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Author(s): Jill Heydt-Stevenson
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"Slipping into the Ha-Ha": Bawdy Humor and Body Politics in Jane Austen's Novels

JILL HEYDT-STEVENSON

IN *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Caroline tries to engage Darcy with a powerful metonymy of phallic power: "I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you. I mend pens remarkably well." Apparently recognizing the significance of her sexual allusion, Darcy playfully invokes autoeroticism when he answers, "Thank you—but I always mend my own."[1] Mrs. Clay, in *Persuasion* (1818), exclaims: "I have *known* a good deal of the [navy]; and besides their liberality, they are so neat and careful in all their ways!" (p. 18; emphasis added). In our gambol in *Mansfield Park* (1814) through a landscape replete with Freudian images of an unlocked door that leads to a wilderness that is "laid out with too much regularity," locked iron gates, missing keys, and spikes (pp. 91, 97–99), Austen tellingly has Maria slide around the

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[1] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, vol. 2 of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, ed. R. W. Chapman, 3d ed., 5 vols. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933), p. 47. Further references from this novel, as well as *Sense and Sensibility* (vol. 1), *Mansfield Park* (vol. 3), *Emma* (vol. 4), and *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion* (vol. 5), are to this edition and are included in the text.

iron gate, endangering her dress and foreshadowing her loss of sexual virtue. Fanny, experiencing a terrible conflict in emotion as she watches Maria enact what she represses, calls out: "You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram, . . . you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes—you will tear your gown—you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha" (pp. 99–100).

Although Austen's comedy has been termed sparkling, ironic, witty, and even malicious, and although critics have written on the subject of Austen and sexuality, the kind of sexually risqué humor on display in these examples has not been fully acknowledged, and then only hesitantly—or coyly—so.[2] As D. A. Miller says, when we come upon a phrase in *Mansfield Park* like Mary's pun on "*Rears*, and *Vices*" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 60) we are "embarrassed and often arrested by the question, 'Could a character in Jane Austen ever mean *this*?'"[3] We might add to Miller's question the suspicion that bawdy humor in general provokes: Could Jane Austen herself ever mean *this* or *that*? The pens of *Pride and Prejudice* and the spikes, ha-ha's, and torn gowns of *Mansfield Park*, along with many other erotically charged allusions, puns, and double entendres throughout her novels and Juvenilia, belie Susan Morgan's contention that Austen's "rooms are littered with nothing so evocative as the 'woman's little pink silk neckerchief' in *Adam Bede*" and that her land-

[2] Notable exceptions include Alice Chandler, whose important article traces many sexual allusions and argues that Austen knew both the "far from prudish" world of the eighteenth century and the world of "post-Evangelical propriety," and that "her books underscore both the social and sexual meaning of marriage" ("'A Pair of Fine Eyes': Jane Austen's Treatment of Sex," *Studies in the Novel*, 7 [1975], 92, 102). Another exception is Claudia L. Johnson, "What Became of Jane Austen? *Mansfield Park*," *Persuasions*, no. 17 (1995), 59–70. For less extended discussions, see Edward Neill, *The Politics of Jane Austen* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 75–76; and Grant I. Holly's Lacanian analysis of the sexual riddles in *Emma*, "*Emma*grammatology," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 19 (1989), 39–51. On the subject of Austen and sexuality, see Jan S. Fergus, "Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen's Novels," in *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, ed. David Monaghan (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1981), pp. 66–85; Robert M. Polhemus, "Jane Austen's Comedy," in *The Jane Austen Companion*, ed. J. David Grey, et al. (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 60–71; Mary Ann O'Farrell, *Telling Complexions: The Nineteenth-Century English Novel and the Blush* (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1997); and Alison G. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1989).

[3] Miller, *Narrative and Its Discontents: Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), p. 32n.

scapes "contai[n] no such projections as Penistone Crags in *Wuthering Heights*."[4]

Fanny Price's phrase—"slipping into the ha-ha"—provides a provocative metaphor for understanding the radical power of Austen's comic irreverence. Imperceptible from a distance, the ha-ha was a "sunk fence" that prevented livestock from crossing from the park into the garden, while also allowing the viewer to maintain the fiction that the grounds were seamlessly connected. The ha-ha was so named because viewers would react with both surprise and laughter when they realized they had been deceived by this earthy trompe l'oeil.[5] Austen's own bawdy "slip" into the ha-ha extends and expands the space normally allowed to a woman during this period. Critics such as Audrey Bilger, Eileen Gillooly, and Maaja A. Stewart have demonstrated that, in the eighteenth century, laughter in general and female humor in particular were seen as a threat to the foundations of public order and social harmony, partly because sexual freedom was linked to—or even seen as a consequence of—the authority of wit.[6] Lord Lyttelton, for example, writes in his "Advice to a Lady" (1731) that of those women who "claim" wit, "more than half have none, / And half of those who have

[4] Morgan, *Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 38. Among the many dictionaries, glossaries, essays, and primary sources I consulted when researching bawdy double-meanings circulating during Austen's time are: John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, eds., *Slang and Its Analogues Past and Present*, 7 vols. in 3 (1890–1904; rpt. New York: Kraus Reprints, 1965); Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 2d ed. (London: S. Hooper, 1788); Thomas Hamilton [Earl of Haddington], *Select Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1824; poems printed nearly every decade from 1730); James T. Henke, *Gutter Life and Language in the Early "Street" Literature of England: A Glossary of Terms and Topics Chiefly of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (West Cornwall, Conn.: Locust Hill Press, 1988); Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy: A Literary and Psychological Essay and a Comprehensive Glossary*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968); Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 7th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1970); and the OED.

[5] A. J. Dezallier d'Argenville explains that this word stems from the French term "Claire-voie, or an Ah, Ah." See *The Theory and Practice of Gardening*, trans. John James (London: G. James, 1712). According to the OED, the derivation is from the "ha!" of surprise.

[6] See Bilger, *Laughing Feminism: Subversive Comedy in Frances Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1998); Gillooly, *Smile of Discontent: Humor, Gender, and Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999); and Stewart, *Domestic Realities and Imperial Fictions: Jane Austen's Novels in Eighteenth-Century Contexts* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1993).

it, are undone."[7] In using bawdy humor Austen announces her "knowingness," since laughter, like sexuality, is associated with agency.

While I am not drawing any comparison between Maria Bertram and the novelist, I am saying that Austen's bawdy humor ignores locked "gates," pushes beyond "spikes," and threatens to "tear" Austen's gown. In doing so, her humor complicates current debates about late-eighteenth-century assumptions regarding women's sexuality: did women actually become less sexually responsive and newly appalled by erotic literature?[8] Tim Hitchcock contends that there was a shift in the definition of women from assertive and sexual to passive and passionless; Randolph Trumbach, however, argues that sexual passion was not eliminated from women's lives after 1750, but rather the new emphasis on romance and domesticity encouraged it.[9] Yet we find a stricter code of repression in place even in Francis Grose's *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*; in his preface to the second edition (1788) Grose explains: "Some words and explanations in the [first] edition having been pointed out as rather indecent or indelicate . . . have been either omitted [or] softened, . . . so that it is hoped this work will now be found as little offensive to delicacy as the nature of it would admit" (p. iii). Grose's concerns verify Hitchcock's point (see pp. 8–23) that there is a transition toward the end of the century away from men's and women's mutual enjoyment and widespread consumption of sexually explicit material such as chapbooks, pamphlets, poetry, and midwifery manuals. Within this context, Austen's bawdy/body humor takes on a performative character

[7] [George, Lord Lyttleton], "Advice to a Lady," in *A Collection of Poems, in Six Volumes, By Several Hands*, [ed. Robert Dodsley], 6 vols. (London: J. Hughes for R. and J. Dodsley, 1763), II, 42.

[8] An often-cited example of the alteration in women's attitudes toward sexual material is Scott's letter to Lady Louisa Stuart, which John Gibson Lockhart quotes. It recounts Scott's great aunt's shame when, after rereading Aphra Behn in 1821, she is unable to fathom having ever heard such material "read aloud" among the "most creditable society in London" in the 1760s. See J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of Sir Walter Scott*, 5 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1914), III, 513.

[9] See Hitchcock, *English Sexualities, 1700–1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 48; and Trumbach, *Sex and the Gender Revolution, Volume One: Heterosexuality and the Third Gender in Enlightenment London* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 424.

as she surprises us by breaching conventional propriety and asks us to question any easy assumption that during her era women would be less likely to experience such bawdy talk as both an enjoyable and ordinary way of communicating with men or with each other. In fact, Austen's humor reveals her success at finessing restrictions that, according to Ros Ballaster, required women in general to conform to "an adoptive female presence of indisputable virtue" and redefined and limited women writers in particular by transforming them into "the signifier of moral purity and incorruptible truth."[10]

Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century propriety is not the only obstacle that makes it difficult to understand why readers have neglected Austen's irreverent wit and ignored how her bawdy humor is fundamentally integrated into the narratives themselves. Austen's transformation into a cult figure has rendered her less-chaste comedy especially unintelligible and inaccessible, and in order to enjoy it one must alter the boundaries within which the interpretive community has confined her. As E. M. Forster said in 1924 of the "Jane Austenite": "Like all regular churchgoers, he scarcely notices what is being said"[11]—or perhaps he notices it so acutely that he censors it out. Henry Austen's "Biographical Notice" emphasized his sister's "faultless" innocence, "placidity of temper," and unwavering kindness.[12] Roger Sales has uncovered how early accounts of Austen's life labored in particular to omit material that smelled of Regency coarseness: in an edition of her letters, her great nephew, Lord Brabourne, eliminated indelicate references to bad breath and pregnancy.[13] And even later biog-

[10] *Seductive Forms: Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 210. Ballaster sees Austen's *Lady Susan* (c. 1793) as "a paradigm of the fate of the woman writer of early amatory fiction in a newly moralistic order" (p. 210). Austen's bawdy humor, however, suggests that if *Lady Susan* is such a paradigm, then Austen herself did not continue to feel as confined as Ballaster indicates.

[11] Forster, "Jane, How Shall We Ever Recollect . . . ," *The Nation and The Athenæum*, 34 (1923–24), 512.

[12] "Biographical Notice of the Author" (1817), in *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, p. 6; see also James Edward Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (London: R. Bentley, 1870).

[13] See Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 9–10.

raphies, Marilyn Butler has shown, continue the practice of "isolating, provincialising and domesticating this sophisticated writer."[14] Austen's novels have been sexually sanitized as well: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that "most of the love story of *Sense and Sensibility* . . . has been rendered all but invisible to most readers, leaving a dryly static tableau of discrete, moralized portraits, poised antitheses, and exemplary, deplorable, or regrettably necessary punishments, in an ascetic heterosexualizing context."[15] In turn Sedgwick's paper was, in Claudia L. Johnson's words, "savagely attacked in the press for having violated the monumentally self-evident truth that Austen had the good fortune to predate such indecorous sexual irregularities as homo- and autoeroticism."[16]

In working to understand Austen's bawdy humor in terms of the prevailing expectations for women of her time, we might ask if her irreverence is the "ha-ha" in the grand landscape of her prose, so notable for its judicious and balanced style. In assuming her inviolable sense of propriety, we are caught by surprise when the illusion of decorum gives way to the reality of immodesty. These instances of immodesty appear in her novels in many forms: in double-meanings, in displaced forms of irreverence, in literary allusions, and in frankly unambiguous references. For example, while Austen's use of physical activities such as walking and riding are often displaced (and presumably deniable) ways of exploring sexual activity, Miss Crawford makes a joke that seems unequivocally bawdy. As Mary describes how her home life acquainted her "with a circle of admirals," she jokes: "Of *Rears*, and *Vices*, I saw enough. Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 60). To return to the question posed by D. A. Miller ("Could a character in Jane Austen ever mean *this*?"), it is worth seeing Miller's own answer: "Mary's irony merely invites—and does no more

[14] Butler, "Simplicity" (rev. of *Jane Austen: A Life* by David Nokes, and *Jane Austen: A Life* by Claire Tomalin), *London Review of Books*, 5 March 1998, p. 6.

[15] "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," in *Solitary Pleasures: The Historical, Literary, and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*, ed. Paula Bennett and Vernon A. Rosario II (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 150.

[16] *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s: Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 192.

than invite—an ironic reading. . . . How far we wish to go with her statement, where we choose to stop in our speculation . . . is our business, she would imply, not hers" (p. 32n). We can agree with Miller, if we also agree that "one effect of the novelist's moral ideology is to infect—even to intimidate—our reading with its own good manners" (Miller, p. 59).

Austen's manners seem less genteel to me, however, and her meaning more deliberate. Mary's admission (through denial) that she has made a sexual pun plainly reveals Austen's own awareness of the Navy's reputation for sodomy. Further, Austen's candid language here (Mary really does mean sodomy), which we admittedly find more often in her letters, gives us permission to read the bawdiness that appears in more mediated forms. Certainly one should acknowledge that all forms of literary production—whether bawdy or not—must be recognized for how they relate to unconscious, momentary failures of repression. I will argue here, though, that once we affirm that Austen's bawdy humor exists, whether in open or displaced forms (as we have now accepted that her allusions to and discussions of politics and slavery exist), then we are able to explore how, for Austen, the body becomes a site of pleasure and vulnerability and a medium for critique.

"Imprisoned" behind the gates of Sotherton, Maria laments: "I cannot get out, as the starling said" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 99). Maria here refers to Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), where Yorick realizes that he is unable to free a captive starling without "pulling the cage to pieces."[17] I am arguing that as a heterodox activity that contests patriarchal expectations of female behavior, Austen's bawdy humor threatens to pull "the cage to pieces"—that is, it undermines those ideological foundations that disguise and romanticize oppression. Specifically, Austen's bawdy irreverence becomes part of a radical critique of courtship as she closes the gap between fallen women and proper ladies, critiques sensibility's ideological sentimentalization of prostitution, and undermines patriarchal

[17] Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy, by Mr. Yorick; to Which Are Added "The Journal to Eliza" and "A Political Romance,"* ed. Ian Jack (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 71.

modes of seeing. Her bawdy references in *Emma* (1815), *Mansfield Park*, and *Persuasion* allow her to link local dereliction—such as Emma's manipulations of others, and others' manipulations of Fanny—to more global iniquities such as prostitution and venereal disease. And in *Persuasion* Austen's bawdy humor shows how Anne Elliot's frankly gratified appreciation—her sexualizing—of Wentworth's physique empowers the woman being courted.

Mary Wollstonecraft, writing in 1791, complains of "the jokes and hoiden tricks, which knots of young women indulge themselves in [while at nurseries, schools, or convents]. . . . They were almost on a par with the double meanings, which shake the convivial table when the glass has circulated freely."[18] *Emma* is dependent on such "double meanings," as sexual secrets drive the narrative and are employed as a way to flirt. Trying to conjoin her poor, illegitimate companion, Harriet, with the ambitious vicar, Elton, Emma invites him "to contribute any really good enigmas, charades, or conundrums that he might recollect" (p. 70). Deciphering such riddles becomes a form of sexual play, for the riddles, which obviously carry an erotic valence, function as a kind of cupid, or mediator, for romance. It is ironic that Emma's father, the impotent Mr. Woodhouse, figures prominently in this game: "So many clever riddles as there used to be when he was young—he wondered he could not remember them! but he hoped he should in time" (p. 70). But the only riddle he can remember (and then only the opening lines) is "Kitty, a fair but frozen maid" (p. 70). Written by David Garrick, this verse was first printed in 1771 in *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, a miscellany of verse and prose that was, in Donald Nichol's words, an "outrageous publicatio[n]" that "reflected the political turbu-

[18] *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, the Wollstonecraft Debate, Criticism*, ed. Carol H. Poston, 2d ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), p. 128.

lence of the time."[19] The contributors to the volume included members of Sir Francis Dashwood's Hell-Fire Club, a notorious organization predicated on debauchery. And though not all of the verse in the miscellany is flagrant in content (we find, for example, poems honoring Shakespeare's birthday and Johnson's *Dictionary*), this riddle is quite lewd, even disturbingly so:

A RIDDLE

Kitty, a fair, but frozen maid,
  Kindled a flame I still deplore;
The hood-wink'd boy I call'd in aid,
Much of his near approach afraid,
  So fatal to my suit before.

At length, propitious to my pray'r,
  The little urchin came;
At once he sought the midway air,
And soon he clear'd, with dextrous care,
  The bitter relicks of my flame.

To Kitty, Fanny now succeeds,
  She kindles slow, but lasting fires:
With care my appetite she feeds;
Each day some willing victim bleeds,
  To satisfy my strange desires.

Say, by what title, or what name,
  Must I this youth address?
Cupid and he are not the same,
Tho' both can raise, or quench a flame—
  I'll kiss you, if you guess.[20]

[19] "Slander, Scandal and Satire," *TLS: The Times Literary Supplement*, 28 Jan 2000, p. 14. I cannot determine that Austen found "Kitty" in *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit*, though her allusion to a riddle that was originally identified with "slander, scandal and satire" makes its association with Mr. Woodhouse's youthful adventures even funnier.

[20] "A Riddle," in *The Poetical Works of David Garrick*, 2 vols. (1785; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), II, 507. The reader will note some textual variants in the stanza that Austen transcribes (see *Emma*, p. 78). It was also republished in other compendiums of riddles and conundrums, where the reader will find further textual variants, such as "forward" or "thoughtless" for "frozen"; some versions lack the third stanza. One example is in Peter Puzzlewell, *A Choice Collection of Riddles, Charades, Rebusses, &c., Chiefly Original* (London: E. Newberry, 1794), p. 66.

The critical responses to Austen's inclusion of such material vary. Nicola J. Watson acknowledges that it is "smutty," but rather than exploring it as an expression of Austen's bawdy humor or as a critique of patriarchal ideology, she ties the riddle to "Austen's broadly conservative political agenda." Alistair M. Duckworth mentions only that Mr. Woodhouse's interest in this riddle "may be simply childish."[21] And Alice Chandler coyly observes that "precisely what kind of game Jane Austen is playing with Mr. Woodhouse and her readers is hard to tell" (p. 92).

We can, in fact, analyze what sort of game Austen is playing, and we can see the riddle as fully integrated into the narrative as a whole. The riddle addresses the plight of a man (the narrator) who has been infected with venereal disease ("a flame I still deplore") and who "prays" to "the hood-wink'd boy" for a cure. The solution to the riddle of lines 16–19 is that the youth who raises and quenches such flames is a chimney sweep. And the prize for guessing—the kiss—is slang for sexual intercourse.[22] The first two lines offer multiple interpretations about how the speaker has been infected. For example, did he contract it from Kitty, the "fair, but frozen maid," or from another woman? Moreover, why is Kitty frozen? Because she is dead (presumably from disease)? Because she was a virgin? Or is it that, because of the normative dictates that required "pure" women to be sexless, his desire for Kitty has driven him to a prostitute who infects him?

The next two stanzas describe two possible cures. Lines 11–15 reveal the narrator invoking a remarkable species of magical thinking, since he believes (according to the folklore of the time, which was still being circulated as late as 1857) that sex with a virgin would cure him of the disease—hence, "Each day

[21] See Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790–1825: Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 96, 95 n. 37; and Duckworth, "'Spillikins, Paper Ships, Riddles, Conundrums, and Cards': Games in Jane Austen's Life and Fiction," in *Jane Austen: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. John Halperin (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1975), p. 293.

[22] In *A Collection of Riddles* Peter Puzzlewell gives the answer, "a chimney-sweeper," on p. 102. For a good example of the slang meaning of "kiss," see *I Know My Own Heart: The Diaries of Anne Lister (1791–1840)*, ed. Helena Whitbread (London: Virago Press, 1988), pp. 95, 368 n. 4.

some willing victim bleeds."[23] This cure is as specious as the hypothetical origins, which were that women themselves were the etiology of contagion. According to Mary Spongberg, venereal disease in particular had been feminized; she documents how it was theorized—specifically from 1761 through at least the 1830s—that "discharge was essential for the transmission of venereal poison," and therefore "venereal disease came to be seen . . . as a natural consequence of [women's] reproductive systems"; thus, an uninfected woman could infect a man through "sex during menstruation, too much sex, too little sex, [or] sex with a woman after too much alcohol or asparagus."[24]

The other cure alluded to in the riddle involves applying mercury to the body in such a way that one turns oneself into a visual image of a chimney, using mercury as a metaphoric chimney sweep. In order to be cured the patient would stand before a fire and rub mercurial ointment into the lower extremities and then cover them with flannel: this procedure would continue until the entire body was shrouded and the patient expelled pints of saliva. The youthful chimney sweep in the riddle "can raise, or quench a flame" (l. 19) because he can kindle desire and supposedly cure the venereal disease; that is, he "sought the midway air,/ And soon he clear'd, with dextrous care,/ The bitter relicks of my flame" (ll. 8–10).

Austen interweaves into the novel the issues that the riddle introduces, such as prostitution, venereal disease, and the double standard; and she incorporates the same images—a matrix of heat and cold and figures of cupids and chimneys—that we find in the riddle. This sexually frank and brutal riddle exists both inside and outside the novel—Austen transcribes only

[23] The Lock Hospital, which exclusively treated venereal disease, especially child victims who had been infected in the very way that the riddle describes, tried to educate the public about this widely held fallacy in a well-publicized campaign. The line "some willing victim bleeds" is of course tragically wrong insofar as these children were the victims of violent rapes. The riddle becomes even more charged when we realize that Garrick was also a major sponsor of the Lock Hospital. See Linda E. Merians, "The London Lock Hospital and the Lock Asylum for Women," in *The Secret Malady: Venereal Disease in Eighteenth-Century Britain and France*, ed. Merians (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1996), pp. 128–45.

[24] Mary Spongberg, *Feminizing Venereal Disease: The Body of the Prostitute in Nineteenth-Century Medical Discourse* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 26, 32, 34.

one stanza, but presumably the contemporary audience, with a better memory than Mr. Woodhouse's, would have known it as well. Further, the young women have written it out entirely on their "second page," having copied it from the "Elegant Extracts" (*Emma*, p. 79)—another joke on Austen's part, given that the *Extracts* were a most conservative publication.[25] And apparently Emma's and Harriet's reading of "Kitty" is not anomalous, given that they are in the habit of reading improper charades: Emma "could perceive" that Mr. Elton was "most earnestly careful that nothing ungallant, nothing that did not breathe a compliment to the sex should pass his lips. They owed to him their two or three *politest* puzzles" (p. 70; emphasis added). Because the riddle exists on a vulnerable border between the acceptable and the illicit, it highlights what is subversive in the novel and also collapses what we have been conditioned to think of as the gulf between the underworld and the respectable world.

Such a collapse between eighteenth-century constructions of the sexual underworld and the proper world is dramatized by the parallels between characters in the novel and the riddle's narrator. Through a series of covert associations, Austen raises the ludicrous and hilarious possibility that the clearly asexual Mr. Woodhouse might have been a libertine in his youth and now suffers from tertiary syphilis. For example, Emma's father, a hypochondriac, cannot bear to be cold and so prefers a fire, even in midsummer; the riddle's narrator, ill with venereal disease, also longs for "fire" to cure him. Both Mr. Woodhouse and the narrator despise marriage and want to surround themselves with young virgins, who will keep them "well." Further, it is also deliciously, though seditiously, funny that one of the reputed cures for venereal disease was a light diet, mostly consisting of a thin gruel—Mr. Woodhouse's favorite meal and the only one he can, "with thorough self-approbation, recommend" (p. 24).[26]

[25] After consulting many of these *Elegant Extracts* from the first decade of the nineteenth century, I was unable to find either the riddle or any bawdy humor whatsoever, though Garrick himself is well represented.

[26] Such "cures" and preventatives were well known to the general population, and Austen would have been cognizant of them since they were the most common subject advertised in eighteenth-century periodicals. See Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex*

When Emma remarks that Miss Fairfax "is a riddle, quite a riddle!" (p. 285), Jane's servitude takes on an even grimmer inflection. Emma is a matchmaker and, like the Cupid in the riddle, one whose pairings have devastating results: both she and the riddle's narrator, having "kindled . . . flame[s] [they] still deplore," seek to "quench" them: the one receives an unwanted proposal, the other venereal disease. Harriet, spurned by Elton, tries to recover her emotional health by burning the mementos she gathered during their abortive courtship. The solution to the riddle is that the "Cupid"—the youth he addresses—is a chimney sweep, and, like the "kiss" at the end of the riddle, "chimney sweeping" was eighteenth-century slang for sexual intercourse.[27] Thus when Harriet throws the mementos (metonymies for Elton himself) into the fireplace, she engages in mock sexual relations with him that she also hopes will cure herself.

In the riddle, Cupid is a pimp who conjoins Kitty and the narrator; in the novel, Emma turns Harriet into both a shopper and an irresistible purchase. She argues with Knightley that "a girl, with such loveliness as Harriet, has a certainty of being admired and sought after, of having the power of choosing from among many. . . . pray let her have time to look about her" (pp. 63–64). In fact we find that when she pushes Harriet toward Elton and then Frank Churchill, when she teaches her vanity and class prejudice, and when she stimulates her romantic imagination, Emma enacts the public discourse that theorized about what led a woman to prostitution. In his analysis of this discourse Markman Ellis lists behaviors thought to lead to whoredom: "pretension and ambition, over-education, . . . hopes of marriage above one's station in life, . . . [and] an over-

and Marriage in England, 1500–1800 (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1977), pp. 599–600.

[27] Farmer and Henley list "to get . . . one's chimney swept out" as slang for sexual intercourse, used "of women only" (*Slang and Its Analogues,* III, 208). The association between chimney sweeps and sexuality was also manifested on May-day, when two sweeps were chosen as the lord and lady of the "great festival," a kind of fertility pageant in which one of the sweeps was wholly encased in a "moving hillock of evergreens" (see William Hone, *The Every-Day Book; or Everlasting Calendar of Popular Amusements . . .* , 2 vols. [1827; rpt. Detroit: Gale Research, 1967], I, 583). I am grateful to Tim Fulford for this citation. Both Chandler and Watson also note that "chimney sweeping" is sexual slang.

excited imagination or stimulated passion for romantic love, [which] lead to the weakening of the prophylactic power of innocence."[28] Thus, we could see Emma becoming the kind of novelist who many writers felt would offer "a threat to female chastity by educating young women into an impossibly ideal view of love" (Ellis, p. 165). In his review of *Emma* Walter Scott finds fault with Austen for her coupling of "that once powerful divinity, Cupid" with "calculating prudence." He suggests that it is the responsibility of novelists to "lend their aid" in writing about "romantic feelings," for the "indulgence" of such feelings, in transforming the lover into a kind of chivalric knight and the lady into an ideal paragon of femininity, "softens, graces, and amends the human [male] mind."[29]

Austen's use of this riddle, and its attendant allusions to prostitution and syphilis, does indeed invoke Cupid with "calculating prudence," but not in the sense that Scott meant: Austen exposes the patriarchal/heterosexual world of conventional courtship as a dangerous, violent, and, indeed, life-threatening arena for both men and women. Thus, she ridicules a system that is based on exploitation of women (who contract venereal disease unknowingly), children (who are raped for a "cure"), and ultimately of the diseased (since these "cures," mostly administered by quacks and doctors alike, were extremely dangerous and, for obvious reasons, rarely successful). These links between a "proper" novel and a riddle associated with the Hell-Fire Club break down the gap between the Kittys and Fannys of *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* and the women of *Emma*, all of whom—at least at one level of signification—are themselves chimneys. That is, their function is to remain fixed in place, designed to heat, to pleasure, and to heal others. No wonder Mr. Woodhouse worries about Emma marrying; no wonder Emma, our own Cupid, prefers matchmaking to marriage.

Austen's manipulation of Garrick's riddle and her plaiting of it into both the main narrative and the subplots of the novel reveal her cognizance of the insistent way that the patriarchal

[28] *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender, and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), p. 164.

[29] Walter Scott, rev. of *Emma; a Novel*, *Quarterly Review*, 14 (1815–16), 200.

system fixes the female body. One could argue that Mr. Woodhouse, petrified of physical activity and connected with disease through both hypochondria and his associations with the riddle, has passed the disease on to Emma by so dislodging her from normal activity that a solitary half-mile walk to visit Mrs. Weston is "not pleasant" (p. 26). Disenfranchised from her physicality, Emma displaces it onto Harriet and Jane, contriving courtships and fantasizing seductions. Thus, like the riddle's narrator, she manipulates others in order to achieve her own satisfaction and health. We are told that Emma marries happily and that her husband leaves his own house to move into hers. But as "the landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable, being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate" (*Emma*, p. 136), we also have to ask whether Emma herself is in this match and in this society more than a "notch"—slang for female pudendum.[30]

Austen is reputed to have found the process of writing *Mansfield Park* immensely funny: anecdotal evidence from one of her nieces claims that "Aunt Jane would sit quietly working beside the fire in the library, saying nothing for a good while, and then would suddenly burst out laughing, jump up and run across the room to a table where pens and paper were lying, write something down, and then come back to the fire and go on quietly working as before."[31] Though Austen allowed herself to laugh, her readers have felt more constrained, for *Mansfield Park* has been remembered as a narrative without laughter and is typically interpreted as her most moral or earnest work—a response that seems comical given that the narra-

[30] Rachel Brownstein made this observation about the meaning of "notch," although not in the context of a discussion of courtship or of Austen's bawdy humor, during her Keynote Address, "England's *Emma*," at The Annual General Meeting of the Jane Austen Society of North America, 9 October 1999. She pointed out that Mary Shelley used this slang term in an 1822 letter to Jane Williams. Partridge dates this usage of "notch" from the late eighteenth century (*Dictionary of Slang*, p. 571).

[31] Constance Hill, *Jane Austen: Her Homes and Her Friends* (London: John Lane, 1904), p. 202. I am here following David Nokes's chronology of the composition of *Mansfield Park* (see *Jane Austen: A Life* [New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997]).

tive arguably contains more examples of libidinous humor and sexual allusion than any other Austen novel. The general content is inescapably erotic: the characters openly canvas Fanny's developing body, and Austen herself offers a worldly and unfazed description of the crime of adultery, which contrasts comically to Fanny's scandalized description of it. Besides the sexualized landscape at Sotherton and Mary's pun on rears and vices, there are still more examples of bawdy humor within the novel. Mary acknowledges the existence of female sexual fantasies when she makes a frisky reference to "the former belles of the house of Rushworth" who whiled away church services by thinking of "something very different" from piety, "especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at" (p. 87). Crawford's gift of a gold necklace "would by no means go through" Fanny's amber cross; it is "too large for the purpose," though Edmund's fits perfectly (p. 271). Edmund remarks to Miss Crawford that "every sort of exercise fatigues [Fanny] so soon . . . except riding" (p. 95); and Miss Crawford, in learning to ride, has so "very much surpass[ed] her sex in general by her early progress" that she is "unwilling to dismount" from Edmund's horse (p. 67).

Readers' inattention to or confusion over these bawdy references arises from the tendency, in Patricia Meyer Spacks's words, to link laughter in this novel with "moral weakness" and "ethical ambiguity."[32] Such an argument, which assumes that the "warped" personalities are the funniest—and therefore not to be laughed with or at—necessarily polarizes characters, especially Mary and Fanny (witty, amoral femme fatale and dour, moral, modest paragon). This antithesis, however, has made it all too convenient for readers to associate Mary's saucy humor with depravity and thus discount the bawdiness that exists in the narrative as a whole. Demonizing Miss Crawford also obscures the evidence that the narrative voice more closely resembles Mary than Fanny, a point that both Eileen Gillooly and Pam Perkins have convincingly argued.[33]

[32] "Austen's Laughter," in *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina Barreca (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988), pp. 77, 76.

[33] See Gillooly, pp. 101–2; and Perkins, "A Subdued Gaiety: The Comedy of *Mansfield Park*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 48 (1993), 1–25.

Perhaps the frequency of these concupiscent witticisms springs from the fact that in *Mansfield Park* virtually every character is trying to "make" or "be made," a verb that is used in the novel to signify promotion and improve property but that also takes on a sexual suggestion as well.[34] Certainly in the ha-ha crossing discussed earlier both the landscape and Maria are about to get "made," as Henry Crawford connives to improve Sotherton by altering it beyond recognition and by seducing its future mistress. This unsettling trope of "making"—courtship's alarming double—lies at the heart of both the humor and the pathos of the novel, which rigorously links prostitution to courtship, and courtship to widespread issues of corruption in the culture at large. When Crawford announces to Fanny that through the Admiral's influence, "He is made. Your brother is a Lieutenant," the terms of Henry's favor are sexual, "abounding in the *deepest interest*, in *twofold motives*, in *views and wishes more than could be told*" (pp. 298, 300; emphasis in original). "Making" here has clearly exceeded mere promotion. As Edward Neill points out, William Price "has in fact to *get made* [promoted]" (p. 76) in order to get any interest from the Portsmouth girls, who "turn up their noses at any body who has not a commission" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 249).[35] William Price, unable to get promoted and therefore to draw the interest of women, cries: "One might as well be nothing as a midshipman. One *is* nothing indeed" (p. 249). This emphasis on nothing, a term with sexual connotations of women's lack, suggests that Price sees himself as a man transformed into a portionless woman.[36]

The polymorphic eroticism of Henry's gift is made conspicuous: to procure Fanny, Henry first has to "make" her brother, a circumstance that is amusingly foreshadowed when Crawford, discovering that William wants to hunt, finds that he "could

[34] See Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, pp. 143–44.

[35] Neill also points out that marriage to Crawford would be "a kind of promotion" for Fanny (p. 76).

[36] A riddle published in Peter Puzzlewell's *Choice Collection of Riddles* offers a good example of the slang meaning of this term in popular and polite eighteenth-century culture: "More tawdry than the dress of beaux, / More fickle than the gale that blows, / More constant than the turtle dove, / More beauteous than the girl I love; / What brave Byng did to save Mahone, / What, ladies, you may call your own" (pp. 34–35). The answer, of course, is "Nothing" (p. 101).

mount him without the slightest inconvenience to himself" (p. 237). Ultimately, though, Crawford cannot "mount" William's career without his own uncle's collusion, which in turn is realized through a series of homosocial interventions—in other words, a series of intimate, companionable, yet ostensibly unerotic gestures that nevertheless prove loaded with sexual innuendo in Austen's rendition of them.[37] Fanny reads about the maneuvers to promote William in letters:

> one from the Secretary of the First Lord to a friend, whom the Admiral had set to work in the business, the other from that friend to himself, by which it appeared that his Lordship had the very great happiness of attending to the recommendation of Sir Charles, that Sir Charles was much delighted in having such an opportunity of proving his regard for Admiral Crawford, and that the circumstances of Mr. William Price's commission as second Lieutenant of H. M. sloop Thrush, being *made* out, was spreading general joy through a wide circle of great people.
>
> (pp. 298–99; emphasis added)

This passage is funny because of the disparity between the task—advancing the picayune William Price—and the hyperbolic "great happiness" they receive from "making" someone whose accomplishments and character are irrelevant to them. Linked with Mary's earlier pun on rears and vices, this passage detailing William's advancement makes us wonder if Austen is creating a continuum among corruption, promotion, and sodomy. I would suggest that Austen is emphasizing here the way in which the patriarchal system objectifies both men and women. If such bonding between men requires the regulative mechanism of homophobia (lest male friends become lovers), then we also find such a mechanism in the navy's brutal treatment of shipboard sodomy and in Mary's need for Henry to

[37] According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, the word "homosocial" "describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.'" Because most societies are unable to allow an "unbroke[n] . . . continuum between homosocial and homosexual" interaction, male bonding usually requires "intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality" (*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985], p. 1).

marry Fanny in order to avoid "grow[ing] like the Admiral in word or deed" (p. 296). Homosociality in the navy devolves into both homophobia and misogyny, as both William and Fanny become negotiable commodities available, after all, for a certain price. Promotion in the navy, like making a good match, becomes a series of commercial-sexual dealings legitimized by an ideology of patronage and alliance.

Austen makes this kind of patronage even more ironic in that the actual Secretary to the First Lord at that time was John Barrow, who was an editor of Lord Macartney's accounts of his journeys and was well known for celebrating Macartney's diplomatic triumph in China when he refused to be manipulated by the emperor, in short to "kowtow" to his demands.[38] Austen's humor, based on hyperbole and disjunction, underscores how the glorious British resistance to Oriental pressure abroad becomes, at home, an all-too-easy acquiescence to the pressures and leverage that a well-established power structure can bring to bear. Further, promotions of this kind were under special scrutiny as a result of the extensively publicized Mary Anne Clarke scandal, which was canvased during 1809 in ballads, caricatures, pamphlets, and newspapers. In this scandal the Duke of York (son of George III and Commander in Chief of the army) and Mrs. Clarke, his mistress, were accused of selling promotions to officers and ecclesiastics; she was paid in cash and also sold and received sexual favors.[39] The scandal is most interesting in regards to *Mansfield Park* because it points out how thoroughly the granting of promotions had been sexual-

[38] See Peter Knox-Shaw, "Fanny Price Refuses to Kowtow," *Review of English Studies*, 47 (1996), 212. Knox-Shaw argues that when Austen alludes in chapter 16 to Barrow's edition of Lord Macartney's embassy to China (*Mansfield Park*, p. 156), she links Fanny's refusal to act in *Lovers' Vows* and to marry Crawford to Macartney's perseverance in Peking.

[39] See Bradford K. Mudge, *The Whore's Story: Women, Pornography, and the British Novel, 1684–1830* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), who explores this scandal in terms of the stories that prostitutes themselves narrate; and Tim Fulford, "Romanticizing the Empire: The Naval Heroes of Southey, Coleridge, Austen, and Marryat," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 60 (1999), 161–96, who argues that Austen's *Persuasion* works to counteract such corruption by presenting a navy that "redefines gentility in terms of professional activity and discipline" (p. 189). Roger Sales notes a "tenuous connection" between William's promotion and the Mary Anne Clarke scandal (see *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p. 110).

ized in early-nineteenth-century culture. Austen's eroticizing of William's promotion resembles the Clarke scandal in that these high-ranking officers function as a cabal whose only goal is self-promotion, as did Mrs. Clarke and the Duke. Further, the conditions of the trade that Crawford expects when he "makes" William Price are akin to the giving and receiving of sexual favors: Crawford "pays" to have William Price promoted in exchange for Fanny Price's body, which he expects will be the reward for his labors.

As the grounds of that exchange and others throughout the novel make clear, Fanny herself is little more than a fetishistic commodity, essentially bought and sold by members of her family, encouraged to prostitute herself for rank and wealth, and doubly deserted by both her immediate and her adopted relatives. Her very name signifies prostitution: the price of the body, a fact that seems to link her etymologically to the infamous Fanny Hill, heroine of John Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), the narrative that is thought to inaugurate the use of the name "Fanny" as slang for female pudendum.[40] I am not suggesting that Austen, in her inclusion of the name Fanny (which is common enough, after all) is alluding to Cleland's book. But I am proposing, in light of her knowledge of the riddle in *Emma* about Kitty and Fanny, that she knew the unconventional meaning of the name, which necessarily enriches its significance in this novel that so closely precedes *Emma*. Interpreting Fanny Price's name in light of Garrick's riddle allows us to see Austen collapsing boundaries between prostitution and courtship. And it is significant that the novel's romantic plot between Crawford and Fanny parallels the riddle's narrative about "Kitty," in that we see the dissolute Henry desiring to be cured (albeit through marriage) by the virgin Fanny, who will "sav[e]" him from the "contagion" of the Admiral (pp. 296, 295).

Austen also associates courtship with prostitution through the significant intertextual relations between Fanny Price's story

[40] See Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*, pp. 265–66; and John Cleland, *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, ed. Peter Sabor (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985), often familiarly referred to as *Fanny Hill*.

and Samuel Johnson's 1751 chronicle of Misella, a sentimental narrative of a poor relation seduced by her cousin/guardian.[41] The remarkable parallels between these two narratives suggest that Austen was working both with and against Johnson's (apparently) nonfictional account: the little girls' backgrounds and age at adoption are similar; their respective parents turn them over to other relatives with a "natural" ease; and both occupy a borderline space below the family but above the servants. The parallels begin to diverge when Misella's cousin seduces her, but even the early stages of this process resemble Fanny's chronicle. The precursor to Misella's sexual downfall (like Fanny's near-ruin) occurs when Misella's cousin (like Sir Thomas) "bid[s]" her "assume" a more equal place "in the family" ("Misella," p. 138). Vanity prompts both men to exploit the children they raise. Misella says that such betrayers "defeat no rivals, but attack only those who cannot resist" (p. 139), which is also true not only of Sir Thomas but of Henry Crawford as well, who declares that he "cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 229)—a phrase that in itself suggests defloration.

In arguing that Austen destabilizes the boundary between prostitution and courtship, I am not declaring that Fanny is "in some not fully definable way a very bad [girl]" (Johnson, "What Became of Jane Austen," p. 68). In line with my general conviction, however, I would argue that Austen works to break down binaries rather than affirm them, and that Fanny is not the paragon of virtue that critics so often maintain. As Pam Perkins contends, Austen's "treatment of Fanny mocks and undermines rather than upholds [moral] conventions" (p. 19). One of Austen's most unsettling and comic inversions in this novel is to make Fanny, our presumed moral representative, the most brilliant actress in the novel. Fanny exclaims, "I could not act any thing if you were to give me the world" (p. 145), but it is transparent that she can and does: though disguising her love

[41] See "The History of Misella Debauched by Her Relation," and "Misella's Description of the Life of a Prostitute," in *The Rambler*, ed. W. J. Bate and Albrecht B. Strauss, vol. 5 of *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 135–45 (hereafter referred to as "Misella"). No one, to my knowledge, has yet made this connection between Johnson's Misella and Austen's Fanny Price.

for Edmund, she is "full of jealousy and agitation" (p. 159). At the end of the novel the narrator is ruthlessly funny in exposing Fanny's pretended sympathy for Edmund's "disappointment and regret" over Mary: Fanny "was sorry; but it was with a sorrow so founded on satisfaction, so tending to ease, and so much in harmony with every dearest sensation, that there are few who might not have been glad to exchange their greatest gaiety for it" (p. 461). Such examples demonstrate how spectacularly successful Fanny is at hiding the breach between her feelings and the self that she projects socially.

Through a metonymic slippage Fanny becomes the "masked" woman, a role that simultaneously empowers and debilitates her. When Crawford asks "Is she queer?—" (p. 230), the word's earlier meaning of "to counterfeit" takes on an added resonance.[42] Her doubleness—that repressed and passionate love contrasted to her innocent demeanor—resembles the doubleness of parts acted at a masquerade where nuns, milkmaids, shepherdesses, and Quakers proved to be the opposite of their chaste exteriors. Traditionally, prostitutes and actresses are coupled on the grounds that their careers are based on fiction: as Catherine Gallagher notes, the prostitute's "behavior, like her language, . . . must be entirely illusionary."[43] Further, the prostitute's mask bespeaks her procurability; similarly, Fanny's own masking of her love for Edmund registers her availability to Crawford, while her apparent prudishness—also a mask for her sexual desires—excites his craving. Ruth Bernard Yeazell is correct that "few risks can attend Fanny in the role of Cottager's wife."[44] It is ironic, however, that Fanny is menaced by the same risks described in *The Lady's Magazine*: "the modest miss" who, in home theater, "personates the coquette" renders herself vulnerable to "the *polite* double entrendres of the refined libertine."[45] The fear that acting compromises young women is borne out in Fanny's case, but in a wholly transposed way: her

[42] See Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*, p. 677.

[43] *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1994), p. 29.

[44] *Fictions of Modesty: Women and Courtship in the English Novel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 151.

[45] *The Lady's Magazine*, 21 (1790), 398; quoted in Yeazell, p. 150.

real-life acting makes her susceptible to the machinations of Crawford, the refined libertine. Thus theater is not the fount of inequity but rather a metaphor for the ideology that forces women to mask their true selves. Like Misella, Fanny must repress "resentment," "continue [her] importance by little services and active officiousness, and . . . stud[y] to please rather than to shine" ("Misella," p. 137). In this sense Austen offers a strong condemnation of the conduct-book advice to feign what one knows and feels, advice that strongly resembles *The Whore's Rhetorick* (1683), where the whore is told: "your whole life must be one continued act of dissimulation."[46] Paradoxically, though, the mask also offers Fanny the liberty to "decide for [her]self" (*Mansfield Park*, p. 318)—and in this sense, her performance procures her sovereignty. Disguise for her, as for women at an actual masquerade, vouchsafed them, in Terry Castle's words, "the essential masculine privilege of erotic object-choice."[47] Fanny ultimately gets chosen, but until that happens, her acting allows her to protect the object-choice she has made.

Austen's irreverent humor leads her to conjoin her seemingly purest, most evangelical heroine to the overdetermined figure of the masked woman. By exploring the range of associations of Fanny's name and by linking her to Misella and the prostitute-actress, that same humor enables Austen to critique the ideology that all women are either pure or fallen, suggesting instead that, in such a society, all women are fallen—and this includes both the Fanny Hills, who are prostitutes, and the Fanny Prices, who are expected to prostitute themselves in the marriage market. Fanny obviously is not a prostitute, and she does not end up the victim of her guardian's machinations; instead, she is married to the man she loves and lives in proximity to her now devoted surrogate parents. Her new life seems to be an example of exactly what the masquerade effected: that is, a situation that was, in Joseph Addison's words, "Nature turned topside turvy, Women changed into Men, and Men into Women, Children in Leading-strings seven Foot high, [and] Courtiers

[46] *The Whore's Rhetorick: Calculated to the Meridian of London and Conformed to the Rules of Art, in Two Dialogues* (1683; rpt. New York: Ivan Obolensky, 1961), p. 47.

[47] *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), p. 93.

transformed into Clowns."[48] At Manfield Park we see an inversion of certain expectations: the outcast little cousin becomes the heiress to the Park (or at least the heiress to the owner's affections), while the daughter, Maria, is exiled.

While such a transposition may seem like an example of "Nature turned top-side turvy," at the larger systemic level it is not: Fanny's triumph is dependent upon the same order that exiles Maria (the acknowledged fallen woman), who has lost because she has openly acted out her desires. Fanny has won because she has dissembled—she has performed the role that patriarchal rules dictate women should play. As the novel tells us, "Fanny was indeed the daughter that Sir Thomas wanted" (p. 472). Like her brother, William, Fanny has been "made" or promoted by the powers that be, because it suits them to do so. It just so happens that their promotions also suit William and Fanny. In expanding the notion of what constitutes fallenness, Austen suggests a far more radical attitude toward prostitution and courtship than was generally found in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century England, where, as Felicity A. Nussbaum argues, prostitutes were "conceptualized . . . as a species set apart from women."[49] The adulteress Maria Bertram may have been banned from Mansfield Park, but Austen's final joke is that one of the fallen women is in the parsonage.

In *Persuasion* Austen inverts the power relations of courtship by pivoting the male gaze on itself, as we watch the narrator frankly acknowledge the pleasures that a woman can take in visualizing the male body. As Anne Elliot and Lady Russell proceed down the streets of Bath, Anne sees Captain

[48] See Addison's letter to *The Guardian*, 7 September 1713, p. 502; quoted in Mudge, *The Whore's Story*, p. 36.

[49] "One Part of Womankind: Prostitution and Sexual Geography in *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 7, no. 2 (1995), 21. See also Trumbach, who argues that "male heterosexuality and the sentimental movement . . . joined hands together to create a new deviant group [prostitutes] against which the majority of the lives of ordinary women could be measured" (*Sex and the Gender Revolution*, p. 168).

Frederick Wentworth across the street. Anne and Captain Wentworth had been engaged, and Anne—at the advice of Lady Russell—had broken off the engagement. Now, eight years later, they are on the verge of reconciliation, so Anne is nearly frantic with anxiety wondering how her guardian will react to him. But Lady Russell apparently has not seen him (or at least does not acknowledge that she has) and focuses on something apparently very different:

> At last, Lady Russell drew back her head.—"Now, how would she speak of him?"
>
> "You will wonder," said she, "what has been fixing my eye so long; but I was looking after some window-curtains, which Lady Alicia and Mrs. Frankland were telling me of last night. They described the drawing-room window-curtains of one of the houses on this side of the way, and this part of the street, as being the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath, but could not recollect the exact number, and I have been trying to find out which it could be; but I confess I can see no curtains hereabouts that answer their description." (*Persuasion*, p. 179)

This passage functions as a displacement of Lady Russell's earlier rejection of Captain Wentworth (p. 27)—she could not then see his intrinsic worth because he was not wealthy. In this later scene she cannot see him because she is fixed on curtains—literal materials that of course function as a metonymy for her fixation on material wealth. It is also possible, of course, that she does see Wentworth but focuses on curtains instead, covering up her reactions as a window curtain covers the means of viewing and being viewed: "Anne sighed and blushed and smiled, in pity and disdain, either at her friend or herself" (p. 179).

At a more transgressive level, the curtains—"the handsomest and best hung of any in Bath"—metonymically evoke Wentworth's body. "Best hung" implies "well-hung," which as early as 1667, the OED tells us, could mean "decorated with rich hangings or tapestry," and "suspended or attached so as to hang well. Said, e.g., of a window-sash." But even earlier, from 1611, it could also mean "furnished with large pendent organs"; "(of a man) having large genitals." Austen's use of this term cor-

responds to Freud's notion of the joke as a "displacement of the psychical emphasis on to a topic other than the opening one"; "It depends not on words but on the train of thought."[50] I would argue that such a displacement occurs on two levels in this scene. First, although our initial attention, like Lady Russell's, is on the curtains, our train of association leads us next to think about Wentworth's body, and in particular his sexualized body. The second point, which discloses the limitations of Freud's comic theories, is a feminist one. Austen's joke here disturbs our rigid expectations of the trajectory that we assume her humor should take—like the fixed thought patterns that lead us to assume which direction a joke will take. When we get the joke, we receive an unexpected but necessary view of the full range of her humor and also of the way in which ideological blinders have prevented us from following that train of thought; like Lady Russell, we see and ignore, or we do not see at all.

If we wonder about the "faultlessly innocent" Austen's awareness of making such a joke, we have only to look in two sources: first her letters, and then Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760–67). In 1801 Austen writes to her sister Cassandra that a certain Admiral Stanhope "is a gentlemanlike Man, but then his legs are too short, & his tail too long." During Austen's time "tail" signified the male genitalia; thus, relying on her own careful observation of the male body, Austen here makes a pointed joke about the disproportion between the various parts of the Admiral's physique.[51] *Tristram Shandy* was one of Austen's favorite novels and one that Park Honan argues "she knew intimately and that offered some of the most valuable models of narrative tactics she found."[52] Sterne's novel offers a sustained play on both the slang term and its connection to windows when Sterne describes Tristram's inadvertent circumcision: "*Susannah*

[50] Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious (1905)*, ed. and trans. James Strachey, et al., vol. 8 of *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Hogarth Press, 1960), pp. 51, 52.

[51] Austen, letter to Cassandra Austen, 12–13 May 1801, in *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. Deirdre Le Faye, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), p. 86. See Partridge, *Dictionary of Slang*, p. 860.

[52] *Jane Austen: Her Life* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 120.

did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,—so slap came the sash down like lightening upon us."[53]

In the passage from *Persuasion* about curtains we have seen how Austen desacralizes social constructions when she, a proper lady, candidly gestures toward the pleasures that a woman can take in canvasing the male body. This is a banquet that we find Austen allowing her characters to feast on in other novels as well. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), when Willoughby enters Barton cottage carrying Marianne, "the eyes of both [Elinor and Mrs. Dashwood] were fixed on him with an evident wonder and a secret admiration which . . . sprung from his appearance" (p. 42). These two ladies appreciate Willoughby's "manly beauty" (p. 43) in "general admiration" (p. 43); while in *Persuasion* Anne's erotic fascination with Captain Wentworth's appearance and physique leads her to presume that Lady Russell will share it, a notably mistaken assumption on her part: "She could thoroughly comprehend the sort of fascination he must possess over Lady Russell's mind, the difficulty it must be for her to withdraw her eyes, the astonishment she must be feeling that eight or nine years should have passed over him, and in foreign climes and in active service too, without robbing him of one personal grace!" (p. 179).

When Lady Russell had earlier objected to Captain Wentworth, we see that it was not only his financial deficiency that concerned her; she is clearly terrified of his sexual potency and masculine vigor as well:

> full of life and ardour, [Captain Wentworth] knew that he should soon have a ship, and soon be on a station that would lead to every thing he wanted. He had always been lucky; he knew he should be so still.—Such confidence, powerful in its own warmth, and bewitching in the wit which often expressed it, must have been enough for Anne; but Lady Russell saw it very differently.—His sanguine temper, and fearlessness of mind, operated very differently on her. She saw in it but an aggravation of the evil. It only added a dangerous character to himself. He was brilliant, he was headstrong.—Lady Russell had little taste for wit; and of any

[53] Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy: An Authoritative Text, The Author on the Novel, Criticism*, ed. Howard Anderson (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), p. 264.

> thing approaching to imprudence a horror. She deprecated the connexion in every light. (p. 27)

Here, as in the joke about being "well-hung," we read Wentworth's body as the inscripted site of his sexual ardor and power—he is sanguine, which means optimistic but also full of blood; a man who desires his "ship" (gendered female) and the "station" that would lead to fulfillment. Further, from a historical perspective, we see Austen linking Wentworth (and the navy in general) to a conception of physical and moral sinew that was, as Tim Fulford argues, a "myth of national character" dependent on "chivalric virtues . . . such as patriotism, self-reliance, courage, paternalism, and, above all, attentiveness to duty" (pp. 163, 162). In particular, Wentworth's masculine prowess differentiates him from the feminizing inherent in colonial life. Anne believes that Lady Russell should be astonished that not only time, but time passed in "foreign climes," has not divested him of "one personal grace." Finally, his ambition links him to the "middle-class backlash" against "aristocratic immorality," a backlash that, Fulford notes, led to a "redefinition of the social and political order [that] relocated chivalric ideals from the aristocracy to the gentry and to the growing professional classes" (pp. 170–71).

Just as Garrick's riddle is fully integrated into *Emma*, so Austen's joke about Wentworth being well endowed is integrated into *Persuasion*. Peter Brooks points out that "narratives in which a body becomes a central preoccupation can be especially revelatory of the effort to bring the body into the linguistic realm because they repeatedly tell the story of a body's entrance into meaning."[54] The narrative about the body, in this case Wentworth's body, "imprint[s] it as a linguistic and narrative sign"—here the "sign" of masculinity and desire (Brooks, p. 8). Thus we must not overlook Austen's joke, but instead read it as the point where Wentworth's body becomes the site of Lady's Russell's resistance and Anne's subsequent loss and rekindled desire. As Lady Russell's fear and ideologies are wittily

[54] *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), p. 8.

condensed into the symbol of "the handsomest and best hung" curtains in all of Bath, it is no wonder that she cannot find what she is looking for, while Anne has found what suits her perfectly. As Brooks notes, even though the male body "is the norm, [it] is veiled from inquiry, taken as the agent and not the object of knowing: the gaze is 'phallic,' its object is not" (p. 15). Austen inverts this "norm" and here turns the male body into the object of knowing. This inversion is especially important in *Persuasion*, where getting the first look at someone enables a character to exert tremendous power over another and to establish his or her own self-protection. As the narrator says, "the part which provoked [Anne] most, was that in all this waste of foresight and caution, she should have lost the right moment for seeing whether he saw them" (p. 179). Austen intimately links sexual energy and wit in her description of Captain Wentworth. Further, the sources of his magnetism—ardor, sanguine nature, and brilliance—are precisely the qualities that we find in Austen's own prose. Unlike Lady Russell, Austen neither experiences imprudence as horror nor deprecates the connection between wit and the erotic.

Throughout this essay I have been arguing that Austen's witty integration of bawdy humor is "tendentious" (Freud's term for humor's aggressive purposiveness) in that it serves to provide an outlet for her hostility toward ideologies that dominate women. Freud asserts that "to the human psyche all renunciation is exceedingly difficult, and so we find that tendentious jokes provide a means of undoing the renunciation and retrieving what was lost" (*Jokes*, p. 101). Thus, the tendentious joke "circumvents" censorship—"the obstacle standing in the way" of satisfaction—by disguising "lustful or hostile" instincts and then satisfying those instincts in a way that society permits. In Freud's opinion, that "obstacle" is "women's incapacity to tolerate undisguised sexuality, an incapacity correspondingly increased with a rise in the educational and social level" (p. 101). This assertion reveals the glaring limitations of male-oriented critiques of comedy for the analysis of women's

humor, and especially for the interpretation of Austen's bawdy humor. What makes her comedy transgressive is that—given the tendencies in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century to dispossess women's humor, and specifically their sexual humor—Austen's bawdy jokes reveal her ability both to isolate such biased ideology and to maneuver its borders through a humor that voices what we would assume are *unacceptable* expressions of sexuality.

These bawdy allusions—while simultaneously outrageous and funny—protest against patriarchal privilege and address contemporary historical notions of masculine and feminine identities. Thus, through Garrick's riddle and its integration in the novel as a whole, Austen denounces the unequal ratio between male freedom and female constraint, a ratio founded on male promiscuity and entitlement. Austen, however, also seems to acknowledge the irony that even though she is aware of the disturbing possibilities inherent in courtship, in her devising of the courtship plot itself she too joins the roster of Cupids participating in raising these "flames." One also suspects, then, that she would recognize the self-reflexive irony inherent in the narrator's reference to Miss Price as "my Fanny" (p. 461). *Mansfield Park* provides the opportunity to break down oppositions between respectable women and their deviant sisters, insofar as their bodies are negotiated as agents of exchange. The novel also explores the comic irreverence of seeing Fanny Price, in the words of Francis Jacox in *The New Monthly Magazine*, as "a bewitching 'little body.'"[55] Subversive in another way, but conjoined, is Austen's encouragement of Anne's pleasure in viewing Captain Wentworth's body, an activity that affirms a courtship that can be fully passionate and that celebrates a woman, heretofore timid, who now brings to that courtship her own sexual volition. (We might ask if the female gaze functions as the antidote to the "disease" inherent in courtship.) Finally, in Austen's characterization of Wentworth as a metonymy of naval (and national) might, she in fact supplies an antidote of a different

[55] [Francis Jacox], "Female Novelists: No. I.—Miss Austen," *The New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 95 (1852), 22. The joke of collapsing the difference between the prim object of courtship and the fallen woman dates back of course to *Shamela* (1741), Fielding's parody of Richardson's *Pamela* (1740–41).

kind: his manly sexuality innoculates the culture against the sexual licentiousness native to the aristocracy, royalty, and colonial influence. Her critique, however, is more expansive than the tendency to blame colonial influence for problems in Britain: her exposure of the values forming the foundation of Garrick's riddle counteracts the notion that she sees voluptuary corruptions as only imported. Although Austen portrays "going abroad" in *Emma*—that unpleasant half mile—as perilous activity indeed, she also sees native perils, both in the ideological constructs of British courtship and in Emma's own imagination as she fantasizes about Jane and Mr. Dixon.

We laugh at Mr. Woodhouse and Lady Russell as we would laugh at the person "crashing witlessly into a lamppost."[56] Likewise, as Austen laughs at the insufficiency of her characters, she also laughs at the insufficiency of the values they represent—rendering doctrines, in the moment of laughter, into instances of non-being, momentarily nullifying the power of ideology. There is no doubt that in Austen's bawdy humor we find a provocative and insurgent energy that recalls the candid and irrepressible magnetism we see so obviously, for instance, in her Juvenilia. In her bawdy/body humor Austen frankly breaches normative ideologies, integrating these instances of immodest and risqué humor into the narratives as a whole: in other words, they are not odd moments to pass over or to titter about in private, but pleasurable and unabashed inscriptions of a sexuality that is foundational rather than incidental or anomalous. As W. H. Auden wrote of Austen: "You could not shock her more than she shocks me; / Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass."[57]

University of Colorado

[56] See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "The Laughter of Being," trans. Terry Thomas, *MLN*, 102 (1987), 749.

[57] Auden, "Letter to Lord Byron (W.H.A.), Part I," in W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland* (New York: Random House, 1937), p. 21.