of marital love that comprehends all six areas in the second-order Peircean paradigm.

When the Gardiners come to Longbourn for their Christmas visit, we find that Mrs. Gardiner has earned enough trust with Elizabeth to be able to gently check her niece's rash tendencies. Regarding Jane's disappointment over Bingley's sudden departure from Netherfield, she comments to Elizabeth that 'these sort of inconsistencies are very frequent' among young men: one such as Bingley 'so easily falls in love with a pretty girl for a few weeks, and when accident separates them, so easily forgets her'. Her point that attraction to outward beauty does not equate with lasting feeling is countered by Elizabeth's assertion that Bingley indeed 'was violently in love with [Jane] only a few days before' he was persuaded by 'the interference of friends' to break off the relationship. Mrs. Gardiner asks for evidence of 'real, strong attachment' in Bingley beyond the mere application of the label 'violently in love'—a phrase 'so hackneyed, so doubtful, so indefinite', and one that is 'often applied to feelings which arise only from a half hour's acquaintance' (pp.159-60). Perhaps she wishes to help Elizabeth better differentiate between the sentimental codifications of romantic love and real-life love. If so, Elizabeth's reply might give her little encouragement:

I never saw a more promising inclination. He was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her. Every time they met, it was more decided and remarkable. At his own ball he offended two or three young ladies, by not asking them to dance, and I spoke to him twice myself, without receiving an answer. Could there be finer symptoms? Is not general incivility the very essence of love? (p.160)

Elizabeth's description is amusingly full of sentimental cliché, fancifully emphasizing traits in Jane and Bingley that are inconsistent with the general narrative reports. Mrs. Gardiner, though wryly acknowledging these to be fine symptoms 'of that kind of love which I suppose him to have felt', deftly turns the conversation to how they might offer some 'relief' to Jane, and proposes that the latter return with her and Mr. Gardiner to London for a '[c]hange of scene' (p.160). In these interactions, Mrs.

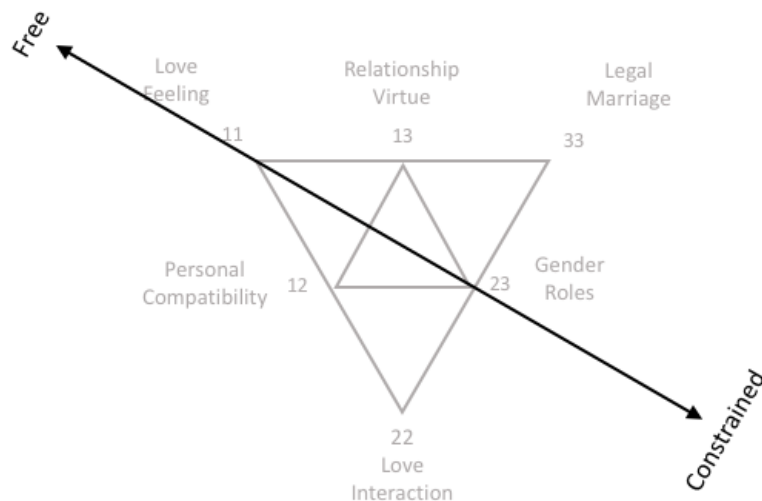
Gardiner exhibits quickness of observation and the tendency not only to mentor her nieces but to proactively assist them in navigating their turbulent courtship waters. Here, she stands in the office of mother, which Mrs. Bennet has abdicated through lack of qualification. Mrs. Gardiner's actions in the scene are a positive embodiment (Iconic Sinsign) of accepted gender roles for a married woman of the period (Category 23 of marital love). Her actions are also a brief exhibit of kind, wise, and instructive interaction with the younger generation—an Iconic Sinsign of the exercise of the relationship virtues of prudence and charity in good balance (Category 13). Her parent-like position notwithstanding, Mrs. Gardiner's interactions with Elizabeth are neither authoritarian nor manipulative: when she sees that Elizabeth does not pick up on her hints about being overly sentimental, she tactfully steers the conversation elsewhere. In this she demonstrates humility—another relationship virtue (Category 13)—or the willingness to see her niece as an equal partner in conversation, despite their differences in age and station. She also exhibits the facility to adapt her manners to the particular conversant—a trait that bodes well for compatibility in relationships (Category 12).

The improving effect of Mrs. Gardiner's mentoring is also apparent in the unfolding of Elizabeth's relationship with Wickham. Having noted 'Elizabeth's warm commendation of him', Mrs. Gardiner 'narrowly observe[s] them both' and becomes 'a little uneasy' over 'their preference of each other', which is 'plain enough' to onlookers (p.162). After getting to know Wickham, she advises Elizabeth to 'be on your guard' because his 'want of fortune would make [an attachment to him] so very imprudent', whereas 'if he had the fortune he ought to have, I should think you could not do better' (p.163). As a man without any material provision for marriage, she rightly questions his unguarded attention to Elizabeth, since the latter has little dowry to compensate—a point of which Elizabeth is surely aware. Mrs. Gardiner's implication is, that if Wickham has true regard for her, he will temper his display of affection until he has secured more of the requisite resources to marry. Elizabeth is a little less concerned about finances: she counters that 'we see every day that where there is affection, young people are seldom withheld by immediate want of

fortune, from entering into engagements with each other'. Nonetheless, Elizabeth seems to sense the wisdom of proceeding with caution, and promises 'not to be in a hurry' with him (p.164). A few weeks after Mrs. Gardiner returns to London, Elizabeth informs her by letter that Wickham has turned his attentions to a Miss King, whose 'sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds' is her 'most remarkable charm'. From her own relative calm over this change, Elizabeth realizes that she has 'never been much in love' with Wickham, and that Mrs. Gardiner's advice was sound—her own resulting 'watchfulness has been effectual' in the case (p.169). Later, Elizabeth and her aunt discuss Wickham's altered feelings. Mrs. Gardiner asks what attractions Miss King might hold for him beyond her fortune, not wanting 'to think our friend mercenary'. Elizabeth defends him by reporting that Miss King is 'a very good kind of girl', and by noting that Mrs. Gardiner herself had previously objected to 'his marrying me, because it would be imprudent'—how then could he be mercenary for 'trying to get a girl with only ten thousand pounds'? Mrs. Gardiner explains: 'But he paid her not the smallest attention, till her grandfather's death made her mistress of this fortune'; surely he shows 'indelicatecy' in pursuing her now when he felt nothing for her before, and surely she shows herself 'deficient in... sense or feeling' to receive such attentions from him. Elizabeth finds this point difficult to gainsay, and cries, 'Well, ... have it as you choose' (pp.173-4). The episode is an illustration of how the 'persuasion' of a motherly figure whose interest is pure can be beneficial and improving to a young woman. Mrs. Gardiner, in this incident, is an Iconic Sinsign (enactment in resemblance) of a married woman's traditional gender-based role (Category 23) as an adviser to her unmarried daughters, nieces, and other young ladies.

The Peircean categories provide interesting insights into Mrs. Gardiner's discussion with Elizabeth about 'mercenary' versus 'prudent' motives in marriage—a central concern of Austen's novels and of much criticism about the novels. Mrs. Gardiner's implication is that, in order to judge Wickham's motives in the case, one must take into consideration whether he has any true *feelings* for Miss King. That is, while he cannot ignore the financial requirements of a marriage settlement, he must

have real affection for her, or else his courting of her is mercenary. As a general phenomenon, we might characterize *marriage settlements* as real-world, legal transactions (Secondness of Thirdness), while *affection* is purely a thing of feeling (Firstness). The former, as Category 23, assumes the same position in the Peircean paradigm of marital love as gender-based roles, and indeed could be considered one aspect of them, insofar as the society of which Austen was a part prescribed specific and different financial obligations for the bride and groom.<sup>344</sup> Interestingly, these two elements of marriage—affection (Category 11), and financial settlements (or, more broadly, gender-prescribed duties, Category 23)—lie opposite one another on the Peircean diagram, forming the two ends of a *free-versus-constrained* continuum of marriage elements:



On the free end of the spectrum is affection, or *love feeling* (11). In its purity, it flows freely from one's heart toward another person, and that person need only be human to qualify. *Personal compatibility* (12), however, exists only when one person perceives that another has certain physical attributes (age, looks, gender), manners (ways of speaking and moving), and habits (ways of thinking and acting) that make

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<sup>344</sup> Gornall, 'Marriage and Property in Jane Austen's Novels', pp.47-50.



him or her a desirable marriage partner; not everyone qualifies, and so compatibility involves a kind of narrowing or constraining process. For a relationship to further progress toward marriage, each party must sense that the other is committed, true, and loyal; such *relationship virtue* (13) comes of each partner channeling his or her own romantic feelings, thoughts, and actions exclusively to the other. This voluntary self-restraint is given added fixedness by the couple's entering into a *legally binding marriage contract* (33), by their consummating their affection in the *tight physical bonds of sexual intercourse* (22), and by their shouldering the unique *gender-based roles* (23) that spring from that physical union—the woman bearing, nursing, and nurturing the resultant offspring; the man protecting them and providing necessary material sustenance; the two working out other roles and responsibilities in line with their religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and individual thinking and preferences.<sup>345</sup> Mrs. Gardiner's advice to Elizabeth about balancing the need for financial provision in marriage (which is on the 'constrained' end of the marital love spectrum) with the equally important need for mutual affection in the relationship (which is on the 'free' end of the love spectrum) is arguably a manifestation of this universal Peircean tension between the love feelings (11) and gender-based duties (23) of marriage, the opposing nature of which is illustrated by their relative positions on the Peircean diagram.<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Elizabeth Grosz contests the idea that there could be a purely 'natural' or biological basis for gender roles, since she believes that even human biology is '*always already cultural*'; see 'Notes towards a Corporeal Feminism', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 5 (Summer 1987), 3-15 (p.7, her italics). Nonetheless, her view of the human body 'as a *hinge or threshold* between nature and culture' (p.9, her emphasis) is close to what I argue for here—namely, that although the phenomenon of gender roles is fundamentally cultural (Thirdness), it is also anchored to the real, fleshy world (Secondness) by the reproductive facts of human biology. This is one reason why gender roles fit so well in the Secondness of Thirdness (23) category: they are the intersection of the biological facts of marital love with the cultural conventions for the same.

<sup>346</sup> Gilbert and Gubar note that 'Austen's novels explor[e] the tensions between the freedom of her art and the dependency of her [female] characters', although they see these opposing forces as

The scenes involving the Gardiners not only show them *teaching* their nieces the importance of balancing the heavy duties and constraints of gender roles with the value of free and natural affection, they also show instances of how they *practice* such balance in their own marriage. At the conclusion of the preceding discussion, Mrs. Gardner invites Elizabeth to accompany her and Mr. Gardiner ‘in a tour of pleasure’ which they have been planning to take in the summer to northern England (p.174). Evidently, the couple feels it important to spend time together away from their children—the trip is to be for several weeks—doing things which they enjoy as a couple, but without planning out every detail. As a couple then married perhaps a decade or more, and in the thick of bearing the daily burdens of raising four energetic children and of making a living by trade, the Gardiners could easily allow these duties to overwhelm their relationship, turning it into a stale grind. The narrative does not allude to an intention on their part of renewing marital feeling and enjoyment by taking such trips, but this and other instances do create a contrast between their cheery, interactive relationship and that, for example, of the Bennets

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irreconcilable, capable only of creating ‘duplicitous’ feelings in women (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.169). Auerbach likewise suggests that Austen’s work reflects a foreboding sense of the greater power of the *constraining* elements of marriage vis-à-vis the *liberating* ones (*Romantic Imprisonment*, pp.3-21). While the constraints imposed by marriage on women in Austen’s time may seem heavy from a modern Western perspective, it does not follow that Austen saw all these constraints as overpowering or innately bad. She may have recognized the tension between the constrained and free elements of the relationship, sifted out what she deemed to be inappropriate constraints, and (as she often did with social problems) sought to understand the proper balance among the remaining, valid elements. One could argue that her novels as often fictionalize the happy effects of self-restraint, of abiding by moral law, and of finding balance among competing virtues in one’s conduct as they do the sorrowful results of society’s imposition of unfair constraints on women. This is not to claim that Poovey, Kirkham, Johnson, and other feminist critics are necessarily wrong when they argue that Austen recognized the injustice of many societal restrictions on women; rather, it is to suggest that her overall authorial intent and energy may have been differently directed—that is, toward finding good balance among the valid, competing elements of the marital relationship, with an emphasis on those elements that were within a woman’s scope of choice and agency at the time.

and of the Collinses, who seem to go about their married lives avoiding one another as much as possible.<sup>347</sup> It is perhaps notable that, on Elizabeth's first day with Mrs. Gardiner in London (the same day they discuss Wickham and Miss King), 'the morning [was passed] in bustle and shopping'—representing the discharge of Mrs. Gardiner's gender-based duties—'and the evening at one of the theatres' (p.172)—representing her practice of taking regular time away from those duties. The effects of such a practice on the Gardiners' relationship is perhaps indirectly reflected in Elizabeth's expectations about her upcoming pleasure tour with them:

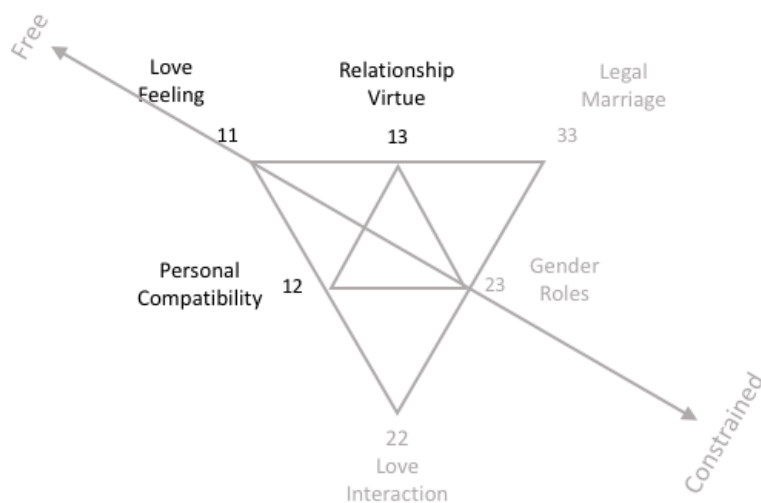
One enjoyment was certain—that of suitableness as companions; a suitableness which comprehended health and temper to bear inconveniences—cheerfulness to enhance every pleasure—and affection and intelligence, which might supply it among themselves if there were disappointments abroad. (p.266)

Elizabeth anticipates the enjoyment of being with a couple who have mutual 'affection' (or *love feeling*), 'suitableness' with herself in 'health', 'temper', and 'intelligence' (which also suggests a level of *personal compatibility* in the couple), and 'cheerfulness' and ability to 'bear inconveniences' (which are manifestations of the *virtues* of charity and temperance<sup>348</sup>). This group of characteristics corresponds to the triad in the upper-left corner of the Peircean paradigm—constituting the three elements of marital love on the 'freer' side of the free-versus-constrained spectrum:

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<sup>347</sup> While the Bennets and Collinses have slipped into a relationship that is too skewed toward the 'constrained' end of the spectrum (being driven primarily by their gender-based roles and not by natural affection), the Gardiners seem to maintain a balance between the demands of their gender roles and their need for mutual affection, which they foster by getting away and spending time together in enjoyable activities.

<sup>348</sup> As described by Saint Paul, a charitable person is both cheerful ('charity... thinketh no evil' and 'hopeth all things') and able to bear inconveniences ('charity suffereth long', 'is not easily provoked', '[b]eareth all things', 'endureth all things'); see I Corinthians 13:4-7, KJV.



The implication here is that the Gardiner's marriage is alive and well in terms of the free and natural feelings that counter-balance the constrained elements in a healthy relationship—a balance that is achieved, at least in part, by taking regular time for sociality and enjoyment away from their children and from the duties associated with raising them.<sup>349</sup>

The Gardiners' tour of Derbyshire with Elizabeth gives some indications that the couple shares common interests, values, and tastes which form a basis for friendship and personal compatibility (Category 12 of marital love). For example, like many of Austen's favorable characters, they both value natural beauty and the countryside more than man-made finery. When Elizabeth first objects to visiting Pemberley

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<sup>349</sup> The Gardiners' direct, daily engagement with their children in general runs counter to the practice of the period's wealthy class, which typically left daily charge of children in the hands of nurses, servants, governesses, schoolmasters, and so on. Austen's positive characterization of involved parenthood in the Gardiners seems to be a more detailed development of what is only suggested in passing in *Lady Susan* by the character of Mrs. Vernon, who also appears to have regular, direct interaction with her children. As mentioned earlier, an adult character's attitude towards children and their needs is often a token, in Austen's fiction, of inner worth and character (McMaster, 'Jane Austen's Children', par.2.).

because she is 'tired of great houses... after going over so many', Mrs. Gardiner emphasizes, 'If it were merely a fine house richly furnished, ... I should not care about it myself; but the grounds are delightful. They have some of the finest woods in the country' (p.267). The next day when the threesome winds through the 'wide extent' of Pemberley woods by carriage and catches their first sight of the house from a hilltop, the narrator describes not so much the 'large, handsome, stone building' itself, but how it is 'situated on the opposite side of a valley, ... standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills', fronted by 'a stream of some natural importance' that is 'swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance'—the banks of the stream being 'neither formal, nor falsely adorned'. The narrator relates Elizabeth's sense that she 'had never seen a place for which nature had done more, or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste'; the three travelers 'were *all* of them warm in their admiration' (p.271, my italics). After their tour of the house, and Darcy's unexpected and brief appearance, the gardener takes them on 'a beautiful walk by the side of the water' into 'a finer reach of the woods' (p.279), where Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner point out various objects of interest to Elizabeth (though in vain, since she is distracted over the encounter with Darcy). As they continue through the woods, 'Mr. Gardiner expresse[s] a wish of going round the whole Park', but on learning it is a ten-mile walk, they instead bend their way back toward the house, slowed by Mr. Gardiner, whose fondness for fishing keeps him watching for 'the occasional appearance of some trout in the water, and talking to the man about them' (pp.280-1). When Darcy rejoins them and meets the Gardiners, he and Mr. Gardiner converse about the 'parts of the stream where there was usually most sport' for fishing (p.282). A few days later, when Elizabeth receives Jane's letter announcing Lydia's elopement, we find that the Gardiners have left the inn, presumably for one of their outdoor walks together (p.309). And weeks later, after the Gardiners have worked closely enough with Darcy to fully understand his intentions towards Elizabeth (through their mutual involvement in settling Lydia and Wickham's marriage), Mrs. Gardiner teases Elizabeth, 'I shall never be quite happy till I have

been all round [Pemberley] park. A low phaeton, with a nice little pair of ponies, would be the very thing' (p.360). The lack of focused commentary on these traits of the Gardiners (their appreciation of nature) keeps their image from becoming regularized or codified as a sentimental stereotype (Iconic Legisign); nonetheless, the image is a positive instance (Iconic Sinsign) of the Austenian ideal for compatibility of personal tastes in a married couple.

Another area of common value and interest between Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner is that of sociality with people of good and intelligent character, whether they be of high or low station. On their Pemberley tour, 'Mr. Gardiner, whose manners were easy and pleasant, encouraged [the housekeeper's] communicativeness by his questions and remarks'. When the latter relates that Darcy was a 'good-natured' boy from the beginning, Mrs. Gardiner replies that '[h]is father was an excellent man', reflecting her personal knowledge of the man's character, perhaps in agreement with the housekeeper's report that he was 'affable to the poor' (pp.274-5). As argued previously, the highest mark of good character in Austen's novels may be Christian charity, and this exchange suggests that the generosity of Darcy's father may be at least one element of the 'excellent' character to which Mrs. Gardiner refers. When Darcy himself appears, the Gardiners are able to converse naturally and intelligently with him, despite their belonging to a lower socio-economic class. Listening on, Elizabeth 'gloried in every expression, every sentence of her uncle, which marked his intelligence, his taste, or his good manners'. For his part, Mr. Gardiner is impressed that Darcy is not only 'perfectly well behaved' and 'polite', but also '*unassuming*' (p.284, my emphasis). While Austen knows her readers will see what the Gardiners do not yet understand—that Darcy's approachableness here is partly a sign of his continued desire to court Elizabeth (and to show her that he has tempered his class-based pride)—she also allows the scene to quietly speak for Mr. Gardiner's values. Mrs. Gardiner agrees, after the exchange, 'with the housekeeper, that though some people may call him proud, / have seen nothing of it'. She observes that to be called a 'liberal master' by his most intimate and long-standing servant could be indicative of real 'virtue' (p.285). The next morning at Lambton Inn,

when Darcy brings his sister to be introduced to Elizabeth, and the ‘embarrassment of [Elizabeth’s] manner’ tips off the Gardiners as to Darcy’s interest in her, the couple takes a more active interest in the gentleman’s character—and in that of Bingley, who makes an entrance on the scene shortly after his friend (p.287). The opportunity to acquaint themselves with these two young men ‘excite[s] a lively attention’ in the Gardiners, whose ‘earnest, though guarded, enquiry’ soon convinces them that Darcy, at least, ‘knew what it was to love’ (p.289). When the half-hour conversation at the inn wraps up, and Darcy and his sister invite the Gardiners and Elizabeth to dine at Pemberley, Mrs. Gardiner ‘look[s] at her niece, desirous of knowing how *she*, whom the invitation most concerned, felt disposed as to its acceptance’. She finds that Elizabeth has ‘turned away her head’ in ‘momentary embarrassment’, and ‘seeing in her husband, who was fond of society, a perfect willingness to accept it’, agrees to the dinner engagement. As soon as Darcy and his party leave, Elizabeth hurries off to her bedroom, ‘fearful of... hints from her uncle and aunt’. The narrator relates, however, that there is in fact nothing for her to fear from their ‘curiosity’, as it is ‘not their wish to force her communication’ (p.291). Rather, by knowing of Darcy’s intentions toward their niece, their wish has become only to learn more about his character—whether he is worthy of her. They pursue this question in a manner that reflects their particular set of values:

There was now an interest, however, in believing the housekeeper; and they soon became sensible, that the authority of a servant who had known him since he was four years old, and whose own manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily rejected. Neither had anything occurred in the intelligence of their Lambton friends, that could materially lessen its weight. They had nothing to accuse him of but pride; pride he probably had, and if not, it would certainly be imputed by the inhabitants of a small market-town, where the family did not visit. It was acknowledged, however, that he was a liberal man, and did much good among the poor. (p.292)

The Gardiners give ‘weight’ to the opinion and viewpoint of the housekeeper—a person who has long been in a position potentially to be treated unfairly by Darcy. They find no reports of incidents in the Lambton neighborhood to contradict Mrs.

Reynold's story, and in fact find information that confirms his general liberality and assistance to the poor—information that again comes from local sources who surely would have known, had Darcy been a stingy or domineering landlord. In attempting to assess whether Darcy might be a suitable companion for Elizabeth, the couple seems to weigh very different factors than do other characters. For example, as soon as Mrs. Bennet learns of Darcy's interest in Elizabeth, every negative word of gossip about his pride melts away in the face of his large annual income; the Lucases, for their part, seem to look mainly for any advantageous connections into higher society that a suitor might offer one of their daughters; and Lady de Bourgh wants Darcy to marry her daughter only to preserve the grandeur and exclusivity of her family. The Gardiners know that Darcy has all these advantages, and that he also has romantic feelings for Elizabeth, but they look deeper for evidence of solid human qualities that will define the kind of husband and companion he will be—character virtues like integrity, temperance, fairness, responsibility, and charity, along with intellectual faculties comparable to Elizabeth's. Their simultaneous inquiries about Wickham uncover the information that he has 'left many debts behind him, which Mr. Darcy afterwards discharged'—a 'well-known fact' in the neighborhood that may be a sign to the Gardiners of Wickham's underlying dishonesty and intemperance (p.292). As it turns out, the ensuing events associated with arranging Lydia's marriage involve the Gardiners with both Darcy and Wickham in the most personal way possible, providing them with sure insight into the character of these two young men. After Lydia's marriage is settled and Elizabeth inquires of her aunt about Darcy's mysterious involvement in it, the latter writes to unfold the entire business. While the focus of the letter is on the events that transpired, her concluding opinions about Darcy may reflect her and Mr. Gardiner's shared assessment:

Will you be very angry with me, my dear Lizzy, if I take this opportunity of saying (what I was never bold enough to say before) how much I like him. His behaviour to us has, in every respect, been as pleasing as when we were in Derbyshire. His understanding and opinions all please me; he wants nothing but a little more liveliness, and *that*, if he marry *prudently*, his wife may teach him. I thought him



very sly;—he hardly ever mentioned your name. But slyness seems the fashion. (pp.359-60)

The Gardiners like Darcy because his ‘pleasing behaviour’ is genuine: they see that it was not merely produced for the occasion of their first meeting at Pemberley, but has persisted through the difficult ordeal of Lydia’s marriage settlement—a process that required much understanding, judgment, humility, and monetary outlay on his part. He may lack a little outward ‘liveliness’, but the Gardiners see there are sound ‘understanding and opinions’ within, and a ‘slyness’ of manner that makes for interesting sociality. They value him not just as a rich suitor of their niece, but as a person of good character who has thoughts, tastes, and manners that make his society intrinsically valuable, for many of the same reasons that they enjoy the company of Jane and Elizabeth. Their assessment of his character is not based merely on superficial facts such as his income or property holdings, or on his outward manner and words alone, but on solid facts of his behavior which they have personally witnessed, or which have been established by reputable sources. The approach of the Gardiners to this character assessment process, which we might broadly characterize as one of *prudence* and *judgment*, is especially instructive for Elizabeth, who learns through the course of the story—in part from the example of her aunt and uncle—to judge people and events more carefully. After Elizabeth and Darcy marry, the narrator reports that ‘the Gardiners... were always on the most intimate terms’ with the young couple, because Darcy and Elizabeth ‘really loved them’ and were ‘sensible of the warmest gratitude’ for their special role, so sensitively and wisely played, in ‘uniting them’ as a couple (p.431). In all these interactions with Elizabeth and Darcy, the Gardiners are a positive enactment (Iconic Sinsign) not only of the obvious marital ideal of mutual affection (Category 11), but also of the subtler ideals of compatibility of taste, manners, and intellect in a couple (Category 12); of virtues like prudence and judgment that grace a marriage relationship (Category 13); and of the sensitive and wise discharge of gender-based duties within an extended family (Category 23).

The marriage ideals illustrated by the Gardiners to this point, then, cover all six second-order Peircean categories except for love interaction (22) and legal marriage (33). As mentioned before, the couple nominally has those two elements simply by virtue of the fact of their having four children and of their bearing the titles of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs'. However, love interaction (22) includes more than just sexual relations, and we have already noted how the couple enjoys taking outdoor walks together and how they are socially interactive during their visit to Pemberley House and at Lambton Inn when Darcy, Georgiana, and Bingley visit them. Like the Vernons, the couple seems to engage often in open dialogue—a form of love interaction that is perhaps more social than romantic but is still an important element of real-life marriages day to day.

The continuing narrative of Lydia's elopement illustrates the Gardiners' trait of social interactivity (22) further, and also develops their strong commitment to lawful marriage (33) and to fulfilling gender-based roles in marriage (23). When Jane writes to Elizabeth about the elopement, she reports that their 'father is going to London with Colonel Forster instantly, to try to discover [Lydia]', but Jane fears that he will not 'pursue any measure in the best and safest way'; rather, in 'such an exigence my uncle's advice and assistance would be every thing in the world; he will immediately comprehend what I must feel, and *I rely upon his goodness*' (p.304, my italics). For a father's steady role in providing protective assistance, Jane has greater confidence in her uncle than in her father. As soon as Elizabeth reads this report from Jane, she too exclaims, 'Oh! where, where is my uncle?' (p.304). After the Gardiners are fetched back from their walk and Elizabeth reads Jane's letter to them, they perceive immediately that '[n]ot Lydia only, but all [their Bennet nieces are] concerned in' the shame of the event; Mr. Gardiner promises 'every assistance in his power' (p.309). On their hasty journey back to Longbourn, the three discuss the possible intentions of Lydia and Wickham. Mr. Gardiner opines that the 'temptation' for Wickham to have Lydia illegitimately 'is not adequate to the risk' to his future reputation and prospects (p.311). Mrs. Gardiner candidly asks whether Elizabeth thinks Lydia could be 'so lost... as to consent to live with [Wickham] on any terms other than marriage',

and the latter sheds tears over the fact that her 'sister's sense of decency and virtue in such a point should admit of doubt', but to her mind the point clearly *is* in question. Mrs. Gardiner further asks whether Elizabeth believes Wickham to be 'capable of the attempt' to take Lydia illegitimately, and Elizabeth assures her (without revealing any details about Georgiana) that 'he has been profligate in every sense of the word', having 'neither integrity nor honour' (pp.312-3). Besides illustrating the Gardiners' ability to engage sensitively yet candidly with Elizabeth on such a delicate subject, this exchange highlights their (and Elizabeth's) conviction of the imperative that physical relationships be sanctioned by lawful marriage (Category 33). The subtle image of moral solidarity created by the scene—and later amplified by Darcy's joining his firm exertions to the party's efforts to bring about a legal union for Lydia and Wickham—serves as a standard against which the attitudes and actions of other characters, such as the Bennets, are compared.<sup>350</sup> The fact that the Gardiners abruptly curtail their vacation to assist in this matter is an Index to their value of lawful marriage, inasmuch as it is a *reaction in defense* of that value. Here, by using an Index of this value rather than a moral discourse (Legisign) about it, Austen conveys her own strongest religious and moral values about man-woman love without, as Bishop Whately puts it, 'being... obtrusive' about them.<sup>351</sup>

When the Gardiners and Elizabeth reach Longbourn, they find Mrs. Bennet in a state of irrational fear that 'Mr. Bennet... will fight Wickham' in London, that he 'will be killed', and that the 'Collinses will turn us out, before [Mr. Bennet] is cold in his grave'. Mr. Gardiner assures his sister that he will 'be in London the very next day' to 'assist Mr. Bennet in every endeavour for recovering Lydia'; he urges his sister not to 'give way to useless alarm' when they don't really know the state of affairs yet. This encouragement from her brother elicits some relief and hope in Mrs. Bennet,

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<sup>350</sup> The Bennets' values and attitudes in this regard are discussed in the next section.

<sup>351</sup> Richard Whately, *Quarterly Review* (Jan. 1821), cited in Butler's biography ('Austen, Jane', p.26).

who exclaims, 'Oh, brother, how kind you are! I know you will contrive it all' (pp.317-8). Her words reflect confidence in Mr. Gardiner's ability to rectify the situation, if anyone can—sentiments very similar to those of Jane and Elizabeth, though perhaps accompanied by less rational thought. In this instance, Austen again uses the expressions of other characters to attribute positive qualities to one of her favorable characters—in this case, Mr. Gardiner in his role and duty as husband, father, brother, and uncle (Category 23), in contrast to Mr. Bennet, who more obviously should fulfill this duty.<sup>352</sup>

Mrs. Gardiner, for her part, stays on at Longbourn for a few more days in hopes that 'her presence might be serviceable to her nieces'. The narrator reports that she 'shared in their attendance on Mrs. Bennet, and was a great comfort to them, in their hours of freedom'—actions of a different character from those of their Aunt Phillips, who 'also visited them frequently' but 'never came without reporting some

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<sup>352</sup> The greater attentiveness, proactivity, and wisdom of Mr. Gardiner compared to Mr. Bennet in discharging this duty are highlighted throughout the elopement episode. In the first few days of the absence of these two men from Longbourn, for example, the family receives not 'a single line' of information from Mr. Bennet, who is known by them to be 'a most negligent and dilatory correspondent' in general but one from whom 'at such a time, they had hoped for exertion' (p.324). By contrast, Mr. Gardiner writes to his wife the day after his arrival in London explaining what has been done so far to find Lydia, and what they plan to do next. From his letter, we learn that Mr. Bennet has taken the shotgun approach of 'enquir[ing] at all the principal hotels in town', while Mr. Gardiner has determined first to write to Colonel Forster to ascertain from Wickham's 'intimates in the regiment' whether he has any 'relations or connections' who might 'know in what part of the town he has now concealed himself', because 'such a clue... might be of essential consequence' in directing their search efforts (pp.325-6). Here, the implicit comparison is between haphazard action on the part of Mr. Bennet, and prudently considered action on the part of Mr. Gardiner. The former bespeaks incompetence from lack of practice in service to family members, while the latter demonstrates pragmatic ability that suggests a history of conscientious discharge of fatherly duty. Duckworth argues as much when he comments that 'Mr. Bennet's... total inability to deal with this affair' reveals his 'negative attitude', whereas 'Mr. Gardiner's actions, his letters to Longbourn, are a positive index to his character' (*The Improvement of the Estate*, p.131).

fresh instance of Wickham's extravagance or irregularity, ...leaving them more dispirited than she found them' (p.324). This scene presents a similar implicit comparison, this time between two married women and how they carry out their roles as a sister and aunt, with Mrs. Phillips illustrating ill-considered words and actions, and Mrs. Gardiner more sensitive and wise behavior. A few days after Mr. Bennet returns from London, Mr. Gardiner writes to inform the family of his discovery of Lydia and Wickham, who 'are not married' and seem not to have 'any intention of being so'. He proposes to Mr. Bennet, however, that 'if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are'. He then sets forth marriage settlement terms that are very favorable to Mr. Bennet, offering to 'act in your name, throughout the whole of this business', allowing '[you to] stay quietly at Longbourn, and depend on my diligence and care' to see Lydia 'married from this house' (pp.333-4). Thus, in the one duty that perhaps belongs most exclusively to fathers in Austen's culture (Category 23)—that of financially transacting a daughter's marriage—Mr. Gardiner stands in place of Mr. Bennet both symbolically and literally. Elizabeth is sensible of 'all the advantages of what they had gained' from the Gardiners' actions on behalf of their family during this crisis, which include 'taking [Lydia] home, and affording her their personal protection and countenance' during the few days prior to the wedding ceremony (pp.336,339). Mrs. Gardiner assumes the motherly responsibility of teaching Lydia and correcting her poor conduct: she recounts to Elizabeth that she 'talked to [Lydia] repeatedly in the most serious manner' of the 'wickedness of what she had done, and all the unhappiness she had brought on her family' (p.359). Mr. Gardiner, on his side, counsels Wickham to quit the militia and move north for a post with the regular army—a move that he represents to Mr. Bennet as 'highly advisable, both on his account and my niece's', because the post will be 'so far from this part of the kingdom'. The advantage to this course is that the couple will be 'among different people' who do not know the circumstances of their marriage, and so the two will have a fresh start, each once again with 'a character to preserve' (p.345). While it is only alluded to here, the wisdom in Mr. Gardiner's advice may

also be preventive for Lydia's sake, for, as Mrs. Bennet laments, 'Lydia [will] be taken from a regiment where she [is] acquainted with every body, and ha[s] so many favourites', where 'there are several... young men... that she likes very much' (p.346). From Mrs. Gardiner's letter to Elizabeth explaining Darcy's role in the settlement, we learn that Mr. Gardiner and the latter 'battled... for a long time' over who would pay off Wickham (p.358). The imagery of the two men vying for the honor to discharge a father's duty is a stark sign (Indexical Sinsign) both of their fulfilment of gender-based duties (Category 23) and of their belief in the imperative of lawful marriage (Category 33). The high level of narrative detail in Mrs. Gardiner's letter, and her assertion that Mr. Gardiner never would have yielded to Darcy 'if we had not given him credit' for an interest in Elizabeth (p.359, my emphasis), indicate that the couple has discussed the whole undertaking extensively. The letter thus creates another implied enactment (Iconic Sinsign) of a husband and wife counseling together (Category 22) in the discharge of a traditionally male duty (Category 23), illustrating the kind of flexibility in implementing gender-based roles that the Vernons and De Courcys have prefigured and that Austen arguably represents as favorable here.

In summary, Austen uses the earlier scenes of the story to develop an image of the Gardiners that emphasizes the *free* and *natural* aspects of her marriage ideals—mutual affection (Category 11), compatibility of taste, sociality, and intellect (Category 12), sexual reproductivity (Category 22), and Christian charity and temperance to grace the relationship (Category 13). The later scenes develop the Gardiners' fulfillment of the more *constrained* and *codified* aspects of Austen's ideals—the exercise of the classical virtues of prudence and judgment (Category 13), adherence to the moral imperative of lawful marriage (Category 33), and the discharge of gender-based duties within the family (Category 23), including active service to, and instructive interaction within, the extended family. Despite the couple's fulfillment of codified marriage ideals, Austen takes care not to make the Gardiners into a conventional stereotype (Legisign) of those ideals. For example, while they are a prosperous young family, Mr. Gardiner is not a wealthy landowner (the stereotypical hero figure), and neither he nor Mrs. Gardiner has an impressive

pedigree. They fulfill the received gender-based roles for marriages of the period, but they work flexibly and collaboratively in the discharge of those duties.<sup>353</sup> Semiotically speaking, their image is thus more of a singular instance (Sinsign) of Austen's particular marriage ideals than it is a general stereotype (Legisign) of received ideals. Moreover, because the image is a positive illustration of her ideals rather than a violation of them, it provides what Drabble, Emsley, and other critics have argued is lacking in *Lady Susan*: examples of positive marriage (Iconic Sinsigns) that are developed in comparable detail to the negative examples (Indexical Sinsigns), giving the story balance in its portrayal of good and bad character as they relate to marriage.

### *Mr. and Mrs. Bennet*

As Buck and Noddings contend, in real life, people are not simply good or evil but are mixtures of the two in varying degrees—a fact that is somewhat over-simplified in the *Lady Susan* story.<sup>354</sup> Although Austen makes a start at creating realistic mixtures of good and bad character in *Lady Susan*, she does not fully develop such characters until her mature novels.<sup>355</sup> In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are an example of a well-developed married couple who have a comically believable mixture of favorable and unfavorable traits—they are characters who, as Samuel

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<sup>353</sup> In this regard, they anticipate what Copeland calls the '[p]artnership marriages' that 'become the keynote' in *Persuasion*, which (in addition to Anne and Wentworth) are 'demonstrated by the Harvilles and the Crofts' in that narrative ('Money', p.144).

<sup>354</sup> Buck, 'Jane Austen and the Nature of Evil', p.202; Noddings, *Women and Evil*, pp.107-16.

<sup>355</sup> Massimiliano Morini, using linguistic analysis, notes a 'change from the [earlier] to the [later] novels in the way characters behave and speak: simple, one-sided characters like [John] Thorpe... gradually disappear, and their antics are replaced by the subtler (though equally boorish or foolish) conversational modes of [characters like] Mrs Elton, Miss Bates, and Sir Walter Elliot'; see *Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques: A Stylistic and Pragmatic Analysis* (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), p.97.

Johnson puts it, 'so mingle good and bad qualities... that... both [are] equally conspicuous'.<sup>356</sup> Their relationship seems to fall, on the spectrum of good and bad marriages, into the 'gray area' described by Jones:

In Jane Austen's novels, as in ordinary life, less than perfect marriages are an inescapable feature of everyday existence, with most married couples inhabiting a kind of second-best world to that enjoyed by the heroes and heroines. These gray-area marriages are not necessarily desperately unhappy – husbands and wives rub along somehow – but they are not what Jane Austen would have considered fulfilling or truly companionate.<sup>357</sup>

The manner in which Mr. and Mrs. Bennet 'rub along' day to day is laid open for view more so than any other married couple in the story. They essentially set the 'less than perfect' context in which the story of marital improvement enacted by the heroines and heroes is framed.<sup>358</sup> As such, Austen's characterization of the Bennets necessarily outlines several aspects of marital relations, but largely in terms of the flaws or faults the couple has fallen into. These flaws and their relation to Austen's marriage ideals are especially apparent when considered within the framework of the Piercean categories.

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<sup>356</sup> *The Rambler*, 4 (March 1750), in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D. in Nine Volumes*, prepared by Jonathan Ingram and David Garcia (Project Gutenberg, September 2013), II, 15-20 (18), <<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/43656>>, accessed 1 June 2018. As a new and emerging form of literature, Dr. Johnson recognized the novel as having great didactic power; he urged writers of the form therefore to be very cautious in creating such 'mixed' characters—their evil aspects should be clearly 'laid open and confuted' (19), lest the fictionalization 'be mischievous or uncertain in its effects' upon youthful or impressionable readers (18).

<sup>357</sup> *Jane Austen and Marriage*, p.138.

<sup>358</sup> Moe suggests that Elizabeth and Darcy see marriage as a means of 'self-improvement' ('Multiple Modernities', p. 1086), but the novel could also be characterized as the converse—as a story about how the institution of marriage is improved by the manner in which individual couples like Elizabeth and Darcy, and Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, practice it.



Personal compatibility (Category 12), for example, is clearly not a strength of the Bennets' marriage as it is for the Gardiners. The opening scene has Mrs. Bennet trying to excite her husband over the fact that a 'single man of large fortune' — Bingley's income is 'four or five thousand a year' — has rented Netherfield; 'What a fine thing for our girls!', she exclaims. Mr. Bennet playfully mocks his wife's transparent design to marry off one of their daughters to a man they have not even met, just because he has money; he plays dumb in his reply: 'How so? how can it affect them?' Not detecting his sarcasm, she sighs, 'My dear Mr. Bennet, ... how can you be so tiresome! You must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them'. Mr. Bennet leads her on: 'Is that his design in settling here?'. Her reply shows that she still thinks he is serious: 'Design! nonsense, how can you talk so!' Mr. Bennet declines her request to personally visit Bingley, and instead offers to 'send a few lines' by her to assure Bingley of his 'hearty consent to his marrying which ever he chuses of the girls'; he also assures her of his 'high respect' for her 'poor nerves' that he has just ruffled; her nerves are, he avers, 'my old friends', since 'I have heard you mention them with consideration these twenty years at least' (pp.4-5). These outward obstinacies notwithstanding, Mr. Bennet is, the narrator informs us, 'among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley', having 'always intended to visit him', though keeping his wife in the dark about it (p.6). Mr. Bennet knows his wife to be what the narrator describes—'a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper', whose 'business [in] life [is] to get her daughters married' (p.5)—but he chooses to deal with this disappointing fact by 'amus[ing] himself at her expense', as Roberts observes.<sup>359</sup> She, on the other hand, cannot understand his character even after 'the experience of three-and-twenty years' of marriage—he being 'so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice' (p.5). Her mind is more on a level with Lady Lucas, who is 'not too clever to be a valuable neighbour to Mrs. Bennet' in their shared pursuit of landing well-to-do

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<sup>359</sup> *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, pp.176-7.

husbands for their daughters (p.19). The anonymous 1813 reviewer cited previously notes that Mrs. Bennet's lack of 'common sense' and 'other good qualities' keep her from being a 'rational companion' and 'estimable wife' for Mr. Bennet,<sup>360</sup> who is a more 'discerning, rational' person.<sup>361</sup> If there is personal compatibility in the pair, it clearly is not in intellect (Thirdness), or in their manner of interacting socially (Secondness), though there has been physical attraction between them sufficient to produce five children. The narrator later relates that Mr. Bennet was attracted, in the beginning, by Mrs. Bennet's 'youth and beauty' and 'appearance of good humour' (p.262)—qualities (Firstness) of the outward person and of gender that are an important part of personal compatibility, but which are not as lasting as inner qualities like the shared tastes and values of the Gardiners.<sup>362</sup> Thus, the opening scenes suggest that the Bennets' marriage is fragile: having a shallow basis, it appears to be weakening over time rather than growing in strength like that of the Gardiners. These early scenes create an image of the Bennets that is an Indexical Sinsign (an oppositional instance) of the Austenian ideal.

As mentioned earlier, mental parity is a signature part of Austen's ideal for compatibility in marriage. *Pride and Prejudice* is, of course, sprinkled with comic incidents illustrating the intellectual divide between Mr. and Mrs. Bennet. When Kitty and Lydia are introduced as young ladies whose 'minds [are] more vacant than their sisters', their continuous 'talk of nothing but [the] officers' in the nearby

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<sup>360</sup> 'Review of *Pride and Prejudice*', p.271.

<sup>361</sup> Roberts, *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.176.

<sup>362</sup> Mr. Bennet's hasty courtship forms a subtle contrast to Jane's more careful approach. Bingley too has 'youth and beauty' and 'good humour' on his side, but Jane wisely takes the time to look deeper for qualities like constancy and integrity before she makes the determination that he is suitable to be her husband—a determination that is not hindered, and ultimately is even helped, by the season of separation imposed under Darcy's persuasion. (Jane's story, as a subplot, anticipates the main plot of *Persuasion*, through which Austen explores further the roles of persuasion and separation in proving the durability of love.)

regiment draws from Mr. Bennet the comment that 'you must be two of the silliest girls in the country'. Mrs. Bennet remonstrates, 'If I wished to think slightly of any body's children, it should not be of my own', but he maintains that '[i]f my children are silly I must hope to be always sensible of it'. That it could be shallow and shortsighted to pursue a man solely because he dons a regimental red coat is lost on Mrs. Bennet ('I do still at my heart', she admits, like 'a red-coat myself very well'); she blindly asserts that their daughters in fact 'are all of them very clever'. Perhaps knowing from experience the fruitlessness of trying to reason with his wife, Mr. Bennet exits the conversation with wry sarcasm: 'This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree' (pp.31-3). When Jane and Elizabeth return from Netherfield after a several days' absence, the narrator's description of Mr. Bennet's thoughts can be taken as a confirmation of the intellectual disparity in his marriage:

But their father, though very laconic in his expressions of pleasure, was really glad to see them; he had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense, by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth. (pp.66-7)

Mr. Bennet finds little intellectual stimulation in the conversation of his wife and younger daughters. Like Elizabeth, he finds irony and humor in ridiculous behavior—especially when it is also socially conforming—while such things wholly escape his wife, since she is fundamentally an emotional being. When Mr. Collins, for example, writes to announce his impending visit, Elizabeth immediately catches his 'pompous' style and the 'oddity' of his 'apologizing for being next in the entail'; she quips to her father, 'We cannot suppose he would help it, if he could.—Can he be a sensible man, sir?' Mr. Bennet replies in the negative, adding that he has 'great hopes of finding him quite the reverse', and that the 'mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter... promises well' for their amusement; he concludes, 'I am impatient to see him' (p.71). Mrs. Bennet has no share in these exchanges; she can only 'rail bitterly against the cruelty' of their estate being entailed away to 'that odious man'—a situation that she 'should have tried long ago to do something or other about', she

asserts, had she been the master of the house. Jane and Elizabeth try to explain that the situation is not one to be changed by exertion, since the entail is a matter of law; they find their mother, however, 'beyond the reach of reason' on this point. Mr. Bennet cannot resist making sport of her naïveté: 'certainly... nothing can clear Mr. Collins from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn', he states, knowing that she will take the remark literally, while Elizabeth and Jane will catch his wit (p.69). After the family spends a day with Mr. Collins, the narrator relates, in fact, that:

Mr. Bennet's expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance, and except in an occasional glance at Elizabeth, requiring no partner in his pleasure. (p.76)

Here, Elizabeth represents the kind of woman whose mind, tastes, and values are enough like her father's that he can share subtle exchanges of ironic humor with her; Mrs. Bennet clearly is *not* this kind of woman, which is why her husband's knowing glances are not directed at her. This scene reinforces an Indexical Sinsign image for Mr. and Mrs. Bennet with respect to the ideal of mental parity and, more broadly, of personal compatibility. The couple is subtly foiled by the Gardiners, who are a positive realization (Iconic Sinsign) of the compatibility ideal. Thus, by employing both Iconic and Indexical types of Sinsign, Austen illustrates more powerfully the kind of mutual improvement that a good marriage can bring about, as well as the dampening effect that mental incompatibility can have on a relationship over time.

One implication of Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's marriage is that mental disparity can lead to loss of mutual respect and affection. Mr. Bennet's realization of his wife's 'weak understanding and illiberal mind', the narrator recounts, 'had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her'; his '[r]espect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever' (p.262). In Peircean terms, we might categorize affection, esteem, respect, and confidence generally as Firstness aspects of marital love, insofar as they are all *feelings* for one's spouse. However, while affection may largely be an *affective* response to the gender, appearance, and personality of one's

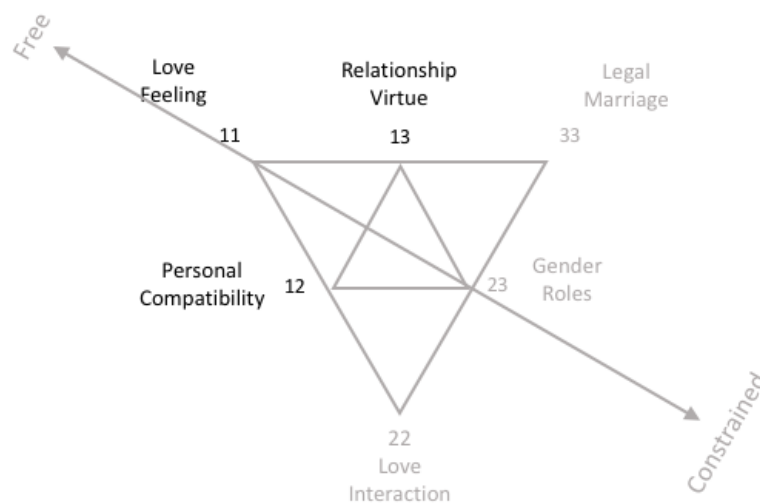
spouse, respect and confidence are always *effective* of the perceived virtues of the spouse. Hence, affection is purer Firstness, while respect and confidence have some Thirdness and border on the relationship virtues (Category 13); esteem perhaps lies somewhere between affection and respect. That Mr. Bennet initially has affection for his wife is not questioned. The delicacy of affection as an emotion, however, is suggested: it is shown to survive only under particular conditions. For Mr. Bennet, his wife's shallow and unprincipled behavior has, in time, cast a pallor over her 'pretty face'. This is not because he is unaffectionate by nature. In fact, both he and Mrs. Bennet are capable of affection, as instanced by various anecdotes connected with their daughters. Lydia's self-confidence, for example, in pressing Bingley for a ball at Netherfield, is explained in terms of her being 'a favourite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age' (p.49). And Elizabeth's pain at leaving home to visit Charlotte in Hunsford comes from the thought of 'leaving her father, who would certainly miss her, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked her going, that he told her to write him, and almost promised to answer her letter' (p.171). When Elizabeth contemplates the relatively poor quality of her parents' marital relations compared to those of the Gardiners, her sorrow is palliated by the thought of her father's 'affectionate treatment of herself' (p.262). The depth of his affection for her is made clear by their conversation directly after Darcy asks permission to marry her. Upon entering the library, Elizabeth finds her father 'walking about the room, looking grave and anxious' (he is, for once, seriously alarmed); he asks, 'Lizzy, ... what are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have not you always hated him?' When she 'assure[s] him with some confusion, of her attachment to Mr. Darcy', he restates what he fears her meaning to be: 'Or in other words, you are determined to have him' because '[h]e is rich... and you [will] have more fine clothes and fine carriages than Jane. But will they make you happy?'. She has to persuade him soberly that she really does love Darcy. 'I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable', he emphasizes, 'unless you truly esteemed your husband'. He wants her to have a better marital situation than his own: 'My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to

respect your partner in life'. His earnest plea that she *not* marry without affection, esteem, and respect for her spouse—a condition of which she would be in the 'greatest danger in an unequal marriage'—is, ironically, an index of the depth of his own affection, esteem, and respect for *her*, and reflects his increased awareness, after twenty-three years in an 'unequal marriage' himself, of the importance of mental parity in a spouse (pp.417-8). After Elizabeth's marriage, Mr. Bennet's affection for her is alive and well: 'Mr. Bennet missed his second daughter exceedingly; his affection for her drew him oftener from home than any thing else could do'. Even Mrs. Bennet, for whom Elizabeth is not a favorite, is 'happy' in 'all her maternal feelings' after Elizabeth's marriage (p.427). As a sign, therefore, of the ideal of mutual affection (Category 11), and of its connection with the neighboring ideals of personal compatibility (Category 12) and relationship virtue (Category 13), Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are a mixed bag: their own relationship is clearly *not* ideal in this regard, and yet their potential for natural affection is still suggested. In other words, their image is an oppositional instance (Indexical Sinsign) of the ideal, and yet it has some *positive, qualitative possibility* (Firstness). Such a sign, in a ten-category Peircean system, would be a Rhematic Indexical Sinsign (Category 122), but in the six-category system that we are using it stays within the Indexical Sinsign (22) category.<sup>363</sup> Of material importance here is the idea that Austen has developed a more realistic mixture of good and bad in at least one 'unfavorable' character couple than she did in *Lady Susan*.

Of course, Austen's exploration, through the Bennets, of marital affection (Category 11) and its relation to the neighboring categories of personal compatibility (Category 12) and relationship virtue (Category 13), has relevance to the tension between the *free* and the *constrained* elements of marriage, as indicated previously on the Peircean diagram:

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<sup>363</sup> The significance of these subdivisions of Sinsign to our analysis of the Gardiners, Bennets, and Wickhams is pointed out later, after considering all three couples.



Unlike the Gardiners, the Bennets' relationship is weak in the same three categories: love feeling (affection) has all but died; personal compatibility retains only primitive elements like gender attraction and outward civility; and relationship virtue exists only in the form of sexual fidelity and the basic integrity of Mr. Bennet.<sup>364</sup> This is consistent with Peircean theory respecting the nature of these categories. Both personal compatibility (Category 12) and relationship virtue (Category 13) are degenerate or 'mixed' categories, and so may be weakened by a process of elimination—that is, by removing one or more of their constituent parts, such as mental parity from personal compatibility, or kindness (in Mr. Bennet's case) or mental fidelity (in Mrs. Bennet's case) from relationship virtue.<sup>365</sup> Affection (Category 11), on the other hand, is a pure monadic category and so either stands or falls on its own. One can, by the exercise of patience and self-restraint, confine one's courtship process to those candidates who are both physically *and* mentally compatible with oneself (as Jane does and Mr. Bennet does not); and one can,

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<sup>364</sup> Mr. Bennet's integrity, along with his faults, are explored further below.

<sup>365</sup> Mrs. Bennet's admission that she still has an eye for a 'red-coat' suggests a laxness in mental fidelity. As Roberts puts it, she has an 'interest in men' that she is 'now indulging by trying to find a husband for her daughters' (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.176).

through self-discipline (which is a form of constraint), be both physically *and* mentally faithful to one's partner (as Jane and Bingley are, and Mrs. Bennet is not); but one *cannot* by will power or constraint manufacture affection. As a genuine Firstness, affection is thus the least constrained element of marital love but also the most fragile.

The example of the Gardiners suggests, however, that the long-term health and survival of affection in a relationship do depend in some measure upon 'nurture' as well as 'nature'. Like all qualitative (Firstness) phenomena, affection is a matter of how one *perceives* something—in this case, the object of one's affection. The narrative about the Bennets (and the larger narrative of the novel) develops the idea that one's perception of a person is shaped not only by that person's appearance and behavior but by the attitude and actions that one takes *toward* that person. In other words, while our feelings (Firstness) may prompt our actions (Secondness), our actions (Secondness) also affect the quality of our feelings (Firstness).<sup>366</sup> We might, therefore, examine the Bennets' marital interactions (Category 22) both as the fruit of their feelings, perceptions, and values for one another (Categories 11, 12, and 13) *and* in terms of the tendency of their interactions over time to enliven or dampen these same feelings, perceptions, and values reflexively. I have already noted that Mr. Bennet adopts an aloof cynicism in many dealings with his wife because of his disappointment over her mental deficiencies. Roberts suggests that another major disappointment in Mr. Bennet's life—the circumstance of his being unable to 'pass on his estate to his progeny'—has also 'contributed to his detachment and cynicism', and 'helps explain his retreat from the world'.<sup>367</sup> The next in line to his estate, Mr.

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<sup>366</sup> Ruderman observes: 'Austen suggests that the things we do for another person attach us to them, by making them seem a part of us'. She notes that this idea agrees with Aristotle's thinking about friendship (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.49).

<sup>367</sup> *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.49. Given Mr. Bennet's status as a prosperous estate owner, his lack of a direct male heir is a considerable disappointment. Downie points out that Mr. Bennet's income of two thousand a year 'was the average income, not of a mere country gentleman,



Collins, is as deficient in mental refinement as Mrs. Bennet; Mr. Bennet immediately takes up a detached sarcasm in his dealings with him as well. 'He seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man' (p.71), Mr. Bennet observes after reading Mr. Collins's first communication with him. In that letter, Mr. Collins invites himself to stay with the Bennets for a week on specific dates, with no reference to the family's convenience, in order to 'heal the breach' between Mr. Bennet and Mr. Collins's late father—an undertaking about which he admits scruples, as 'it might seem disrespectful' to the memory of his father 'to be on good terms with any one, with whom it had always pleased him to be at variance' (pp.69-70). Rather than attempt to privately take Mr. Collins to task about his inconsiderate attitude in this matter (as Elizabeth does when Mr. Collins proposes to her, and as Mrs. Gardiner does with Lydia after her elopement), Mr. Bennet stands aside and watches with amusement while his cousin plays out his social ineptitude and self-aggrandizement—a retreat from fatherly duty that does not escape Darcy's notice. Likewise, when Mrs. Bennet comes to her husband 'in an uproar' asking him to 'make Lizzy marry Mr. Collins', Mr. Bennet does not take the time to confer with her in private about this important family matter, as the Vernons or Gardiners might have done. Instead, he has her call Elizabeth in, and informs the latter of the 'unhappy alternative' that is before her: 'Your mother will never see you again if you do *not* marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you *do*' (pp.124-5). To Mrs.

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but of a baronet' in the 1790s, and his estate, though certainly not equal to a Netherfield or a Rosings, was 'a country house of some size' with a 'park' that would 'have required a gardner and a number of assistants to maintain'. Added to his horses, carriage, farm, and full contingency of 'domestic' servants, Mr. Bennet was 'clearly... a prosperous member of the landed gentry and most certainly not... an impoverished country gentleman struggling to make ends meet' ('Who Says She's a Bourgeois Writer?', pp.70-1); here, for the 1790s baronetcy income information, Downie cites John Habakkuk, *Marriage, Debt, and the Estates System: English Landownership 1650-1950* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), p.167. Hume's financial estimates also generally agree with this assessment of Mr. Bennet's socio-economic status ('Money and Jane Austen', pp.296-305).

Bennet's exclamation of dismay at her husband's unexpected and humiliating rebuff in the presence of their daughter, he replies (still in Elizabeth's presence):

"I have two small favors to request. First, that you will allow me the free use of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of my room. I shall be glad to have the library to myself as soon as may be." (p.125)

Here, Mr. Bennet is arguably on Austen's side of the question as to whether a young lady ought to be allowed to decline a suitor, without being otherwise compelled by her parents, and yet his manner of dealing with his wife in enacting this principle does not reflect Austen's favor. As Roberts notes, '[e]ventually, Elizabeth, the one daughter that Mr. Bennet respected, had to feel that her father had been incorrect' in so often 'exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children'.<sup>368</sup> Unlike Mrs. Vernon, who confers with her husband and listens to his views even though he is not her equal in prudence, Mr. Bennet fails to enlist the cooperation and talents of his wife, using her weakness of mind as an excuse to wholly exclude her from any collaboration.<sup>369</sup> There are, however, incidents that suggest her character to have value. For example, when the family learns from Miss Bingley that her brother will not return to Netherfield for the winter, Mrs. Bennet's reaction is significant:

Mrs. Bennet still continued to wonder and repine at his returning no more, and though a day seldom passed in which Elizabeth did not account for it clearly, there seemed little chance of her ever considering it with less perplexity. Her daughter endeavoured to convince her of what she did not believe herself, that his attentions to Jane had been merely the effect of a common and transient liking, which ceased when he saw her no more; but though the probability of

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<sup>368</sup> *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.77 (quoting *PP*, p.263).

<sup>369</sup> Wollstonecraft argues, in Chapters 3, 4, and 12 of *Vindication*, that societal laws and educational practices of the times were so arranged as to produce intellectually shallow women like Mrs. Bennet. However, Austen's tone does not seem to excuse shallow female behavior on grounds of poor educational or societal influences.

the statement was admitted at the time, she had the same story to repeat every day. (pp.155-6)

Here, though Elizabeth gives a rational explanation for Bingley's behavior, it does not stick with her mother, whose persistent 'perplexity' over the circumstance is a subtle index to the fact that something basic is amiss. With respect to such a matter of the heart, if the explanation for it fails to pass muster with Mrs. Bennet, who operates at the most primitive emotional level, then no amount of rationalization will save it. Elizabeth, who is eminently rational, cannot fully believe it herself; the scene leaves open the idea that her mother's reaction may play a subtle part in Elizabeth's disbelief of her own explanation. As smart as Mr. Bennet is, he has not figured out how to benefit from his wife as an emotional barometer in such relationship matters. In reality, his wit and mental quickness have great need of being balanced with emotional sensitivity. It is interesting to consider Mr. Bennet's reaction to the same news about Bingley:

"So, Lizzy," said he one day, "your sister is crossed in love I find. I congratulate her. Next to being married, a girl likes to be crossed in love a little now and then. It is something to think of, and it gives her a sort of distinction among her companions. When is your turn to come? You will hardly bear to be long outdone by Jane. Now is your time. Here are officers enough in Meryton to disappoint all the young ladies in the country. Let Wickham be *your* man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably." (p.156)

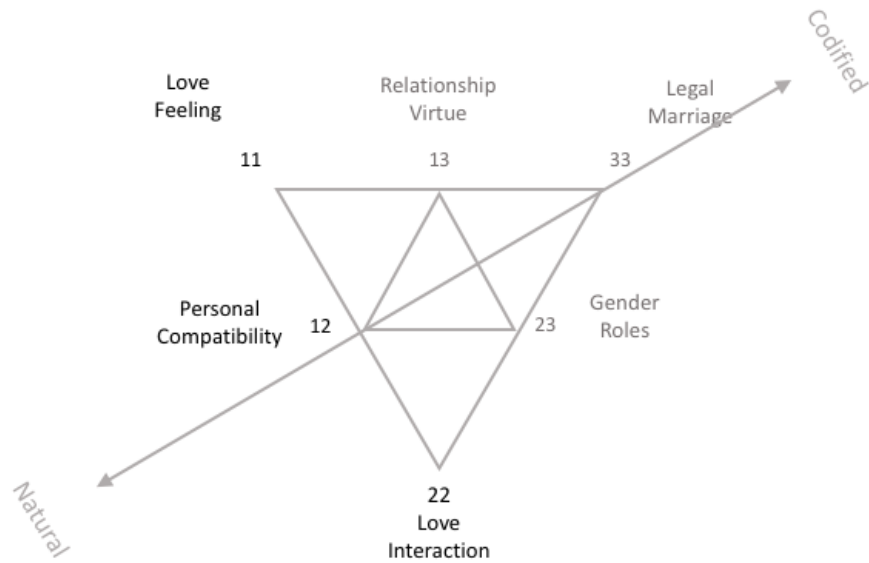
That Mr. Bennet combines such prescience about Wickham with a witty but insensitive trivialization of Jane and Elizabeth's love affairs is a clear sign of the imbalance in his character. He often 'withdraws... to some cerebral compartment of the mind', McMaster observes, to 'reconstruct the personnel of his family... as mere figures of fiction that prance about for his amusement', making them 'in effect only characters in a book which he may choose to close at any time'. This is great for a

‘critic’ or a ‘reader’, but ‘not so fine in a husband or father’.<sup>370</sup> As Elizabeth laments, her father’s ‘ill-judged... direction of talents’ not only inhibits his relationship with his wife but brings ‘disadvantages [to] the children of so unsuitable a marriage’ (p.263). Unfortunately, the narrative gives no instance of efforts on the Bennets’ part to take time for recreational activities away from their children that might narrow their emotional divide and rekindle affection, as the Gardiners do; we see only a gradual attenuation of natural feeling between them. Thus, with respect to the Austenian ideal for love interaction (Category 22) that includes wholesome recreation, mutually improving sociality, and warm physical relations, the Bennets again seem to be largely an Indexical Sinsign—an image that is an oppositional instance, or at best a reductionist realization, of the ideal.

This analysis of the Bennets’ marriage in the areas of love feeling (Category 11), personal compatibility (Category 12), and love interaction (Category 22) suggests the overall reduced state of the *natural* elements of their relationship, which are highlighted here on the Peircean diagram:

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<sup>370</sup> ‘Talking about Talk in *Pride and Prejudice*’, in *Jane Austen’s Business: Her World and Her Profession*, ed. by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel (Houndmills and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp.81-94 (pp.86-7).



With regard to the *codified* elements of their relationship (represented by the faded triad in the upper-right corner of the diagram), I have thus far made only passing observations—for instance, the tenuous state of Mrs. Bennet’s mental fidelity (part of relationship virtue, or Category 13), and Mr. Bennet’s lack of fatherly leadership (an element of gender-role duty, or Category 23). Of course, the titles ‘Mr.’ and ‘Mrs.’ indicate a legally married status for the couple (Category 33). However, the narrative provides some detail about the Bennets that has further implications for these codified elements and their relation to Austen’s marriage ideals. With respect to relationship virtue (Category 13), for example, Mr. Bennet’s flaws are clearly connected with the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. In choosing to withdraw himself from his wife, daughters, and cousin, Mr. Bennet betrays a lack of *confidence* in their ability to improve, and underestimates the potential of his own influence for good with them. Faith, by contrast, is confidence that principled effort *will* yield improvement, despite present uncertainties.<sup>371</sup> Mr. Bennet, however, takes the route of fear and inaction with regard to the faults of his family members.

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<sup>371</sup> Saint Paul describes faith as ‘the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1, KJV).

This choice contrasts with the faith shown by other characters, such as Sir Reginald, and Darcy, who has enough faith in Elizabeth's better vision of 'gentlemanly' manhood to make changes in his own behavior and to take action on behalf of even the severely flawed Lydia and Wickham.<sup>372</sup> Mr. Bennet's inaction and lack of faith in his family members reinforces their faults and becomes self-fulfilling prophecy, such as in the cases of Lydia's elopement and Mr. Collins's marriage of expediency. Their degrading choices only increase his disillusionment over his family situation. His progression from fear and inaction to disillusionment and cynicism is an Indexical Sinsign of Austen's ideal, and it shadows the positive progression in other characters (Iconic Sinsigns of the ideal) from faithful action to greater hope and cheer. For example, Mr. Bennet's lack of hope, which follows from his weak exercise of faith, is gently foiled by the character of Jane, who patiently hopes for the best in everyone and ends up being right about them, as Moe observes, more often than some of the 'detached critics' in the story.<sup>373</sup>

Mr. Bennet's character further suggests that the downward path of fear and inaction does not stop at disillusionment and cynicism, but may proceed to incivility and unkindness. As an example of what Elizabeth calls the 'continual breach of conjugal obligation' by her father 'in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children' (pp.262-3), Mr. Bennet, upon learning of Charlotte's engagement to Mr. Collins, 'pronounce[s]' to his daughters that he is 'gratified... to discover that Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible', is 'as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter!' (p.143). Charlotte's engagement to Mr. Collins draws from Mrs. Bennet the lamentation, 'it is very hard to think that Charlotte Lucas should ever be mistress of this house, that I should be forced to make way for her, and live to see her take her place in it!'. Mr. Bennet makes the

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<sup>372</sup> Saint James asserts that 'faith, if it hath not works, is dead', and that neither faith nor works can exist alone; he gives the challenge: 'shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works' (James 2:17-89, KJV).

<sup>373</sup> 'Multiple Modernities', p.1083.

unkind reply that they should ‘hope for *better things*’; namely, ‘that I may be the survivor’ (p.146, my italics). The implications of this remark approach the sentiments of Lady Susan and Mrs. Johnson when they wish Mrs. Manwaring to fret herself to death, but the unkind idea in this case is couched in light-hearted, civil language. The scene is an example of Austen’s increased ability to depict good and evil character in subtle and believable mixtures; the underlying idea, however, that charitable thinking is at the heart of goodness, and self-centered thinking at the root of evil, is apparent in both narratives.

In Mr. Bennet’s character, Austen also develops the interconnectedness of faith, hope, and charity, and the consequences of the lack of these virtues. When Mr. Bennet realizes, from Lydia’s elopement, the extent of the evils of his own inaction, the guilt at first makes him sulky and inconsiderate of his family. Even after his return from London, when Mr. Gardiner sends him word that he has found the couple and arranged for their marriage, Jane and Elizabeth learn of the development only haply from the housemaid; they have to track down and query their father about it. They immediately request his leave to share the news with their mother, whom they know is most anxious for information about it; he waves them away to do ‘[j]ust as you please’ (p.337). Mr. Bennet knows as well as Jane and Elizabeth how keenly his wife awaits information about the matter, and yet he makes not the smallest personal effort to share the news with her.<sup>374</sup> His lack of consideration for his wife and daughters, and his sarcastic remarks to them, contrast with the sensitive, attentive, and supportive behavior of other husband figures like Reginald, Sir Reginald, and Mr. Gardiner. His behavior represents, in essence, a failure of

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<sup>374</sup> Susan Fraiman points out that ‘among women whose solace is news, Mr. Bennet keeps the upper hand by withholding information’—‘[h]e controls his family by being not tightfisted but tight-lipped’; see *Unbecoming Women: British Women Writers and the Novel of Development* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp.69-70.

*kindness*, or charity.<sup>375</sup> Thus, in this scene, Mr. Bennet is not only a sign of what charity is *not* (that is, he is an Indexical Sinsign of the virtue), he is also an instructive instance of how failures in charity may proceed from failures of faith and hope. It is apparent that Mr. Bennet's non-practice of the cardinal Christian virtues has a dampening effect upon his family members—more starkly, perhaps, in the case of Lydia's elopement, but also in the increasing fretfulness of Mrs. Bennet over time, and in Elizabeth's sense of the 'disadvantages' under which she and Jane labor to find respectable husbands.<sup>376</sup> Through the narrative concerning these interrelated characters, Austen allows us to see how the Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity, though largely practiced in the privacy of one's thoughts, are not just personal virtues but *relationship* virtues in their broader effects.

Mrs. Bennet's conduct also has relevance to the Christian virtues. As noted previously, she has a kind of blind faith or belief in the merit of all her daughters, and she has faith in her brother, Mr. Gardiner, to fix things up with Lydia. She certainly hopes for good marriages for *all* her daughters, and takes action toward those ends, but since her actions are unprincipled, they do not lead to desirable outcomes.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> 'Charity... is kind', observes Saint Paul, '[d]oth not behave itself unseemly', and 'thinketh no evil' (1 Corinthians 13: 4-5, KJV).

<sup>376</sup> This dampening trend is vaguely foiled by Jane and Bingley, and by the Gardiners, who, as discussed earlier, have a lifting and cheering effect upon those around them by their faith, hope, consideration, and generosity towards their fellows. (In Jane and Bingley's case, the couple mainly exhibits these positive *attitudes*, whereas in the Gardiners' case the couple also exhibits positive *actions*, which is why I classify the former couple as an Iconic Qualisign and the latter an Iconic Sinsign.)

<sup>377</sup> One might argue that her incapacity is representative of the kind of women produced by the cultural practices that Wollstonecraft complains about. Here, the only outcome closely linked with Mrs. Bennet's motherly maneuvering is Lydia's elopement, whereas the positive outcomes of the story stem mainly from the principled actions of *other* characters—Lydia's legal marriage from the generous exertions of Mr. Gardiner and Darcy; Jane and Bingley's happy union from their own patience and devotion to each other, and from Darcy's eventual 'blessing' of the match; and Elizabeth



With respect to charity, Mrs. Bennet loves her daughters, but her feelings for them and for others do not reach the level of unselfish and disinterested consideration that is characteristic of that virtue.<sup>378</sup> On the contrary, her 'consideration' for Bingley, for example, is sparked by his 'four or five thousand a year' (p.4); her feelings for Mr. Collins are 'odious' until he proposes to marry Elizabeth, when, suddenly, 'the man whom she could not bear to speak of the day before, was now high in her good graces' (p.79); her friendship with Lady Lucas gives way to 'rude', 'sour', and 'ill-natured' feelings once Charlotte is engaged (pp.143-4); and her open disdain for Darcy abruptly changes to delight upon his offering marriage to Elizabeth ('*Such a charming man!—so handsome! so tall!*' [p.419]). Notably, her sudden delight in Darcy's person is prefaced with the exclamation:

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.419)

Her view of Darcy as a means to aggrandize her family is uncharitable because it manifests a desire to lift herself above her neighbors. Unlike Mr. Vernon, whose abundance of hope and charity tempers his wife's more critical tendencies, Mrs. Bennet has neither the strength of faith, the patience of hope, nor the balm of charity to balance her husband's pessimistic and inconsiderate leanings. The image of the couple is, therefore, on the whole, Indexical to an Austenian ideal for a marriage graced by Christian virtue.

The doings of the Bennets are not without implication for the operation of the classical virtues of justice and temperance within marriage and family. In the scene just mentioned, for instance, upon hearing her mother's sanguine outburst about Darcy's riches, 'Elizabeth rejoiced that such an effusion was heard only by herself'

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and Darcy's marriage from their willingness to accept correction from each other and encouragement from the Gardiners.

<sup>378</sup> Disinterestedness is included in Saint Paul's enumeration of the attributes of charity: 'Charity... seeketh not her own' (1 Corinthians 13:4, KJV).

(p.420), as it would hurt Darcy's feelings to hear her mother so crassly value him for his property rather than as a person. Implicit to both charity and justice is the idea that the real worth of a person lies in his or her humanity.<sup>379</sup> While Mrs. Bennet judges Darcy to be worthy of her daughter by virtue of his riches alone, Mr. Bennet deems him worthy only when he is convinced of Darcy's *human* qualities:

Elizabeth... was earnest and solemn in her reply; and at length, by repeated assurances that Mr. Darcy was really the object of her choice, by... relating her absolute certainty that his affection was not the work of a day, but had stood the test of many months suspense, and enumerating with energy all his good qualities, she did conquer her father's incredulity, and reconcile him to the match.

"Well, my dear," said he, when she ceased speaking, "I have no more to say. *If this be the case, he deserves you.* I could not have parted with you, my Lizzy, to any one *less worthy.*" (p.418, my italics)

Mr. Bennet clearly values Elizabeth's mental and moral qualities, and yet he is not blind to her faults. In fact, it may be from his sense that she tends to judge too quickly by appearances that he previously warned her of her vulnerability to a jilting by Wickham, and that he insists, in this instance, on hearing substantive *facts* about Darcy's character. In terms of the exercise of justice, then, Mr. Bennet seems if anything to err on the side of judging his family members on a more rigorous basis than he does others, while his wife is blindly biased to her own daughters, and unfairly holds others to a higher standard.<sup>380</sup> Mrs. Bennet's obvious bias is a source of frequent embarrassment to Elizabeth. For example, when Mrs. Bennet visits

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<sup>379</sup> This sense is captured in Christ's teachings to 'love thy neighbor as thyself' (Mark 12:31, KJV), which is charity, and 'whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them' (Matthew 7:12), which is justice. All these scriptural teachings are foundational to Austen's ideals, and they seem to have become more important to Austen as her life progressed, as Roberts has suggested.

<sup>380</sup> This point is reflected in her assertion, mentioned earlier, that 'If I wished to think slightly of any body's children, it should not be of my own', and in Mr. Bennet's reply, 'If my children are silly I must hope to be always sensible of it' (p.32).

Netherfield, and Bingley comments that Charlotte Lucas is 'a very pleasant young woman', Mrs. Bennet counters:

Oh! dear, yes;—but you must own she is very plain. Lady Lucas herself has often said so, and envied me Jane's beauty. I do not like to boast of my own child, but to be sure, Jane—one does not often see any body better looking. It is what every body says. I do not trust my own partiality. (p.48)

Her attempt to backpedal on her own 'partiality' is comic—as if Bingley and Darcy would not have noticed it without this admission? Her tendency to puff up the merits of her own daughters, and to give comparatively stingy assessments of the virtues of others, represents a basic failure of *justice*, and is part of the 'illiberal mind' to which the narrator attributes Mr. Bennet's loss of respect for her and the 'overthrow' of his 'views of domestic happiness'. The narrator notes, however, that Mr. Bennet does not 'seek comfort for [this] disappointment... in any of those pleasures which too often console the unfortunate' (p.262). While the intemperate habits alluded to here are not enumerated—they are represented well enough by Wickham's gambling and womanizing—their connection with lack of integrity or justice is suggested. In a similar fashion to how Mr. Bennet's failure to act in faith leads to disappointing results in his family, which in turn tempts him to be cynical and uncharitable towards them, Mrs. Bennet's illiberal mind disappoints her husband, and tempts him to consider with self-pity the spoiled hopes of his marriage, which in turn might justify the indulgence of intemperate habits. Mr. Bennet's sense of justice is more intact than his wife's, however. On this point, he is a positive example (Iconic Sinsign) of how justice bolsters temperance, whereas other characters (such as Wickham) might illustrate, as Indexical Sinsigns, the downward progression from injustice to hopelessness and intemperance. Through Mrs. Bennet, Austen allows us to see how a self-centered (uncharitable and unjust) view can quickly turn into a victim mentality that justifies intemperate behavior. As a foil, the ever charitable and hopeful Jane never seems to lose sight of the equal value of others in relation to herself, and so maintains an equanimity of temper that

positively illustrates, as an Iconic Qualisign, the interconnection of charity, justice, hope, and temperance.

Mr. Bennet's behavior with respect to Lydia has relevance to the classical virtue of courage, or fortitude. When Lydia is invited by Mrs. Forster to accompany her and the regiment to Brighton, Elizabeth recognizes the invitation as a 'death warrant' of Lydia's chances to learn propriety and prudence, and urges her father to veto the trip: 'If you... will not take the trouble of checking' her '[v]ain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrouled' flirtation, she warns, Lydia 'will soon be beyond the reach of amendment'. Though acknowledging Lydia's reckless impropriety, Mr. Bennet again opts to stand aside. Indeed, Elizabeth knows with what 'indignation' her attempt to block the Brighton trip would be met by her sister and mother were they to know about it (pp.255-7). Unlike Sir Reginald, here Mr. Bennet shrinks from the duty to admonish his daughter. In this choice, he considers his own convenience more than Lydia's welfare. His example shows how fear and self-centered thinking undermine fortitude, making him an Indexical Sinsign (non-example) of that virtue. The evident backward shrinking in his behavior contrasts with the positive, forward force of Mr. Gardiner and Darcy, whose faith in correct principles, and whose charitable focus on Lydia's welfare above their own convenience, strengthen their fortitude to act on her behalf, and to check her course. They are Iconic Sinsigns (positive enactments) of courage and of its wellsprings of faith and charity. Considered together with Mr. Bennet, they are another instance of Austen's more proportional use of both positive and negative examples (Iconic and Indexical Sinsigns) to illustrate her ideals.

Our study of the Bennets as signs of the classical virtues has so far omitted only *prudence*. In contrast to the principled advice that Mrs. Gardiner gives to her nieces, Mrs. Bennet encourages vain, coquettish, and scheming behavior in her daughters to secure husbands. When Mr. Bennet attempts, in his sarcastic way, to suggest that Lydia and Kitty ought to temper their flirtation with the officers and to consider more than a man's outward appearance, Mrs. Bennet dismisses the idea in front of them, insisting they are 'clever' no matter what they do or think; she tells Mr.

Bennet that he 'must not expect such girls to have the sense of their father and mother' (p.32). While this last statement may have some truth, her wisdom in voicing it in the presence of their daughters is questionable. She gives little consideration to the effect of her words upon them. By discouraging introspection on their part, she sets them up to act rashly and conceitedly. For daughters like Jane and Elizabeth, who are disposed to self-evaluation, Mrs. Bennet's imprudence is relatively benign; but with a headstrong daughter like Lydia, her thoughtless approach quickly leads to trouble. When Lydia's elopement with Wickham is discovered, Mrs. Bennet feels no culpability in the event; she is full of 'invectives against the villainous conduct of Wickham, and complaints of her own suffering and ill usage, blaming every body', the narrator notes, 'but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally owing' (pp.316-7). Here again, her lack of a just view of herself contributes to her imprudence and that of her daughter, whom she has taught to similarly resist introspection. Mr. Bennet, on the other hand, clearly sees his fault in the matter. When he returns from his fruitless search for Lydia, and Elizabeth shows empathy for 'what he must have endured', he replies, 'Say nothing of that. Who should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it'. Listening on, Kitty asserts that she 'would behave better than Lydia' if she 'should ever go to Brighton'. To this idea, Mr. Bennet responds with renewed fortitude and prudence: '*You* go to Brighton!—I would not trust you so near it as East Bourne, for fifty pounds! No, Kitty, I have at last learnt to be cautious, and you will feel the effects of it' (pp.329-30). This scene, and the differences in how Mr. and Mrs. Bennet react to Lydia's elopement, illustrate the connection between humility and introspection (or a *just* outlook) and one's ability to practice fortitude and prudence; the scene also shows how bias and blindness with respect to one's self (or an *unjust* outlook) hamper the development of these virtues. As a representation of prudence, therefore, the Bennets are largely a flawed image (Indexical Sinsign): Mr. Bennet's late improvements cannot wholly counteract the fallout from his wife's lack of the virtue, though his gains show promise for ameliorating her ill effects, at least in the lives of Kitty and Mary, who

will remain at home still for some time. The image of the couple, again, is not an unmitigated Indexical Sinsign but retains traces of positive elements.

It is useful to recall, in our discussion of the codified elements of marital love, that relationship virtue corresponds to the qualitatively degenerate Thirdness (13) category, which has two degrees of degeneracy<sup>381</sup> and so ought to be the mildest form of codification of the three elements in our codified triad. As outlined previously, the various character virtues are well-codified in the classical and Christian philosophical traditions that Austen inherited, and yet her fiction gives more emphasis to the *natural* benefits of the practice (and the natural detriments of the non-practice) of these virtues within marriage and family relationships, and less emphasis to rigid conformance with codified forms.<sup>382</sup> In this regard, Austen's fictionalizations of virtue are a meld of the *qualitative* and the *lawful*, which is why I categorize her brand of relationship virtue as Firstness of Thirdness.

After relationship virtue, the next higher level of codification in marital love is gender-based roles, which correspond to the reactionally degenerate Thirdness (23) category, having only one degree of degeneracy from pure codification.<sup>383</sup> As mentioned, gender roles are *reactional* in the sense that they spring, as a consequence, from one's biological sex as exercised in reproduction—the husband becoming a father and protector, and the wife a mother and nurturer.<sup>384</sup> At the same time, they are *codified* in the sense that many gender-based duties are prescribed by culture, with some even being inscribed in religious and civil law. Mr.

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<sup>381</sup> CP, V, 72.

<sup>382</sup> As Horowitz notes, Austen 'agrees in many respects' with the conduct writers, 'but her tone is never rigidly moralistic as theirs tends to be' ('The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', p.71).

<sup>383</sup> CP, V, 72.

<sup>384</sup> This is not to say that gender roles are *wholly* defined by the sexual relations from which they spring; culture obviously plays a major part as well. But of the two factors, the biological differences are the only *necessary* origin, though as I noted earlier this may make little difference to one upon whom the duties of a gender role bear.

Bennet, though disdaining Mr. Collins's studied observance of codified social rules, conforms with many of society's expectations for his gender role: he marries a wife with an adequate dowry; he provides an estate and a respectable income for her sustenance and that of their children; he makes the social call on Bingley to introduce his eligible daughters; he protects Jane's health by authorizing her to take the carriage to Netherfield (though his wife overrules him in the case); he corrects Mary when she oversteps accepted bounds of displaying her pianoforte talent at the Netherfield ball; he protects Elizabeth from Mr. Collins's unwanted marriage proposal; he attempts to recover Lydia when she elopes with Wickham; he seeks to 'discharge' his financial 'obligation' to Mr. Gardner and Darcy after they settle Lydia's marriage (p.340); he encourages Bingley as a possible son-in-law by being 'agreeable' and 'communicative' with him when they go out shooting together (p.383); and he supports Elizabeth's choice of Darcy by 'taking pains to get acquainted with him' after they are engaged (p.420). In all these actions, Mr. Bennet discharges the duties of his fatherly role, but at times more in form than in substance. For example, his correction of Mary at the Netherfield ball includes the snide public remark that '[y]ou have delighted us long enough' (p.113), which suggests that his action may be motivated as much by his own embarrassment as by a fatherly desire to teach his daughter.<sup>385</sup> Both he and Mrs. Bennet are shallow in the discharge of the parental duty to teach their children—a fact that eventually comes to the fore with Lydia but is noticed much earlier by Darcy. When Elizabeth ponders the objections about her family expressed by Darcy in his post-proposal letter, she cannot help feeling the truth of many of his assertions, especially with respect to her parents' poor efforts at training Kitty and Lydia:

Her father, contented with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely

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<sup>385</sup> As McMaster observes, his manner in such instances is fine for a 'critic', but 'not so fine in... a father' ('Talking about Talk', p.87).

insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavour to check the imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be of improvement? (p.236)

Mr. Bennet is too unconcerned about his daughters, and Darcy may not be the only man to notice it. When Elizabeth and the Gardiners counsel together about Lydia's elopement, Mr. Gardiner is mystified as to how Wickham could 'form such a design against a girl who is by no means unprotected' (p.311). Elizabeth points out that:

he might imagine, from my father's behaviour, from his indolence and the little attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in his family, that *he* would do as little, and think as little about it, as any father could do, in such a matter. (p.312)

Elizabeth's assessment is severe on her father (perhaps she adjusts it later when she sees how concerned he is about Darcy's designs with respect to her), but her comments highlight the fact that his fatherly inaction sends the wrong message to men who are interested in his daughters, and makes him indirectly culpable in Wickham's decision to risk dishonor with Lydia. Mr. Bennet's casual attention to fatherly duty is also apparent in his tenuous financial preparations for the provision of his wife and children after his death—a male duty equal in importance, in Austen's time, to protecting the virtue of his daughters.<sup>386</sup> His worry about being unable to pay back Mr. Gardiner the cost of settling Lydia's marriage makes him wish, 'more than ever', that 'instead of spending his whole income' in previous years, 'he had laid by an annual sum, for the better provision of his children, and of his wife, if she survived him' (p.340). In terms of fulfilling his gender-based role, therefore, Mr. Bennet's image is 'less than perfect'—an Indexical Sinsign in our six-category paradigm, with some positive aspects that might warrant a Rhematic Indexical Sinsign classification in a ten-category system.

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<sup>386</sup> Copeland in particular argues for Austen's awareness of male financial duties in his article 'A Consumer's Guide to *Persuasion*', mentioned earlier.



As an even more flawed image of a wife and mother, Mrs. Bennet's behavior has interesting implications for the over-codification of that gender role in Austen's time. As mentioned, Elizabeth's reflections on her mother's imprudence highlight how the latter undermines the principled efforts of others to teach Kitty and Lydia. Rather than inculcating virtue and sense in the girls to make them rational partners for future husbands and prudent guides for future children, she teaches them to grasp for rich men by the easiest means at their disposal, and to seek the thrill of being the center of male attention.<sup>387</sup> Together, the couple is an Indexical Sinsign of Austen's ideals for gender-based duty, calling out to readers, through an obviously reductionist picture of the discharge of such duties, for a sensible and balanced observance of traditional gender roles within marriage and the family.

The most codified element of heterosexual love is legal marriage, corresponding to the genuine Thirdness (33) category—it exists quite literally as a written entry in a legal or religious ledger book somewhere. The Bennets are legally married, but their individual senses of the actual meaning and value of that contract are dissimilar—a point that emerges from the events surrounding Lydia's elopement. As mentioned, Mr. Bennet realizes the debt he owes to Mr. Gardiner and Darcy for salvaging a legal marriage from Lydia and Wickham's illegitimate affair; his earnest desire to pay back the debt monetarily could be considered an index or token of his value for a legal union above a purely physical relationship. In contrast, when Elizabeth alludes to 'the obligations which Mr. Gardiner's behaviour [has] laid them all under', Mrs. Bennet shrugs it off:

“Well,” cried her mother, “it is all very right; who should do it but her own uncle? ... Well! I am so happy. In a short time, I shall have a daughter married. Mrs. Wickham! How well it sounds.” (p.338)

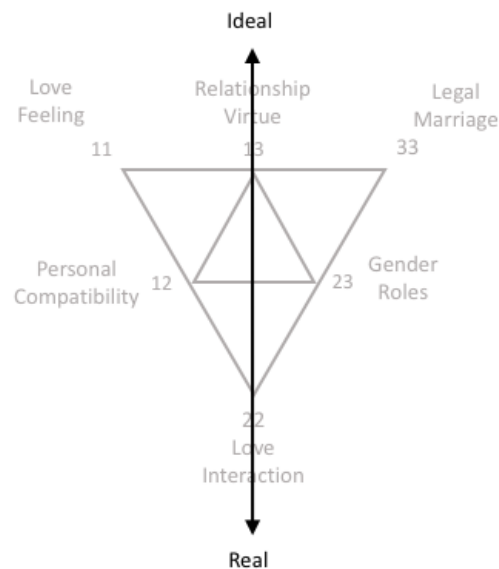
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<sup>387</sup> That women should have such aims is in part a natural result, Wollstonecraft argues, of their education under over-codified notions of female frailty and irrationality, as mentioned previously.

To Mrs. Bennet, the legal sanction of physical relations by marriage is clearly less important than the social status and sense of respectability that are gained by the title 'Mrs.' She can only think about buying new clothes for Lydia in celebration of her marriage, an expense for which Mr. Bennet will 'not advance a guinea', lest it signal approbation of the couple's 'impuden[t]' behavior (pp.342-3). The different manner in which she and Mr. Bennet receive Lydia and Wickham on the day of their wedding reflects their divergent attitudes about the significance of the ordinance. Mrs. Bennet 'stepped forwards, embraced [Lydia], and welcomed her with rapture'; then 'gave her hand with an affectionate smile to Wickham'. She is pleased with her daughter and Wickham—they are making the required nod to social convention, and this is all the legal ceremony signifies. 'Their reception from Mr. Bennet', the narrator relates, 'was not quite so cordial. His countenance rather gained in austerity; and he scarcely opened his lips' (p.348). He is not pleased; Lydia and Wickham are complying with the legal requirement only under duress and for its social benefits, and not as an honest promise of lifelong devotion to each other. As an image of legal marriage (Category 33), therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet may be a nominally *compliant* one in terms of their own marital status, but they are a deeply *divided* one in terms of their thoughts and feelings about it; they are, again, an Indexical Sinsign in our six-category system. Besides provoking us to consider the ways in which a legally-contracted marriage can be ideal or not, the Bennets help us to see how one's sense of devotion and fidelity (Category 13) affect the meaning that one attaches to the ordinance of marriage (Category 33), and, further, how this meaning affects one's ability thereafter to work in concert (or not) with a spouse in the discharge of the parental duty to teach moral behavior to children (Category 23).

The manner in which the Bennets 'rub along' day to day certainly is not ideal, but neither is it all bad, and there is enough of good intent and human frustration to

allow us to identify with the couple, and to find humor in their failings.<sup>388</sup> In this respect, the couple differs from Lady Susan, who is perhaps less comical and less believable a character overall. Within marital love, the opposition between the humanly *real* relationship and the perfectly *ideal* relationship, referred to earlier by Paulson,<sup>389</sup> can be mapped onto our Peircean diagram as follows:



The real is that which exists in the imperfect, fleshy world of fact; in marriage, this is sexual relations and the various other real interactions that spouses engage in, such

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<sup>388</sup> When we can ‘identify’ or ‘relate’ with a fictional object, we consider that object to be within the realm of *possibility* for our own experience, and this is what allows humor to enter in. In Peircean terms, the fictional object is a Sign, and each reader is an Interpretant of that Sign. In a third-order semiotic analysis (a ten-category system), Peirce says that an Indexical Sinsign is a Rhematic type (Category 122) if ‘its interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility’ rather than as a ‘sign of fact or a sign of reason’ (CP, II, 243). In other words, when we see a representation of flawed humans that has enough qualitative likeness (Firstness) to our own experience that it seems *possible*, and yet we do not take it as a representation of fact (history) or as merely part of some theoretical argument, then that representation is a Rhematic Indexical Sinsign. This explains in part why our analysis of the Bennets keeps bringing us to an Indexical Sinsign classification with traces of Firstness—a Rhematic Indexical Sinsign, or Category 122.

<sup>389</sup> ‘Jane Austen: *Pride and Prejudice*’, p.334.

as dancing, walking, and talking (Category 22), the character of which may be a mix of good and bad. The ideal is that which exists only in the perfect world of feeling and thought; in marriage, this corresponds to the feelings, virtues, and laws (Categories 11, 13, and 33) that we as individuals believe *could* bind a couple together perfectly but never quite do in real life, though we strive for them.<sup>390</sup> In between these two extremes are gender roles and personal compatibility (Categories 23 and 12, respectively). In heterosexual marriage, one may feel that gender roles ought to reflect a free and cooperative arrangement between a man and a woman, but in practice some differentiation of roles arises from the nature of sexual relations, child-bearing and rearing, and the need to obtain material provision—what might be called ‘pragmatic’ factors.<sup>391</sup> Likewise, one may feel that personal compatibility in a heterosexual couple ought to be simply a matter of individual preferences about the kind of *person* one wishes to be joined with, but some less personal and more ‘pragmatic’ considerations inevitably affect our perceptions, such as income, possessions, family connections, and so on. As we have seen, the Bennets are a mixture of the ideal and the ‘less than ideal’ in every major aspect of marital relations, which makes their relationship, above all else, a very *real* one. They are the kind of characters about whose creation Dr. Johnson urged early

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<sup>390</sup> Pam Morris notes that Austen’s fictional representations always make ‘a deliberate, skeptical refusal of the heroic’, showing a ‘writerly commitment to people and things so normal as to remain beneath aesthetic notice’—that is, they are real enough *not* to become mere reflections of a romantic ideal. In doing so, they approach ‘the greatest achievements in human creative thinking’, which always, according to Bertrand Russell in *Mysticism and Logic* (Dover Publications, 1918), Morris argues, ‘have been the result of a fusion of two contrary impulses’, ‘namely *idealism* and *empiricism*’; see *Jane Austen, Virginia Woolf and Worldly Realism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), pp.2,11, my emphasis. Here, *idealism* correlates with the perfect world existing only internally in our feelings and thoughts (Category 13), and *empiricism* correlates with the real world (Category 22).

<sup>391</sup> As noted earlier, by this analysis I do not dispute the major influence of culture in the definition of gender roles, but I do argue (counter to fashionable critical views) for their essential connection with biological sex at some level.

novelists to exercise caution, lest they misguide impressionable readers by presenting believable and relatable pictures that might supplant proper ideals. Kirkham suggests that Austen, in seeking to create a more 'truth-telling form of literary art' than her predecessors, rejects Dr. Johnson's advice, forging a new direction for the novel, replete with characters like the Bennets.<sup>392</sup> This is true in the sense that previous novels (including Austen's own juvenilia) perhaps do not approach the level and subtlety of 'mixture' of good and bad that are evident in a character couple such as the Bennets. Nonetheless, as I have argued, in the case of the Bennets at least, Austen's depiction is not 'mischievous or uncertain in its effects'; rather, in the spirit of Dr. Johnson's advice, the flaws of the couple's thinking and behavior are clearly 'laid open and confuted',<sup>393</sup> so that we may both laugh at them, relate with their (and our) humanity, and try not to copy their mistakes in our own marriages.

### *Lydia and Wickham*

The marriage of Lydia and Wickham is more seriously flawed than that of the Bennets, and correspondingly less comical. Fay notes that 'the mores of the time specify that elopement will mark Lydia as a fallen woman because her relation with her lover is sexual only'; 'Austen portrays' her actions 'as a clear extension of her mother's obsession with getting a husband at any cost'.<sup>394</sup> Wickham is something of a male version of Lady Susan in a slightly milder form. Together, the couple creates

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<sup>392</sup> *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, pp.16-7.

<sup>393</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler*, 18-9.

<sup>394</sup> *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p.41. Heydt-Stevenson argues that Lydia can be seen as 'fulfilling any number of roles: as the stereotype of the sexually voracious woman', for example, or 'as the cipher of her mother's view that a woman signifies nothing without a husband'. But '[b]y any eighteenth or nineteenth-century standards, Lydia transgresses the rules' and thus 'embod[ies] the earlier model of the young woman encouraged to be sexual in order to win a husband' (*Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions*, pp.95-6).

an example of how '[t]he passions of men' enable superficially educated women to 'avail themselves of the power which they attain with the least exertion'<sup>395</sup>—that is, the power of sex appeal. As a couple, Lydia and Wickham seem designed to provoke an understanding of marital happiness through a consideration of what that state is *not*—by showing an instance of marriage at its miserable low. The reductionism of their marriage is particularly apparent when considered in Peircean terms.

Like her mother, Lydia makes no pretense as to what she is about. Her aims in life are primitive and largely oriented to gratifying vanity. At the home of the Lucases, she and Kitty 'eagerly' dance with 'two or three officers' while Darcy and Sir William look on. The latter loftily remarks that he considers dancing to be 'one of the first refinements of polished societies'. Darcy, indirectly commenting on *this* particular group of dancers, replies that it is 'also... in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world', for '[e]very savage can dance' (pp.27-8). Taken as a comment on Lydia's behavior, his observation echoes the narrator's description of her as a girl of 'high animal spirits'—'well-grown' for fifteen—with 'easy manners' to attract 'the attention of the officers' (pp.49-50).<sup>396</sup> Clearly, Lydia is a young woman of warm feeling (Category 11), but only that sort of feeling which arises from being an object of male attention. She walks with Kitty the mile to Meryton 'three or four times a week' to learn news about the regiment from her Aunt Phillips, to shop for hats and other coquettish frills, and to find opportunities to flirt with the officers. In this pursuit, Lydia is not susceptible to teaching or restraint. Whereas Kitty is 'disconcerted' when their father suggests they temper their unrestrained flirting, Lydia reacts 'with perfect indifference' and continues to openly 'express her admiration' of her current favorite officer and 'her hope of seeing him in the course of the day' (pp.31-2). Her intemperance, and the self-preoccupation that enables it, are initially given only small indicators. For example, when Jane and Elizabeth meet

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<sup>395</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, ch.4, par.12.

<sup>396</sup> Here, 'well-grown' may suggest voluptuousness, and 'easy manners' lack of inhibition.

her and Kitty at the roadside inn on their return trips from London and Hunsford, respectively, they find that Lydia has ordered for them a meal of ‘such cold meat as an inn larder usually affords’, with the intent to ‘treat you all’—except that Lydia has already spent all her own money, and so Jane and Elizabeth are obliged to pay for the meal. Lydia shares the news with her sisters that Mary King ‘is gone down to her uncle at Liverpool... to stay’. She comments that Wickham ‘never cared three straws about her. Who *could* about such a nasty little freckled thing?’ (pp.242-4). She asks Jane and Elizabeth about their trips:

Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. Jane will be quite an old maid soon, I declare. She is almost three and twenty! Lord, how ashamed I should be of not being married before three and twenty! My aunt Phillips wants you so to get husbands, you can't think. She says Lizzy had better have taken Mr. Collins; but I do not think there would have been any fun in it. Lord! how I should like to be married before any of you; and then I would chaperon you about to all the balls. (p.244)

Not only is it evident that her aim is to ‘get a husband’ in the quickest and easiest way possible, it is clear that she also wishes to place herself ‘before’ all her sisters. Her thoughts revolve entirely around herself, to the point that, as the narrator reports, she ‘seldom listen[s] to any body for more than half a minute’ (p.246). Her competitive and jaded self-comparisons with other young ladies who are in the market for husbands (including her sisters), and her slighting remarks about them, are opposite (an Indexical Sinsign) to the charitable and fair thinking that are at the heart of relationship virtue (Category 13). The coarseness of her mind is particularly marked (as with many of Austen’s unfavorable characters) by her frequent use of God’s name as an expletive.<sup>397</sup> In this, Austen suggests a connection between

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<sup>397</sup> For Austen and other devout Christians of the time, such a practice was considered a clear breach of the third of the Ten Commandments: ‘Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain’ (Exodus 20:7, KJV). Lydia’s indiscretion in this regard groups her with other vulgar and morally

thoughtlessness about God (or lack of religious *faith*) and greed and self-centered thinking. Greed, like *hope*, has to do with the mind's focus on a desired object; both qualities are motivators to action. From a Christian viewpoint, however, greed is a counterfeit of hope, since the realization of its object generally fails to deliver the anticipated happiness, or at least so the case of Lydia and Wickham (and of Lady Susan) might suggest.<sup>398</sup> In Lydia's crass and insensitive treatment of Jane, Elizabeth, and Mary King, Austen also suggests a downward progression from irreverence and greed (as counterfeits of *faith* and *hope*) to extravagance, jaded criticism, and inconsiderate behavior (which reflect deficits, respectively, in *temperance*, *justice*, and *charity*). Therefore, not only is Lydia, in these early scenes, a pure Indexical

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degenerate characters such as John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*. Although opinions of critics differ about Austen's religious devotion, I agree with White's assessment: 'That the issue is so undecided follows... from modern ideas about religion [being] anachronistically applied to Austen'. Like '[m]ost Anglicans' of her day, Austen 'had every reason to trust in the truth claims of Christianity'; her 'religious commitments can be, as Bruce Stovel has said, "powerful in her life and not difficult to trace in her novels, but quiet, untheoretical, and rarely openly expresses"'; see *Jane Austen's Anglicanism* (London: Routledge, 2016), p.7, citing Bruce Stovel, "'The Sentient Target of Death": Jane Austen's Prayers', in *Jane Austen's Business: Her World and Her Profession*, ed. by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel (Houndmills and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp.192-205 (p.201).

<sup>398</sup> This is not to say, of course, that Austen considered the pursuit of material security evil in itself; her exploration, expressed through Elizabeth's questions to Mrs. Gardiner, of the line of demarcation between 'the mercenary and the prudent motive', between 'discretion' and 'avarice' (p.173), is clearly an important theme of the narrative. Critics such as Poovey and Johnson suggest that Austen, through characters like Lydia, affirms established notions about the rewards of virtuous conduct and the consequences of 'selfish' behavior partly as a stealth effort to depict the desperate female grasping that is engendered by patriarchal society (Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, pp.174,203; and Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, pp.76-7). Be this as it may, one can also plausibly argue that the female exigencies of Austen's time merely created an especially ripe opportunity for her to dramatize women's struggle to practice Christian virtue, as well as the opportunity to finely delineate competing virtues such as charity and prudence, and to explore the distinctions between closely related feelings such as hope and greed, affection and vanity, love and lust.



Sinsign of these foundational relationship virtues (Category 13), she is also a lesson in the killing effect of their counterfeits upon *natural affection* for one's fellows (Category 11), perverting that feeling into the sensation merely of being the center of the attention of others.

In later episodes, Austen continues to highlight Lydia's self-love (Category 11) and lack of virtue (Category 13) while also showing the flimsiness of her personal compatibility with Wickham (Category 12), of her actual interactions with him (Category 22), of her compliance with marital law (Category 33), and of her fulfillment of female gender roles (Category 23). For example, there appear to be no indicators of any personal suitability between her and Wickham beyond the fact that she is a woman and he a man. In the note that she leaves for Mrs. Forster the morning of her elopement, Lydia claims that 'there is but one man in the world I love, and he is an angel', but only a few sentences later she asks her friend to give her regrets to an officer 'Pratt' for breaking her 'engagement' to dance with him that night, and to assure him that she will 'dance with him at the next ball we meet, with great pleasure' (p.321). Indeed, Elizabeth 'had never perceived, while the regiment was in Hertfordshire, that Lydia had any partiality for [Wickham]'; rather, 'Lydia had wanted only encouragement to attach herself to any body': her 'affections had been continually fluctuating'—her 'favourite' being '[s]ometimes one officer, sometimes another... as their attentions raised them in her opinion' (pp.308-9). As with Lady Susan, Lydia's 'affection' is tied more to a man's ability to keep her at the center of his attention than to any trait of his character or person per se, unless perhaps it be a handsome appearance. The narrative gives no conversations or other instances of direct interaction between Lydia and Wickham (as it does for the Gardiners, for example) from which we might perceive them to be compatible. Both are without financial resources, so even 'pragmatic' considerations of marital compatibility do not obtain. Elizabeth's rumination on the couple's unsuitability to marry helps her to realize how much of mutually-improving substance her own relationship with Darcy has, whereas Lydia and Wickham's must be a 'union of a different tendency': she wonders 'how little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only

brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue' (pp.344-5). Without virtues or mental faculties to improve one another, or character strengths to balance each other's weaknesses, or even resources to meet their own material needs, the couple's mutual appeal seems to be sexual only, although in Lydia's case there is also the circumstantial appeal of Wickham's enabling her to be the first of the sisters to marry. This is a very thin basis of compatibility (Category 12).<sup>399</sup>

With regard to gender roles (Category 23), moreover, Lydia fulfills only the most ludicrous culturally-assigned function of women in the period—namely, that of being a complete and useless dependent of her husband. Once she gets Wickham to elope with her, she considers her female duty entirely discharged—all other responsibility, including that of planning the wedding ceremony itself, is left to Wickham and the men. From this point on, Lydia perceives her sole duty to be to enjoy her increased status as a married woman. On her return to Longbourn immediately after the wedding, she 'turn[s] from sister to sister, demanding their congratulations', and, 'with anxious parade', takes the place at 'her mother's right hand', declaring, 'Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman' (pp.348,350). She certainly does not try to assume the period's sentimental stereotype of a modest and discrete wife.<sup>400</sup> Rather, on the occasion, her sisters note that 'Lydia was Lydia still; untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless' (p.348). As to the more serious female duty to uphold her husband's character (as Mrs. Vernon does, for example), even supposing Lydia were sufficiently cognizant of the kind of character that is worth upholding, she is too careless to be entrusted with his confidences, as evidenced by her failure to keep secret for more than a few days

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<sup>399</sup> Notably omitted from the narrative are any references to amiable sociality, intellectual interplay, or mutual service between the pair—a contrast with the narratives about Jane and Bingley, the Gardiners, and Elizabeth and Darcy.

<sup>400</sup> Her running after regimental officers, however, might fit other stereotypes for the Napoleonic War period, as outlined by Tim Fulford in 'Sighing for a Soldier: Jane Austen and Military Pride and Prejudice', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 57.2 (September 2002), 153-178.

Darcy's part in their marriage settlement, though she had 'promised... so faithfully' not to divulge it (p.353). The casualness of her sense of duty to her husband, uncle, father, and future brother-in-law (Category 23) in this case finds a corollary in her superficial sense of the meaning and value of marital law generally (Category 33). That legal marriage has real value, she is never in doubt; her note to Mrs. Forster that she is bound for Gretna Green with Wickham indicates, as Elizabeth notes after reading the letter, that 'at least... *she* was serious' about marriage as 'the object of their journey' (p.322).<sup>401</sup> However, to her mind, the value of legal marriage does not include its being a sanction of sexual relations between a couple: when she discovers that marriage 'had never been [Wickham's] design' in running off with her, she is content that 'they should be married some time or other, and it did not much signify' whether it was before or after they had physical relations (p.357). Thus, with respect to principles and duties of committed love that require any kind of *self-restraint*, which underlie marital law, Lydia has little interest, whereas she is alive to the personal privileges that accrue to compliance with the letter of such law.<sup>402</sup> In the one category of marital love that is completely unconstrained—that of love feeling (11)—Lydia enjoys only self-love. In all the other Peircean categories of marital love, which involve successively more constraint, she manifests an 'ungovernable... temper' (p.428). For example, in considering who is compatible to be her marriage partner (Category 12), she does not limit her choice based on any personal considerations beyond a man's looks and availability; this is a reduction of the Austenian ideal for personal compatibility. Her interactions with Wickham (Category 22) include sexual relations but otherwise manifest no effort to engage in

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<sup>401</sup> Gretna Green being the first town over the border into Scotland, where marriage laws did not require parental permission for one as young as Lydia.

<sup>402</sup> Her lack of interest in self-restraint is reflected in her 'perfect indifference' to her father's attempt to check her flirting (p.32), and in her reaction to Mrs. Gardiner's teachings about the 'wickedness of what she had done' by living with Wickham illegitimately: Mrs. Gardiner reports that, 'If she heard me, it was by good luck, for I'm sure she did not listen' (p.359).

mannerly conversation, thoughtful counseling, or active service to him (or at least the narrative mentions no such interactions). Her practice of personal virtue (Category 13) is similarly crippled by a focus on self, reducing faith to irreverence, hope to greed, charity to inconsideration, temperance to extravagance, justice to jaded criticism, prudence to carelessness, and fidelity to mental fickleness. She enters into legal marriage (Category 33) to enjoy its prestige but not as a thoughtful and public commitment to a lifelong, exclusive relationship with a man; this is a reduction of marital law. Finally, her lack of self-discipline has made her unprepared to assume any serious responsibilities as a wife and mother (Category 23)—she is ill-equipped to act as a confidant or counselor to her husband or as a competent guide for their future children. She is able only to assume the inane role of a completely dependent wife. Besides being a reduction of what Austen considered the genuine duty of women to be, Lydia's character may also be a parody by Austen on over-sentimentalized female debility; if so, Lydia's image is, however, more singular (Sinsign) than stereotypical (Legisign), since it is loud and crass rather than discreet and delicate. Thus, in every major aspect of marital love as framed by the universal Peircean categories, Lydia is a provoking alter-image (Indexical Sinsign) of my proposed Austenian ideals.

Whereas Lydia makes little effort to hide her vain and primitive aims (she is, at least, basically forthright in this regard, as is her mother), Wickham uses every artful means at his disposal to conceal his selfish intentions and to appear to be a virtuous and respectable man. Introduced by the narrator as having a 'most gentlemanlike appearance', he has 'all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address'. Like Lady Susan, his outward beauty is combined with 'a happy readiness of conversation' that is 'perfectly correct and unassuming'. His appearance in Meryton catches 'the attention of every lady' (including Elizabeth), all of whom are 'struck with the stranger's air' (pp.80-1). Words like 'appearance', 'figure', and 'air' suggest an artful form but emptiness of substance. Elizabeth thinks him 'beyond' the other officers 'in person, countenance, air, and walk', but she has no facts by which to determine his character beyond the 'skill' with which he

converses with her at the Phillips's. On this scant basis, Elizabeth feels her 'admiration' of him is not in 'the smallest degree... unreasonable' (p.85). The irony of attaching 'reasonableness' to such a shallow admiration is apparent just as it is when Reginald defends Lady Susan to his father. As Wickham sits at cards with Elizabeth and speaks of Meryton society 'with gentle but very intelligible gallantry',<sup>403</sup> he suavely misrepresents the history of Darcy's dealings with him, attempting to build his own reputation by pulling down another's. After relating Darcy's supposed injustice in denying him a promised church living, Wickham asserts that, nonetheless, '[t]ill I can forget his father, I can never... expose *him*'—a sentiment for which Elizabeth silently 'honour[s] him' and thinks him 'handsomer than ever' (pp.88-9). McMaster notes that Elizabeth ought to see through these claims because they 'announce themselves as false': by making them, Wickham performs 'the very act [that] he says he never will do'.<sup>404</sup> In Austen's fiction, a character who lifts himself up by pulling down another person's reputation is always marked as unfavorable, since such behavior is not only likely deceptive but also uncharitable and unjust (and, accordingly, Indexical to the virtues of honesty, charity, and justice). When Elizabeth expresses surprise to Wickham that a friend as 'truly amiable' as Bingley could not 'know what Mr Darcy is', Wickham adds hypocrisy to duplicity by asserting that Darcy 'can be a conversible companion if he thinks it worth his while' (p.92), thus accusing Darcy of the precise act of pretentiousness that *he* is committing at that moment. His ability to create convincing impressions comes from 'deploying his verbal powers' and, 'as Lady Susan does', using 'his good looks and plausible manner to reinforce false claims'.<sup>405</sup> The next day, when Jane reasons with Elizabeth privately on the improbability of

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<sup>403</sup> Here, 'gallantry' is a signal word from Austen. As Hinnant notes, 'the passions generated by amatory gallantry' in her stories 'are likely to be either transient or blind or, even worse, merely simulated' ('Romance and the Courtship Plot', p.306).

<sup>404</sup> 'Talking about Talk', p.87.

<sup>405</sup> McMaster, 'Talking about Talk', p.87.

Wickham's claims, Elizabeth cannot believe 'that [he] should invent such a history... as he gave me last night; names, facts, every thing mentioned without ceremony'; and '[b]esides, there was truth in his looks' (p.96). Like William Elliot (*P*, p.175) and Lady Susan (*LM*, pp.3-5), Wickham has perfected the art not only of sounding right (Elizabeth later calls his manner 'captivating softness' [p.202]) but also of *looking* right.<sup>406</sup> His art succeeds with Elizabeth for a time. 'Till [she] entered the drawing-room at Netherfield [for the ball] and looked in vain for Mr. Wickham..., a doubt of his being present had never occurred to her' (p.100). This is the first instance in which Elizabeth finds Wickham's behavior to contradict his words (he had asserted that Darcy would have to stay away if he wished to avoid seeing him, not vice versa), and consequently she is surprised. But his words and manners to this point have been calculated to charm her away from any serious consideration of facts. It is evident that he succeeds in this endeavor at least until Elizabeth begins to counsel with her Aunt Gardiner about him. Wickham's early relations with Elizabeth parallel those of Lady Susan with Reginald. Through the Susan-Reginald and Wickham-Elizabeth pairs, Austen warns us of the power of 'immediate influence' to discourage objective contemplation and to enable deception. In other words, strong first impressions can blind a person, and one must learn to balance such affects against substantive facts, and to allow the operation of time to prove a suitor's real character and intentions (as Elizabeth promises Mrs. Gardiner to do in the case). For Wickham, then, these early scenes create an image of a man who has the *potential* for personal compatibility (Category 12) and happy social interactions (Category 22) with a witty and intelligent woman like Elizabeth (for whom his manners and skill at conversation are particularly attractive), but *not* with a coarse and mentally unrefined woman like Lydia. The Lydia-Wickham couple, therefore, remains a reductionist image (Indexical Sinsign) of those two facets of marital love. At the

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<sup>406</sup> Here, just as Austen teaches us to 'profoundly distrust' mere words (Thomsen, 'Words "Half-Dethroned"', pp.95-6), she also warns that we ought to distrust mere looks.

same time, Wickham's talks with Elizabeth about Darcy are presented as possible instances of dishonest, unjust, and uncharitable behavior, which would in such case be Indexical Sinsigns of relationship virtue (Category 13), whether or not Elizabeth recognizes them as such. Finally, Wickham's history, like Lydia's, shows a lack of preparation to assume any serious gender-based responsibilities: he has not yet acquired the resources or means to provide for a wife and children; this raises the question (alluded to by Mrs. Gardiner) as to what he has been doing with his time and professional opportunities the last several years. With respect, therefore, to what Austen likely considered to be the substantive duties of men (Category 23), Wickham's image in the early scenes is one of possible *neglect* (an Indexical Sinsign) rather than of proactive fulfillment like the images of Mr. Gardiner and Darcy.

The later scenes confirm Wickham's shirking of male gender duties (Category 23) and his lack of virtue (Category 13); they also have implications for his stance toward marital law (Category 33) and the quality of his feelings for his wife (Category 11). His sudden 'desertion' of Elizabeth in favor of Miss King, when he learns that the latter has received an inheritance, indicates that his feelings for Elizabeth, whatever their character and source, are not equal to his desire for money, which Elizabeth believes to arise from his 'distressed circumstances' (pp.173-4). Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, however, provides facts about Wickham indicating that the reverse is true: his distressed circumstances have arisen from his lust for money, his 'idleness and dissipation', and his lack of discipline in developing a profession (p.223).<sup>407</sup> Rather

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<sup>407</sup> In his letter, Darcy reports that Wickham had at first considered a profession as a clergyman to obtain the 'valuable family living' offered by Darcy's father, but he had grown impatient while waiting for the vacancy. He therefore had 'resolved against taking orders' and had sought 'some more immediate pecuniary advantage' from Darcy in lieu of the church living. Professing an 'intention... of studying the law', he had obtained from Darcy the lump sum of 'three thousand pounds' to support himself in that pursuit. Three years later when the church vacancy arose, he had returned to Darcy in financial distress again, and had reapplied for the church living, having 'found the law a most unprofitable study' (pp.223-4).

than proactively preparing himself to meet the demands of the male duty to provide materially for a wife and children (Category 23), Wickham has sought for quick and easy money without much work or effort on his part—in this, his image is one of sloth and irresponsibility, or an Indexical Sinsign of the discharge of male duty.<sup>408</sup> Furthermore, his ‘hope of revenging himself’ on Darcy (for denying him the church living) by eloping with Georgiana and obtaining her thirty-thousand-pound dowry convinces Darcy that ‘Mr. Wickham ought not’, whatever other profession he might pursue, ‘to be a clergyman’—his ‘vicious propensities’ and ‘want of principle’ make him especially unfit for that profession (222-5). Here, Wickham’s casual and irreverent approach to the office of a clergyman, like Lydia’s flippant use of the Lord’s name, could be seen as a lack of religious *faith*; his greed for Georgiana’s dowry as a counterfeit of *hope*; his jealousy toward Darcy as a lack of *charity*; his vengefulness as a counterfeit of *justice*; his ‘idleness and dissipation’ as a want of *temperance*. Even more so than in Lydia’s case, his poverty in these relationship virtues (Category 13) seems to have had a destructive effect on his natural feelings for his fellows (Category 11)—Darcy in particular—leaving only malice where there might have been affection. As Darcy’s history with Wickham begins to settle into Elizabeth’s mind, she reacts with ‘[a]stonishment, apprehension, and even horror’, remarking the ‘alarming... affinity’ of the account ‘to [Wickham’s] own history of himself’; she perceives that ‘gross duplicity’ must inhere in Wickham’s story if Darcy’s account is true (pp.226-7).<sup>409</sup> Her continued reflections lend only ‘farther

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<sup>408</sup> ‘Men are always praised for utility in Austen’s novels’, observes Ruderman. Lives of ‘idle pleasure’ such as Wickham’s are contrasted with those of ‘industrious manage[ment]’ like Darcy’s (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.61).

<sup>409</sup> As mentioned earlier, Peirce notes that genuine Secondness phenomena (which include Indexical Sinsigns) often involve surprise, shock, and a sense of ‘double consciousness’ (*CP*, I, 324). Elizabeth’s revulsion at the ‘gross duplicity’ of Wickham’s story is a classic example of the effects of a genuine Index upon the mind. Such shock, furthermore, can give way to horror when one perceives an amiable appearance to mask an ugly reality. Through characters such as Wickham and Lady Susan,



justification' to the truth of Darcy's account. When she reviews Wickham's previous conversations with her in this light, she suddenly is 'struck with the impropriety of such communications to a stranger'; she sees 'the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done', recalling that 'he had told his story to no one but herself' while Darcy was staying in the neighborhood, 'but... after [his] removal, it had been every where discussed' (pp.229-30). Here, Wickham's gossip signals his lack of integrity (justice) and charity—an Indexical Sinsign, again, of these foundational relationship virtues (Category 13).<sup>410</sup> After he elopes with Lydia, he is reported by Colonel Forster also to have been 'imprudent and extravagant' during his time with the regiment, having 'left Meryton greatly in debt', and having 'left gaming debts behind him... [of] more than a thousand pounds... at Brighton' (pp.320,328). These facts not only create an image of Wickham that is Indexical to the virtues of *temperance* and *prudence* (Category 13), they also illustrate how greed and intemperance undermine a man's ability to succeed at a profession and accordingly to meet the demands of the responsibility to provide for a wife and children (Category 23). Finally, the narrative of Wickham's elopement and subsequent marriage to Lydia indicate the reduced condition of his value for affection (Category 11) and legality (Category 33) in marriage. In contrast with Bingley's thoughtful and open approach to courting Jane, Wickham's designs on Lydia are intentionally concealed; rather than learning of them gently and warmly through personal communication, the news of his absconding with her is obtruded on the family at midnight by an express from Colonel Forster. A second letter from the Colonel adds

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Austen consistently exposes 'sins of pretentiousness' in human nature (so-called by Shields), and in so doing puts us on guard against these tendencies in others and in ourselves (*Jane Austen: A Life*, p.33).

<sup>410</sup> Austen's sense of the importance of integrity in relationships, and of avoiding gossip, was also grounded in biblical teachings. 'Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee', Christ teaches, 'go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone' (Matthew 18:15, KJV). Saint Paul reproaches those who 'learn to be... not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking of things which they ought not' (1 Timothy 5:13, KJV).

the information that Wickham told a comrade that he ‘never intended to go [to Gretna Green], or to marry Lydia at all’ (p.303)—a fact that Darcy later confirms with Wickham. After the couple is married and Elizabeth observes their manner of interacting, she concludes that ‘their elopement had been brought on by the strength of [Lydia’s] love, rather than by his’; that ‘his flight was rendered necessary’ only ‘by distress of circumstances’; and that ‘he chose to elope with her at all’ only because ‘he was not the young man to resist an opportunity of having a companion’ whenever he could (p.351). Here, Elizabeth reasons out Wickham’s motives and priorities in eloping with Lydia: firstly, he wished to escape the consequences of his irresponsible behavior in the locality (a motive that shows his lack of *justice* and *industry*); and secondly, he saw the chance to gratify sexual lust—a desire that may be considered a counterfeit of genuine conjugal *love*, inasmuch as it considers one’s own needs and feelings above those of a partner, and is fundamentally a desire to *take* rather than to *give*. A third motive—greed—arises only accidentally when Mr. Gardiner and Darcy offer him a financial settlement to marry Lydia. As noted, greed can be considered a counterfeit of *hope*, but in this case it is also a reductionism of *prudence* in matrimonial affairs. Genuine prudence (to Austen) might be the wisdom to enter into marriage only when one has the means ‘to be supported in tolerable independence’, as Elizabeth characterizes it (p.344). Wickham is astute enough to see that marriage with Lydia is the means to obtain support for several years of living,<sup>411</sup> but he has not put any personal effort into working to obtain the financial resources to marry. Therefore, not only is his image in this instance a reductionism of prudence and of male duty (Categories 13 and 23), it is an even deeper reductionism of legal marriage (Category 33) than that of which Lydia is guilty. While Lydia values the institution for its status and prestige, and is willing to give herself to the first man who can grant her that status (with whom she will believe herself in

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<sup>411</sup> Mr. Bennet alludes to Wickham’s astuteness in this regard when he quips, ‘Wickham’s a fool, if he takes her [for] a farthing less than ten thousand pounds’ (p.335).

love), Wickham values legal marriage only for its poundage, for which he will wed a girl for whom he knows and admits that he has no affection. Neither sees legal marriage as a necessary sanction of sexual relations, but at least Lydia believes her feelings for her partner to be love (Category 11, though she mistakes vanity for love), while Wickham knows quite well that he does not care for Lydia. To him, she 'might have sufficient charms' (as Elizabeth wretchedly considers when she first learns of their elopement) 'for such an attachment as... an elopement, without the intention of marriage' (p.308), but nothing more; Lydia has some sex appeal to Wickham but no long-term character appeal. Thus, the couple's feelings for one another (Category 11), rather than fulfilling the Austenian ideal of genuine affection, might be characterized in Lydia's case as the primitive and fleeting sensation of *providing* an object of sexual attention, and in Wickham's case of *consuming* such an object. Clearly, Wickham does not see marriage with Lydia as a voluntary and binding vow before family, friends, and God of lifelong love and commitment to a chosen and preferred partner; rather, his decision to legitimize the relationship with her is made only under duress and in exchange for a sufficiently large sum of money. This approach to marriage is antithetical (an Indexical Sinsign) to the Austenian moral imperative of legal marriage as the prerequisite to physical relations (Category 33).

In summary, Lydia and Wickham's relationship is severely starved in every substantive aspect of marital love as framed by the Peircean categories. There are physical desire and consummation (Category 22), and *ex post facto* legality (Category 33), but there is very little genuine love (Category 11): that feeling is replaced with the self-interested counterfeits of vanity and lust. Long-term commitment and other virtues that might bolster the relationship (Category 13), such as faith in God and in each other, charitable thinking, temperance, and prudence, are replaced with counterfeits like jealousy, greed, extravagance, and dissipation. Neither party is serious about, or prepared to assume, any weighty gender-based duties that might arise from a physical union (Category 23), such as nurturing, teaching, and providing for the material needs of children. Even in the area of personal compatibility (Category 12), though each party seems to find the other physically attractive

enough, there is nothing to suggest that either perceives any intrinsically *personal* attributes as being appealing about the other; there are only *circumstantial* allurements—for Lydia the chance to be the first sister married, and for Wickham the opportunity to obtain a financial settlement. In pondering the match, Elizabeth ‘could easily conjecture’ that ‘little of permanent happiness could belong to [such] a couple’ (pp.344-5)—a sentiment that likely reflects Austen’s value judgment. To an extent, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet present a time-elapsed picture of the fruits of such a shallow relationship, although the Bennets’ marriage is helped by more commitment, thoughtfulness, and lawfulness on the husband’s side. As a result, the Bennets’ marriage is relatable enough to be humorous (though still clearly unfavorable), whereas the marriage of Lydia and Wickham is hopelessly bad; neither couple’s image is wholly favorable like that of the Gardiners. Considered as a group, the Sinsign representations of marriage in *Pride and Prejudice* are more balanced, nuanced, and realistic than those in *Lady Susan*, depicting a gradation of actual marital affairs that includes not only the miserably bad (Lydia and Wickham) but also the comical ‘gray areas’ (the Bennets) and the admirably wholesome relationship (the Gardiners).<sup>412</sup> This increased level of semiotic balance, I would argue, reflects a maturation in Austen’s novelistic art.

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<sup>412</sup> It is interesting that the three active examples (Sinsigns) of marital affairs in the novel progress from the strongly oppositional (Lydia and Wickham) to the comically oppositional (the Bennets) to the positively exemplary (the Gardiners)—a progression that is predicted by Peirce for a Secondness-type sign, which is ‘a genus characterized by Reaction’. Such a genus ‘will by the determination of its essential character split into two species, one a species where secondness is strong, the other a species where the secondness is weak, and the strong species will subdivide into two that will be similarly related, without corresponding subdivision of the weak species’ (CP, 5, 69). In the story, the Sinsigns split into the oppositional couples (Category 22, the Wickhams and Bennets) and a favorable couple (Category 12, the Gardiners); the oppositional couples again split into the strongly oppositional (Category 222, the Wickhams) and the weakly oppositional (Category 122, the Bennets), while there is no corresponding split in the favorable couple (Category 112, the Gardiners).

## THE COLLINSES AND DE BOURGHS

The marriage of Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas plays a significant part in the narrative, as do the associated affairs of Lady Catherine de Bourgh. Although the latter is already widowed when the story begins, she and her sickly daughter have symbolic importance for marriage. As characters, the de Bourghs and Collinses seem calculated to represent marital *convention and tradition* more than to give individual instances of marital affairs that are significant in their own right; they are thus better classed as Legisign representation than as Sinsigns.<sup>413</sup> As mentioned, the dominant cultural norms of Austen's day emphasize the 'public' aspects of the marriage relationship (the alliance between families, the furthering of family fortunes, and the authority and role of parents in settlements), although 'private' aspects were on the rise in actual practice.<sup>414</sup> Fay suggests that Lady Catherine's actions, especially with respect to 'her plans for her daughter and Darcy', dramatize the 'ineffectual' efforts of parents to wield the traditional authority to 'impos[e] their will on their dependants' and 'to marry [them] off... according to their own financial designs'.<sup>415</sup> Johnson notes that Lady Catherine's efforts, in particular, attempt to conflate 'the interests of great families' and 'the imperatives of morality'.<sup>416</sup> When Mr. Collins sets out at Lady Catherine's instruction to get a wife, he conceives of the task merely as performing a series of conventional speech acts; 'he performs each', McMaster notes, 'as though it were an exercise in rhetoric', showing 'a developed sense of form and precedent', with 'a strong (if misguided) sense of the different modes of verbal structures and of their conventions'.<sup>417</sup> His compliance with the conventions

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<sup>413</sup> As Peirce says, Legisigns work through Sinsigns that are *replicas of a known type*, as opposed to being singular instances that each have a peculiar significance (CP, II, 246).

<sup>414</sup> Julia Prewitt Brown, 'Private and Public in *Persuasion*', p.169.

<sup>415</sup> *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, pp.43-4.

<sup>416</sup> *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.86.

<sup>417</sup> 'Talking about Talk', p.85.

of gallantry while acting on motives of self-aggrandizement is perhaps not remarkable; it creates for him an image that we might generally class with that of Lady Catherine as symbolic of the period's more traditional marital values. However, when Charlotte, the 'sensible, intelligent... intimate friend' of Elizabeth (p.19), voluntarily sacrifices her feelings to marry him so that she may obtain an 'establishment', the image of the new couple produces a sort of mental *recoil* that moves it into the reactionally degenerate (Indexical) species of Legisigns.<sup>418</sup>

In the early episodes, Austen develops the very different nature of Charlotte and Mr. Collins's personalities. As Elizabeth's intimate friend, Charlotte is presented as socially and intellectually similar to her. Their early conversation about Jane's feelings for Bingley is an example of amiable, perceptive, and thought-provoking discourse on the nature of romantic love. Charlotte observes that, besides pure affection,

[t]here is so much of gratitude or vanity in almost every attachment, that it is not safe to leave any to itself. We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough; but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better show *more* affection than she feels. (p.24)

Charlotte's wisdom about affection needing some 'encouragement' is borne out in the relationship of Jane and Bingley and in that of Elizabeth and Darcy. Charlotte's

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<sup>418</sup> Moe captures the Indexical aspect of the couple's image when she remarks that the 'tension between circumstance and principle' in Charlotte's decision 'is *bluntly* posed by Austen' ('Multiple Modernities', p.1096, my italics). Newman suggests that Austen's characterization of the oppositions inherent in Charlotte's choice are designed to highlight the plight of women as much as the unnatural or unsuitable aspect of the marriage ('Can This Marriage Be Saved', pp.700-703). Fraiman sees the contradictions of Charlotte's choice as an illustration of her (and Elizabeth's) entrapment in the economics of patriarchal property inheritance; she feels that Austen portrays the match merely as economically 'prudent' (*Unbecoming Women*, pp.85-6). I will argue that Austen also uses the instance to suggest a deeper sense of what 'prudence' in matrimonial affairs means.

observation, too, that in real life affection is often alloyed with gratitude or vanity is manifest in several instances, including Elizabeth's gratitude for Darcy's actions on Lydia's behalf, Lydia's vanity over the attention of the officers, and Miss Bingley's repeated attempts to worm her way into Darcy's heart by appealing to his vanity. Good or bad, Charlotte sees that such things happen; they are facts (Secondness) that represent a means (Thirdness) for a woman to stir amatory feelings (Firstness) in men, fleeting though some such feelings may be. Elizabeth believes in a more ideal and lasting kind of affection—one in which a woman clearly knows 'the degree of her own regard' for her suitor, having taken the time and trouble to really 'understand his character' (as she asserts Jane is trying to do with Bingley). Arguing the other side of the question, Charlotte asserts that no matter how 'well known to each other or... similar before-hand' a couple may believe themselves to be, they will prove 'sufficiently unlike afterwards to have their share of vexation', and so 'it is better to know as little as possible' beforehand 'of the defects of the person with whom you are to pass your life'. Here again Charlotte is being realistic and resigned, but Elizabeth's laughing reply that such thinking 'is not sound' suggests that she believes her friend to be taking realism and resignation too far (pp.24-5). Whereas *prudence* in matrimonial affairs does require a woman to be realistic, it does not dispense with the need to carefully consider her suitor's character; nor does *honesty* justify a woman's facing reality so harshly that she opts to 'show *more* affection than she feels'. *Hope*, likewise, may require some resignation to present difficulties, but it does not sacrifice the sought-for ideal; and *charity* may require a woman to bear with some weaknesses in her husband but it does not require her to marry a man whose faults she is personally unsuited to improve or deal with. Thus, in this scene, Charlotte's courtship principles (Category 13) seem weaker than Elizabeth's, but her natural intellect, manners, and wit are comparable,<sup>419</sup> making the two compatible as

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<sup>419</sup> As Johanna Smith discusses in 'The Oppositional Reader and *Pride and Prejudice*', pp.37-8.

friends (Category 12) and able to engage in constructive and stimulating conversation (Category 22).

Mr. Collins, on the other hand, is physically repulsive, socially awkward, and mentally crude. Introduced as 'a tall, heavy looking young man' (a typical pejorative of Austen's) with a 'grave and stately' air and 'very formal' manners (p.72), his appearance at Longbourn is preceded by Mr. Bennet's announcement to his family that 'Mr. Collins, ...when I am dead, may turn you all out of this house as soon as he pleases' (p.68). In his own introductory letter, Mr. Collins alludes to 'the circumstance of my being next in the entail' and tries to impress the family with his importance by imparting the information that 'the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh... has preferred me to the valuable rectory of [her] parish' (p.70). This 'early and unexpected prosperity' of his, and an upbringing 'under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father', the narrator relates, have combined to foster in Mr. Collins 'a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his rights as a rector', and to make him 'altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility' (p.78). His indelicacy and mental deficiency contrast sharply with Charlotte's sensitive and refined intellect; his growing self-importance and enjoyment of social leverage contrast with her humility and resignation to her relatively powerless social position. The reader's awareness of these contrasts, however, is initially delayed through Austen's early narrative focus on Mr. Collins's dealings with the Bennet family, which begin thus:

He had not been long seated before he complimented Mrs. Bennet on having so fine a family of daughters, said he had heard much of their beauty, but that, in this instance, fame had fallen short of the truth; and added, that he did not doubt her seeing them all in due time well disposed of in marriage. (p.72)

This address mingles obviously studied phrases of gallantry and courtship with the crass sentiment, spoken in the presence of the girls, that they are goods to be 'disposed of' on the marriage market. His ensuing conversation continues to mix conventional courtly cliché with uncouth expressions: 'I am very sensible, madam, of



the hardship to my fair cousins [of the entail], ... [b]ut I can assure the young ladies that I come prepared to admire them' (p.72); of Lady Catherine, 'he had never in his life witnessed... such affability and condescension' in 'a person of rank'—she even 'had been graciously pleased to approve' his first two sermons (p.74);<sup>420</sup> and with regard to the 'indifferent state' of Miss de Bourgh's health, he observes that it 'unhappily prevents her being in town; and by that means... has deprived the British court of its brightest ornament' (p.75). When asked by Mr. Bennet to read to the girls after tea, Mr. Collins disdains to read the proffered novel and opts instead for Fordyce's sermons, which he begins to read 'with very monotonous solemnity'; he stops reading, however, when an interruption from Lydia affords him the excuse to pursue a game of backgammon with Mr. Bennet—an activity more suited to his nature (pp.76-7). For, as Austen hints, Mr. Collins is no man of letters or intelligence.<sup>421</sup> His actions are driven by the desire for patronage from the wealthy, whose traditions are his blind guide. Having received, for example, the dictate from Lady Catherine to marry, and considering himself 'excessively generous and disinterested' in planning to marry one of the Bennet girls to make 'amends... for inheriting their father's estate', he first selects Jane as his candidate—her 'lovely face' and position as the eldest agree with 'his strictest notions of what [is] due to seniority'. On learning from Mrs. Bennet that Jane is nearly engaged to someone else, Elizabeth quickly 'succeed[s]' Jane as his choice, she being 'equally next to Jane in birth and beauty'. This change of mind occurs in a moment, 'done while Mrs.

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<sup>420</sup> This circumstance suggests that Mr. Collins subscribes to the idea, mentioned by Johnson in connection with Lady Catherine, that wealth and pedigree somehow automatically invest a person with moral authority.

<sup>421</sup> Having a 'weak head', Mr. Collins 'had merely kept the necessary terms' at 'one of the universities' (p.78); he is 'better fitted for a walker than a reader' (p.80); and he loses 'every point' in the whist game that he plays at the Phillips's house (p.92). These subtle hints again signal the mental disparity between him and Charlotte, though as mentioned the reader is not given reason to mentally pair the two until a later scene.

Bennet was stirring the fire' (pp.78-9)—an indication that it has little to do with any feelings for either young lady personally (Category 11) and more to do with such matters as outward appearance, family hierarchy, and so forth (Category 33). On entering the Phillips's house and considering its 'size and furniture', he declares that 'he might almost have supposed himself in the small summer breakfast parlour at Rosings' (p.84). His desire here to create a self-vaunting comparison is evident, even if only through his association with a 'person of rank'. This kind of pride is clearly a counterfeit of the virtues of humility and justice, and is a deterrent to the formation of authentic relationships (Category 13). His behavior at the ball provides further instances that might be said to violate Austenian ideals for these basic virtues.<sup>422</sup> Mr. Collins reflects the traditional view that the rules and ceremonies of conduct prescribed and codified by men, clergy, and those of high rank are surer guides to 'what is right' in a situation than the presumably uneducated thoughts of any woman.<sup>423</sup> Besides again illustrating Mr. Collins's pride (or lack of humility, Category

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<sup>422</sup> He repeatedly brings up his own 'preferment' by Lady Catherine to people whom he does not even know. During the pianoforte playing, he inserts a speech about his pious duties as a clergyman, speaking 'so loud as to be heard by half the room', and concluding his speech 'with a bow to Mr. Darcy' (p.113). Earlier in the evening, he sidles up to Darcy with an obsequious personal introduction (citing again his connection with Lady Catherine), ignoring Elizabeth's advice not to do so. He dismisses Elizabeth's advice on the grounds that such matters are not 'within the scope of your understanding', there being 'a wide difference between the established forms of ceremony amongst the laity, and those which regulate the clergy'—the latter office being, in his estimation, 'equal in point of dignity with the highest rank in the kingdom'. He asserts that, in this instance, 'I consider myself more fitted by education and habitual study to decide on what is right than a young lady like yourself' (p.109). Here, Mr. Collins's judgment is seen actually to be 'blind adherence to a dictate of society' (to use Ruderman's phrase), whereas Elizabeth displays the type of 'prudence [which] requires discerning for oneself' (Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.62).

<sup>423</sup> Jane Nardin suggests that Austen's novels express 'her growing sense of the tension' between 'morality and propriety' in her society, the latter being rigidly prescribed by rules of conduct but the former 'tak[ing] precedence over propriety' in her own estimation; see 'Propriety versus Morality in Jane Austen's Novels', *Persuasions* 10 (Jane Austen Society of North America, 1988), 70-5 (par.6).

13), his dealings with Elizabeth also are strongly oppositional to the Austenian ideal of a man and a woman counseling together on equal rational grounds (Category 22), and of the woman, in particular, playing a role in regulating morality within the family (Category 23). Austen knows that readers will see Mr. Collins's decision to introduce himself to Darcy here as the product of his desire for social climbing more than a genuine sense of duty toward, or friendly interest in, another human being.

Mr. Collins's marriage proposal to Elizabeth dramatizes the disparity that may exist between a purely codified approach to marriage and one that is genuinely felt. 'Having resolved to do it without loss of time', the narrator relates, Mr. Collins 'set about' his proposal 'in a very orderly manner, with all the observances which he supposed a regular part of the business' (p.117). First, he must profess an ardent love: 'Almost as soon as I entered the house', he tells Elizabeth, 'I singled you out as the companion of my future life'. Before he is 'run away with' by his 'feelings on this subject', however, he pauses to state his reasons for marrying, which notably include nothing personal about Elizabeth: they are, 'first, ...to set the example of matrimony in [my] parish'; second, to 'add very greatly to my happiness'; third, to heed Lady Catherine's recent injunction that he 'must marry'; and last, to satisfy his conscience about displacing the Bennet women from their home on the death of Mr. Bennet by 'chus[ing] a wife from among his daughters'. Having thus clarified that his motives in fact have nothing to do with Elizabeth personally, he resumes his avowal of ardent love by declaring that 'nothing remains... but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection'. Here, he interjects that he knows quite well 'that one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents... is all that you may ever be entitled to' as a dowry. When Elizabeth declines 'the honour' of his 'proposals', he continues his address 'with a formal wave of the hand', stating that he well knows 'that sometimes [a] refusal' in such cases 'is repeated a second or even a third time' by young ladies 'to the man whom they secretly mean to accept'. He believes that her refusal is 'merely words of course', for he cannot conceive how his 'hand is unworthy' of her, or how 'the establishment' he offers 'would be any other than highly desirable' to a young lady like her. Given his 'situation in life' and his

‘connections with the family of De Bourgh’, he ‘must... conclude’ that she is ‘not serious’ in her ‘rejection’ but is merely desirous ‘of increasing my love by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females’. In repeating her refusal multiple times, Elizabeth states emphatically that her ‘feelings in every respect forbid’ her marrying him, and she begs him to take this expression not ‘as an elegant female intending to plague you’ but as the words of ‘a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart’. He remains, nonetheless, ‘persuaded that when sanctioned by the express authority’ of her ‘excellent parents’, his ‘proposals will not fail of being acceptable’ (pp.118-22). Elizabeth finally withdraws without speaking, seeing that words have become fruitless.<sup>424</sup> This exchange makes it clear that, for Mr. Collins, marriage need not involve any real affection or personal esteem (Category 11); it is simply an arrangement for the material and social benefit of the two parties. Austen suggests, through this scene, that while a man may meet the codified letter of marital law (Category 33) in the shallow and self-seeking manner of Mr. Collins without receiving any great social censure, and some women may agree to such purely ‘pragmatic’ unions in order to obtain material security, the practice is neither ideal nor likely to realize a full measure of marital happiness. Elizabeth’s firm refusal of Mr. Collins disrupts his codified notions and exposes the crudeness of his aims and sentiments (and of men in general who do likewise). Unfortunately, unlike Darcy, Mr. Collins does not allow Elizabeth’s refusal to become instructive or corrective for him; rather, he harbors resentment over her decision. Nonetheless, only ‘his pride’ and not his heart is ‘hurt’, for in fact, as the narrator notes, ‘[h]is regard for her was quite imaginary’ (pp.125-6). Thus, in this scene, Mr. Collins’s image is Indexical not only of the humility and integrity (Category 13) that enable a man to receive personal correction, but also of genuine human warmth and affection (Category 11),

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<sup>424</sup> The circumstance reflects McMaster’s observation that, for Mr. Collins, such interchanges are ‘simply part of that separate world of words where he is quite used to residing, a world where words... have been divested of most of their obligation of expressing meaning’ (‘Talking about Talk’, p.86).

since resentment here is a clear opposition to amiable feeling, and affectation of love as practiced here is an empty substitute for genuine affection.

If Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth, and her refusal, highlight the disparity between a purely codified approach to marriage and one that is genuinely felt, his proposal to, and acceptance by, Charlotte give a striking instance of the sobering realities attendant to an over-codified observance of the relationship. Mr. Collins's proposal to Charlotte is clearly crafted to take readers by surprise, so that the image of the couple rushes into the mind with Indexical force. After mentioning the chance presence at Longbourn of Charlotte during the awkward aftermath of Elizabeth's refusal of Mr. Collins, and her utility in occupying Mr. Collins in conversation that day, the narrator relates that 'Charlotte's kindness' to Elizabeth 'extended farther than Elizabeth had any conception of;—its object was nothing less, than to secure her from any return of Mr. Collins's addresses, by engaging them towards herself'. Charlotte's efforts prove so successful that, by early the next morning, she is met with 'so much love and eloquence' from Mr. Collins that 'every thing [is] settled between them to the satisfaction of both' parties after just a few minutes of private parley in the lane. When Mr. Collins makes his proposal, the narrator wryly notes that Charlotte does not 'trifle with his happiness' by leading him on as an elegant female might do, because '[t]he stupidity with which he was favoured by nature' prevents her from desiring any 'continuance' of the 'charm' of his addresses longer than is necessary (pp.136-7). Despite her personal aversion to him, Charlotte is 'tolerably composed' about her choice when she reflects on it shortly afterward; she knows that Mr. Collins is 'neither sensible nor agreeable', and she considers his 'society... irksome', but she does not think 'highly either of men or of matrimony' in general. Nonetheless, she knows marriage to be 'the only honourable provision' and the 'pleasantest preservative from want' for a 'well-educated' woman 'of small fortune' like herself, and 'at the age of twenty-seven' she feels 'all the good luck' of

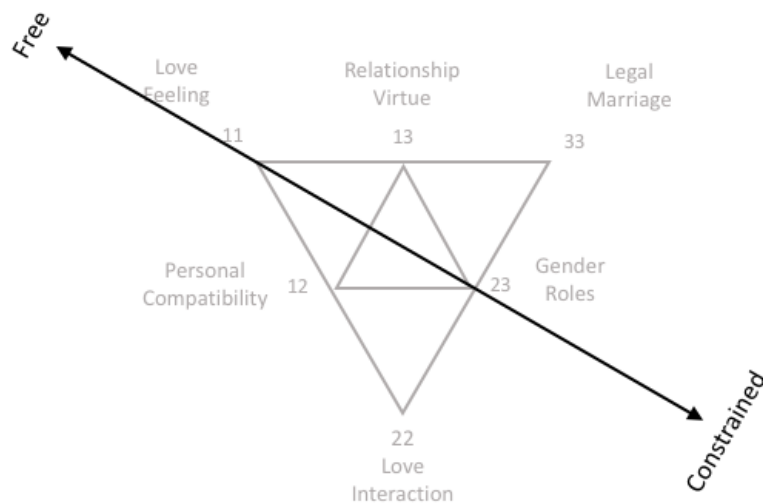
securing him.<sup>425</sup> She also knows that Elizabeth, ‘whose friendship she value[s] beyond that of any other person’, will see her marriage as ‘a most humiliating picture’ (to quote Elizabeth’s thoughts as later expressed by the narrator) and as a sacrifice of ‘every better feeling to worldly advantage’ (pp.137-8,141). Charlotte’s feelings about the stupidity, insensibility, and irksomeness of her groom-to-be contrast strongly with the Austenian ideal for honest affection and esteem in marriage (Category 11). Whatever esteem she might have for him is highly encumbered by personal interest in an ‘establishment’, and thus her feelings are anything but the *free-flowing* kind that are classified as Firstness in a Peircean analysis of marital love.<sup>426</sup> Furthermore, whatever establishment she gains clearly will be *confining*, since she will constantly need to suppress her true feelings and present the face of a proper and dutiful wife to Mr. Collins, to Lady Catherine, and to their social circle.<sup>427</sup> Thus, by entering into a marriage without natural feeling, Charlotte tips the balance of the *free* and *constrained* elements of her relationship decidedly toward the latter:

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<sup>425</sup> His odiousness notwithstanding, Mr. Collins is a ‘solvent young man’, and, as Van Ghent observes, such were in high demand among poorly-dowered young ladies (‘On *Pride and Prejudice*’, p.296).

<sup>426</sup> As Peirce says, Firstness ‘is predominant in the ideas of freshness, life, *freedom*’, where ‘[t]he free is that which has not another behind it, determining its actions’ (*CP*, I, 302, italics added).

<sup>427</sup> When we consider that she may also feel obligated to give her body in sexual relations to Mr. Collins, the image of Charlotte’s marriage fulfills the Romantic ‘imprisonment’ motif described by Auerbach, which involves ‘intensely complex combinations of pleasure and pain, fulfillment and frustration’ (*Romantic Imprisonment*, p.5).



Her relationship will be dominated by the three elements on the constrained end of the balance—the gender duties (Category 23) assumed in being Mr. Collins’s lawfully wedded wife (Category 33), which will include interacting with him socially and sexually on some level (Category 22), and possibly bearing and raising his children (Category 23). However, because she feels no natural affection for him (Category 11), and because his mind and manners are quite different from hers (Category 12), the long-term success of their union may depend largely on their personal virtues (Category 13). From the scenes considered so far, these virtues seem to include a basic commitment to *fidelity* on both sides, *hope* on Charlotte’s side for ‘tolerable’ peace and contentment (a manifestly lower hope for the married state than that held by Jane and Elizabeth), *hope* on Mr. Collins’s side for social advancement (a motivating principle arguably closer to *greed* and *vanity* than to hope), a reduced *prudence* on both sides that favors economic advantage over less tangible values, a rigid *justice* on his side that holds to the letter of social law rather than to the spirit of human equality, and a partial *honesty* on her side that faces reality sincerely but disassembles her personal feelings. Thus, the initial picture of relationship virtue for the couple is stilted, and all three of the ‘freer’ aspects of marital love (affection, personal compatibility, and relationship virtue) are relatively weak.

The later scenes involving Charlotte and Mr. Collins continue to illustrate the disparity in character between the pair while hinting at how Charlotte plans to secure 'tolerable' contentment in her highly constrained situation. Because she is 'not romantic' and 'never was', she believes that she needs 'only a comfortable home' to have 'a chance of happiness with him' (pp.140-1).<sup>428</sup> However, in the words of her parting conversation with Elizabeth the day before her wedding, there is a touch of foreboding:

"I shall depend on hearing from you very often, Eliza."

"*That* you certainly shall."

"And I have another favour to ask you. Will you come and see me?"

"We shall often meet, I hope, in Hertfordshire."

"I am not likely to leave Kent for some time. Promise me, therefore, to come to Hunsford."

Elizabeth could not refuse, though she foresaw little pleasure in the visit.

"My father and Maria are to come to me in March," added Charlotte, "and I hope you will consent to be of the party. Indeed, Eliza, you will be as welcome to me as either of them." (p.165)

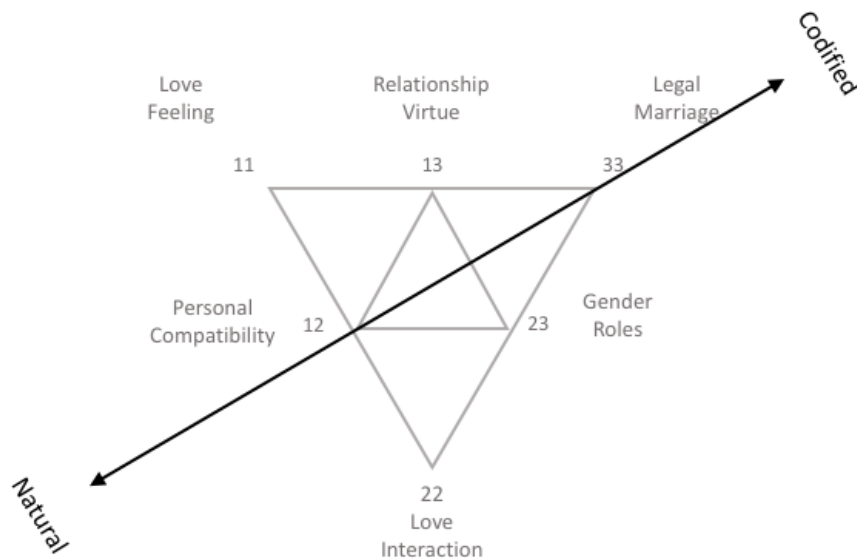
Charlotte knows that she will soon belong to Mr. Collins and will be confined to his society on a day-to-day basis. She foresees loneliness and the need for sensitive, like-minded company. Because her husband is not suited to meet these personal needs, she looks to correspondence and visits from Elizabeth to compensate. One might argue that she senses the impending lack of the *natural* dimension of her

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<sup>428</sup> Ruderman argues that the view of many modern critics 'that some people are interested in marriage, while others are made for something else' is not what Austen is suggesting by this and similar episodes; rather, characters like Charlotte are contrasted with others like Elizabeth who marry more favorably to underscore the idea that '[h]umans seem naturally inclined to couple with each other' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.12-3). This argument is developed further below.



marriage—the amiable feelings (Category 11), compatibility of mind and manners (Category 12), and stimulating sociality and activity (Category 22) that are part of a healthy relationship like that of the Gardiners.<sup>429</sup> These natural elements are needed to counterbalance the codified elements of marriage, the two of which exist in delicate balance and tension, as illustrated previously:



When Elizabeth does visit Charlotte at Hunsford, she sees that her friend's anxiety was prescient. When Elizabeth and her party arrive, Mr. Collins receives them with 'formal civility... at the gate', takes them into the parsonage, welcomes them 'a second time, with ostentatious formality to his humble abode', shows them his garden, describes it 'with a minuteness which left beauty entirely behind' (numbering all 'the fields' and the 'trees' in every 'distant clump'), and declares that 'the prospect of Rosings' from the garden exceeds all the other virtues of the place (pp.176-7). Here in nature, Mr. Collins is seen to be most *unnatural*: his eye perceives none of the *qualities* of nature's beauty but only its *quantities* and the

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<sup>429</sup> Here, it is suggested that Charlotte's marriage will lack 'the happiness of Austen's couples [who] find true companionship with each other, friendship that includes both good talk and the doing of favors for each other' (Ruderman, *The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.121).

man-made 'modern building' that constitutes Rosings Park. As for the parsonage house, which is Charlotte's domain, it is 'rather small' (confining) but has been 'fitted up' by her 'and arranged with a neatness and consistency' that provides 'a great air of comfort', if only Mr. Collins's presence can be 'forgotten'; and Elizabeth sees 'by Charlotte's evident enjoyment' of the house that 'he must be often forgotten'.<sup>430</sup> Indeed, Charlotte 'own[s]' to Elizabeth that she 'encourage[s]' her husband to go out and work in the garden 'as much as possible' (pp.177-8). Part of Charlotte's plan, evidently, is to minimize direct interaction with her husband (Category 22), and to keep to her distinct female role and sphere of activity (Category 23). For Mr. Collins, this may be very acceptable, since he has married only for status and social appearances; and for Charlotte, it may be necessary for her present peace of mind, but it does not do anything to satisfy her deeper social and emotional needs. Her strategy is similar in some ways to Mr. Bennet's social withdrawal from his wife, and to Mr. Vernon's avoidance of uncomfortable social responsibilities—a less-than-optimal approach that does not live up to the Austenian ideal of a companionate relationship like that of the Gardiners. Still, it is representative of traditional marital structure for the times, and so Charlotte and Mr. Collins's image as a whole fits well into the Indexical Legisign category.

When Mr. Collins is 'displaying' to Elizabeth and the party of visitors 'the good proportion' of one of the parsonage rooms, including 'its aspect and its furniture', Elizabeth senses that 'he addressed himself particularly to her, as if wishing to make her feel what she had lost in refusing him' (p.177). His lingering resentment over her rejection has more indicators than just this one instance. When Elizabeth takes her leave of Hunsford at the end of the visit, Mr. Collins suggests that she 'carry a very

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<sup>430</sup> Berglund notes that Charlotte wants Mr. Collins's parsonage not only for its comforts and situation but also for the 'occupation' it provides—the 'domestic duties [that] she obviously delights in'; but Austen's omission of further information on Charlotte's future happiness, Berglund argues, raises the 'implicit question of whether [housekeeping duties] will keep a woman happy in the long run' ('Woman's Whole Existence', p.160).

favourable report' of his and Charlotte's situation back 'to Hertfordshire', since Elizabeth has been 'a daily witness' of 'Lady Catherine's great attentions to Mrs. Collins'; he touts that 'it does not appear that your friend [Charlotte] has drawn an unfortunate—but on this point it will be as well to be silent' (p.239). Later, when Mr. Collins learns of Lydia's elopement, he writes immediately to Mr. Bennet to 'condole' with the family, calling the event a 'distress... of the bitterest kind'—one 'which no time can remove'—and rubs as much salt into the wound as possible:

Howsoever that may be, you are grievously to be pitied, in which opinion I am not only joined by Mrs. Collins, but likewise by Lady Catherine and her daughter, to whom I have related the affair. They agree with me in apprehending that this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who, as lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family. And this consideration leads me moreover to reflect with augmented satisfaction on a certain event of last November, for had it been otherwise, I must have been involved in all your sorrow and disgrace. Let me advise you then, my dear Sir, to... throw off your unworthy child from your affection for ever, and leave her to reap the fruits of her own heinous offense. (pp.327-8)

Here are malice and gossip instead of *charity*, spite rather than *forgiveness*, pride instead of *humility*, jealousy rather than familial *affection*, and self-righteousness rather than fair *judgment*. All of these characteristics make Mr. Collins an alter-image of humane feeling and virtue (Categories 11 and 13). His lack of Christian virtue, along with his faulty sense of morality, are elaborated further when he writes to Mr. Bennet to dissuade him from consenting to Darcy's proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. 'This young gentleman is blessed', he writes with evident jealousy and covetousness, 'with every thing the heart of mortal can most desire,—splendid property, noble kindred, and extensive patronage'; and so, he offensively asserts, 'of course, you will be inclined to take immediate advantage' of Darcy's offer. But he wishes to warn Mr. Bennet, Elizabeth, 'and her noble admirer' that Lady Catherine will not 'consent to... so disgraceful a match', and so the pair will be entering into 'a marriage which has not been properly sanctioned' (pp.402-3). He assumes, as he did when proposing to Elizabeth, that in this case neither Mr. Bennet nor Darcy could be

motivated by anything but the kind of social aggrandizement that motivates his own choices. In the letter, he also expresses, with reference to Lydia and Wickham, his 'notion of christian forgiveness'; namely, 'You ought certainly to forgive them as a christian, but never to admit them in your sight, or allow their names to be mentioned in your hearing' (p.403). In short, Mr. Collins is blind to the meanness of his own human feelings (Category 11) and to the hollowness of the social codifications that govern his conduct (Categories 13, 23, and 33).

Charlotte is not so blind, however. On the 'not unseldom' occasions when her husband's behavior makes her 'ashamed', Elizabeth 'discern[s] a faint blush' on her face (p.177). Mullan notes that Charlotte's blushes show that she 'remains the clear-eyed person that ever she was' about his character, though she 'must keep her true thoughts about her husband to herself'.<sup>431</sup> Still, after watching Charlotte interact with her husband for a day, and after 'meditat[ing] upon Charlotte's degree of contentment', Elizabeth is impressed with her friend's 'address in guiding, and composure in bearing with her husband', and has 'to acknowledge that it was all done very well' (p.179). Because of Charlotte's unromantic nature, perhaps she sees her own marriage as 'a tolerable constraint within which her flourishing does not have to be seriously curtailed', as Moe suggests.<sup>432</sup> As a pragmatist, Charlotte sees her happiness as relying more on her own choices than on those of her husband or his prestigious benefactress<sup>433</sup>—a point of view that gives Elizabeth pause, and perhaps recalls Jane's advice that she make more 'allowance' for Charlotte's 'difference of... temper' when judging her (p.153). While Mr. Collins's behavior does not show great promise for improvement, the slow and steady effects of Charlotte's exercise of principled agency (Category 22), including her choice 'wisely not [to] hear' most of his crudities (p.177), are here suggested to have long-term value and

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<sup>431</sup> *What Matters in Jane Austen?*, locs.4221-4.

<sup>432</sup> 'Multiple Modernities', p.1091.

<sup>433</sup> She sees, as Newman puts it, 'that power is in self-mastery, internal not external' ('Can This Marriage Be Saved?', p.323).

to exemplify patience and charity (Category 13); they are a step higher than Mr. Bennet's neglectful and sarcastic approach to dealing with his wife's faults,<sup>434</sup> and are not without instructive value for Elizabeth when she later considers how, as Darcy's wife, she will deal with his faults. Thus, as an individual character, Charlotte is a mix of mostly admirable qualities with some overly pragmatic principles.<sup>435</sup> Her good points, however, only heighten our sense of Mr. Collins's inequality with her. The Indexicality of the couple's image prompts a reconsideration of the period's more traditional codifications and gender-based roles for marriage (making the image, again, an Indexical Legisign overall), and suggests that the codified elements of marriage have only limited meaning in the absence of the natural and free elements, although even in a very constrained marriage such as Charlotte's, a person may, through wise exercise of agency, achieve 'tolerable' contentment.

While Mr. Collins is a blind follower of prescribed marital traditions, Lady Catherine embodies those elements of society that would reduce marital law (Category 33), gender roles (Category 23), and rules of propriety (Category 13) to mere forms and traditions that serve 'the interests of great families'.<sup>436</sup> Nardin suggests that such characters illustrate the widening gap in an 'increasingly materialistic society' between a rigid 'code of propriety' advanced by the upper

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<sup>434</sup> Duckworth suggests that although Mr. Bennet is 'more witty and attractive than Charlotte' overall, he 'is a less than responsible character in his refusal to play a part'. Charlotte at least takes up a useful homemaker role, whereas 'Mr. Bennet... refuses to adopt the role of father and landowner', opting instead to be a mere 'spectator'. 'His chosen freedom from social commitment' makes his the more 'serious faults in... character' (*The Improvement of the Estate*, p.128).

<sup>435</sup> Dabundo points out that 'Charlotte... acts in accordance with her own wishes to devise and then implement her own marital strategy. Elizabeth may not approve of Charlotte's choice, but Charlotte has considered her circumstances, especially her age', and from her perspective 'this marriage represents an estimable improvement over lifelong spinsterhood' ('Five Styles of Women's Roles', p.42).

<sup>436</sup> Johnson, *Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.86.

ranks and ‘the sort of... conduct Christian morals would dictate’.<sup>437</sup> Austen makes this gap obvious in the character of Lady Catherine and of her daughter. When the group from Hunsford Cottage dines at Rosings, for example, Lady Catherine talks ‘without any intermission’, ‘delivering her opinion on every subject’ in ‘authoritative’ tones that mark her ‘self-importance’, while the rest of the party (including the ‘pale and sickly’ Miss de Bourgh<sup>438</sup>) sit in quiet submission (pp.183-5). She is shocked, however, when Elizabeth answers her questions frankly, ‘giv[ing] [her] opinion decidedly’ in one case against a rigidly prescribed age for the admittance of young ladies into society, and in another case refusing to make ‘a direct answer’ about her age (p.187). When Elizabeth’s party prepares to return home, Lady Catherine assesses their arrangements for the chaperoning of Maria and Elizabeth—a point of propriety about which she claims to be ‘excessively attentive’. The example she cites in support of this attentiveness is, ironically, her sending of ‘two men servants’ with Georgiana to Ramsgate the previous summer (p.235)—the situation in which Georgiana was nearly seduced by Wickham. Thus, while Lady Catherine is assertive and involved in the discharge of her motherly role (Category 23), unlike Mrs. Gardiner she has little lasting influence with her young charges, since they do not perceive her actions to be motivated by genuine personal concern.<sup>439</sup> Instead, she seems to be driven by a lust for dominance and control in all matters. Thus, in this

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<sup>437</sup> ‘Propriety versus Morality’, par.20.

<sup>438</sup> Here, Austen attributes to Miss de Bourgh one obviously negative aspect of the over-codified notions of propriety embraced by the genteel class—namely, that of female frailty. Upon first spying Miss de Bourgh from a window in the parsonage, Elizabeth thinks she ‘looks sickly and cross’ and so will make ‘a very proper wife’ for Darcy; but Miss de Bourgh is proud and ‘abominably rude’ to stay in her carriage while Charlotte stands ‘out of doors in all this wind’ to visit with her (p.180). Fraiman suggests that Miss de Bourgh can be seen as a general symbol of ‘a decline in aristocratic welfare’ — an ‘enfeeblement of his own class that encourages Darcy to look below him for a wife with greater stamina’ (*Unbecoming Women*, p.75).

<sup>439</sup> Gilbert and Gubar suggest that Lady Catherine’s ‘authoritative management’ of young ladies ‘cannot be identified with nurturing love’ (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.125).

scene we find her giving directions to the young ladies not only about proper chaperoning but also about 'the best method of packing' and about 'the necessity of placing gowns in the only right way' in their trunks (p.237). Her tendency to want to dictate every choice, large or small, contrasts with the gentler approach of Mrs. Gardiner, who counsels with Elizabeth about moral matters but lets go of lesser matters. Thus, Lady Catherine's image with respect to the fulfillment of motherly duty (Category 23) is one of adherence to correct established forms (Legisign) but not of demonstrative (Qualisign) or substantive (Sinsign) maternal warmth and concern.

Lady Catherine's approach to duty also differs from that of Mrs. Gardiner in its conception of human relationships: the former sees them as hierarchical, with one party in a superior position and the other in an inferior one; while the latter sees them as bi-lateral, with both parties offering value based on their common humanity. In this respect, Lady Catherine is like Lady Susan, who enjoys only a sense of superiority, and is unlike Bingley, Jane, and the Gardiners, who believe in the inherent value of all people. Whereas the modest, just, and charitable thinking (Category 13) of the latter characters enables them to engage in mutually improving interaction with others (Category 22), the proud, unjust, and uncharitable thinking of Lady Catherine removes the improving effect of relationship virtue from her affairs. For example, when she visits Elizabeth at Longbourn to try to stop her from receiving Darcy's attentions, her behavior is 'more than unusually ungracious': she 'throw[s] open' the front door of the house, enters and seats herself without acknowledging anyone, comments on their 'very small park' and 'most inconvenient sitting room', asks Elizabeth to walk outside with her, and opens the doors to inspect the size and condition of various rooms as she is leaving the house (pp.389-91). The initial effect of this uncourteous behavior is that Elizabeth resolves 'to make no effort for conversation with [the] woman', and so it is evident that Lady Catherine has undermined the purpose of her visit from the start. Once she and Elizabeth are outside, she informs the latter that she has heard the rumor, which 'must be a scandalous falsehood', that Darcy means to marry Elizabeth; but she will 'not injure

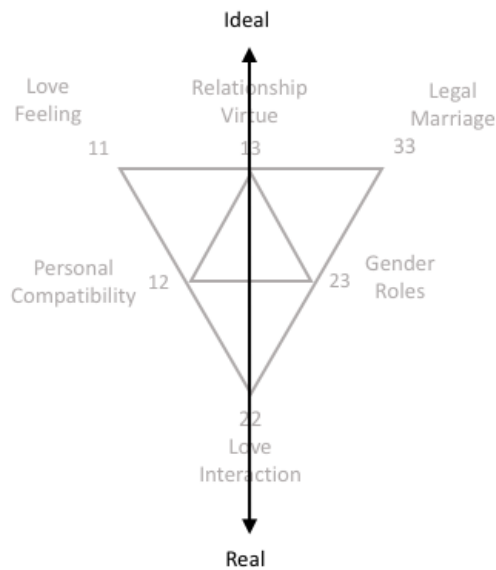
him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible'. These cutting remarks, and her insolent accusation that the rumor has 'been industriously circulated by' the Bennet family, increase Elizabeth's 'disdain' for the woman and prompt her to refuse a direct answer when Lady Catherine 'insist[s]' on knowing whether 'there is [any] *foundation*' to the reports. Lady Catherine's further accusation that '*your* arts and allurements... have made [Darcy] forget what he owes to himself and to all his family' indicates that she believes the uppermost concern of a gentleman in marrying ought to be the aggrandizement of his family. She asserts that Darcy and her daughter 'have been intended for each other' from 'their infancy' by both families: the two mothers 'planned the union' early in their lives. It thus is not 'to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family'; if Elizabeth has 'the presumption to aspire' to marrying Darcy, she is 'lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy' (pp.391-3). Indeed, she asserts, 'honour, decorum, prudence' and 'the claims of duty... and gratitude' all 'forbid' Elizabeth's marrying him (pp.394,397). However, Elizabeth refutes 'so wholly unreasonable' an idea that the will and interests of the de Bourgh family equate with the claims of duty (Category 23) and of virtue (Category 13); indeed, she maintains that '[n]o principle of either, would be violated by my marriage with Mr. Darcy' (pp.395,397). Seeing that her appeals to blind obligation to the wealthy fail with Elizabeth, Lady Catherine warns her that she 'will be censured, slighted, and despised, by every one connected with him' if she marries Darcy—a situation that she thinks Elizabeth will recognize as not being in her best 'interest' (p.394). Here, however, she deals in the currency of her own life and not in that of Elizabeth's; like Mr. Collins, she fails to understand that not everyone cares so much about rank and prestige as she does. Elizabeth's reply that 'it would not give me one moment's concern' ought to disrupt her false notions about class pride, but instead she doubles down and vows that, 'depend upon it I will carry my point' (p.397). Her determination to enforce her will over Elizabeth's is reminiscent of the avowals of Lady Susan and Mrs. Bennet to impose their wills on their daughters with respect to marriage. Just as in those cases, however, the self-interested *fortitude* of Lady



Catherine is implied by the story's outcome to be weaker than the outward-focused *faith* and *courage* (Category 13) of Elizabeth and Darcy.<sup>440</sup> Thus, while the image of Lady Catherine and her daughter is generally representative of the landed gentry's traditional marital practices (emphasizing hierarchical power and the role of parents in financial settlements), and accordingly is a Symbolic Legisign, when it is considered next to the image of Elizabeth and Darcy, the limitations of rigidly following traditional marital practices are suggested. When the Indexical Legisign image of Charlotte and Mr. Collins is also considered, the images of the three couples provoke a reconsideration of the importance of personal feeling (Category 11) and preference (Category 12) in matrimonial affairs, of adjusting the rules of propriety to better align with purely moral principles (Category 13), of applying gender-based roles flexibly based on the inclinations of individuals (Category 23), and of deemphasizing matters of property and finance in legal marriage (Category 33). Not only should the codified elements of marriage be balanced with the natural elements, and the constrained with the free, but pragmatic factors (the tangibly *real*) also ought to be balanced with intangible values and principles (the *ideal*):

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<sup>440</sup> 'Lady Catherine's seeming power over her relations', Fay suggests, 'is revealed as real impotence when Darcy makes Elizabeth his choice'; here, through Lady Catherine, Fay suggests, Austen is 'depicting ineffectual models of maternity' (*A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, pp.43-4).



Legal marriage, for example, should be more than just an agreement about the disposition of tangible assets such as property, estates, and dowries; it should also be an honest vow of commitment and fidelity. Likewise, love interaction ought to include not only sexual relations but also constructive social intercourse (which is a less tangible interaction); and love feeling ought to include not only the sense that one's partner (or his house) is physically attractive but also a sense of affection for his or her character (which is a less tangible thing). In Austen's development of the couples that we have considered so far, she suggests the desirability of balancing these tangible and intangible factors, or at least that so doing will be productive of healthier, longer-lasting, and more fulfilling marriage relationships.

### ELIZABETH AND DARCY

The tension between the real and the ideal, the codified and the natural, and the constrained and the free elements of marriage becomes especially apparent in the relationship of Elizabeth and Darcy, as does the importance of finding balance among these competing elements. In the character of Darcy, Gornall notes that Austen makes 'the conflict between' financial 'settlements' (the *real*) and 'romance' (the *ideal*) 'explicit', the 'two aspects of marriage' initially have 'an equal grip' on Darcy, so that he 'takes a long time to make up his mind' whether to propose to

Elizabeth 'but eventually comes down on the side of romance' when he chooses her.<sup>441</sup> Smith notes that several feminist critics see Elizabeth's story as an expression of the sense of inner struggle in Austen between realistic and idealistic forces:

For [Judith] Newton, the novel alternates between *realism* and a *fantasy quest* plot; for Poovey, the alternation is between *realistic social criticism* and a final '*aesthetic gratification*'; for Sarah Webster Goodwin, *realism* is joined to and undercut by the '*possibly-real*' of *feminist utopia*.<sup>442</sup>

According to Fay, the story suggests that a woman, in order to achieve a measure of the ideal and not simply to capitulate to pragmatic forces, must be 'properly active' like Elizabeth, not just 'self-possessed' and serenely 'passive' like Jane. In favoring proactivity, Austen expresses her ethic of energy generally but also suggests that passivity, as a 'stereotypically "feminine" ... characteristic often assigned to novel heroines', is an over-codification that needs some adjustment.<sup>443</sup> Tanner observes that Darcy is attracted to Elizabeth for her naturalness, which contrasts with the polished decorum of other young ladies like Miss Bingley: Elizabeth 'looks "almost wild" from the exertion' of walking to Netherfield to visit Jane; her 'vitality, vivacity

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<sup>441</sup> 'Marriage and Property', pp.50-1.

<sup>442</sup> 'The Oppositional Reader', p.29 (my italics). Judith Lowder Newton argues that 'no matter how much force [Elizabeth] is granted at the beginning of her story... ideology... as it governed literary form required that she should marry, and marriage meant relinquishment of power'; see *Women, Power, and Subversion: Social Strategies in British Fiction, 1778-1860* (London: Methuen, 1985), p.8. Poovey suggests: 'in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen substitutes aesthetic gratification... for the practical solutions that neither her society nor her art could provide' (*The Proper Lady*, p.207). Sarah Webster Goodwin argues that any feminist utopianism in Austen is only part of a fragile and undercut 'possibly real'; see 'Knowing Better: Feminism and Utopian Discourse in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Villette*, and "Babette's Feast"', in *Feminism, Utopia, and Narrative*, ed. by Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Goodwin (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), pp.1-20 (p.9).

<sup>443</sup> *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, pp.45-6. This idea harmonizes with Poovey's assertion that Austen favors 'energy' in her heroines, including, even, in the villainous Lady Susan (*The Proper Lady*, p.177).

and wit' add to her 'physical magnetism' for Darcy. Her 'liveliness' is the trait that 'Darcy is said to lack... and... is the main quality that Elizabeth will bring to the marriage'; without this personality element, Tanner maintains, 'society is merely dull'.<sup>444</sup> The 'well-timed sprightliness' and 'independence of character' of Elizabeth are just what is required to 'teach [Darcy] to know himself'<sup>445</sup>—that is, to see what is over-codified in his own life and to adjust it. Willis points out that Darcy overlooks deficiencies in Elizabeth's appearance and family status (codified elements) because he perceives in her eyes the power of 'harmonizing... feeling with judgment'—of balancing *codified* precepts with *natural* sentiment—while he ignores advantages in Miss Bingley's appearance and family status because of her lack of this balance.<sup>446</sup> The narrowness of Miss Bingley comes from *constraining* her behavior always to conform to correct appearances (as William Elliot does in *Persuasion*), even when doing so involves disassembling her feelings. This contrasts with Elizabeth's relatively *free* demonstrativeness, and so the free-versus-constrained opposition emerges in this character pair. Emsley notes that the story deals with the theme of balancing the virtues of justice and charity: the former is represented in Darcy's firm truth-telling and factual judgment-formation,<sup>447</sup> the latter in Elizabeth's generous affections and compassion for her siblings and friends. Underlying this justice-charity contrast in the couple are their particular individual character strengths: Darcy's integrity and self-control with respect to ethical conduct,<sup>448</sup> and Elizabeth's lively and free-flowing feelings—subtle manifestations of the free-versus-constrained opposition. Interestingly, Hinnant sees this opposition occurring in the reverse direction: Darcy feels a 'passion' for Elizabeth that initially 'gives without

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<sup>444</sup> *Jane Austen*, pp.122,134-5.

<sup>445</sup> Anonymous, 'Review of *Pride and Prejudice*', p.274.

<sup>446</sup> 'Eyes and the Imagery of Sight', p.157.

<sup>447</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, pp.11,13.

<sup>448</sup> As Butler puts it, 'Darcy, though stiff, is careful, scrupulous, [and] truthful' (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.216).

return, without recognition’—an unconditional passion ‘that cannot count on a full reciprocity, nor calculate an assured, immediate or full comprehension’.<sup>449</sup> This feeling wells up in him freely, in spite of his knowledge of her undesirable family connections. Elizabeth’s initial feelings for him, on the other hand, are constrained by the prejudice formed from her short-circuiting of just deliberation with respect to his character—a rashness that he senses when, at the ball, he wishes her ‘not to sketch my character at the present moment, as there is reason to fear that the performance would reflect no credit on either’ him or her (p.105). His feelings for her at that point are free and vulnerable, while hers for him are encumbered by misconception.<sup>450</sup>

Their obvious personality differences notwithstanding, McMaster argues that Darcy’s ‘ability to discuss other people’s language’ with Elizabeth (such as Bingley’s ‘indirect boast’ about his ‘quickness’), ‘and to use language himself with wit and measured deliberation, is one thing that marks Darcy out from the beginning as a man of intelligence, and a fit mate for Elizabeth’.<sup>451</sup> The mental and linguistic parity of the two enables them finally to ‘form a new amalgam’<sup>452</sup> from their considerably different talents and personalities; they fall in love on a ‘contrariety’ principle (as our anonymous 1813 reviewer expresses it<sup>453</sup>) that is representative of Austen’s special sense of how opposition of temper may exist and even be mutually beneficial in a

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<sup>449</sup> ‘Romance and the Courtship Plot’, p.305.

<sup>450</sup> Fraiman also sees Darcy on the free end of the relationship and Elizabeth on the constrained end, but in a very different way. As a man, Darcy is free to judge and act without concern for what others might think, whereas Elizabeth, as a woman, is ‘reliant on male admiration and marriage for [her] economic survival’ and so is insidiously pushed ‘into the vanity of other girls’ who must accommodate themselves to ‘the ideology of romance’ (*Unbecoming Women*, pp.72-3,84).

<sup>451</sup> ‘Talking about Talk’, p.82.

<sup>452</sup> McMaster, *Jane Austen on Love*, p.78.

<sup>453</sup> ‘Review of *Pride and Prejudice*’, p.272.

marriage. Roberts notes that the benefits of such differences extend to matters of social class:

As represented by Darcy, the aristocracy was not a closed caste, but open to infusions of life from below. Not only did he marry down in the social sense, but also related easily and successfully to people of different classes than his own [the Gardiners].<sup>454</sup>

Despite a general lack of vitality in the aristocracy, Roberts argues that Austen saw elements of its codifications that were worth preserving. Elizabeth ‘belonged to a family line that was running out’ and so was ‘capable of appreciating the tradition of Darcy’s family and helping to maintain it’. To her, ‘Darcy stood for permanence’, and to him, ‘Elizabeth represented an energy that could translate into improvement’; through ‘marriage, the two were synthesized’.<sup>455</sup> Because the couple is a *positive* and *active* fulfilment of Austenian marriage ideals, one could consider it an iconic sign of those ideals. However, since it is a fulfilment that is largely expressed within the framework of traditional marital structures and symbols for the period (including, notably, the Pemberley estate), it also falls under the general rubric of Legisigns.<sup>456</sup> In a ten-category semiotic system, their image would be a Rhematic

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<sup>454</sup> *Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, p.49.

<sup>455</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>456</sup> Roberts suggests that Austen valued tradition and believed in the importance of community and traditional roles; she wanted to preserve many of the proven values of the aristocracy while adapting other practices through a process of organic change (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, pp.42-59). Roberts’ view accords with Duckworth’s, which sees the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy as a ‘dynamic compromise between past and present, the simultaneous reception of what is valuable in an inheritance and the liberation of the originality, energy and spontaneity in the living moment’ (*The Improvement of the Estate*, p.142). Johnson sees Austen’s purpose in ‘consent[ing] to conservative myths’ about traditional marriage more subversively: Austen invokes them in the Elizabeth-Darcy couple ‘only in order to possess them and to ameliorate them from within, so that the institutions they vindicate can bring about, rather than inhibit, the expansion and the fulfillment of [female] happiness’ (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.93).

Indexical Legisign because it communicates in all three Peircean modes (qualitative, oppositional, and conventional—Category 123), but in our six-category semiotic system the image conflates to an Iconic Legisign due to its overall *positive portrayal* of Austenian ideals. Not only does the couple signify Austenian ideals in a well-balanced way in the Peircean *semiotic* sense, but the ideals signified by the couple also have balance and completeness in the Peircean *universal* sense, as a close examination of several events in the narrative suggests.

In the introductory episodes, for example, Austen develops Elizabeth and Darcy's personal compatibility (Category 12) tangentially, through their contrasts with Jane and Bingley, respectively. Darcy has a 'fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien', an income of 'ten thousand a year', and a 'large estate in Derbyshire', but he seems to consider himself 'above his company' at the Meryton assembly (pp.10-11). His public manner is neither natural, open, nor easy like Bingley's. However, of the two, Darcy is 'the superior' in 'understanding', which gives Bingley 'the highest opinion' of his 'judgement' and 'the firmest reliance' on his 'regard' (p.17). The strength of their friendship is clearly founded on very different but complimentary qualities—a fact that has implications beyond their own relationship. If, as Hudson argues, Austen believed 'conjugal love' to be 'patterned after fraternal love' and a good marriage after the 'ideal sibling relationship',<sup>457</sup> Darcy's steady friendship with Bingley indicates his *potential* to engage in a marriage relationship with a woman of distinct character from his own. As discussed, Elizabeth and Jane enjoy a similar relationship of closeness and trust despite having very different temperaments. Thus, although in the opening scenes Austen avoids any suggestion of a pairing between Darcy and Elizabeth (she instead highlights Elizabeth's reaction of disgust at Darcy's haughtiness), she hints that Darcy's manner and thinking may not be as incompatible with Elizabeth as the latter supposes. Jane learns early on from Miss Bingley that Darcy 'never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintance',

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<sup>457</sup> 'Sibling Love in *Pride and Prejudice*', pars.7,14.

with whom 'he is remarkably agreeable'. This suggests that his defects in manner do not necessarily extend to intimate relations. Charlotte, ever the realist, points out to Elizabeth that it is quite natural for 'so very fine a young man, with family, fortune, every thing in his favour', to have fallen into the habit of 'think[ing] highly of himself', since society generally allows that such have 'a *right* to be proud' (p.11). Through these hints, Austen leaves open the possibility that Darcy's pride is as much circumstantial as intentional; and while both his cold manner and his pride are obvious in public, neither need be supposed beyond the reach of improvement by the right woman.

Just as Darcy has the greater intellect and Bingley the more ductile temper, Elizabeth is described by the narrator as having 'more quickness of observation and less pliancy of temper' than Jane. Unlike her sister, Elizabeth sees both the virtues and faults of others; having observed Bingley's sisters carefully, she remarks to Jane that 'their manners are not equal to his', and privately concludes that the two are 'proud and conceited' (p.16). In her debate with Charlotte about the proper approach to courtship, she deems that Jane's acquaintance with Bingley of 'only a fortnight' is 'not... enough to make [Jane] understand his character' at the level required to 'be certain of... her own regard' for him or 'of its reasonableness' (pp.24-5). Here, Elizabeth shows her value for having a sense of esteem for a spouse's *character*—a less tangible attribute of a potential partner than those on which Charlotte is focused (income, property, and so forth). Hence, our earliest pictures of Elizabeth and Darcy, before they actually interact with one another, show them both to have strong mental faculties and to have formed and maintained durable and confiding relationships with siblings and friends of distinct temperaments. At the same time, it is evident that they have very different dispositions themselves—Darcy with a formal and reserved public manner, and Elizabeth with an open, playful one. Their differences in socio-economic standing are also plain. Although substantial, these differences are not insurmountable in an Austenian model of marital love. Therefore, for readers who already have some sense of Austen's ideals, we might



classify the couple's image at this point as one of *vague potential* (Qualisign) for marital compatibility (Category 12).

The narrator's brief report of the initial visits exchanged between the Longbourn ladies and the Netherfield party indeed suggests that Darcy is not as stuffy as Elizabeth thinks. After observing Elizabeth's behavior during these visits, Darcy revises his first impressions of her: whereas he 'at first scarcely allowed her to be pretty', he now notices the 'uncommonly intelligent... expression of her dark eyes'; likewise, while her figure may lack 'perfect symmetry', he now sees that it is 'light and pleasing'; and although her manners are 'not those of the fashionable world', he perceives them to have an 'easy playfulness' (pp.25-6). Here, in a less public setting, he looks not only *at* her eyes but as it were *through* them into her heart and mind.<sup>458</sup> Similarly, he perceives in her physical form not just a certain shape but an element of health and spryness; in her manner, not just elegance but natural expressiveness.<sup>459</sup> Thus, while he may be accustomed to receiving the attentions of privileged young ladies, Darcy does not *confine* his interests strictly to ladies of this class; rather, he exercises some *freedom* of scope in his taste for female society. Likewise, though he may be used to associating with people who judge the worth and beauty of others by outward measures alone (*codified* elements and *tangible* assets), he also sees value in *natural* characteristics such as a lively physique and a playful manner, and in *intangible* assets like a perceptive mind. He decides to pursue his 'wish to know

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<sup>458</sup> McCann notes the effect of setting upon Darcy: 'his forbidding manner falls away' when he is 'at Pemberley, where... he can be his true self' ('Setting and Character', p.322). In other words, the more domestic and familiar the setting, the more natural and easy Darcy's manners are, and the more his abilities shine. And although Netherfield and Longbourn may not be as familiar and comfortable to him as Pemberley, they are less public than the Meryton assembly and so his behavior improves.

<sup>459</sup> Nardin observes that 'elegance' in Austen's novels is often 'linked with fashion rather than with duty'; people who are 'obsessed with elegance emphasize the forms of propriety, but tend to ignore the moral considerations that give them authority' ('Propriety versus Morality', p.23). Here, because Darcy is not focused solely on Elizabeth's elegance of form and manner, Austen may imply that his sense of values and propriety is not rigidly tied to fashion or codified decorum.

more of [Elizabeth]' at first by 'attend[ing] to her conversation with others' (p.26)—an approach oriented to assessing her character and intellect more than her looks, fashion, or breeding. His image in the scene is thus a faint resemblance (Icon) of a well-balanced approach to assessing a woman's personal compatibility (Category 12)—one that considers her fulfillment of codified ideals but also her natural qualities, her conformance with decorum but also her freedom of expression, her financial assets but also her intellectual ones, her family connections but also her personal character.

The events of the gathering at Lucas Lodge further develop Darcy's appreciation for Elizabeth's character, and also suggest the couple's ability to engage in frank and spirited discourse. When Elizabeth detects that Darcy is eavesdropping on her conversations, she gives him saucy notice of it: 'Did you not think, Mr. Darcy, that I expressed myself uncommonly well just now, when I was teasing Colonel Forster to give us a ball at Meryton?' She knows it is not 'feminine' for a young lady to initiate conversation with a young gentleman—even 'impertinent' to do so with one as privileged as Darcy (as she acknowledges to Charlotte just before addressing him)—but she cannot suppress either her curiosity or her objections at his snooping. Darcy is not abashed by her address since indeed he has attended her conversations only 'as a step towards conversing with her himself'; his reply that she has spoken with 'great energy' on 'a subject which always makes a lady energetic' not only shows a readiness of conversation and a social accessibility that contrast with his previous 'forbidding' demeanor at the Meryton assembly, but also alludes to the husband-hunting that he knows often underlies a woman's love of a ball. 'You are severe on us', replies Elizabeth, showing that she fully understands his meaning (p.26). This first direct interaction of the couple illustrates their ability to cut through superficial gallantry and communicate candidly, albeit in a playful way.<sup>460</sup> In the pianoforte-

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<sup>460</sup> The tendency of the couple to mentally 'spar' is reminiscent of Lady Susan's enjoyment of the challenge posed by the 'saucy' Reginald. Just as in that relationship, Elizabeth and Darcy's sparring is

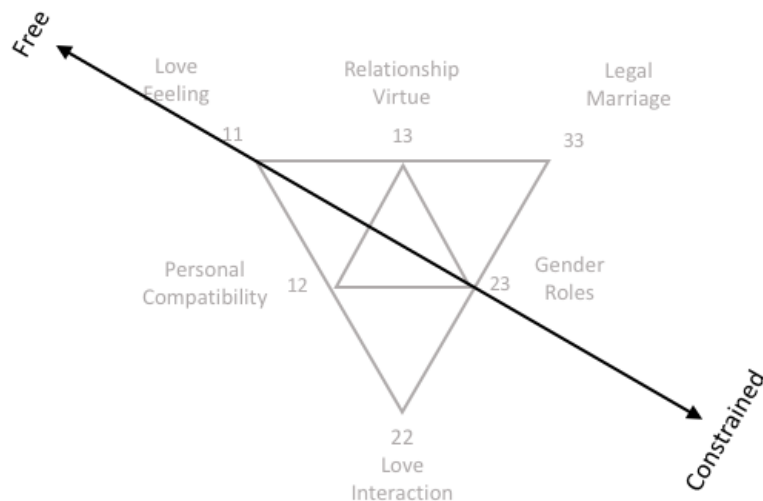
playing episode that ensues, Elizabeth's 'easy and unaffected' performance is 'pleasing, though by no means capital', while her sister Mary's display is technically impressive but delivered with a 'pedantic air'; the narrator notes that the former 'had been listened to with much more pleasure, though not playing half so well' (p.27). Here, those who 'had been listening' notably include Darcy: the narrator's comment leaves open the idea that Darcy can value a woman's natural feeling as much as her outward acquirements—pianoforte-playing being one accomplishment that is clearly part of codified femininity for the period.

Elizabeth is nonconforming in other aspects of codified femininity. For instance, she does not always yield unquestioningly to the will and authority of men. When Sir William Lucas is 'struck' with the idea 'of doing a very gallant thing' by suddenly taking Elizabeth by the hand (as she walks by) and presenting her to Darcy 'as a very desirable partner' with whom to dance, and Darcy shows himself 'not unwilling to receive' her hand, she responds that she has 'not the least intention of dancing' and certainly has not 'moved this way in order to beg for a partner'. She then declines Darcy's personal request 'to be allowed the honour of her hand' for the dance, unwilling to suppress her feelings of antipathy toward him just to play the dutiful and deferential female. Sir William points out that Darcy 'dislikes the amusement [of dancing] in general' but has made 'no objection' in this case, 'for who would object to such a partner?' Privately, both Elizabeth and Darcy know that Darcy *has* once objected to dancing with her (at the Meryton assembly, when Bingley urged him to do so), and so Elizabeth replies with an arch smile, 'Mr Darcy is all politeness', and

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an indicator of their mental parity—in Peircean terms, it is an Iconic Sinsign, or pantomime, of that condition. Accordingly, it also anticipates the question as to whether Elizabeth and Darcy's sparring will be driven by a desire on either side to dominate the other as it is with Lady Susan, or by the more healthy desire to engage as an equal partner in the exchange of understanding as it is with Reginald. Here, Poovey reads Elizabeth's wit and vivacity differently: they are a subconscious defense mechanism against her sense of vulnerability under the economy of patriarchal inheritance, a sense that is triggered by Darcy as a powerful figure in that economy (*The Proper Lady*, pp.196-8).

walks off. Her 'resistance' to the ideal of the stereotypically deferent female does not offend Darcy's male pride; rather, it leaves him 'thinking of her with some complacency' (pp.28-9). Taken as a whole, the events at Lucas Lodge form a *positive enactment* (Iconic Sinsign) of a budding relationship that combines contrariety (Category 22) with mental parity (Category 12)—a relationship that seems to provoke the *liberating* tendency in both parties to push against the social *constraints* of their codified gender roles (Category 23), and to balance them against their honest feelings (Category 11), their natural inclinations (Category 12), and their personal values (Category 13). The tension and balance in the scene between the free and the constrained elements of their relationship, as depicted previously on the Peircean diagram, are apparent:



The tendency of the pair, only lightly suggested in these early scenes, to provoke in each other a reconsideration of their personal balance may express Austen's sense of what a good man-woman relationship can do: Elizabeth's courage to express her real feelings rather than to conform always to decorum and to gender stereotypes impresses Darcy, and perhaps causes him to consider his own formal manner and class values more carefully; likewise, Darcy's poke about female motives at balls perhaps prompts Elizabeth to judge more liberally of the penetrating powers of this man whom she has heretofore considered merely vain and proud.

Elizabeth's values, and Darcy's need of their balancing effect in his life, are highlighted in her visit to Netherfield to attend Jane when she is sick. The arrival of the note from Jane reporting her illness makes Elizabeth 'anxious' and 'determined to go to her' despite the unavailability of the family carriage at the time. Her mother points out that Elizabeth 'will not be fit to be seen' if she walks there 'in all this dirt', but Elizabeth asserts that 'I shall be very fit to see Jane—which is all I want'; the 'distance is nothing, when one has a motive' (p.35).<sup>461</sup> When she arrives at Netherfield flushed and dirty, Bingley's sisters receive Elizabeth with 'a great deal of surprise', amazed that 'she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself' (p.36). Miss Bingley later remarks that the instance 'shew[s] an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum' (p.39). Darcy's reaction is 'divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion's justifying her coming so far alone' (p.36). He agrees with Miss Bingley that he would not wish his own sister to disregard decorum so blatantly—a reflection, Nardin notes, of his early 'tendency to place too much stress on preserving the forms of gentility' due to 'pride in his own high social status'.<sup>462</sup> Here, Darcy's preconceived notions of propriety and decorum, as a Firstness, are juxtaposed with Elizabeth's vibrant and wholesome image, as a Secondness, challenging him to reconsider whether his notions weigh charitable intents proportionately with fine appearances. Bingley's observation that her act shows a very pleasing affection for her sister reinforces the idea that charity is a *relationship* virtue—a virtue that both flows from a relationship and deepens that relationship

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<sup>461</sup> The relative insignificance to Elizabeth of a three-mile walk suggests both her good health and her concern for her sister's well-being over fashion and decorum—a reflection not only of how she balances codified femininity with her natural impulses, but also of her practice of *charity* as codified in scripture: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For... I was sick, and ye visited me' (Matt 25:36, KJV).

<sup>462</sup> *Those Elegant Decorums*, p.50.

when exercised. This kind of affectionate character has inherent value, he argues to his sisters and Darcy, no matter their family's social status. Darcy's view of Jane and Elizabeth's relatively low family status is more pragmatic; he notes that 'it must very materially lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world' (p.40). The statement is perhaps accurate in its assessment of aristocratic values, and shows that his own judgments are currently encumbered by such ideas. Thus, with respect to relationship virtue (Category 13), the scene is Indexical because it illustrates by an oppositional instance what is really charitable and wholesome on the one hand (Elizabeth's visit to her sick sister), and what is proud, class-based, and unjust on the other (Miss Bingley and Darcy's judgments of her indecorum). The scene also has a faint Iconic element, however, because it creates a brief image of Darcy being *susceptible* to Elizabeth's positive example, suggesting the future *possibility* of the pair engaging in mutually-improving interaction (Category 22).

Elizabeth's stay at Netherfield includes other incidents that may be seen to touch on Austen's conception of how codified and natural elements may be balanced in marriage. Inasmuch as codified ideas are those which have been inscribed in authoritative books, we might expect the discussion between Elizabeth, Darcy, and the Bingleys about the books in Darcy's library at Pemberley to be relevant to Austen's values about codified principle. The discussion arises when Elizabeth expresses her desire to read a book rather than to join the party's card game—a choice reflecting an interest in knowledge acquisition that Mr. Hurst finds 'rather singular' for a woman (p.40). Darcy expresses a similar value for knowledge when he comments, in response to Miss Bingley's compliment that he is 'always buying books' to add to his 'delightful' library at Pemberley, that he 'cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these' (p.41). This remark shows a general concern over societal problems for which he believes the wisdom codified in books has value to address; he believes it his duty to collect and preserve such

wisdom for his own benefit and use, and for that of his future family.<sup>463</sup> At this moment, Elizabeth is 'so much caught by what passed' in the conversation that she sets aside her book to listen more attentively (p.42)—a hint that she may be attracted, as Roberts suggests, to the sense of 'permanence' afforded by Darcy's grounding in codified principle, which is something that is missing in her own family.<sup>464</sup> The library scene, therefore, is a subtly positive representation of Darcy's potential, with Elizabeth's support, to fulfill the traditional male role (Category 23) of teaching posterity and thereby fostering virtuous principles (Category 13) in his family and in society.<sup>465</sup> We might classify the scene as an Iconic Legisign because it

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<sup>463</sup> Darcy's societal concerns may be a reflection of the events that Roberts relates occurred in England in the years just before and while Austen wrote *Pride and Prejudice*. This was a period when the order and stability of English life 'broke down dramatically' due to the 'stresses and strains of the Revolutionary Age' that was ignited in 1789 in France (*Jane Austen and the French Revolution*, pp.3-4,11). As mentioned earlier, Roberts suggests that Austen saw the family as a stabilizing institution that could further social continuity (*ibid.*, p.11), a view that is reflected in Darcy's statement here.

<sup>464</sup> *ibid.*, p.49. As an aside, we may note that all codifications are Thirdness, having the general nature of *law*. A principle is usually codified into law only when enough people feel, from enough personal experience, that the principle is morally right and worth binding themselves by. In this scene, Darcy's book collection represents the body of wisdom that 'many generations' of his family have felt worth collecting and preserving—the family being the institution which, arguably in Austen's estimation, is best adapted to teaching such knowledge, and the father being the figure chiefly charged with ensuring that this teaching occurs. Austen's favorable male characters exemplify this fatherly sense of responsibility to teach just principles; consider, for example, Sir Reginald, Henry Tilney, and Mr. Knightley. As Roberts suggests, Elizabeth may have a primal attraction to Darcy's sense of duty and integrity in this regard, much as he has a primal attraction to her wholesome sibling affection, although in Elizabeth's case we are allowed to see that her positive feelings about Darcy are suppressed at first.

<sup>465</sup> Duckworth suggests that this tradition of the father's role stems from Burke, who conceived the ideal statesman to be one who exhibits a 'disposition to preserve and an ability to improve'; see Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: James Dodsley, 1790), pp.193-4. Duckworth notes that 'it is exactly these requirements which are united in the marriage of Darcy and

consists mainly of *rational discourse and logical arguments* with respect to this idea of fatherly duty (which makes it a Legisign), but it also includes the hint of Elizabeth's *positive impression* of Darcy as a fulfilment of such duty (which is the Iconicity of the image). Here, by adding the Iconic element to the image (its *resemblance* to Austen's particular ideals for cooperative discharge of gender roles, reflected in Elizabeth), Austen softens the Legisign element (the traditional concept of the independent discharge of patriarchal duty, reflected in Darcy) so that her ideals are more acceptable to her contemporary readers.

When the conversation of the group at Netherfield turns to the subject of female accomplishments (another codified element of gender roles for the period<sup>466</sup>), Darcy's views are suggested to lie somewhere between the class-based views of Miss Bingley and the less-encumbered views of Elizabeth. Attempting to ingratiate herself with Darcy, Miss Bingley exclaims how 'extremely accomplished for her age' Georgiana is: '[h]er performance on the piano-forte is exquisite'. Bingley's innocuous comment that 'I never heard a young lady spoken of for the first time, without being informed that she was very accomplished' could be read as a backhanded comment by Austen on the connection of this convention with popular fashion. Darcy counters, 'I cannot boast of knowing more than half a dozen, in the whole range of my acquaintance, that are really accomplished'. Elizabeth's reply—'you must comprehend a great deal in your idea of an accomplished woman'—is a

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Elizabeth. Darcy's is the disposition to preserve, Elizabeth's the ability to improve' (*The Improvement of the Estate*, p.142).

<sup>466</sup> Gary Kelly documents as 'markers of cultural distinction' in the period, several types of female accomplishment, including '[d]ancing, singing, and playing music'; '[d]rawing, painting, fashionable modern languages'; 'the social arts of conversation and letter-writing'; and 'knowledge of... approved essays, drama, poetry, travelogues' and 'historiography'; see 'Education and Accomplishments' in *Jane Austen in Context*, ed. by Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.252-261 (p.257). Wollstonecraft complains that such a focus on 'corporeal accomplishment' in a woman's upbringing and education 'subordinate[s]' her 'cultivation of understanding', having 'baneful consequences' in her discharge of family and social responsibilities (*Vindication*, ch. 2, par. 17).



tacit request for further explanation (pp.42-3). Seeing an opportunity for solidarity with Darcy, Miss Bingley eagerly elucidates for their country-town friend what is deemed 'accomplished' among high society:

[N]o one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not *greatly surpass what is usually met with*. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in *her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice*, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved. (p.43 emphasis added)

As indicated by the italicized words, this standard is rooted in social comparison and in the competitive desire for preeminence, with a focus on tangible polish. Miss Bingley believes she speaks wholly for Darcy, but he adjusts her description: 'to all this she must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading'. Elizabeth cannot resist a witticism: 'I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*' (p.43). Despite this remark, Darcy's conception of worthwhile female accomplishment includes an intangible element that Elizabeth also values—that of an educated and thoughtful mind<sup>467</sup>—though he seems to retain his value for the other, outward measures embraced by high society. In this exchange, Austen distinguishes finely between a system of ideals that focusses on *externally visible* acquirements and one that balances such things with *internal assets* like knowledge. She also nicely discriminates between codifications that have stood the test of time (such as the tenets collected in Darcy's library) and those that are merely fashions of a period. In this scene, it is clear that Darcy stands to gain from Elizabeth's disentanglement from the more trendy codifications of his social class, and that

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<sup>467</sup> Kelly notes that Elizabeth, like '[a]ll Austen's heroines' but unlike Miss Bingley, 'bring[s] to marriage more of the intellectual, moral and cultural capital accumulated through education than the cash or property' that will improve a gentleman's standing in society ('Education and Accomplishments', pp.254-5).

Elizabeth also stands to gain from Darcy's grounding in durable tenets codified in his family library.<sup>468</sup> The scene is thus another Iconic Legisign (a conventional sign with undertones of positive potential) of Austenian ideals—in this case of her ideal for an intellectually compatible couple (Category 12) to counsel together (Category 22), the better to inform a rational discharge of their respective gender roles (Category 23), grounded in shared tenets of time-tested knowledge (Category 33).

The effect of each successive scene involving Elizabeth and Darcy to add greater dimensionality and specificity, as measured in Peircean terms, to Austen's picture of wholesome marital relations is apparent. Having discussed the relatively timeless value of knowledge and weighed it in the balance with outward accomplishments only lately codified as feminine, the party at Netherfield next discusses the merits and demerits of 'persuadability' as a character attribute—a question that anticipates Austen's more extensive treatment of the theme in *Persuasion*. The subject arises from Darcy's friendly banter with Bingley over his 'indirect boast' that he would be gone from Netherfield in five minutes were he to resolve to leave. Darcy challenges the fortitude of his friend's resolutions in general:

I am by no means convinced that you would be gone with such celerity. Your conduct would be quite as dependant on chance as that of any man I know; and if, as you were mounting your horse, a friend were to say, "Bingley, you had better stay till next week," you would probably do it, you would probably not go—and, at another word, might stay a month. (p.53)

Elizabeth quips that Darcy has only 'shewn [Bingley] off now much more than he did himself' by highlighting his persuadability.<sup>469</sup> Bingley thanks her for 'converting what my friend says into a compliment on the sweetness of my temper' but points out that she is 'giving [Darcy's remark] a turn which that gentleman did by no means

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<sup>468</sup> In a Peircean view of things, there may be tenets of varying degrees of universality, with the more timeless ones approaching nearer to pure Thirdness.

<sup>469</sup> An ironic remark given her later detestation of Bingley's yielding to Darcy's persuasion to break off his courtship with Jane.

intend; for he would certainly think better of me, if under such a circumstance I were to give a flat denial, and ride off as fast as I could'. Elizabeth suggests that in such a case, 'obstinacy in adhering to' his 'original intention' would not 'atone for' its 'rashness' in the first place—in other words, *fortitude* is more like blind obstinacy if one is unwilling to consider a friend's questions as to the reasonableness of a resolution. Darcy clarifies, 'you must remember, Miss Bennet, that the friend who is supposed to desire his return to the house, and the delay of his plan' in the hypothetical case 'has merely desired it, asked it without offering one argument in favour of its propriety'. Darcy is clearly preaching against the tendency to make choices based more on the persuasions of others in the moment than on a rational consideration of the principles involved. Elizabeth questions whether Darcy's values leave any place for the influence of friendship: 'To yield readily—easily—to the *persuasion* of a friend is no merit with you'. His answer: 'To yield without conviction is no compliment to the understanding of either' (p.54). Darcy's implication is that one should yield to the persuasions of a friend only when convinced of the justice of that friend's reasoning; to yield otherwise would be to compromise one's own principles and potentially to confirm the friend in wrong thinking as well. Elizabeth probes further for the tipping point in the balance between his sense of what is just or principled in a case, and any alternative course that he might consider from 'the influence of friendship and affection'. She asks whether, 'in general and ordinary cases between friend and friend, where one of them is desired by the other to change a resolution of no very great moment, should you think ill of that person for complying with the desire, without waiting to be argued into it?' Darcy admits that the question would depend on 'the degree of importance which is to appertain to this request, as well as the degree of intimacy subsisting between the parties' (pp.54-5). He demonstrates his belief that there *are* cases wherein one might yield to a friend, by resuming his letter to his sister, rather than carrying on the debate, when asked by Bingley to drop the subject. The exchange illustrates Elizabeth's ability to engage with Darcy in meaningful discussion of philosophical and ethical questions that many of her contemporaries might have deemed to belong to the

male realm, and to enrich the discussion with her unique female perspective emphasizing relationships and affection. In the couple's exploration of the virtue of fortitude as it relates to friendship, then, Darcy weighs in on the side of adhering to just and wise principles (that is, on exercising fortitude when bolstered by *justice* and *prudence*), while Elizabeth points out the value of placing trust in affectionate friends (that is, of tempering fortitude with the *humility* that leads one to have *faith* in the care and guardianship of another). As in the previous Netherfield scenes, the image of the couple here is created more by their conventional discourse than by any notable deeds or affective imagery, and so it is a Legisign image overall. As before, its Object of signification is the arguably the Austenian ideal of a couple having mental and linguistic parity (Category 12), of their counseling together for mutual improvement (Category 22), adhering in the process only loosely to traditional gender roles (Category 23), and of gracing their relationship with an understanding of principles of virtuous conduct (Category 13). The scene also has a fleeting Indexical element: that of Darcy *resisting* Miss Bingley's distractions while he writes a long letter to Georgiana, and later of *abandoning* the persuadability debate to resume his letter; both of these oppositional instances signal the strength of his affection for his sister (Category 11), his sense of duty to her as an older brother (Category 23), and Georgiana's higher priority in his life over Miss Bingley and theoretical debates. Accordingly, Elizabeth and Darcy's image in the scene might be classed as an Indexical Legisign. The sign also expands our conception of relationship virtue (Category 13) by calling out interrelationships between fortitude, justice, and prudence, and by pointing out the counterbalancing effects of humility and faith on fortitude. The scene suggests that such balance can be facilitated by the unique experiences which men and women, acting in their respective traditional gender roles (Category 23), bring to the table—men with their books and worldly

knowledge, and women with their domestic concerns for family relationships and feelings.<sup>470</sup>

The ability of Elizabeth and Darcy to engage in a meaningful give-and-take of moral knowledge is evident in the events of Elizabeth's last day at Netherfield, when she discusses with Darcy the human failings of pride and vanity. With the whole party gathered in the drawing room (and Darcy more conscious than ever of his attraction to Elizabeth<sup>471</sup>), we are first allowed to see by contrast that Miss Bingley is relatively *incapable* of engaging Darcy meaningfully. She affects to have interests in common with him: she tells Mr. Hurst that no one wants to play cards because she has learned that Darcy doesn't want to play that evening; she pretends to read the second volume of a book that Darcy has just picked up to read; and she tells her brother that she 'should like balls infinitely better' if there were 'more rational... conversation instead of dancing', knowing those to be Darcy's preferences. She also tries to affect female delicacy when she calls 'shocking' Darcy's assertion that he 'can

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<sup>470</sup> Even if one considers gender roles so arranged and stereotyped to be socially unjust, one may find defensible the argument that the diverse experiences brought by two individuals to a relationship bring valuable balance and perspective to a couple—arguably the essence of Austen's ideal here. Ian Watt suggests that 'the feminine sensibility was in some ways better equipped to reveal the intricacies of personal relationships and was therefore at a real advantage in the realm of the novel'; see *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.299. Of course, feminist criticism since Wollstonecraft has argued more or less that gender differences have been constructed to enable the subjugation of women to patriarchal authority (cf., for example, Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, ch.4, par.4; Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.121; Poovey, *The Gender of Genres*, p.125; and Seeber, *General Consent*, p.131). Much of this debate hinges on the question of how much of gender uniqueness is owed to physical biology and how much to culture. My view, as mentioned earlier, gives slightly more weight to biology (which I correlate with Peircean Secondness, or the external facts of marital love) than does the feminist view.

<sup>471</sup> The night before, her 'mixture of sweetness and archness' when declining again to dance with him had prompted the realization that he 'had never been so bewitched by any woman'; he 'really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger' (pp.56-7).

admire' her and Elizabeth 'much better' from his seat by the fire than by getting up to walk about the room with them, though her choice to parade her 'elegant' figure in this way is in fact (as the narrator relates) 'aimed' at Darcy. When Elizabeth suggests they punish Darcy for his bold remark by teasing and laughing at him, Miss Bingley strokes his vanity by asserting that 'calmness of manner and presence of mind' cannot be teased, and that one cannot 'laugh without a subject'. Elizabeth, however, is unafraid to be real with him. 'Mr. Darcy is not to be laughed at!' She challenges whether he could be free from the kinds of '[f]ollies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies' that so often 'divert' her and give her occasion to laugh (pp.60-2). Though the remark is light-hearted, one senses the needle in it: Darcy takes himself too seriously, and self-importance is a step toward pride. Darcy counters that 'the wisest and best of [men's] actions... may be rendered ridiculous by a person whose first object in life is a joke'—an equally penetrating observation on Elizabeth's tendency, like her father, to use 'human being[s] merely as an occasion to say something witty'.<sup>472</sup> Darcy admits, 'I have faults enough, but they are not, I hope, of understanding', and 'it has been the study of my life to avoid those weaknesses which often expose a strong understanding to ridicule'. As examples of the kinds of faults that often go with a strong mind, Elizabeth mentions 'vanity and pride' (pp.62-3)—another needle at Darcy, though Elizabeth may also be susceptible to these failings, since her mental powers are represented as being on a par with Darcy's.<sup>473</sup> Thus, in Austen's conception of relationship virtue (Category 13), pride and prejudice

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<sup>472</sup> McMaster, 'Talking about Talk', p.89.

<sup>473</sup> Butler suggests that the Elizabeth-Darcy narrative is essentially a story about 'the sin of pride, ...which takes the form of a complacency about the self and a correspondingly lower opinion, or prejudice, about others'. She argues that the twin sins of pride and prejudice are 'the opposite of what [Austen] conceives to be the Christian duty', citing as evidence Austen's petition, in her third written family prayer, that God help her family 'to be severe only in the examination of our own conduct', and to 'judge of all [that our fellow-creatures] say and do with that charity which we would desire from them ourselves' (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp.205-6).

are both opposites of *charity*, and *humility* is an essential element of charity. Pride and prejudice also violate *justice* because they view the self and others unequally; they also undermine *faith* and *hope* in others by lowering one's estimation of the goodness and abilities of others. As enemies of faith, hope, charity, and justice, therefore, the sins of pride and prejudice strike at the heart of Austen's ideal of relationship virtue. Accordingly, this scene ought to be read as more than a witty exchange between the couple; rather, it might be considered a preliminary exploration of their potential to improve one another's understanding and practice of virtuous principles. Elizabeth's tendency to prejudge becomes evident when she 'turn[s] away to hide a smile' on hearing Darcy's assertion that 'where there is a real superiority of mind, pride will be always under good regulation' (p.63). In her rush to read pride into his character, she misses his meaning of 'real superiority of mind', taking it as a reference to himself rather than as an allusion to that humble state of mind which enables and inclines a person to detect pride in himself as easily as in others. This latter state of mind is morally above what is commonly found and thus constitutes *real* superiority in Darcy's estimation, whereas a prideful mind is only *imagined* superiority and is all too common. That Elizabeth misreads his meaning is clear from her sarcastic comment to Miss Bingley: 'I am perfectly convinced... that Mr. Darcy has no defect', for he 'owns it himself without disguise'. Darcy counters that he has 'made no such pretension'; he admits that his 'temper', for example, is 'too little yielding', even 'resentful'. He believes that 'every disposition', however, has 'a tendency to some particular evil', the implication being that (for example) a ductile person like Bingley might yield too easily to persuasion, a just-minded person might hold onto wrongs too stubbornly, and so on. Elizabeth calls Darcy's resentful temper a tendency 'to hate every body'—a statement that demonstrates her own propensity to make judgments too hastily. Darcy replies that her tendency is 'willfully to misunderstand' others—that is, to misjudge when motivated by a view to

making sport (p.63). The image of the couple in this scene is quite adversarial, and yet it demonstrates what McMaster describes as the ability to ‘cut through empty forms to achieve and provoke a remarkable degree of personal... discovery’<sup>474</sup>—in this case, discovery of their respective moral flaws, or of the virtues they each need to develop more fully (Category 13). The comparative limpness of Miss Bingley’s interactions with Darcy—her inability to engage with him in meaningful conversation or to provoke him to morally-improving introspection—illustrates her personal incompatibility with him and, by contrast, Elizabeth’s greater fitness to be his wife (Category 12). Miss Bingley’s words adhere to decorum, but Elizabeth’s words ‘do their full work, and more in direct and frank representation’.<sup>475</sup> The image of Miss Bingley and Darcy is thus one of potential for a conventional but unfruitful marriage (an Indexical Legisign), while that of Elizabeth and Darcy in this episode is one of provocative potential (an Iconic Sinsign) for moral improvement (Category 13), assuming Elizabeth is able to develop affection for Darcy at some point. The scene also links the flaw of *pride*, which in Darcy’s case takes the form of justice untempered by charity, with feelings of *resentment*; and it links the flaw of *prejudice*, which in Elizabeth’s case takes the form of quick-wittedness unchecked by charity, with feelings of *antipathy*. Feelings of resentment and antipathy clearly block *affection* from forming (in Darcy’s case for Wickham, and in Elizabeth’s case for Darcy), and so the scene also suggests a connection between personal virtue

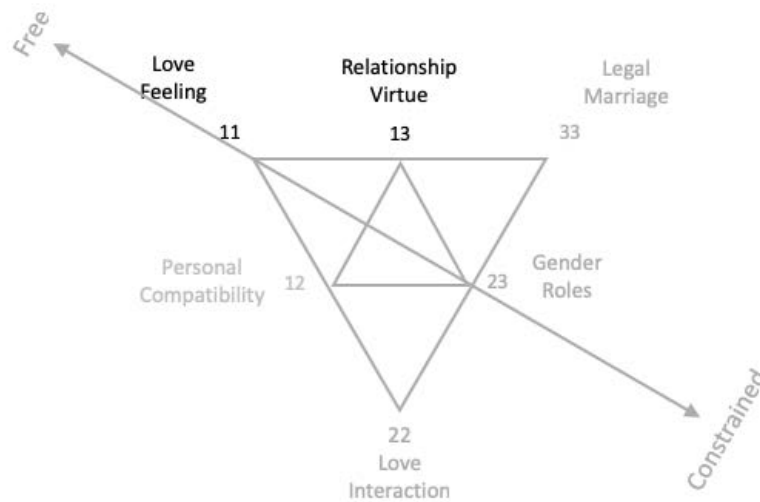
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<sup>474</sup> ‘Talking about Talk’, p.89.

<sup>475</sup> McMaster, ‘Talking about Talk’, p.88. Peter Sabor points out that Miss Bingley, rather than morally lifting Darcy, invites him to join with her in petty snobbishness. Sabor cites as an instance of this her snide suggestion, on learning of Darcy’s increasing admiration for Elizabeth, that he place the portraits of her aunt and uncle Phillips next to that of his great-uncle in the Pemberley gallery; see ‘“Staring in Astonishment”: Portraits and Prints in *Persuasion*’, in *Jane Austen’s Business: Her World and Her Profession*, ed. by Juliet McMaster and Bruce Stovel (Houndmills and London: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1996), pp.17-29 (p.28).



(Category 13) and love feelings (Category 11).<sup>476</sup> As a personal virtue, charity curbs selfish impulses, allowing one's affection to flow, whereas pride and prejudice (counterfeits of charity) choke out affection, leaving resentment and antipathy in their wake. Both the virtue and its counterfeits have a *constraining* force: the virtue restrains the ego so that affection can flourish, while the counterfeits strangle amiable feeling, perverting it into resentment or antipathy. The relationship between charity and affection is another example of the tension and balance that exist between the constrained and the free elements of marital relations, as depicted previously on the Peircean diagram:



One effect of the preceding scenes is to build our anticipation of events and circumstances that might work to remove Elizabeth's prejudice about Darcy and so allow her affection to flow. However, the advent of Wickham in her life arguably serves only to deepen her prejudices for a time. Her interactions with him also create a subtle contrast with her interactions with Darcy. Wickham's conversation,

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<sup>476</sup> Ruderman argues that Austen's fiction illustrates this connection throughout: 'Being able to control one's desires, to take pleasure in *principled behavior*, is a precondition for being capable of loving deeply, the novels show' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.32, my emphasis).

though very amiable on the surface, dwells mostly on the faults and injustices of others to himself—an example that is not improving for Elizabeth personally, given her tendency already to ‘[see] everyone’s mistakes but her own’.<sup>477</sup> Darcy’s exchanges with her, though stiff and adversarial, provoke serious reflection and introspection, which can only work to the improvement of her mind. Her interactions with both men are ‘lively’, since both are mentally and linguistically talented; and yet we are allowed to see that Darcy’s relationship has more improving effect, despite Wickham’s being the ‘easier’ relationship.<sup>478</sup> Elizabeth’s warm and compassionate feelings, though improving for the rigid and resentful Darcy, are rather *enabling* for the opportunistic Wickham, and so do not contribute to his improvement. Fortunately for Elizabeth, the same faith and trust in others that enable her to be deceived by Wickham play a part in saving her from his designs. Ultimately, the facts in Darcy’s post-proposal letter are what disabuse her mind of misconceptions about Wickham, but the sober and prudent influence of Jane and Mrs. Gardiner also play an important part. As discussed earlier, though Elizabeth does not agree with Jane’s reasoning about the improbability of some of Wickham’s assertions, or with Mrs. Gardiner’s sense that his behavior toward Miss King reflects that of a ‘fortune-hunter’ (to use Butler’s expression<sup>479</sup>), yet she knows the good and disinterested intent of her sister and aunt, and trusts them deeply. She therefore adjusts her course to take things slower with Wickham—a step of *faith* that safeguards her until she learns the facts about him. Thus, while Butler’s claim is true that Elizabeth has a weakness toward ‘pride in her own fallible perceptions’ that leads her into errors, her claim that this weakness is Elizabeth’s ‘governing

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<sup>477</sup> Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.203.

<sup>478</sup> Willis expresses a similar idea: ‘Elizabeth’s potential for just judgment and rational feeling is expanded through the agency of Darcy’, while her ‘potential for error is revealed through her relationship with Wickham’ (‘Eyes and the Imagery of Site’, p.158).

<sup>479</sup> *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.207.

characteristic' may be overstated.<sup>480</sup> The strength of Elizabeth's faith in her aunt and sister *compensates* for this weakness in precisely the way Elizabeth suggests to Darcy that one might benefit from the persuasions of a good friend when choosing a course. Overall, the scenes of Elizabeth's dealings with Wickham serve to highlight, by subtle contrast (Indexicality), her relatively greater compatibility (Category 12) with Darcy and the greater tendency of her relations with him (Category 22) to improve both her and him morally, particularly in the balancing of *judgment* with *faith* (Category 13). Since these scenes again show *positive potential* for Elizabeth and Darcy as a couple, they also have Iconicity and so might be classified as an Iconic Sinsign. They might also be said to clarify Austen's sense of how judgment and faith work together: whereas judgment relies primarily on experiential knowledge (Darcy's judgment of Wickham is based on his personal experience with him), faith acts without such knowledge, trusting instead in the personal experience of another whose goodness one knows (Elizabeth trusts in Mrs. Gardiner's advice about Wickham).<sup>481</sup> In marriage, each party will always have a different scope of experiential knowledge; for example, Darcy knows more about Wickham's past doings, while Elizabeth knows more about Jane's feelings for Bingley. In Austen's ideal, the couple learns and improves not only by acting on their individual knowledge (judgment) but also by counselling with each other and with family

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<sup>480</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>481</sup> In the sense that faith is based more on a *feeling* (of trust) than on knowledge, my argument here suggests an adjustment to Fay's view that Austen saw *reason* as the 'supreme guide to conduct' (*A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p.37). It is true that she, like Wollstonecraft, emphasizes the rational faculties of women in opposition to the over-sentimentalized notions of femininity in her day, but she also illustrates in her fiction the balancing of reason with feeling, as others like Willis have noted in these scenes ('Eyes and the Imagery of Sight', pp.156-8).

members and friends, and by placing trust (faith) in others' advice and experience until one has gained personal experience in a matter.<sup>482</sup>

Elizabeth's dealings with Darcy at the Netherfield ball speak to the importance of natural feeling, physical attraction, and mental parity in Austen's conception of marital compatibility. Like Reginald, Elizabeth has an 'open' disposition that occasionally exhibits a 'burst of feeling or indignation' (*P*, p.175). When Wickham fails to show up at the ball and Denny tips her off that it is owing to Wickham's wish 'to avoid a certain gentleman here', her 'displeasure' with Darcy is 'sharpened by immediate disappointment', and she can 'hardly reply with tolerable civility' to his 'polite inquiries'—she feels that any show of kindness to Darcy would be 'injury to Wickham' (pp.100-1). This reaction is similar to Reginald's defensiveness about Lady Susan to his father. We know Elizabeth's warm sentiments are misdirected here as certainly as Reginald's were, but we can see in this instance Austen's similar hint as to Elizabeth's capacity for love and loyalty, which again are positive characteristics in general for a spouse. The narrator relates that her 'ill-humour' does 'not dwell long on her spirits' (p.101), suggesting that she does not hold onto bad feelings, but like Reginald (and unlike Lady Susan) quickly lets them go. A few minutes later, when she is caught off guard and agrees to dance with Darcy, she cannot resist the urge, as they are dancing, to improve his cold manners. Note her pedagogical tone:

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

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

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<sup>482</sup> The need for faith in the absence of empirical knowledge is also emphasized by Saint Paul's teachings about faith, mentioned earlier, wherein he defines that virtue as 'the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen' (Hebrews 11:1, KJV).

“Very well.—That reply will do for the present.—Perhaps by and bye I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones.—But *now* we may be silent.”

“Do you talk by rule then, while you are dancing?”

“Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together, and yet for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible.” (p.102)

While it is clear that Elizabeth feels Darcy’s reserve and stiff manner need to be loosened up, his brief replies are not just the superficial language of decorum. When he asks whether she talks ‘by rule’ while dancing, for example, he subtly challenges her own seeming attempt, through this conversation, to comply with social rules for dancing in public rather than to use conversation for genuine communication. His implication is that the kind of talk which appears outwardly natural may not always be inwardly genuine—a concept that could save Elizabeth a world of trouble in her dealings with Wickham. When Darcy asks whether she and her sisters often walk to Meryton, Elizabeth cannot, in fact, resist broaching the subject of Wickham. She replies in the affirmative, mentioning the ‘new acquaintance’ they have just made. The indignant look that ‘overspread[s] his features’ is taken by Elizabeth for ‘hauteur’; she cannot help accusing him, after he questions Wickham’s ability to retain friends as easily as he makes them, of punishing Wickham ‘in a manner which he is likely to suffer from all his life’ (p.103). Here, Darcy resists the temptation to speak ill of Wickham (much as Frederica refrains from speaking against her mother), even when he knows that doing so places his behavior in an unfavorable light. After a brief interruption to their conversation, he tries to interest her in another topic (books), but Elizabeth’s curiosity about his justification for disliking Wickham continues to occupy her mind. She brings it up again, albeit indirectly:

“I remember hearing you once say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose, as to its *being created*.”

“I am,” said he, with a firm voice.

“And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?”

“I hope not.”

“It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion, to be secure of judging properly at first.” (p.105)

It is evident that this is a continuation of their earlier discussion about the balance and tension between justice (a fact-based moral exercise) and charity (a feeling-based one). Elizabeth wants proof that his judgment against Wickham is based on facts rather than on jealous feelings (as Wickham has told her), since the latter would simply be prejudice. He assures her firmly that his judgment has been truthfully formed, though he does not yet choose to share the facts behind it. ‘I hear such different accounts of you’, she continues, ‘as puzzle me exceedingly’. Darcy guesses that Wickham has imposed on her: ‘I can readily believe... that report may vary greatly with respect to me’; knowing her lively feelings and tendency to rush to conclusions, he hopes she will defer sketching his character till a later time when she knows the facts better (p.105). Here, Austen creates the ironic situation of Elizabeth intimating that Darcy is being prejudiced when she is doing just that herself: she is rushing to judge Darcy without possession of the facts in the case, because her vanity has once been hurt by him. At the same time, her case against Darcy has a valid point that he might do well to consider: his resentment is ‘unappeasable’ because he ‘hardly ever forgives’, and forgiveness is a liberating element of Christian virtue.<sup>483</sup> As in previous scenes, it is evident that Elizabeth and Darcy’s conversation quickly goes to the heart of the feelings and moral issues with which they are grappling, cutting through the pleasant gallantries that are the norm for social intercourse in such settings. Their interactions are representative of the kind of genuine exchange (Category 22) that is an essential element of Austen’s ideal for marriage. The scene is an iconic sign of these ideals, inasmuch as the couple’s

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<sup>483</sup> ‘And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses’ (Mark 11:25, KJV).

interactions create a sort of pantomime of them. The couple's image also contrasts (Indexically) with the prevailing conventions of the period for polite discourse that does not broach uneasy subjects—a reflection again of Austen's sense that the codified must be balanced with the natural in marriage.

The events of the ball and of Mr. Collins's proposal to Elizabeth include subtle indicators of the warmth of Elizabeth and Darcy's feelings, and of their natural attraction. For example, at the conclusion of the preceding conversation, the narrator relates that 'in Darcy's breast there was a tolerably powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another' (p.105). In Austen's ideal, pure love is a powerful feeling that can prompt forgiveness of a hapless offense like Elizabeth's, and indignation at a cunning deception like Wickham's. It is also a feeling whose first spark may be physical attraction. Before dancing with Darcy, Elizabeth has two 'dances of mortification' with the 'awkward and solemn' Mr. Collins, who 'often mov[es] wrong without being aware of it' (p.101). The ability of Elizabeth and Darcy to converse while dancing suggests a much more graceful harmony in their physical movements, one which prompts Sir William to 'bow... to compliment' them on their 'superior dancing' (p.103). Though Elizabeth's mind is prejudiced against Darcy, Austen gives occasional somatic signs (well-known tokens for the period) of her subconscious feelings for him. When she sees that Darcy has overheard, from across the dinner table, her mother's crude talk about Jane and her other girls getting rich husbands, she 'blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation', and cannot help 'frequently glancing her eye at Mr. Darcy' to see his 'dreaded' reaction (p.112). She is likewise embarrassed when her father publicly asks Mary to stop playing at the pianoforte, and when her cousin makes his fawning introduction to Darcy; in each case she notices Darcy's expression of indignation, contempt, or gravity. Though Elizabeth professes not to care about Darcy, we witness her sensitivity to what he thinks about her family.

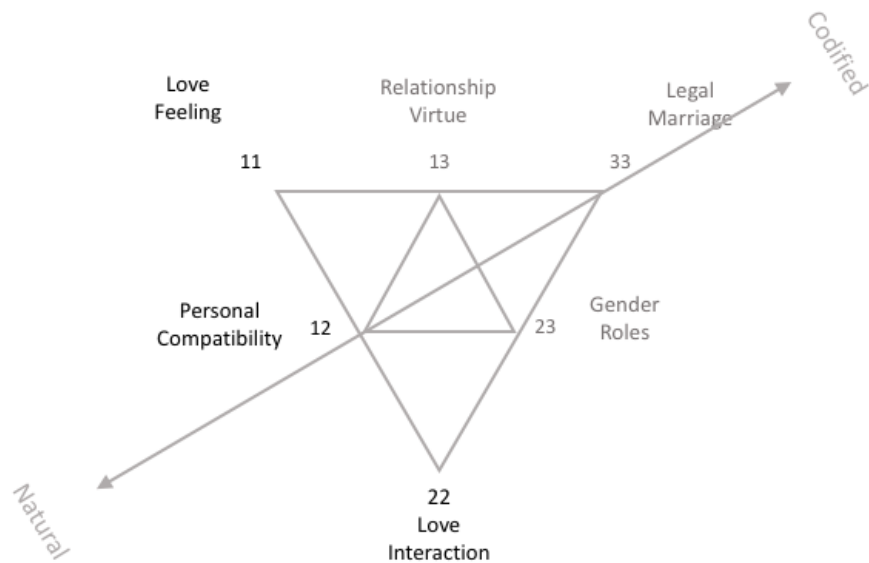
The revulsion she feels when Mr. Collins proposes marriage to her perhaps makes her more conscious than ever of the kind of man to whom she is *not*

attracted, and the impossibility of her ever marrying someone whose mind and sentiments are as unlike hers as Mr. Collins's are. No doubt she has always considered affectionate feelings to be a prerequisite to marrying a man, but coming face-to-face with Mr. Collins's proposal makes her conviction of this idea more real. Her belief in the importance of affection in the relationship, and her warm affection for Charlotte as a friend, likewise cause her to react with such 'astonishment' at Charlotte's acceptance of Mr. Collins 'as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum'; she cries out, 'Engaged to Mr. Collins! my dear Charlotte,—impossible!' (p.140). More than just an indicator of her open and lively character, this tongue-slip is a reflection of her sense of how mentally *incompatible* Mr. Collins and Charlotte are. Through these subtly comparative incidents (Iconic Sinsigns) with Mr. Collins and Charlotte, and through brief glimpses at the reactions (Indexical Sinsigns) of Darcy and Elizabeth in various situations, Austen suggests the feelings that exist between the latter couple (Category 11), the compatibility of their minds (Category 12), and the physical magnetism that simmers below the surface of their interactions (Category 22).<sup>484</sup> These three elements of marital love, as mentioned, correspond to the *natural* side of their relationship, as distinct from the *codified* side:

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<sup>484</sup> In refutation of Charlotte Brontë's contention that Austen's 'business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet', Willis suggests that 'the eye is, in *Pride and Prejudice* in particular, the symbol of "what throbs fast and full, though hidden"—that very element Charlotte Brontë feels to be missing from Jane Austen's fictional world' ('Eyes and the Imagery of Sight', p.156). This insight harmonizes with my observations above with respect to Elizabeth and Darcy's frequent glances at one another.





Elizabeth's visit to Charlotte at Hunsford, and the coincidental visit of Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam to their aunt at Rosings Park, develop further the couple's ability to improve their balance in the natural and codified, the ideal and pragmatic aspects of their relationship. Elizabeth is shown already to have good balance in the tension between the natural and codified elements. On her first visit to Rosings, she is relatively calm compared to Maria and Sir William, who feel 'alarm' as they 'ascen[d] the steps to the hall'; she has 'heard nothing of Lady Catherine' to inspire awe by way of 'extraordinary talents or miraculous virtue, and the mere stateliness of money and rank' she is able to 'witness without trepidation' (p.182). Elizabeth knows as well as the Lucases that titles, ranks, property, and money are codified symbols of power, but to her they are not more important measures of a person's worth than 'talents' or 'virtue'. As a result, she is not ruffled by Lady Catherine's mansion and authoritative air; she carries on natural and intelligent conversation with the woman like she does with any other. When Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam join the gatherings at Rosings, Austen uses Colonel Fitzwilliam as an intermediary through which to develop Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. Colonel Fitzwilliams's 'fancy' is 'caught... very much' by Elizabeth when her party arrives at Rosings for one of their visits:

He now seated himself by her, and talked so agreeably of Kent and Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new books and music, that Elizabeth had never been half so well entertained in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lady Catherine herself, as well as of Mr. Darcy. *His eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity....* (pp.193-4)

Darcy notices the ease and liveliness with which his cousin converses with Elizabeth. His consciousness of his own lack in these areas is thus heightened, and he is placed in a state of greater readiness to be taught and improved. After coffee, 'Colonel Fitzwilliam remind[s] Elizabeth of having promised to play to him', and he 'dr[aws] a chair near her' as she sits down at the instrument. Darcy breaks away from Lady Catherine and, 'with his usual deliberation... station[s] himself so as to command a full view of the fair performer's countenance' (p.195). Here, Austen contrasts the friendly and intimate approach of Colonel Fitzwilliam with Darcy's awkward and deliberate one, which shows interest but creates emotional distance. The scene sets the stage for the ensuing pedagogy. Elizabeth teasingly recounts to her close admirer Darcy's ungentlemanly conduct at the Meryton assembly—how he 'danced only four dances, though gentlemen were scarce' and 'more than one young lady was sitting down in want of a partner'. When Darcy gives the excuse that he 'had not at that time the honour of knowing any lady in the assembly beyond my own party', she replies, 'True; and nobody can ever be introduced in a ball-room'. Seeing the irrationality of his behavior, he admits, 'Perhaps... I should have judged better, had I sought an introduction, but I am ill qualified to recommend myself to strangers'. Here, Darcy is humble enough to admit the weak reasons for this behavior. He has 'not the talent which some people possess... of conversing easily' with those he has 'never seen before', of 'catch[ing] their tone of conversation, or appear[ing] interested in their concerns'—like he observes his cousin doing with Elizabeth. Though she is sporting with him again, Elizabeth's question as to 'why a man of sense and education... who has lived in the world' could be ill-qualified for

such a task, perhaps helps him better see the baselessness of his social anxieties (pp.196-7). She points to the solution:

“My fingers,” said Elizabeth, “do not move over this instrument in the masterly manner which I see so many women’s do. They have not the same force or rapidity, and do not produce the same expression. But then I have always supposed it to be my own fault—because I will not take the trouble of practising.” (p.197)

His response is both a concession and a counterpoint:

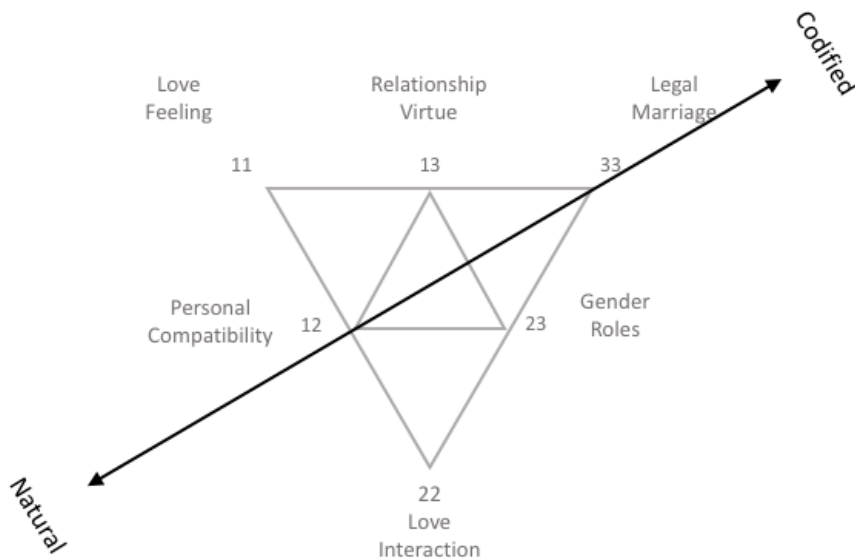
Darcy smiled and said, “You are perfectly right. You have employed your time much better. No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think any thing wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers.” (p.197)

The concession here is that one must practice to improve in anything, and he needs to practice his public manners. The counterpoint is that one must decide what is important to practice, and not to focus only on those things which make for public display. Elizabeth’s playing may not be brilliant technically—she has not employed her time with that priority in mind—but it has more feeling than that of others like Mary and the Bingley sisters, because she has given more attention to the development of human feeling. Of the two types of ‘performance’, the private one is the more important, and neither he nor Elizabeth has focused their personal development on public display. This again is a concept that it would do well for Elizabeth to bear in mind as she judges the pleasing ‘performances’ of Wickham and even of Colonel Fitzwilliam. What one genuinely *feels* (Firstness) and *does* (Secondness) are ultimately more faithful representations of love than what one *says* (Thirdness),<sup>485</sup> since professions may not always reflect honest intent. This tension between one’s love feelings (Category 11) and love actions (Category 22) on the one hand, and one’s professions and vows of love (Category 33) on the other, is another

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<sup>485</sup> In this triad, words are Thirdness because they are representational—a *medium* of communication between a *first* and a *second* party.

manifestation of the underlying natural-versus-codified tension diagrammed previously:



Critics of marriage sometimes object to it because it is merely a ceremony of *words* and a corresponding written record, and they question whether we ought to attach significance to such things. Here, Austen seems to suggest that both the codified words and the honest intent (demonstrated through action) are important to a meaningful marriage relationship. The discussions of Elizabeth and Darcy in this scene create an image of potential balance in the couple between *natural* affection and interaction on the one hand, and *codified* (public) communications on the other. This image is an Iconic Legisign because it consists largely of *conventional discourse* about the ideal (which makes it a Legisign), but it also suggests the couple's *positive potential* to realize the ideal (which gives it Iconicity).

In the same scene, Darcy's interactions with Lady Catherine, like those of Elizabeth with Colonel Fitzwilliam, have implications for his love for Elizabeth. When Lady Catherine asks Darcy how Georgiana gets on in her pianoforte playing:

Mr. Darcy spoke with affectionate praise of his sister's proficiency.

“I am very glad to hear such a good account of her,” said Lady Catherine; “and pray tell her from me, that she cannot expect to excel, if she does not practice a good deal.”

“I assure you, Madam,” he replied, “that she does not need such advice. She practises very constantly.” (p.194)

It is clear that Darcy is attentive to his sister and is involved in supervising and encouraging her good habits, which reflects not only his affection for her (Category 11) but also his sense of responsibility to her as an older brother (Category 23). He is also forthright in defending her, even when it means pushing back against Lady Catherine. Though his aunt and he both enjoy rank and prestige, he is no pawn of them. More importantly, his affection and protectiveness toward his sister may be indicative (like Reginald’s toward his sister) of his potential and capacity to care for and protect a wife. That he has similar feelings for Elizabeth is suggested when Lady Catherine, in Elizabeth’s hearing, tells him that ‘I have told Miss Bennet several times, that she will never play really well, unless she practices more’, whereupon the narrator relates that ‘Mr. Darcy looked a little ashamed of his aunt’s ill breeding’ (p.195). Here, Darcy’s shame is a mirror image of Elizabeth’s embarrassment over her family’s poor behavior before Darcy at the Netherfield ball, and similarly suggests an underlying attraction between them. His interactions with Lady Catherine in this scene form a subtle image (Iconic Sinsign) of the Austenian ideal of a man having affection for his wife (Category 11) and protecting her from the disrespect of others (Category 23).

In the final days of Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam’s stay at Rosings, before Darcy actually proposes to Elizabeth, it is evident that he struggles to determine whether he can be a good fit for her, though to Elizabeth the signs of his inner debate appear only as mysterious oddities in his behavior. For example, when he drops in to the parsonage and unexpectedly finds Elizabeth alone, rather than deferring the visit to another time, he sits down and makes seemingly idle conversation with her. ‘It must be very agreeable’, he comments about Charlotte, for ‘her to be settled within so easy a distance of her own family and friends’. Elizabeth does not see fifty miles, or

even half that, a convenient distance for a woman to be separated from her family, unless 'there is fortune to make the expence of travelling unimportant'. She admits, however, that it is possible for 'a woman [to] be settled too near her family'. Elizabeth is surprised when Darcy suddenly draws his chair closer and declares, '*You* cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment'—an allusion to the trying nature of her domestic life at Longbourn (p.201). Sensing that she is not receptive to the topic, however, he quickly draws back, changes the subject, and shortly afterward leaves. He makes several other visits to the house alone, and keeps 'accidentally' running into Elizabeth on her strolls in the park, asking her 'odd unconnected questions' about her enjoyment of being away at Hunsford, and of having time for 'solitary walks'; he keeps 'speaking of Rosings' as if 'she would be staying *there* too' in the future 'whenever she came into Kent again' (p.204). From talks with Colonel Fitzwilliam, Elizabeth knows that Darcy has lengthened his and the Colonel's stay at Rosings once already. But neither she nor Charlotte can account for his behavior. 'It was plain to them all', on the other hand, 'that Colonel Fitzwilliam came because he had pleasure in their society' and because of 'his evident admiration' of Elizabeth; in comparing him with 'her former favourite George Wickham', Elizabeth sees that the Colonel has 'less captivating softness' but 'the best informed mind' of the two (p.202). Here, Elizabeth shows some progress in her recognition of the greater value to herself of the quality of a man's mind and principles. When shortly afterward she learns, from a stroll in the park with the Colonel, that he intends to marry for money, she realizes that his principles, though better than Wickham's, still fall short of her ideals, and determines not 'to be unhappy about him' (p.210). In these scenes, it is evident that Darcy, driven by his deep attraction to Elizabeth, is struggling to determine whether he can make a successful marriage with her despite their family and class differences; while Elizabeth, through her musings over the pleasing yet unsubstantial character of Wickham and Colonel Fitzwilliam is gradually being conditioned to recognize the merits of Darcy's character. The image is one of a slow convergence of the two powerful protagonists, with a corresponding build-up of oppositional tension. The

*tension* in the image (Secondness) makes it a Sinsign, and the attendant sense of *latent feeling* makes it Iconic—an Iconic Sinsign. The image's Object of signification is Austen's sense of how marriage can be a 'great Improver' of individuals (*Letters*, p.159), wherein the raw energy and material brought by each, if it is compatible to be joined (Category 12), will result in powerfully-improving interaction (Category 22).

The scenes related to Darcy's proposal, however, have the provoking effect of revealing that the couple is *not* yet ready to be married—that their individual characters each require further painful change before they can be successfully joined. On the day of Darcy's proposal, Elizabeth walks with Colonel Fitzwilliam and learns that Darcy has 'congratulated himself on having lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage'; knowing this friend to be Bingley, Elizabeth is secretly hot with anger, convinced that Darcy has acted on motives of the 'worst kind of pride' (pp.207,209). The bitterness of her resentment is seen to be proportional to the brightness of her sense of justice and charity for Jane (Category 13), which have been violated. Darcy's very apparent agitation upon entering the parsonage to offer his hand to Elizabeth (while the others are gone to tea at Rosings) is a conventional love token for the period. His 'hurried manner', '[sitting] down for a few moments, and then getting up' and 'walk[ing] about the room' show a distractedness that is code for a person in love. Austen employs this love token but does so in a novel manner: she situates Darcy's declaration of love in the moment of Elizabeth's highest resentment against him, which keeps the event from being an *obvious* replica of the known token type. The event retains a degree of idiosyncrasy and contrariness that makes it an Indexical Legisign of the love ideal rather than a pure Symbolic Legisign. At the same time, the image of Darcy's love is shown to be *real* due to the human flaws with which it is mixed: 'In vain have I struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you'. His 'avowal of all that he felt and had long felt for her' here is prefaced by the frank admission that he has had to surmount other, less-elevated feelings in the process. He is no less 'eloquent' on the character of these feelings than he is 'on the subject of tenderness': his 'sense of her

inferiority—of its being a degradation—of the family obstacles which judgment had always opposed to inclination’ are ‘dwelt on with a warmth’ that does not ‘recommend his suit’. He concludes with the hope that his declaration of love will be ‘rewarded by her acceptance of his hand’—a request to which Elizabeth sees ‘he ha[s] no doubt of a favourable answer’ (pp.211-2). Despite all that Austen has done to this point to develop the greater mental, physical, and moral qualities of Darcy as compared with Mr. Collins, the similar smugness of his proposal with that of Mr. Collins is inescapable.<sup>486</sup> But Elizabeth’s ‘intentions [do] not vary for an instant’; she has ‘never desired [his] good opinion’, and he has ‘certainly bestowed it most unwillingly’. When asked for the reasons ‘why, with so little *endeavour* at civility’ his offer is ‘thus rejected’, she points out the incivility of *his* address: he says that his love for her comes against his will, his reason, and even his character; he ‘has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister’; and he has ‘reduced [Wickham] to his present state of poverty’. Darcy is astonished at the degree to which her mind is prejudiced against him, and cries, ‘This is the estimation in which you hold me!’ Were her delineation of his offenses against Wickham true, he sees that his faults would be ‘heavy indeed!’ Nonetheless, he suggests that ‘these offences might have been overlooked, had not your pride been hurt by my honest confession of the scruples that had long prevented my forming any serious design’ (pp.211-4). Here, although both Elizabeth and Darcy are clearly frank people, Darcy’s frankness is in question because he takes it too far—to the point of inconsideration for the feelings of Elizabeth, which shows a lack of both temperance and charity.<sup>487</sup> His class-based pride, too, is clearly *not* ‘under good

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<sup>486</sup> Johnson remarks the ‘appalling resemblance’ of Darcy’s proposal ‘to that of Collins’—appalling in its ‘failure of deference to others’ (*Women, Politics, and the Novel*, p.82).

<sup>487</sup> McMaster observes that *Pride and Prejudice* deals with ‘frankness’ as a character trait, much like *Persuasion* deals with ‘firmness’, and suggest that, (quoting Austen) ‘like all other qualities of the mind, it should have its proportions and limits’ (*P*, p.126). ‘The issue of how much of the truth should be articulated, and how much left unsaid, gets full coverage’ in the story (‘Talking about Talk’, p.83).



regulation'; it provokes Elizabeth to set aside any 'concern' she 'might have felt in refusing' him, had he 'behaved in a more gentleman-like manner'—a point that brings 'mortification' to him (p.215). The angry reaction of Elizabeth to his confessed scruples about her family is also, as Darcy suggests, a kind of pride.<sup>488</sup> Thus, while the scene takes the form of a battle of words (an Indexical Legisign), its thrust is to illustrate the inability of ardent love to mix with pride. It is not enough for Darcy's love to be stronger than his pride, since the pride still wounds his lover. Nor can his honesty and frankness work their power with her unless tempered by charity, since otherwise his words cut where they ought not to. Likewise, Elizabeth cannot effectively correct the ill-advised actions of her would-be lover without taking the trouble to learn the truth about his actions, as her prejudice in such case is all too apparent to him; she only corrects in some areas while wounding in others. As depicted in this scene, the couple has potential for mutual compatibility (Category 12) only if, as a prerequisite, each makes further individual progress in the relationship virtues of humility, charity, and temperance (Category 13), and in overcoming the corresponding opposite tendencies to pride and prejudice.

Elizabeth's rejection of Darcy's suit is, however, a starting point for positive change in both characters. For the first time, Elizabeth is affected by Darcy deeply enough to stop and consider his character more objectively. 'That he should have been in love with her for so many months', enough to 'wish to marry her in spite of all the objections which had made him prevent his friend's marrying her sister, and which must appear at least with equal force in his own case', is an 'incredible' fact that she cannot dismiss (p.216). It suggests more substance of character than she has given him credit for, and she begins to consider his character in a more serious light. From his ensuing letter explaining his actions with respect to Bingley and

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<sup>488</sup> Butler observes that 'Elizabeth's corresponding sin is more subtle and her enlightenment requires the space of the whole book'—perhaps because from the start 'she seems unconscious that she suffers from pride at all' (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.203).

Wickham, she might perceive his tendency and determination to judge justly. For example, after observing Bingley's clear 'partiality' for Jane at the Netherfield ball, Darcy writes that:

Your sister I also watched.—Her look and manners were open, cheerful and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them by any participation of sentiment.—If *you* have not been mistaken here, *I* must have been in error. Your superior knowledge of your sister must make the latter probable.—If it be so, if I have been misled by such error, to inflict pain on her, your resentment has not been unreasonable. But I shall not scruple to assert, that the serenity of your sister's countenance and air was such, as might have given the most acute observer, a conviction that, however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily touched.—That I was desirous of believing her indifferent is certain,—but I will venture to say that my investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears.—I did not believe her to be indifferent because I wished it;—I believed it on impartial conviction, as truly as I wished it in reason.  
(p.220)

The effort that Darcy has put into being impartial and of waiting to have more objective evidence before acting, are apparent. Likewise, his *humility* in admitting that he *does* have biases, that he was likely wrong in his assessment of Jane's feelings, and that Elizabeth is better-positioned to know the real character of her sister's feelings, all argue for the honesty of his account. His example is instructive of the virtue of *justice*. This contrasts with what Elizabeth has tended to do: she has allowed first impressions and pride in her own quickness of perception (vanity) to color her observations about both Darcy and Wickham; in short, she has allowed *prejudice* to short-circuit justice. This is the easier (and human) thing to do, but the virtue of justice is not to be developed without effort, and Darcy here exemplifies (as an Iconic Sinsign) its practice in a manner that is particularly impactful to Elizabeth, given its close connection with the welfare of her 'most beloved sister'. Clearly, even just deliberations can go wrong, as they have in this case, but where they do err, one can exercise the *humility* to admit it as Darcy does. His honesty and humility are

further bolstered by the admission in his letter that he concealed from Bingley the information of Jane's being in London when she visited the Gardiners, and that this act 'is [the] one part of my conduct in the whole affair, on which I do not reflect with satisfaction', as perhaps the act 'was beneath me' (pp.221-2). His tendency to reflect on his own conduct, and to admit where it has been wrong, is perhaps another key to his success in developing justice as a character attribute. On the other hand, after knowing how upset Elizabeth is over the harm of his actions to Jane, to suggest that he could 'reflect with satisfaction' on *any* part of his decision is perhaps too brutal a truth to share with her, and is another example of his need to give as much thought to the feelings of others as he does to being truthful. This gets to the heart of Austen's debate about balancing justice and charity: both virtues require *thoughtfulness* (Thirdness), but where justice must ponder over *facts* about one's own conduct in relation to others (Secondness), charity must think about the *feelings* of others in relation to one's conduct (Firstness); consequently, justice exercised without charity might properly construe the facts about people but neglect their feelings (as Darcy has done), while charity exercised without justice might give proper attention to their feelings but misconstrue facts about them (as Elizabeth has done). The two virtues must be exercised *together* to achieve the completeness expressed in the Peircean *feeling-fact-thought* triad.<sup>489</sup> The image of Elizabeth reading and contemplating Darcy's deliberations as set forth in this part of his letter is an Iconic Legisign both of his strength in justice and his weakness in charity, and also of her strength in charity and weakness in justice. It is a Legisign because of the logically constructed, articulate language of the letter that creates the image, and it is an Iconic Legisign because it faintly suggests the couple's positive potential to

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<sup>489</sup> Regarding Austen's sense of balance about the exercise of virtue, Emsley comments that her novels 'represent the philosophical tradition of the [classical and theological] virtues as a coherent and harmonious whole in a way that has not since been equaled' (*Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.16).

balance one another in these virtues (Category 13), should they choose to pursue further mutual counsel (Category 22) with a humbler attitude.

The second topic of Darcy's letter—that of his history with Wickham—proves to be more immediately instructive for Elizabeth than the first. His inclusion in the letter of sensitive, private details about his sister shows humility, and creates intimacy with Elizabeth by putting her into his confidence. His citing of Colonel Fitzwilliam as a witness to 'every particular of [his] transactions' with Wickham (p.225), and his effort to provide Elizabeth an opportunity to corroborate the facts with his cousin, add credibility to his relation of events. When Elizabeth tries to 'recollect' any substantive facts about Wickham from her personal experience that might counter Darcy's assertions, 'no such recollection befriended[s] her'; she can 'remember no more substantial good' about Wickham 'than the general approbation of the neighbourhood... which his social powers had gained him' (p.228). Darcy's communications with Elizabeth have the effect of putting her into a more objective *judgement* process than she has heretofore engaged in, at least with respect to Wickham. For the first time, she is considering real *facts* and evidence about him (Secondness), not just impressions and *feelings* (Firstness), and her conclusions about him are quite different as a result.<sup>490</sup> She sees clearly the 'impropriety' of his early 'communications' about Darcy to her (she being 'a stranger' at the time) and the 'hatefully mercenary' character of his later 'attentions to Miss King' (p.229). She also considers that, 'proud and repulsive' as Darcy's 'manners' are, 'she ha[s] never, in the whole course of their acquaintance... seen anything that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust—any thing that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits' (p.230). She is beginning to learn the importance of balancing impressions and feelings about people with facts, and so her *justice* and *prudence* (Category 13) in

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<sup>490</sup> Here, Ruderman notes that 'Austen's portrayal of prejudice is an example of her general theme: it is a feeling not grounded on reason, a feeling that is in need of guidance' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.100). Morris makes a similar point: 'In Austen's fiction, characters have to learn that their vision or wishes need to be subjected to empirical facts' (*Worldly Realism*, p.11).

this scene are being improved by her interaction with Darcy (Category 22). She grows 'absolutely ashamed of herself', realizing she has been 'blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd' in her judgment of both Wickham and Darcy:

Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly.—Pleased with the preference of one [Wickham], and offended by the neglect of the other [Darcy], on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself. (p.230)

The shocking (Indexical) nature of Elizabeth's self-discovery, as Butler argues, is the result of her having had 'no inkling of her own fallibility until Darcy's proposal and the explanatory letter'.<sup>491</sup> She realizes that up to this point she has 'prided' herself on her own 'discernment', which has blocked introspection. Equally 'humiliating' is her 'discovery' that what she has felt for Wickham is not so much love (Category 11) but the tickling of her *vanity*, which (as we have seen with Lydia and Lady Susan) is really self-love (p.230).<sup>492</sup> In this letter, Darcy exhibits the contrasting tendency to examine his own flaws as vigorously as those of others—a moral circumspection that is essential to the exercise of justice. The 'generous candour' of Jane (p.230), which also comes to Elizabeth's mind as a contrast to her own narrow judgments in the instance, similarly illustrates how circumspection relates to *charity*: it enables a person to view the actions of others in a more generous light—on the same plane with one's own flawed humanity—and prevents a sense of superiority from skewing one's feelings and judgments. Elizabeth experiences a softening of her resentment toward Darcy, which enables her to read even his objections about her family—their 'impropriety of conduct' at the Netherfield ball (p.231)—with more justice, and to see those events as a reasonable basis for reservations on Darcy's part, both with

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<sup>491</sup> *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, p.208.

<sup>492</sup> Poovey suggests that the story rewards our 'romantic wishes' for Elizabeth only after 'the heroine's vanity' has been 'humbl[ed]'. Thus, '[a]t the level of plot, power is taken from egotism and given to love' (*The Proper Lady*, p.201).

respect to Bingley's courting of Jane and his own courting of herself. Her revised mental outlook begins to change her feelings about Darcy. This kind of change of mind and heart exemplifies, as Emsley suggests, the Christian principle of *repentance*<sup>493</sup>—a positive and necessary part of personal progression. With repentance, one recognizes one's errors (which may involve some humiliation, as it does with Elizabeth) and then determines to change the wrong behavior.<sup>494</sup> Moe captures well Elizabeth's attitude here: 'Elizabeth regards herself as the subject of reform and marriage as an intimate process of self-improvement'; she takes 'pleasure in knowing herself to have been wrong and to be capable of self-transcendence', for which she eventually will be 'rewarded with a man perfectly suited to her'.<sup>495</sup> One result of her repentance is that Elizabeth begins to recognize the improving effect of Darcy's society: she begins to feel *gratitude* to him, which for

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<sup>493</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.9.

<sup>494</sup> Austen, well versed in the New Testament, understood that repentance involves a healthy kind of sorrow: 'Now I rejoice', writes Saint Paul to early converts, 'not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner' (2 Corinthians 7:9, KJV). Dabundo calls this type of humiliation 'part of... education'—the recognition of the 'need to change' that comes of 'self-awareness' and 'self-abasement, when the naked self stands revealed'. It 'is powerful and telling' in 'transforming lives' ('Five Styles of Women's Roles', p.49). Not all critics read Elizabeth's 'humiliation' here only in terms of penitence, of course. Ruderman observes that 'a scene of humiliation almost always precedes the union of hero and heroine', showing 'that love is an awareness of one's neediness and lack of independence—a point disputed by many recent critics of Austen who wish to defend love as allowing for separateness' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.53). Fraiman reads Elizabeth's humiliation in terms similar to other feminist critics, but with a Freudian twist: 'the male bonding between father and daughter... collapse[s]' when Elizabeth realizes her father's 'inadequacy and Darcy's capacity'. She undergoes a process that 'forces [her] out of the library, into the ballroom, and up to the altar'. Elizabeth's 'separation from her father' and 'reattachment to another'—'the changing of the paternal guard'—is a 'fall' from male-like authority and 'pride' to the humiliating 'destiny' of young women in patriarchal society—that of becoming the currency of exchange in the economic transactions of men (*Unbecoming Women*, pp.72-84).

<sup>495</sup> 'Multiple Modernities', pp.1086,1088.

Austen is a precursor to romantic love (Category 11). This change in her feelings is symbolized in the closing of the scene when Elizabeth returns from her walk (having read and reread Darcy's letter) to find that she has missed Colonel Fitzwilliam's departure (he had waited 'at least an hour, hoping for her return') and can 'but just *affect* concern in missing him'; he is 'no longer an object'—she can 'think only of her letter' (p.232). This scene is a very powerful sign of the couple's ability to communicate on a deep and meaningful level (unlike Miss Bingley and Darcy, and Colonel Fitzwilliam and Elizabeth), reaffirming our sense of their personal compatibility (Category 12) and their capacity to engage in mutually-improving interaction (Category 22)—in this case, toward the improvement of Elizabeth's practice of *justice* and *prudence* through her *repentance* (Category 13). The couple's image is an Iconic Legisign because it is created by the conventional means of a letter that re-impresses us with their positive potential to realize Austen's ideals for principled interaction and mutual pedagogy in a marriage relationship.

In the scenes that immediately precede Elizabeth's trip to Derbyshire with the Gardiners, we are given indicators that her contrition over her failings is lasting and productive of personal change, more so than were her father's misgivings over his failings with Lydia.<sup>496</sup> The scenes also heighten our sense of Elizabeth's appreciation for proactive protection from a strong male figure, given Mr. Bennet's neglect of this duty. During her last week at Hunsford (after Darcy and Colonel Fitzwilliam depart), Elizabeth continues to reflect on Darcy's letter, still sometimes feeling 'indignation' over 'the style of his address', and other times feeling 'compassion' toward him for 'how unjustly she had condemned and upbraided him'. In all cases, however, 'her own past behaviour' is 'a constant source of vexation and regret' to her (pp.235-6). When she and Jane meet Lydia and Kitty at the roadside inn on their way back to Longbourn, she is already more introspective and less prone to vanity: she

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<sup>496</sup> A contrition that is productive of actual change is arguably what Saint Paul means by the 'godly sorrow' associated with repentance, as differentiated from ordinary regret.

recognizes Lydia's remark about Wickham not caring 'three straws' for Miss King (that 'nasty little freckled thing') as having a 'coarseness of... *sentiment*' very near to what 'her own breast had harboured' about Darcy but a few days ago, though she may not have used 'such coarseness of *expression* herself' (p.244). Back at home, when she privately shares with Jane the news of Darcy's proposal, his follow-up letter, and her own humiliating realizations, she admits and clearly describes the nature of her folly: 'I meant to be uncommonly clever in taking so decided a dislike to him, without any reason. It is such a spur to one's genius, such an opening for wit to have a dislike of that kind' (p.250). Later, when Lydia and her mother lament the removal of the regiment to Brighton, and all the pleasures they must give up, Elizabeth 'trie[s] to be diverted by them; but all sense of pleasure [is] lost in shame. She fe[els] anew the justice of Mr. Darcy's objections' about her family's lack of moral restraint, and is more 'disposed' than ever 'to pardon [Darcy's] interference in the views of his friend' (pp.254-5). She sees that Darcy's protectiveness toward Bingley was motivated by the same sense of moral watchfulness that prompted his actions to prevent Wickham's elopement with Georgiana. She is ashamed of the comparatively lax moral attitude of Lydia and her parents, and soberly reasons with her father as to the dangers of permitting Lydia to go with the Forsters to Brighton. Her father's unwillingness to be more proactive in protecting Lydia from moral danger shows comparative weakness, and Elizabeth realizes more than ever the 'disadvantages' to children of having an indulgent father (p.263). The image of Elizabeth's increased sobriety and moral circumspection, and of her reasoning with her father in these scenes, is an iconic Sinsign of her gains in *judgment*, *temperance*, and *prudence* (Category 13). Her importunity of her father to restrain Lydia, largely unheeded, also builds our sense of her desire and value for a man who would proactively discharge his duty to teach and protect his family (Category 23). In all these characteristics, Elizabeth's image draws nearer morally to that of Darcy, increasing their fitness to marry (Category 12) and to raise children together (Category 23).



Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley gives many signs of the 'thawing' of her feelings for Darcy, and of the reformation of his ungentlemanlike conduct. When Elizabeth is informed by letter from Mrs. Gardiner that their pleasure tour will be shortened to 'go no farther northwards than Derbyshire', it is impossible for her to see 'the mention of Derbyshire... without thinking of Pemberley and its owner' (p.265). It seems, on the one hand, that Darcy is never far from her thoughts; and, on the other, that Pemberley is inseparable from her thoughts about Darcy. McCann suggests that each mansion in an Austen novel is 'the proper symbol' of a character's 'economic, social, [and] intellectual condition', and so we might consider Elizabeth's perceptions of Pemberley to reflect her feelings and thoughts about Darcy.<sup>497</sup> As noted previously, when Elizabeth first sees Pemberley, she is unexpectedly impressed by its *natural* beauty and situation as much as by its size and stateliness. As she and the Gardiners approach the property, she watches 'with some perturbation' for the beginning of Pemberley Woods. When they turn in at the gate to the property, 'her spirits [are] in a high flutter'. These are conventional tokens of love feeling (Category 11) mingled with Elizabeth's excited prudential sense of what it could mean 'to be mistress of Pemberley' (p.271).<sup>498</sup> Everywhere Elizabeth turns,

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<sup>497</sup> 'Setting and Character in *Pride and Prejudice*, p.317. Duckworth similarly suggests that 'the aesthetic taste evident in the landscape of Pemberley' does more than simply appeal to Elizabeth's own taste; it 'permits Elizabeth and the reader to infer the fundamental worth of Darcy's social ethical outlook'; see '*Mansfield Park* and Estate Improvements: Jane Austen's Grounds of Being', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 26 (1971-2), 25-48, in *Jane Austen: Critical Assessments*, ed. by Ian Littlewood, 4 vols (Mountfield: Helm Information, 1998), IV, 133-51 (133).

<sup>498</sup> Newman, as mentioned earlier, argues that 'no woman who is economically dependent, not even Elizabeth, ...is unmoved by property' ('Can This Marriage Be Saved', p.698). While a strongly materialistic interpretation of this scene (and also the episodes associated with Charlotte's marital choice) dominates feminist criticism generally, I want to suggest that Austen signals, as much through Elizabeth as through Charlotte (though in a different way), the importance of balancing materialistic considerations with less tangible values, keeping in mind Ruderman's assertion that Austen knew how

she finds more down-to-earth wholesomeness than she expects: the elderly housekeeper is 'much less fine, and more civil, than she had any notion of finding her'; the furniture and décor are 'neither gaudy nor uselessly fine; with less of splendor, and more real elegance, than the furniture of Rosings' (p.272).<sup>499</sup> In Darcy's father's 'favourite room', the housekeeper points out miniature portraits of Darcy and Wickham, left there 'just as they used to be' eight years prior, when he commissioned them; because his father 'was very fond of them', Darcy has made no alterations (p.274). Though he does not himself like Wickham, Darcy respects his father's feelings and wishes—an indicator that he would not have breached his father's will concerning Wickham without just cause. Elizabeth also learns from Mrs. Reynolds that Darcy has purchased a new pianoforte as a gift for his sister, to be presented to her the next day when he and Georgiana arrive at the house; more than a mere profession, this deed is an attestation to his affection for his sister. When the old woman speaks of his kind disposition and affability to the poor, 'Elizabeth listened, wondered, doubted, and was impatient for more'. The housekeeper 'could interest her on no other point', relating 'the subjects of the pictures, the dimensions of the rooms, and the price of the furniture, in vain' (p.275). Here, we see that although Elizabeth is 'not unmoved' by Darcy's property, she is more interested in descriptions of his virtuous character than in enumerations like those given by Mr. Collins of Rosings Park. Mrs. Reynolds comments to her that '[s]ome people call him proud; but... it is only because he does not rattle away like other young men' (p.276). This comment suggests that what is often taken for pride in Darcy is in fact just a reserved manner. Regarding what the narrator describes as a 'very pretty sitting-room, lately fitted up with greater elegance and lightness than the apartments below', the housekeeper relates that Darcy has 'but just done [it], to

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to make her heroines work within a convention without being defined by it (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.41). I develop this idea further hereafter.

<sup>499</sup> McCann observes that Pemberley, like Darcy, is an image that improves upon further inspection ('Setting and Character', p.322).

give pleasure to Miss Darcy, who had taken a liking to the room, when last at Pemberley'; anything that 'can give his sister... pleasure, is sure to be done in a moment' (p.276). This second sign of Darcy's kind treatment of his sister might be supposed to be representative of how he will treat a wife. In the gallery room, Elizabeth looks for his portrait among the others, and is 'arrested' by its 'striking resemblance' to him and by 'such a smile over the face, as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her' (p.277). She returns to the portrait again before quitting the gallery, and considers his character anew through the eyes of his intimate acquaintances—his sister and the housekeeper. The effect is profound:

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance.... As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain was it in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (p.277)

When her party leaves the house and Darcy abruptly appears, the feelings of both he and Elizabeth again take somatic shape: 'Their eyes instantly met, and the cheeks of each were overspread with the deepest blush'; he spoke to Elizabeth 'not in terms of perfect composure'; she 'instinctively turned away' but then stopped and 'received his compliments with an embarrassment impossible to be overcome'; she 'scarcely dared lift her eyes' as he spoke; he was not 'at ease' and his 'accent had none of its usual sedateness'; he repeated his civil inquiries about her family 'so often, and in so hurried a way, as plainly spoke the distraction of his thoughts' (p.278). To Elizabeth, his 'behaviour' was 'so strikingly altered' since 'his last address in Rosings Park, when he put his letter into her hand'—his manners less 'dignified' and his speech so gentle—that she 'knew not what to think, nor how to account for it' (p.279). After he excuses himself to enter the house, Elizabeth cannot attend to her aunt and

uncle's conversation; her 'thoughts were all fixed on that one spot of Pemberley House, whichever it might be, where Mr. Darcy then was', and she 'longed to know what at the moment was passing in his mind; in what manner he thought of her, and whether, in defiance of every thing, she was still dear to him' (pp.279-80). As described previously, when Darcy rejoins her and the Gardiners in the woods and asks her to 'do him the honour of introducing him' to her aunt and uncle, she supposes he 'takes them now for people of fashion', and that he will revert to his stiff pride once he learns who they are. Instead, he proves to be amiable, conversational, and attentive. Elizabeth doesn't think it possible that her 'reproofs at Hunsford could... work such a change as this', or that he could 'still love' her (p.282). However, when he asks whether he might be allowed 'to introduce my sister to your acquaintance during your stay at Lambton', she realizes 'immediately... that whatever desire Miss Darcy might have of being acquainted with her, must be the work of her brother'. At this point, though it is 'impossible' for her to be 'comfortable' as they stroll along together, she is 'flattered and pleased' by his wish to introduce Georgiana to her—a 'compliment of the highest kind' (p.284). This request is a sign that has more staying power in Elizabeth's mind than all the other small indicators of his regard that Elizabeth has seen. When she retires at night, 'she could do nothing but think, and think with wonder, of Mr. Darcy's civility, and above all, of his wishing her to be acquainted with his sister' (p.286). For a man whom she has called 'ungentleman-like' and 'the last man in the world whom I could ever be prevailed on to marry' (p.215), he has shown a remarkably humble and conciliatory attitude. He has exhibited a regard for her that has remained constant despite her very personal rejection and willful misunderstanding of his character. The scene of Elizabeth's visit to Pemberley is provokingly intense but a very *positive* indicator (Iconic Sinsign) of improvement on both sides. Their improvements in relationship virtue have clearly resulted from their earlier confrontation, which not only aired their pent-up feelings but also provoked a reaction in each party. The Pemberley encounter demonstrates that each has chosen to react humbly, seeking personal reform rather than retribution. As McMaster suggests, Elizabeth's 'reproof' has

‘taught’ Darcy to ‘extend his communication, and to mend his language’, and Darcy has taught Elizabeth ‘to regard truth as well as style in her pronouncements’.<sup>500</sup> The episode might be considered an Iconic Sinsign of the warming of Elizabeth’s feelings for Darcy (Category 11), of the couple’s growing compatibility (Category 12), of the painfully improving effect of their interactions (Category 22), of their gains in personal virtue (Category 13), and of Darcy’s wholesome and proactive discharge of brotherly duty to his sister (Category 23). Notably, the only Peircean category missing from this representation is legal marriage (Category 33), always the last piece to fall into place in a love story.

Darcy’s visit with his sister to Lambton Inn reinforces the adjustments that have been made in the minds and hearts of Elizabeth and Darcy. As noted previously, when Darcy and Georgiana arrive at the inn, the Gardiners realize by ‘the embarrassment of [Elizabeth’s] manner’ and ‘the circumstance itself’ that a love interest is at work. Elizabeth herself is ‘quite amazed at her own discomposure’ and ‘the perturbation of [her] feelings’ on the appearance of her friends (p.287). She recognizes these indicators as symptoms of her own increasing regard for Darcy. She detects in all of Darcy’s conversation during the visit ‘an accent so far removed from

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<sup>500</sup> ‘Talking about Talk’, p.93. Here, the ‘truth’ that Elizabeth has learned to regard corresponds to Secondness, or real-world Fact, such as that interposed by Darcy through his letter. Duckworth notes that Austen’s heroines have to learn to limit their ‘individualism’ and recognize ‘the possibly destructive effects of excessive freedom... to the social fabric by the strongly subjective self’. This concept ultimately proceeds, Duckworth argues, from Austen’s ‘belief, not in man as the creator of order but in man’s freedom to create within a prior order’—a belief that is reflected in the ‘close attention to physical fact’ she gives in her novels. ‘Thus her individualism as an author’, continues Duckworth, ‘like the individualism of her heroines, respects finally the given structure of her world’ (*The Improvement of the Estate*, pp.32,34). Here, Duckworth argues that a respect for objective, external reality—one of the three fundamental pillars of Peircean pragmatic philosophy—is an anchor to the practice of personal virtue in Austen’s value system. This is arguably manifested by the opposing position of pure Secondness (real-world fact) on the Peircean diagram to Firstness of Thirdness (personal virtue), the two elements existing in a relationship of counterbalancing tension.

hauteur or disdain of his companions, as convinced her that the improvement of manners which she had yesterday witnessed' is more than an anomaly. She sees him 'seeking the acquaintance, and courting the good opinion of people [the Gardiners], with whom any intercourse a few months ago would have been a disgrace'; he is 'civil... to the very relations whom he had openly disdained' before. Even when among his own 'dear friends at Netherfield, [and] his dignified relations at Rosings', she had never 'seen him so desirous to please, so free from self-consequence, or unbending reserve' than at this time, 'when no importance could result from the success of his endeavours, and when even the acquaintance of those to whom his attentions were addressed, would draw down the ridicule and censure of the ladies both of Netherfield and Rosings' (pp.290-1). When Elizabeth retires for the evening, she 'lay awake two whole hours, endeavouring to make... out' her own feelings about him: 'long... ashamed of ever feeling a dislike against him', she admits that the 'respect created by [her] conviction of his valuable qualities' has taken on 'a friendlier nature'. It is a feeling 'above respect and esteem'; it is '[g]ratitude, not merely for [his] having once loved her', but for his 'loving her still well enough, to forgive all the petulance and acrimony of her manner in rejecting him, and all the unjust accusations accompanying her rejection'. Instead of 'avoid[ing] her as his greatest enemy', he has been 'most eager to preserve the acquaintance', to solicit 'the good opinion of her friends', and to 'mak[e] her known to his sister'. This is 'a change in a man of so much pride' that she can only attribute to 'ardent love'. At this point, she must determine 'how far it would be for the happiness of both' for her to 'employ the power, which her fancy told her she still possessed, of bringing on the renewal of his addresses' (pp.292-3). Here again, Elizabeth has *gratitude* for Darcy (the precursor to romantic love), but unlike before, she is now fully conscious of it, and there are no lingering reasons to resist the feeling. This scene, then, represents not just the *potential* for affection between the pair but Darcy's actual 'ardent love' and Elizabeth's growing sense of esteem and gratitude (Category 11). It is evident that these feelings have flourished because Darcy's class-based pride, so harmful before in his suit, has been appropriately levelled, and Elizabeth's prejudice,

so cutting before in her rejection of his suit, has been chased away by truth. The justice and charity (Category 13) of both characters have been brought into better balance. Because the scene is created largely by the *conventional means* of third-person narration, it is a Legisign of these ideals. However, because it also has the effect of creating a *feeling of greater harmony* and *less contention* in the couple, it has Iconicity and is therefore an Iconic Legisign.<sup>501</sup>

When Elizabeth and the Gardiners dine at Pemberley, Miss Bingley sees the engagement as a sign of growing fondness between Darcy and Elizabeth. With ‘sneering civility’, she suggests to Elizabeth (in the hearing of the company) that the recent removal of the militia regiment from Meryton ‘must be a great loss to *your* family’. ‘Elizabeth instantly comprehend[s]’ that she alludes to Wickham, the mention of whom causes Darcy to look at Elizabeth ‘earnestly’ with ‘a heightened complexion’, and ‘his sister [to be] overcome with confusion, and unable to lift up her eyes’; Elizabeth ‘presently answer[s] the question in a tolerably detached tone’. She knows that Georgiana’s ‘meditated elopement’ with Wickham has ‘been revealed’ to ‘no creature’ but herself and Colonel Fitzwilliam, and so her ‘collected behavior’ in this instance quells a potentially shameful scene for Georgiana (pp.297-8), and reflects Elizabeth’s trustworthiness to keep Darcy’s confidences and to protect the good name of his sister. The incident might be considered a pretest of how she might act in the intimate role of wife to Darcy and of older sister to Georgiana.<sup>502</sup> Later, when Elizabeth has left the room, Miss Bingley persists in

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<sup>501</sup> I have pointed out previously the softening effect of Austen’s use of Iconic Legisign imagery for Elizabeth and Darcy as a couple. The overall significance of this frequent usage is discussed further in the conclusions to this thesis.

<sup>502</sup> Elizabeth’s capacity to sensitively and prudently manage this crisis with Georgiana suggests her preparation to assume female mentoring and advisory responsibilities, especially with regards to younger siblings and children. Her image reflects Austen’s answer to Wollstonecraft’s concern that ‘in the regulation of a family’ and ‘in the education of children, understanding... is particularly required’;

criticizing Elizabeth's looks, manner, and family to Darcy, until he can 'contain himself no longer' and openly tells her that he has, for 'many months' now, 'considered [Elizabeth] as one of the handsomest women of my acquaintance' (p.300). Here, though Darcy has been conscious of his affection for Elizabeth for a long time, he makes the fact explicit. This not only ends Miss Bingley's hopes for securing any special place in his affections, but also commits Darcy more fully to his stated preference for Elizabeth. Hence, the effect of the scene is to tighten further the sense of intimacy and family binding that is developing between Elizabeth and Darcy. The image is positively indicative (an Iconic Sinsign) of the growing strength of their mutual affection (Category 11), of their commitment to one another as loyal confidants (Category 13), of their sense of duty to protect one another's family members (Category 23), and of their movement toward a lawful (Category 33) and physically intimate relationship (Category 22).

The elopement of Lydia and Wickham develops further Darcy's proactive fulfillment of the male role to serve and protect his family, and Elizabeth's appreciation for his discharge of this duty. When Darcy enters Lambton Inn to find Elizabeth in a distraught emotional state over the news of Lydia's elopement, he is all facts and action: 'And what has been done, what has been attempted, to recover her?' When Elizabeth relates that her father has gone to London but that she hasn't 'the smallest hope' of him finding her, and when she laments the '[w]retched, wretched mistake' she has made in not alerting her family to Wickham's 'real character', Darcy paces about the room in 'earnest meditation, his brow contracted, his air gloomy' (p.306). His behavior indicates both troubled feelings and a gearing-up for action. The troubled feelings, Elizabeth later learns, are a combination of concern for her distress and a regret that *he* had not warned *her* sooner of Wickham's treacherous nature. It is not a time for talk, however, and he soon leaves

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and 'women, whose minds are not enlarged by cultivation, or ...expanded by reflection, are very unfit to manage a family' (*Vindication*, ch.4, paras.45,54).



Elizabeth at the inn so as to take action. Elizabeth presumes his quick exit reflects a wish of having nothing further to do with her or her disgraced family, and she sees 'him go with regret', realizing that 'never had she so honestly felt that she could have loved him' as then, 'when all love must be vain' (pp.306,308). Later, when Mr. Gardiner reports from London his arrangement of Lydia and Wickham's marriage, Elizabeth ponders over the potential fallout of her sister's elopement on her family. At least she 'ha[s] no fear' of the news 'spreading farther, through [Darcy's] means', as there are 'few people on whose secrecy she would have more confidently depended'. Nonetheless, she considers the event a death knell to her prospects with Darcy, for she cannot suppose 'that [he] would connect himself with a family, where to every other objection would now be added, an alliance and relationship of the nearest kind with a man whom he so justly scorned'. She is 'humbled' and 'grieved', and becomes 'jealous of his esteem, when she could no longer hope to be benefited by it' (pp.343-4). She is struck with the conviction of Darcy's suitability to her personally:

She began now to comprehend that he was exactly the man, who, in disposition and talents, would most suit her. His understanding and temper, though unlike her own, would have answered all her wishes. It was an union that must have been to the advantage of both; by her ease and liveliness, his mind might have been softened, his manners improved, and from his judgement, information, and knowledge of the world, she must have received benefit of greater importance. (p.344)

Moe comments that 'Elizabeth looks upon Darcy as a provider in more than a material sense'; he 'is appealing precisely to the extent that he would be improved by [her] good qualities' and she by his. In Austen's 'ideal couple', Moe argues, 'each participant accrues from the partner precisely that which their relationship demonstrates each lacks alone', and 'love catalyzes recognition of [their]

shortcomings, even as it promises to compensate for them'.<sup>503</sup> Elizabeth feels this way about Darcy even before she learns from Mrs. Gardiner about his role in settling Lydia and Wickham's marriage. In her letter, Mrs. Gardiner reveals that Darcy had left for London the day after witnessing Elizabeth's distress over the elopement, 'with the resolution of hunting for [the pair]'. He had felt it 'his duty to step forward, and [to] endeavor to remedy an evil, which had been brought on' by 'his mistaken pride'—his deeming it 'beneath him[self], to lay his private actions open to the world' in exposing Wickham and making it 'impossible for any young woman of character, to love or confide in him'. On discovering the couple in town, he had first attempted to persuade Lydia to return to her family, but finding her 'absolutely resolved on remaining where she was', and finding that Wickham had no intention of marrying her, he had bargained with the latter to marry her for a 'reasonable' sum of money. He then had 'battled' with Mr. Gardiner to be allowed to be the one to pay Wickham in full, eventually succeeding due to the Gardiners' sense that Darcy was also acting on motives of love for Elizabeth (pp.336-8). On reading this letter, Elizabeth is thrown 'into a flutter of spirits'; she is amazed at what Darcy has done—

he had taken on himself all the trouble and mortification attendant on such a research; ...where he was reduced to meet, frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe, the man whom he always most wished to avoid, and whose very name it was punishment to him to pronounce. He had done all this for a girl whom he could neither regard nor esteem. Her heart did whisper, that he had done it for her. (p.360)

The cause of Elizabeth's distress—her worries over the effects of Lydia's elopement on her family's reputation—is here vigorously prosecuted by Darcy, arguably the

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<sup>503</sup> 'Multiple Modernities', p.1807. As mentioned, Poovey, Fraiman, and other feminists read Elizabeth's softening to Darcy more as a subtle sign of her surrender to the romantic norms of a patriarchal economy (Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, pp.205-7; Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women*, pp.72-84).

only man who is equipped to protect her.<sup>504</sup> His image in this scene (created largely by a letter again, making it a Legisign) is one of true and durable love (Category 11). This kind of love contrasts with mere sexual lust such as Wickham has for Lydia, because it does not require the physical presence of his beloved to be fired. In consideration of Darcy's generous and disinterested service, Elizabeth is 'proud of him'—'[p]roud that in a cause of compassion and honour, he had been able to get the better of himself' (p.361). More than anything, she is now in love with his *character*. As argued previously, his labor to bring about Lydia's marriage reflects his and Elizabeth's shared value for legal marriage (Category 33) as a sanction to a physical union (Category 22). His actions are also suggestive (an Iconic Sinsign) of the higher feelings and principles (Categories 11 and 13) that can motivate a man to seek such a union, as well as the sense of fatherly duty (Category 23) that motivates a man to protect and serve his wife and family members.

The depth of Darcy's reformation is demonstrated when he brings Bingley back to Longbourn. As the two men approach the house, Jane is not the only one who is visibly affected. Elizabeth's color, 'which had been driven from her face, return[s] for half a minute with an additional glow'. She hopes his return is a sign 'that his affection and wishes' toward her are 'still... unshaken', but she is 'not... secure' in this hope (p.370). When the men are seated in the house, she 'venture[s] only one glance at Darcy' and finds him more 'serious... than... she had seen him at Pemberley', thereafter often 'looking at Jane' as much 'as at herself' and speaking very little in general. She is 'disappointed' by this because it seems to reflect 'less anxiety to please' than his behavior did at Pemberley (p.371). However, she later

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<sup>504</sup> Emsley notes that when Darcy 'acts to preserve Lydia's reputation', he exhibits not only *love* for Elizabeth but also the determination to be *just*—to make restitution for his negligence in failing to warn Elizabeth's family about Wickham (*Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.23). Ruderman argues along the same lines, asserting that '[i]n all the novels, true love... is possible only when a character recognizes and acts on his or her duty'; a character's 'concern with [personal] virtue is the ground for the deepest attachment... and... the deepest feeling' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.23).

learns from him that he had been ‘narrowly observ[ing]’ Jane to learn from his ‘own observation’ whether ‘her affection’ for Bingley was as Elizabeth had represented it to be. Once he was convinced that it was so, he had ‘made a confession’ to Bingley of his former concealment of Jane’s visit to London; he had expressed his conviction to Bingley that he was ‘mistaken’ about Jane’s indifference; and he had assured Bingley that he would no longer stand in the way of their ‘happiness together’ (pp.411-2). As Bingley’s proposal to Jane follows quickly on the heels of this act, we are allowed to see what Austen has no need to state: that Darcy has made restitution for the misguided behavior for which Elizabeth reproved him when she rejected his first proposal—both in his interference with Bingley and Jane, which he has corrected by removing himself as an impediment, and in his resentful treatment of Wickham, which he has corrected by extending to that gentleman another chance at respectability. His actions in both cases speak to the genuineness of his reformation and to his ongoing commitment to better conduct, guided by what he has learned from Elizabeth about balancing his *fortitude* and *justice* with *charity* (Category 13). The image of his actions in this scene is a Legisign because it is created through *conventional* (third-person) narration, but an Indexical one because it arises in *reaction* to Elizabeth’s reproof.

When Darcy and Bingley dine at Longbourn a few days later, we are given a sense of the intensity of Elizabeth’s new-found feelings for Darcy. At the opening of the dinner scene, Elizabeth ‘hopes that the evening [will] afford some opportunity of bringing [her and Darcy] together’ for ‘conversation’, but circumstances combine to keep them apart (p.377). The couple’s longing for an opportunity to communicate, the tension of their physical separation, and Elizabeth’s frustration at the perversity of the circumstances that make it so, all suggest the magnetism between the pair (Category 22), and heighten our sense of their feelings of attraction (Category 11). The image of the scene is one of *emotional tension* (qualitative Secondness) and also of *provoking obstruction* (reactional Secondness), and so seems to be a mix of Iconic Sinsign and Indexical Sinsign representational modes.

The scene of Darcy's second proposal serves to demonstrate the significant emotional, mental, and moral progress the couple has made. However, before the pair can qualify for the happiness that Austen suggests an ideal marriage can afford, their character has to pass the final test of Lady Catherine's challenge to their union. As discussed earlier, that lady's proud, class-based influence has proven ineffectual in dissuading Elizabeth from Darcy. However, Elizabeth worries about how it might have affected Darcy. 'With his notions of dignity', she fears that Lady Catherine will have 'addressed him on his weakest side' by 'enumerating the miseries of a marriage with *one* [Elizabeth], whose immediate connections were so unequal to his own'. These 'arguments, which to Elizabeth had appeared weak and ridiculous', she fears might have seemed to him as having 'good sense and solid reasoning' (p.400). Here, the image of Elizabeth's situation is a Firstness—a mental state of suspense which we are to hope will be shattered by some Secondness—by a fact of Darcy's behavior that refutes Lady Catherine's influence over him. Elizabeth's uncertainty as to the outcome of this test of Darcy's character also creates a subtle test of her own. In the event that Darcy is persuaded by Lady Catherine to keep his 'dignity unblemished' and 'return no more' to Longbourn, Elizabeth will have to decide what to do. She determines that if Darcy gives Bingley 'an excuse... within a few days' for 'not keeping his promise' to return to Longbourn, she will conclude that he 'is satisfied with only regretting' her; she determines 'then [to] give over every expectation, every wish of his constancy' and 'cease to regret him at all', since his reformation will have proven to be only transitory (p.400). Elizabeth's decision reflects the strength of her courtship ideals (especially as compared with Charlotte's): she is unwilling to marry a man for any amount of property—even for Pemberley—unless he can meet her on equal grounds of genuine affection. However, unlike Wickham at the ball, Darcy shows up at Longbourn as promised. When he and Elizabeth take a walk with the party and end up alone, their feelings start to pour forth. Elizabeth expresses her gratitude for his 'kindness' to her 'poor sister', of which only she in the family has knowledge; she thanks him on behalf of them all. Darcy confirms that 'the wish of giving happiness' to her had been the primary 'inducement' in his search for Lydia

and Wickham—that much as he ‘respect[s]’ her family, he had thought only of her (p.406).<sup>505</sup> Elizabeth is ‘too much embarrassed to say a word’ in response (Austen uses silence here as an indicator of intense feeling), and the pause brings on Darcy’s second declaration of love:

You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever. (p.406)

The emotional build-up of the preceding episodes, of the entire novel, comes to a head in this request for a one-word answer. The affirmation of Elizabeth’s reciprocal love, and Darcy’s joy in it, are conveyed not by quoted dialogue but through indirect discourse: Elizabeth’s feelings have ‘undergone so material a change... as to make her receive with gratitude and pleasure, his present assurances’; Darcy’s ‘happiness’ over this reply is ‘such as he had probably never felt before’. The outside world, heretofore a separation that has intensified the longing between the two, dissolves into obscurity once these avowals are made: ‘They walked on, without knowing in what direction’; there was ‘too much to be thought, and felt, and said, for attention

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<sup>505</sup> Here, his affirmation of ‘respect’ for her family is evidence of the increased graciousness he has learned from Elizabeth, whose ‘precept and... reproof’, McMaster suggests, ‘change his manners along with his verbal practices’ (‘Talking about Talk’, p.93). Gilbert and Gubar argue for a different underlying dynamic to the increased ‘respect’ between Darcy and Elizabeth here, one in which Elizabeth, like all Austen’s heroines, finally accepts and is ‘initiated into a secondary role of service and silence’ before men in exchange for material security in marriage (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, p.160). This view carries forward, as mentioned previously, into later feminist criticism, such as that of Poovey (*The Proper Lady*, pp.205-7) and of Fraiman (*Unbecoming Women*, pp.72-84). The feminist view is valid and understandable given a focus on the plight of women, but like Ruderman (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.1,23) my sense is that Austen’s primary focus here, and with her heroines and heroes in general, is the connection of moral behavior with their ability to love deeply and marry happily. The implications of the story for the plight of women arise more readily, perhaps, to later generations of readers in the historical hindsight of further progress in women’s rights (as Butler also suggests in ‘History, Politics, and Religion’, p.156).

to any other objects' (p.407). The couple learns that the interposition of Lady Catherine to separate them has only caused them to probe and to discover their own feelings for one another more deeply:

"It taught me to hope," said [Darcy], "as I had scarcely ever allowed myself to hope before. I knew enough of your disposition to be certain, that, had you been absolutely, irrevocably decided against me, you would have acknowledged it to Lady Catherine, frankly and openly."

Elizabeth coloured and laughed as she replied, "Yes, you know enough of my *frankness* to believe me capable of *that*. After abusing you so abominably to your face, I could have no scruple in abusing you to all your relations." (p.407)

Darcy acknowledges that her reproofs were 'deserve[d]', that his conduct in his first proposal had been 'unpardonable', though 'it was some time... before' he was 'reasonable enough to allow [the] justice' of her words. When he recounts some of her criticisms that struck him most deeply, she begs him not to 'repeat' what she had said, as she has 'long been most heartily ashamed' of the prejudice behind many of her statements. She explains his letter's effect to remove those prejudices, and he confesses that, though the letter 'was necessary' for her information, he had since come to feel that it was written with 'bitterness of spirit'. When she objects to his self-reproach,<sup>506</sup> he maintains that some of his '[p]ainful recollections' cannot and 'ought not to be repelled'. He had not been 'taught' by his parents to 'correct' his 'temper', and though 'given good principles' had been 'allowed' and 'encouraged' to 'care' only for those of his 'own family circle'—to 'think meanly of all the rest of the

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<sup>506</sup> Elizabeth calls the closing words of Darcy's letter, in which he wishes her God's blessings, 'charity itself' (p.409). Dabundo, agreeing with Roger Gard, suggests this scene reflects shared Christian values in Darcy and Elizabeth. 'They are not ultimately different', Dabundo suggests, 'whatever their social class and background, education, privilege, and gender distinctions, in what matters most' ('Five Styles of Women's Roles', p.51); here, Dabundo cites Roger Gard, *Jane Austen's Novels: The Art of Clarity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p.105.

world', or 'at least to think meanly of their sense and worth compared to' his own. He asserts that 'such I might still have been but for you, dearest, loveliest Elizabeth!' She has taught him the 'hard' but 'advantageous' lesson to value people for their character instead of their rank and connections. He explains that his improved 'civility' to her and the Gardiners when they toured Pemberley had been an effort to show her that he 'was not so mean as to resent the past', in the hopes of obtaining her 'forgiveness' and lessening her 'ill opinion' of him, and to show that her 'reproofs had been attended to'. For her part, Elizabeth had been surprised at receiving any favorable notice at all from him at Pemberley; she certainly had not felt that any 'extraordinary politeness' was 'due' her after her cutting and prejudiced rejection of his proposal. After Darcy conveys Georgiana's delight in making her acquaintance and gives an account of his deeds with respect to Lydia, the couple realizes the lateness of the hour and returns to Longbourn (pp.407-12). The image of the pair in this episode is one of congenial interaction (an Iconic Sinsign), but this time not merely *suggestive* of their potential but rather *confirmative* of the fruits of their interactions. These fruits arguably include ardent mutual feeling (Category 11), a pleasing sense of suitability in mind and temper (Category 12), improved depth and balance in their exercise of virtue, untainted by pride or prejudice (Category 13), a spoken mutual pledge of lawful marriage (Category 33)<sup>507</sup> and the physical union it implies (Category 22), and a sense of gratitude on each side for the discharge of their respective gender duties (Category 23) as already demonstrated—Darcy in his service to Lydia, and Elizabeth in her sisterly encouragement of Georgiana.

The succeeding days of Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement serve to illustrate the anchoring effects of the couple's planned union and of their continued discharge of gender-based duties. These effects are felt both in their own relationship and in

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<sup>507</sup> As Mullan points out, in Austen's fiction a man's declaration of love constitutes an offer of marriage, and a woman's reciprocation of that love an acceptance of his offer (*What Matters in Jane Austen?*, loc.4521-22).



those with their extended family and friends. For example, their engagement strengthens their respective sibling bonds with Jane and Bingley. When Elizabeth shares her news with Jane, the latter says of Darcy:

I always had a value for him. Were it for nothing but his love of you, I must always have esteemed him; but now, as Bingley's friend and your husband, there can be only Bingley and yourself more dear to me. (p.415)

Jane has always had a sisterly regard for Darcy as Bingley's brotherly friend, but the relation is made more 'dear' by his assuming the status of her future brother-in-law through both Bingley *and* Elizabeth. The happy thoughts surrounding this prospect keep the sisters up 'half the night... in conversation' (p.415). A similar strengthening of the bond between Elizabeth and Bingley is evident when the two gentlemen enter Longbourn House the next morning and Bingley looks at Elizabeth 'so expressively' and shakes hands 'with such warmth' as leaves 'no doubt' in Elizabeth's mind 'of his good information'. He 'soon afterwards' asks, 'Mrs. Bennet, have you no more lanes hereabouts in which Lizzy may lose her way again to-day?' (p.416). This good-humored suggestion reflects not only Elizabeth's increased dearness and familiarity to him, but his readiness to facilitate Darcy's probable wish of having time alone with Elizabeth to continue their discussion of marriage plans. In his readiness to promote his friend's match, Bingley contrasts with Darcy's previous attempt to interfere in his own—a mark of his generosity that is appreciated by both Darcy and Elizabeth.<sup>508</sup> With this kind of enthusiastic support, the couple does indeed find time to counsel together:

During their walk, it was resolved that Mr. Bennet's consent should be asked in the course of the evening. Elizabeth reserved to herself the

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<sup>508</sup> Butler points out that Darcy and Elizabeth 'are continuously compared with... Bingley and Jane' in their 'attitudes... to the people around them'; the former, prior to their individual reformations, 'tend... to adopt a low opinion of others', whereas the latter always 'are modest about themselves and charitable about others' (*Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*, pp.210-1).

application for her mother's. She could not determine how her mother would take it; sometimes doubting whether all his wealth and grandeur would be enough to overcome her abhorrence of the man. But whether she were violently set against the match, or violently delighted with it, it was certain that her manner would be equally ill adapted to do credit to her sense; and [Elizabeth] could no more bear that Mr. Darcy should hear the first raptures of her joy, than the first vehemence of her disapprobation. (p.416)

This exchange suggests a gender-based division of labor, but one that is organically arrived at, with Elizabeth notably claiming duties for herself without interference from Darcy.<sup>509</sup> Elizabeth also clearly feels it her duty, like Mrs. Vernon, to protect the dignity and tranquility of her husband-to-be. After Darcy applies to Mr. Bennet for his daughter's hand, Elizabeth is summoned by her father to the library. At this moment, Elizabeth 'earnestly... wish[es] that her former opinions had been more reasonable, her expressions more moderate', as such 'would have spared her from explanations and professions... exceedingly awkward to give' at this time. But she sees that her duty to her father, and her continuing lesson in overcoming prejudice, make such explanations 'necessary', and so she exercises the humility and patience to make them (p.417). The image of this scene is similar to that of Darcy having to make awkward confessions to Bingley about his interference, as part of his duty to his friend and his effort to put aright the effects of his former prideful behavior. Elizabeth also relates to her father 'what Mr. Darcy had voluntarily done for Lydia'. He exclaims:

This is an evening of wonders, indeed! And so, Darcy did every thing; made up the match, gave the money, paid the fellow's debts, and got him his commission! So much the better. It will save me a world of trouble and economy. Had it been your uncle's doing, I must and *would* have paid him; but these violent young lovers carry every thing their own way. I shall offer to pay him to-morrow; he will rant and

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<sup>509</sup> Ruderman suggests that there is 'a division of labor' which Austen 'seems to see... as right', one 'that a man's or woman's feelings "generally" support' (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.149).

storm about his love for you, and there will be an end of the matter.  
(pp.418-9)

Darcy's exercise of his duty to protect Elizabeth's reputation (by helping Lydia) clearly lifts a great burden from Mr. Bennet, so that the virtues of this exercise of duty are seen to radiate outward to the extended family. The next day, 'Elizabeth ha[s] the satisfaction of seeing her father taking pains to get acquainted' with Darcy; her father 'soon assure[s] her' that Darcy is 'rising every hour in his esteem' (p.420). Here, Mr. Bennet reciprocates the friendship and support received from Darcy, compounding its effect. Mr. Bennet's approbation of Elizabeth's choice adds to her joy in marrying Darcy and strengthens her relationship with her father—arguably one of Austen's ideals for marriage. Mr. Bennet's approbation of Darcy is conveyed to Elizabeth with his typical irony:

"I admire all my three sons-in-law highly," said he. "Wickham, perhaps, is my favourite; but I think I shall like *your* husband quite as well as Jane's." (p.420)

While Darcy's exercise of male duty strengthens Elizabeth's family, her exercise of female duty has clearly played a part in the formation of his love. When playfully requesting him 'to account for his having ever fallen in love with her', Elizabeth asks whether it was not sparked by her 'impertinence'—an attitude so different from the 'deference' and 'officious attention' paid him by other women. He affirms that her 'liveliness of... mind' did attract him. Elizabeth thinks this a 'perfectly reasonable' account, given that he could have known 'no actual good' about her at the time, and anyway 'nobody thinks of *that* when they fall in love'. Darcy counters, 'Was there no good in your affectionate behavior to Jane, while she was ill at Netherfield?' (pp.421-2). That this should come immediately to mind when he reflects on the beginnings of his love is significant. His mental image of her devoted attendance on Jane perhaps captures the essence of what first attracted him, and continues to attract him, just as Elizabeth's image of his attendance to Georgiana's comfort at Pemberley perhaps captures the essence of what first attracted her, and continues to attract

her. The scene of the couple's engagement days concludes with their writing to various relations to share their joyous news, which includes their extending an invitation to the Gardiners to join them at Pemberley for Christmas. This last act in particular suggests the effect of their marriage to bridge socio-economic barriers and to lessen class differences.<sup>510</sup> In sum, the image of the couple in the days of their engagement is one of *pleasant* and thoughtful assembling of a *traditional* marriage—arguably an Iconic Legisign of Austenian ideals. The effects of these union-making activities are to strengthen the existing bonds of the Bennet and Darcy families through a wise and sensitive discharge of the couple's individual gender-based duties (Category 23), and to expand the scope and strength of both families by adding new in-law relationships (Category 33).

Not until the closing scene of the novel do we actually find Elizabeth and Darcy married and settled at Pemberley. Although the chapter is short, it provides enough information, and implies the passage of enough time, to represent the general tendency and fruits of Elizabeth and Darcy's marriage.<sup>511</sup> Of note is the fact that

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<sup>510</sup> As Roberts suggests in *Jane Austen and the French Revolution* (p.49). Fraiman makes a similar observation: 'Elizabeth pumps richer, more robust blood into the collapsing veins of the nobility, even as she boosts the social standing of her relatives in trade'. In doing so, 'she promotes the political stability essential to industrial prosperity and the fortunes of middle-class and noble men alike' (*Unbecoming Women*, p.75).

<sup>511</sup> McMaster notes that Austen does not typically characterize the married lives of her heroines and heroes in detail; rather, she lets us imagine their happiness 'as a continuation of [the courtship] process' that has 'created their love' (*Jane Austen on Love*, p.79). Poovey sees the brevity of Austen's denouements differently, calling them a necessary 'freezing [of] the narrative' in order to 'abando[n] realism' for a romantic closure—one that masks the author's deeper ideological intents (*The Proper Lady*, p.243). Seeber argues along similar lines: the 'happy ending' of *Pride and Prejudice* 'emerges as fragile' because of this obvious movement from realism to idealism (*General Consent*, p.88). Tauchert also follows suit, calling the ending 'a purely symbolic resolution of material problems'; 'Austen's insistence on idealised marriage as narrative resolution' is 'an illusory foreclosure of real questions' (*Romancing Jane Austen*, p.23). Perhaps it is good to remember, however, that compared to general novelistic practice up to her time, Austen's narratives—including her endings—represent an overall

their wedding ceremony (Category 33) and that of Jane and Bingley are conducted on the same day—‘the day on which Mrs. Bennet got rid of her two most deserving daughters’ (p.427). This detail symbolizes Austen’s sense that the ideal marriage is always, at some level, a family affair, not to be fully understood or enjoyed outside that context. Indeed, Pemberley becomes Georgiana’s permanent home as much as Elizabeth’s, so that Darcy’s two dearest ladies live together. Their ‘attachment’ grows into ‘exactly what Darcy had hoped’ it would, with Georgiana receiving ‘knowledge’ and ‘instructions’ (p.430) from the example and mentoring of Elizabeth (Category 23). Mr. Bennet’s life, too, is graced and improved by the marriage of his favorite daughter: his ‘affection for her’ often draws him to Pemberley (p.427), with its library and its two occupants of similar intellectual taste to his own (Category 12). The Gardiners are on even more ‘intimate’ terms with the couple than Mr. Bennet (p.431), owing to their distinction of having first brought Elizabeth to Pemberley, where her feelings for Darcy began to thaw (Category 11). Their presence might also mean that the halls of Pemberley are often blessed with stimulating conversation and provident counsel (Category 22). Kitty, as mentioned, divides her time between Pemberley, Jane’s new estate in Derbyshire, and Longbourn, ‘to her very material advantage’; her two older sisters give her careful ‘attention and management’ (pp.427-8), keeping her from Lydia’s unsavory influence (Category 23). Finally, although Lydia is seldom (and Wickham never) admitted to Pemberley, even that couple’s condition is improved to such extent as their ‘extravagant’ and ‘unsettled’ lifestyle permits (p.429), by Elizabeth and Darcy’s charitable but prudent assistance

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*increase* in realism for the genre. Ruderman argues we ought to ‘be wary of assuming that’ to Austen ‘a domestic life involves [only] submission and diminishment for women’, because she ‘does not portray it this way’. The ‘concluding forecast of *greater* happiness to come’ in each of her novels ought rather to ‘raise... doubts about seeing Austen’s choice of marriage... as a concession to novelistic convention or to the social mores of her day’ (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.11-3).

(Category 13).<sup>512</sup> Thus, the marital love of Elizabeth and Darcy—full and balanced in feeling, deed, and law—is shown by this traditional narrative ending (Iconic Legisign), centered in Pemberley, to secure not only their own happiness but to enhance that of the larger Darcy-Bennet family circle.<sup>513</sup>

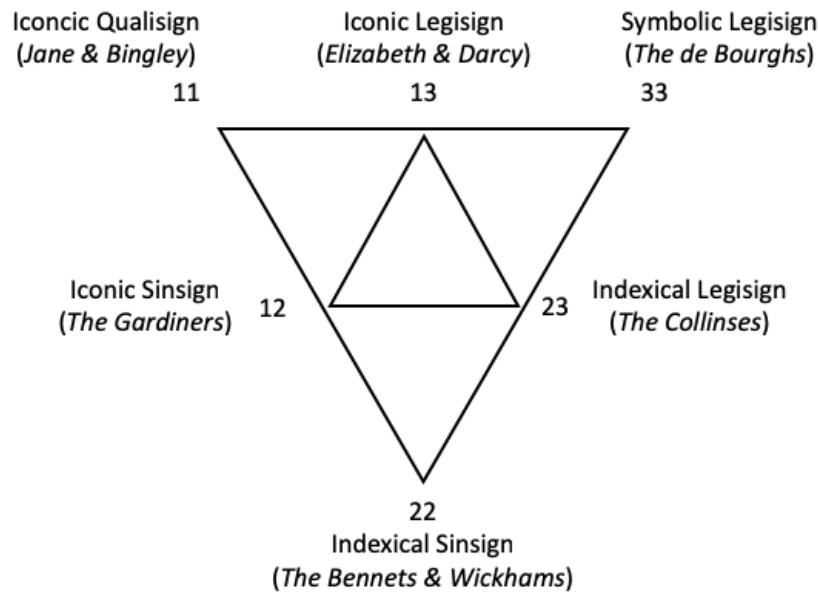
#### SYNTHESIS AND SUMMARY

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen takes up the unfinished business of *Lady Susan*, not only expanding and fleshing out her conception of marital love and its essential elements, but also bringing to the task a much richer and developed set of literary devices. Besides her obvious dropping of the epistolary form as a primary narrative technique, she employs a more complete and balanced set of representational *modes*. Whereas in *Lady Susan* the Indexical mode is prominent and the Iconic and Symbolic modes are also used, in *Pride and Prejudice* she uses all three modes plus the full complement of sub-modes:

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<sup>512</sup> Lydia writes to Elizabeth to hint that 'Wickham would like a place at court very much'—'[a]ny place would do, of about three or four hundred a year'—but Elizabeth quickly 'put[s] and end to every entreaty and expectation of the kind'. Instead, through 'economy in her own private expences', she helps her little sister with 'discharging their bills' now and then, and Darcy pulls strings where he can to help Wickham get on in his career (pp.428-9).

<sup>513</sup> As mentioned, Poovey argues that this ending 'substitutes aesthetic gratification... for the practical solutions that neither her society nor her art could provide'. Nevertheless, she notes that the 'union that concludes this novel reestablishes the ideal, paternalistic society that Mr. Bennet's irresponsibility and Wickham's insubordination once seemed to threaten. With Darcy at its head and Elizabeth at its heart, ...everyone... will live more or less happily in the environs of Pemberley, the vast estate whose permanence, prominence, and ...uniquely satisfying fusion of individual taste and utility, of nature and art, symbolize Austen's ideal' (*The Proper Lady*, pp.202,207). McCann similarly argues that Pemberley 'becomes a symbol of a fixed value, of a stable condition to which the heroine belongs, but from which she is [initially] separated by immaturity, and to which she finally attains' ('Setting and Character', p.318).



For example, Jane and Bingley convey her ideals for natural and virtuous love in the Iconic (11) mode, by providing a simple picture of such love, much as Frederica and Reginald do but with a broader view of the courtship process. Lydia and Wickham, like Lady Susan and Manwaring, are in the Indexical (22) mode, showing what good marriage is *not*; however, their image provides a closer view of the consequences of selfish behavior within the extended family than does that of Lady Susan. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet are also in the Indexical mode but a milder form, creating humor and better realism than the Lady Susan image. The Gardiners signify in the Iconic Sinsign (12) mode; they show what a good marriage is by exemplifying its practice in some detail—a mode largely missing from the Lady Susan story, as critics have noted. The couple illustrates how to balance natural love (feeling and interaction) with lawful love—virtuous, dutiful, and contractual. The Collinses, as an Indexical Legisign (23) type, represent conventional marital practice for the period in its most over-codified and unnatural aspect; such a representation is also largely missing from the Lady Susan narrative. Lady Catherine and her daughter are in the Symbolic Legisign (33) mode; they give a cold and empty picture of the period’s rigid and class-based marital conventions—a mere shell of the ideal. This image type is likewise missing from *Lady Susan*, since even the traditional marriage of Sir and Lady De Courcy in

that story has substance and warmth. With Elizabeth and Darcy, Austen invokes the Iconic Legisign (13) mode: like the Vernons and De Courcys, their marriage is conventional in a positive and substantial way. However, the couple illustrates a much wider and finely-nuanced range of marital feelings, principles, and practices than do the Vernons and the De Courcys; they also illustrate with much greater specificity the balance and interplay between all these elements, including how to balance duty and feeling, convention and natural inclination, tangible assets and intangible values.



## CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS

In the introduction, I suggested that the Peircean categories might be useful in studying Austen's ideas about love and marriage at two distinct levels: first, at the level of the communicative *modes* that she uses in her novels (the semiotic level); and second, at the level of her *ideas* themselves (the universal level). The question remains as to what new or significant findings this analysis has brought forth.

### ANALYSIS SUMMARY

At the semiotic level, it is clear that Austen's art and skill of representation developed significantly between her writing of *Lady Susan* and *Pride and Prejudice*. This certainly is not a new insight; other critics have noted significant changes in her style, narrative technique, level of realism, and depth and nuance of treatment between her early, experimental work and her mature novels.<sup>514</sup> However, not only does my semiotic analysis provide a more measurable sense of Austen's progress in this regard (for instance, she used only three of the six Peircean semiotic modes in *Lady Susan* but all six modes in *Pride and Prejudice*), it also suggests possible motivations for the kinds of semiotic improvements she made. For instance, the

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<sup>514</sup> Brian Southam's study of Austen's juvenile and final fragmentary manuscripts, for example, provides a glimpse into 'the artist at work', showing 'that the six [published] novels stand at the end of a long apprenticeship'—a process 'of laborious composition, of trial and error', and of 'many years of highly conscious experiment' that ultimately yielded 'a more complex and refined narrative method' than her early work. He notes particularly that her mature novels employ more 'figurative and symbolic devices in language and action', which, it might be argued, correlate with the expanded set of Sinsign and Legisign representational modes called out in my analysis; see *Jane Austen's Literary Manuscripts: A Study of the Novelist's Development through the Surviving Papers* (London and New York: The Athlone Press, 2001), pp.viii-ix. Similarly, Morini's linguistic analysis suggests that although Austen's earlier work 'already contains the narratological germs' of her later novels, her narrative techniques 'are mastered more and more fully' with each successive novel, in the process becoming significantly 'more complex narratologically' (*Jane Austen's Narrative Techniques*, p.37).

Lady Susan story is missing a character couple in the Iconic Sinsign mode—what I have often called a positive ‘pantomime’ of the signified object. Such a sign has Firstness (quality) and Secondness (action) but no Thirdness (convention): it does *not* rely on the reader’s knowledge of cultural conventions to be interpreted.<sup>515</sup> At the time when Austen was writing, most significant characters in novels were from the aristocratic classes (the nobility and the gentry), and so there were fewer established conventions for middle- and lower-class characters. Thus, the actions of characters like the mercantile-class Gardiners could be used to signify positive marital qualities and practices without invoking conventional interpretations in Austen’s contemporary readers, whereas the actions of a couple like Reginald and Frederica would be more susceptible to conventional interpretation, since the pair is basically aristocratic. For this reason, the Gardners make a better Iconic Sinsign, and Austen’s introduction of a mercantile-class couple in her cast of characters for *Pride and Prejudice* reflects increased semiotic balance and skill compared to her earlier work.

Part of the theory behind Peirce’s categories is that they are fundamental to all phenomena, or at least that he witnessed them in all the phenomena that he studied, which included observations in a wide variety of scientific, mathematical, logical, philosophical, and cultural fields. Thus, in relation to a novel, which can be viewed as (among other things) a communications phenomenon, the theory is that the novel will always have these three types of signs at some level; but if it is weak in one or more types, the communication won’t be as effective. Since *Lady Susan*, in the analysis here, appears to be lacking in the use of some sign types, one could argue that it does not ‘work’ as well as a novel like *Pride and Prejudice*, which uses all

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<sup>515</sup> Again, this is a relative statement, given that all literary objects require some cultural knowledge to interpret; the point is that Iconic Sinsigns rely *less* on cultural knowledge than do Legisigns. A pantomime, for example, is understood through its visual resemblance to the signified object, which involves only one’s *sensory* experience of having seen that real object before.

the sign types. Such a conclusion agrees generally with the critical consensus about why Austen chose not to publish *Lady Susan*.<sup>516</sup>

A corollary to the above argument is that a story which is balanced and complete in its use of all the semiotic modes will have greater fictional *realism* to readers than one that is not.<sup>517</sup> This agrees with my analysis of the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* versus those in *Lady Susan*—the Sinsign and Legisign characters in particular. Whereas *Lady Susan* has only one Sinsign couple (Lady Susan and Manwaring—an exceptionally unfavorable couple), *Pride and Prejudice* has both a favorable Sinsign (the Gardiners) and two unfavorable Sinsigns (the Wickhams and Bennets). Likewise, *Lady Susan* has two favorable Legisigns (the Vernons and De Courcys) but no unfavorable Legisigns, while *Pride and Prejudice* has both a favorable Legisign (Elizabeth and Darcy), a negative Legisign (the Collinses), and a rather sterile and empty Legisign (the de Bourghs). Because the latter novel is more richly and subtly comparative (as Ryle has noted<sup>518</sup>), not only is the story, arguably, more realistic as a whole than *Lady Susan*, but the individual characters are also more realistic, since none is interpreted out of context from the others. So, for example, because the Bennets are subtly contrasted with both the Gardiners on the favorable

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<sup>516</sup> See, for example, Drabble ('Introduction', p.11), Emsley (*Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.55), McMaster ('The Juvenilia', p.174), and Buck ('Tender Toes, Bow-wows, Meow-meows and the Devil', p.202).

<sup>517</sup> Shaw defines 'realistic fiction' as representations dealing 'with problems not [just] of *knowledge*, but of *will and action*' (here, we may note that Legisigns are knowledge-based representations, while Sinsigns are will- and action-based representations), with the latter type of representations (Sinsigns) being indispensable because they 'create imaginative experiences that elicit the mental operations necessary to confront the world [that readers] identify as real' (*Narrating Reality*, pp.78,131, my italics). Pam Morris argues that Austen, 'often seen as the originator of the British tradition of realism', achieves this status by making 'skeptical mockery of... individualist exceptionalism' in her novels—that is, by calling out some *unheroic* traits in her heroines and heroes, and by showing some *unvillainous* characteristics in her villains (*Worldly Realism*, pp.3,5).

<sup>518</sup> 'Jane Austen and the Moralists', p.92.

side and with the Wickhams on the negative side, they are a more believable and humorous unfavorable couple than Lady Susan and Manwaring. Darcy and Elizabeth are, in my reading, clearly a positive traditional couple, but they are more realistic than the De Courcys because Austen has thrown them into the comparative mix with the pompously traditional Lady Catherine on one side and the pedantically conventional Mr. Collins on the other. Relative to the de Bourghs and Collinses, they are a warmer and more humanized image of traditional marriage—an impression that Austen has achieved, as mentioned, in part by adding an element of iconicity to their otherwise Legisign image, wherein they subtly *resemble* Austen's ideals for flexibility in the discharge of gender-based duties, for rational discourse between husband and wife, for balancing 'propriety' against moral principle, and for considering both the tangible and intellectual assets of a spouse. These kinds of representations better reflect real life, wherein we are confronted with a gradient mixture of the good and the bad, both in others and in ourselves.<sup>519</sup> Even in a traditionally romantic storyline like that of Elizabeth and Darcy, the ability of readers to savor and enjoy both the outcome of the story and its journey involves the ever-present element of opposition, and such a condition cannot be signified with a simple set of 'good' and 'bad' characters, as critics of *Lady Susan* have suggested.<sup>520</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> Francus notes that even ideal marriages like Elizabeth and Darcy's are 'tinged with ambiguity'; their lives are 'complicated, and Austen resists engaging in simple wish fulfillment or simple morality. Her worthy characters still face significant challenges, even after they have married those they love and achieve financial stability.... Mrs. Bennet will be a hideous mother-in-law. There are still crazy relatives, class anxieties, and communal and professional problems to be solved. Austen's happy endings are not perfect endings; struggles remain, but with a partner to help deal with them' ('The Mercenary and the Prudent', p.68).

<sup>520</sup> Nardin argues that Austen is trying only to show us positive *possibilities*; her novels 'are capable of convincing at least some intelligent readers that an orderly, dignified, and rational—if not perfect—life within society, where most of us must remain, is possible' (*Those Elegant Decorums*, p.4).

One facet of marriage that this analysis has brought into greater focus, and to which it has added specificity, is Austen's sense of how character virtues promote and strengthen love relationships, and how their counterfeits hamper and weaken the same.<sup>521</sup> Regarding the difficulty of developing any given virtue, Emsley makes Aristotle's point that one can go wrong in many ways but succeed (hit the 'mean') in only one way; each virtue has more than one 'opposite'—it has excessive forms and defective forms.<sup>522</sup> Although my analysis has not attempted to delineate the relationships between all the classical and theological virtues (such an analysis could be a dissertation of its own), it has brought out Austen's sense of how several of the virtues relate to problems of love relationships, and how opposing virtues like justice and charity balance one another in such relationships. Most of her value judgments, as argued herein, with respect to the proper exercise of these virtues emphasize the need for balance between feeling (Firstness), fact (Secondness), and moral law (Thirdness). For example, Lydia disregards the moral law (Thirdness) with respect to pre-marital sex because she is driven by vanity, a counterfeit of affection (Firstness); Charlotte exercises a lopsided sense of prudence that prioritizes her material needs (Secondness) ahead of her emotional needs (Firstness); and Miss Bingley's sense of right conduct is tied to class-based decorum (Thirdness) more than to human decency and feeling (Firstness).<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>521</sup> As mentioned, it is a central argument of Ruderman that Austen believes 'attachment', 'true love', and the 'deepest feeling' to be possible only when a person practices virtue (*The Pleasures of Virtue*, pp.1,14,23,32,49). She also suggests, on the other hand, that 'a decent person finds pain in wrongdoing', and she instances how Jane Fairfax was 'captious and irritable' to Frank Churchill when she harbored a 'consciousness of having done amiss' (*E*, p.457, cited in *The Pleasures of Virtue*, p.37).

<sup>522</sup> *Jane Austen's Philosophy*, p.4.

<sup>523</sup> Fay puts it this way: 'Austen neither approves Lydia Bennet's abandonment of proper judgment when she elopes with Wickham as a kind of revolutionary disregard, nor Charlotte Lucas's rational marriage to Mr Collins as an old regime anachronism. Neither does she approve... the bourgeois Caroline Bingley's attempts to hook Darcy' (*A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p.43).

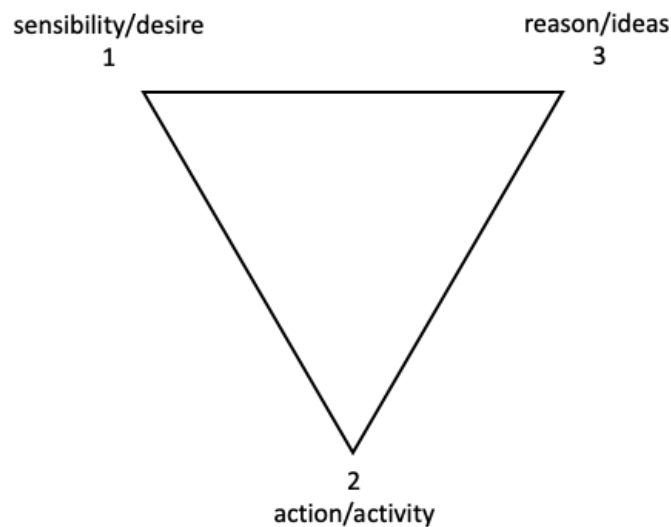
My analysis also suggests a new way to characterize Austen's response to her culture's preoccupation with genuineness and naturalness, especially as these traits relate to courtship and marriage. Most critics readily catch Austen's pervasive satire of her society's tendency to affect these traits, which had become prescribed elements of the genteel character. Critics therefore have often associated genuineness and naturalness only with social codification, suggesting that there is no *a priori* naturalness. And yet, critics like Moe grant that when it comes to the social codifications of marriage, Austen's sense is that the practice 'should not be defined by its being an omnipresent social form', but 'should be made meaningful by the intentions behind it'; and, for Austenian characters like Elizabeth Bennet, '[a]ctions must be sincerely felt so that social norms, like marriage, can be *naturalized* as self-expression'.<sup>524</sup> Many critics also tacitly grant that there is a tension between the *codified* and the *natural*, but this assumes that such a thing as 'natural' really exists. Since my analysis is based on Peirce's pragmatic philosophy, which *does* recognize real naturalness (in the form of Firstness, as *feeling*, and Secondness, as *external reality*), the over-complicating of this problem drops away, and we can view Austen's representations as simply calling for the removal of affectation and the practice of 'genuine' genuineness. After all, Moe's quote above is something of a Peircean slip: *actions* (Secondness) must be sincerely *felt* (Firstness) so that *social norms* (Thirdness), like marriage, can be naturalized as self-expression.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, my analysis gives greater meaning and definition to the pervasive critical observation that Austen's fictional characters are *well-balanced*. Particularly in her mature novels, of which *Pride and Prejudice* is our case study, her creation of character couples that fill all the semiotic modes in the Peircean paradigm can be seen as a measure of this representational balance. But even in *Lady Susan*, there is evidence of paradigmatic balance in Austen's *ideas* about marital love: her character couples signify (in various different ways) the

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<sup>524</sup> 'Multiple Modernities', p.1087 (my italics).

importance of having affection (Firstness), wholesome interaction (Secondness), and lawful marriage (Thirdness). With respect to the story of Elizabeth and Darcy in particular, Fay commits a double Peircean slip when she calls it an ‘enactment [of] the proper resolution Austen finds for the meeting of *sensibility*, *reason*, and *action*; it is her definition of a proper Romanticism, a proper fit between *ideas*, *desire*, and political *activity*’.<sup>525</sup> On a Peircean diagram, her statement would look like this:



As my analysis suggests, Austen’s conception of marital love can be seen as including more than just these three fundamental aspects; it also includes the predicted Peircean subcategories, wherein love feeling (11) and love interaction (22) are combined into a sense of compatibility (12); love interaction (22) and marital law (33) mix together to yield gender-based duty (23); and love feeling (11) and marital law (33) merge into relationship virtue (13).

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<sup>525</sup> *A Feminist Introduction to Romanticism*, p.43 (emphasis added).

## FURTHER INQUIRY

A Peircean analysis also opens up ideas for literary studies in various related areas. For example, a more detailed Peircean study of the classical and theological virtues introduced by Emsley was already mentioned; such an analysis could be used not only to study Austen but other authors. Within the field of Austen studies proper, since my analysis has treated only two novels there is room and opportunity for detailed Peircean studies of her other novels, which could compare with the current analysis or with studies of related authors, such as Maria Edgeworth. Another example that I have only touched upon lightly in this analysis is the various kinds of somatic symbols used in Austen's (and other authors') novels—the heart (11), hand (22), and mind (33), for example, along with the subtypes of foot (12), mouth (23), and eye (13)—recalling that Willis says the latter represents the harmonizing of feeling and judgment.<sup>526</sup> There are many more possibilities; it is hoped that this study can be a stimulus for meaningful critical work both on the semiotic level of literary representation and on the universal level of literary ideas.

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<sup>526</sup> 'Eyes and the Imagery of Sight', 161-2.



## APPENDIX: SEVEN KINDS OF LOVE

By John S. Robertson, February 1998

There appear to be seven main kinds of relationships that exist between man and woman. They can be described as follows:

(1) **Puppy love.** The kind of feeling that one gets when one is emotionally attached to a person but there is never any expression beyond longing. Examples might be grade-schoolers that have a crush on a classmate, but never say anything about it; or possibly people that are attracted to rock stars but without any hope of having any contact with the star.

(2) **Prostitutional love.** This kind of 'love' is purely physical without any legal attachment, or any emotional commitment.

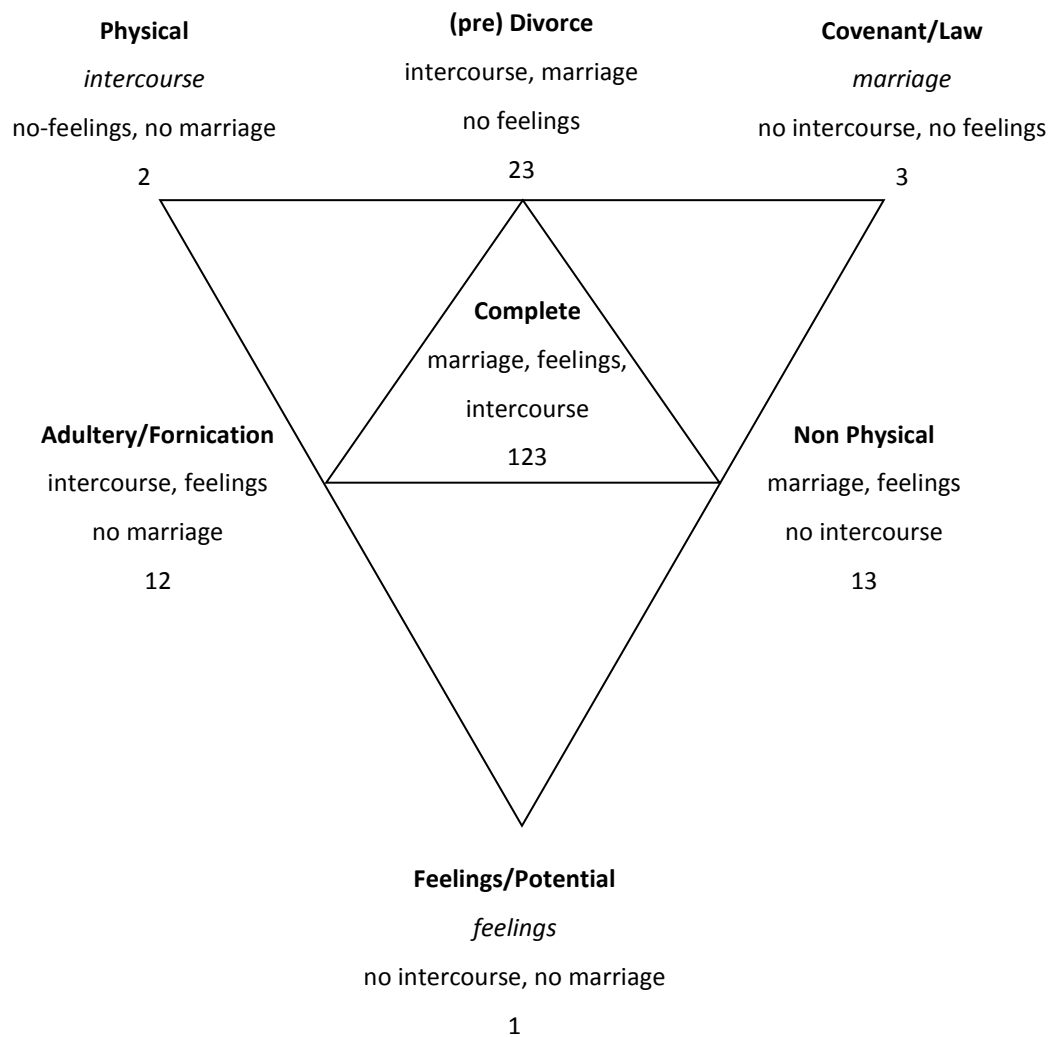
(3) **Marriage for legal reason only.** This kind of love might be exemplified by someone who marries, say, to gain American citizenship only. There is no physical consummation of the marriage, nor are there any emotional feelings toward each other. Another example might be royalty who have their children marry for reasons of shoring up alliances. There is otherwise no physical or emotional expression.

(4) **Marriage with feeling and by law, but without physical consummation.** A good example of this might be the Quakers, whose only hope for maintaining membership was adoption. The heaven's gate cult also had this as their doctrine.

(5) **Adultery.** This relationship has feelings and physical consummation, but is not sanctioned by law.

(6) **'Pre-divorce'.** This is a relationship that is physical and legal, but there are no real feelings.

(7) **Complete.** This is a relationship that has appropriate feelings, appropriate physical expression and has appropriate legal sanction.



Based on our previous discussion, it should be clear that the types of love listed above form a system, based on the categories. In the context of the relationship between man and woman, Firstness would be feelings, Secondness would be, bluntly, sexual intercourse, and Thirdness would be lawful marriage.

Of course, relationships that are based solely on

- feeling (where one is alone -- pure Firstness)
- physical (without emotional or legal sanction -- pure Secondness)
- law (without feeling or consummation -- pure Thirdness),

are relationships that are reductionistic in the best sense of the word. Similarly, any of the three combinations are also reductionistic.

- adultery and fornication (Firstness and Secondness -- no marriage) are weak imitations of genuine love;
- the life of a Quaker (Firstness and Thirdness -- no physical) are similarly impoverished -- multiplying and replenishing the earth is an unobserved commandment; and
- any physical marriage relationship devoid of feeling (Secondness of Thirdness)

are again poor imitation of *a full relationship, which obviously is Firstness and Secondness and Thirdness.*

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