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"Not what they have chapter and verse for:" On Judgments, Assumptions, and Expectations in Austen and Eliot

Piper Dutton

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“Not what they have chapter and verse for:”
On Judgments, Assumptions, and Expectations in Austen and Eliot

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An Honors Thesis
Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with honors in English from Hamline University

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Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Acknowledgements	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	4
<i>Development of the Novel</i>	8
<i>Author, Narrator, and Narrative Authority</i>	10
<i>On Jane Austen and George Eliot</i>	15
<i>Judgment, Assumption, and Expectation</i>	20
Chapter 2: Judgment	23
<i>Judgment and Judging</i>	26
<i>Moral Mentorships</i>	31
<i>Art and Aesthetic Judgment</i>	35
Chapter 3: Assumption	43
<i>Assuming</i>	46
<i>Gossip</i>	49
Chapter 4: Expectation	62
<i>Inheritances</i>	63
<i>Wills</i>	73
Afterword	82
Bibliography	87

Abstract

The nineteenth century left lasting impacts on our contemporary world, from political and economic developments to social and philosophical ones, and this extends to literature in the development of the novel as a major form. Jane Austen and George Eliot played integral roles in this maturation of the novel, as well as what Elizabeth Sabiston calls “the emerging female text and voice,” and thus both they and their art form merit continued reading and discussion (3). Novels are tools of social norms and revolution, and in the nineteenth century functioned as tools of the author in teaching their morals, worldviews, and philosophical perspectives to readers. Informed by feminist and narratological perspectives as well as by close readings and cultural and philosophical contexts, this project undertakes a sociocultural study of how fiction conveys ways of understanding and interacting with the world. Specifically, this project examines how in these texts, judgment, assumption, and expectation, of and from self and others, lead to better understanding and knowledge of others, self, and the world. I look at the ways Austen and Eliot deal with nineteenth century issues, such as tensions between society and the individual and questions of epistemology and morality, and how they reflect a shift across the century from a highly prescriptive society to a more flexible one that relies less on predetermined position to determine worth and morality. Both authors value similar social actions, but they have different perspectives on the reasons for their characters' successes in meeting moral standards or failures to live up to them. Ultimately, this project views literature as a reflection of society which allows us to experience and understand others in ways that we cannot always in the real world.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“People say what they like to say, not what they

have chapter and verse for.”

Middlemarch 461

In the field of Victorian British literary studies, as in the broader disciplines of literary and cultural studies, a great deal of 21st-century criticism has focused on the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, and between literature and epistemology. A recent example is Philipp Erchinger’s *Artful Experiments: Ways of Knowing in Victorian Literature and Culture* (2020). Erchinger examines in Victorian literary and scientific discourses “the activities through which knowledge is brought about into being, sustained, debated, modified, adapted, corrected, used, reimagined, extended and made subject to continuous transformation and change” (1). In two chapters, Erchinger analyzes meaning-making in George Eliot’s work in relation to contemporary scientific and social scientific methods. I too am interested in how characters come to “know” their world, others, and themselves, but I focus on how Eliot and her predecessor, Jane Austen, define characters through their meaning-making processes in interpersonal and social contexts. In the chapters that follow, I analyze how Austen and Eliot use characters’ judgments, assumptions, and expectations to develop and reveal character as well as to reflect on these social beings’ processes of “knowing.”

Nineteenth century literature has been analyzed, criticized, and talked about since it was written. Some of the topics of conversation, including philosophical perspectives and aesthetics, have remained important in critical thought, from the works of people like Mary Wollstonecraft, William Wordsworth, and Matthew Arnold in their contemporary moment through to modern criticism. The philosophies of Austen and Eliot have been much discussed—perhaps Austen’s

more so because there are few explicit writings about it from the author herself—from perspectives (a debate among perspectives like skepticism, empiricism, relativism, and rationalism ongoing for the time) to epistemological ideologies, and questions of socio-political and economic importance. The latter are of particular critical interest given the current events of each writer's time: Austen was born in the same year as the American Revolution, and lived through the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, while Eliot lived through the Reform Acts that expanded the vote in Great Britain, and both were living in the ongoing Industrial Revolution that changed the economic, political, and social systems of the world. Their novels directly reflect this, and influence the world as depictions of social norms, changes, and ideals. The relations between Austen and Eliot and philosophical perspectives and ideas of the time have been and continue to be discussed and debated, including how they viewed the construction of knowledge, the moral responsibilities of individuals, and their work's relationship to their socio-political views. Aesthetic discussions of the authors' work have also addressed moral implications, and critics have considered representations of taste, beauty, and value, particularly as they relate to education and other social and economic structures. Art in their novels is also closely intertwined with the education of women, an important topic for social norms with economic implications due to marriage, which relates it to questions of inheritance and ownership as well. And while questions of knowledge and social relations are couched in philosophy for both Austen and Eliot, by Eliot's time psychology was also a factor to be considered, though rather differently than today as Victorian psychological understandings were different. A parallel line of critical inquiry into nineteenth century literature looks at style and the development of the novel. Discussions of free-indirect discourse and narrative authority recur, particularly in relation to Austen's fiction, and a number of critics have examined the formal

techniques that both authors use to make moral statements and impart epistemological and other philosophical perspectives to their readers.

Through engagement with some of this criticism and close readings of some of the central works of Jane Austen and George Eliot, I endeavor to engage with this conversation and contribute examinations of interpersonal relations that, informed by these debates and questions, show how readers and characters within the novels come to know themselves and others. Using a framework of feminist and narratological perspectives to understand how these two women wrote, I undertake to keep in mind the cultural and philosophical contexts of the nineteenth century world they and their readers lived in to examine how their fiction depicts and teaches ways of understanding the world, and taking it with us into our everyday lives. Jane Austen and George Eliot were and remain incredibly important authors, particularly in the ways they impacted the realist novel. Elizabeth Sabiston writes that these women have “a consciousness of their craft,” and the time at which they were writing meant that they left an impact on novels as a form in terms of their techniques, subject matter, and perspectives; Jane Austen, Sabiston paraphrases Brigid Brophy, “takes the novel as she sees it, pulverizes it, and creates a new form that brings the novel to full maturity,” a legacy George Eliot would inherit and continue (2-3). These ever-popular novels, in reflecting their society, also contribute to “the emerging female text and voice,” and ultimately examine the relationship between “woman and community,” and their authors’ consciousness of the ways women have been limited by the society they exist within, particularly in the nineteenth century, plays no small role in the social critiques and systems of philosophy they write and impart (Sabiston 3, 189). Austen and Eliot knew what they were doing in their writing, and they changed the literary and social world as they did so.

I maintain, as do other scholars, that these authors leverage their work to convey to their readers their worldviews, including philosophical and socio-political perspectives. As D.A. Miller suggests in *The Novel and The Police*, literature is also part of the way that cultures self-police, and the imparting of belief systems through it maintains them. Literature reflects and has the power to change our world, and in the process teaches readers, often through the journeys of characters, how to interact with and in the world. Social performance and interactions were incredibly important in the nineteenth century, as is reflected in the novels of the time. Nineteenth-century characters are revealed to be who they are by their actions, words, and thoughts, and one particularly revealing aspect is how they conceptualize other people. Their judgments, assumptions, and expectations of those with whom they interact are based on social constructs and particularly founded on relative economic and political situations, and often work to reveal the character of both individuals, the one thinking and the one being thought about. And through the judgments, assumptions, and expectations made about characters, by other characters and by the narrator, the reader is taught to think similarly, bringing the philosophical perspectives of the author into their experience. This project examines how judgment, assumption, and expectation, of and from self and others, functions in five novels: Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*, and George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. Specifically, I examine the ways these social interactions lead to better understanding and knowledge of others, self, and the world, for characters and readers. In the nineteenth century, there was a tension between society and individuality, examined through judgements of characters and readers; questions of truth, epistemology, and morality come up in relation to assumptions. And expectations, particularly societal and legal ones, reflect a shift across the century from a highly prescriptive society to a more flexible one, a question of control versus

free will that sees the nineteenth century move away from relying on rank and social position to determine worth and morality. Austen and Eliot are not entirely different—both authors value, for example, similar social actions, in terms of respect for others and taking care of one's responsibilities. But they are different women, living in different times. They have different perspectives on the reasons for their characters' successes in meeting moral standards, or failures to live up to them, based on differences in philosophy and social standards. Ultimately, this project views literature as a reflection of society which allows us to experience and understand others in ways that we cannot always in the real world. While the social scene in the nineteenth century was different than it is today, and the specific contexts of these characterizing thoughts and responses are not as relevant, the systems of thought conveyed by Austen's and Eliot's work continue to raise crucial questions about how we come to “know” ourselves and others; we still judge, assume, and expect today, though in different contexts.

Development of the Novel

Terry Eagleton calls the novel an “anti-genre,” an anarchic form which defies definition by neat delineation of traits and elements, taking and reusing and “*Frankenstein-ing*” together other literary forms to modernize literature for the world of the middle class and democratic popularity (1). This is especially true for what we call the realist novel, “the dominant style of the modern English novel” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the novel begins to flourish, particularly novels of social life and reform (11). Modern novels were, generally, written about everyday people, or at least more everyday people than the Romances and poems that had been popular up until then were about, and were able to be enjoyed by everyday people. In Britain by the nineteenth century, the novel was both a popular and established literary genre, with critical apparatuses like literary magazines and journals becoming abundant and, by the end

of the century, English--the study of the language and literature--was an established academic discipline. Literature, and particularly the novel, became about and a part of “the processes by which, and the purposes for which, society creates its national and even tribal codes,” laying out norms of language, culture, and society and teaching readers how to function within them (Burrows 177).

What we would generally recognize as or think of if asked to describe the modern realist prose novel, however, was not the realist novel in its earliest form. In the eighteenth century particularly, though throughout the early nineteenth century as well, the epistolary novel was a major form--novels told through letters written by characters, such as Samuel Richardson’s 1740 *Pamela* and 1747 *Clarissa* (and all the way through to perhaps the most well-known epistolary novel, Mary Shelley’s 1818 science fiction novel *Frankenstein*). Jane Austen herself, an avid letter writer, dabbled in the epistolary novel--the last of her juvenalia (or first of her novels, depending on who you ask), *Lady Susan*, is epistolary, as were early drafts of *Sense and Sensibility*, and of course letters and their contents play important roles in her other books as well. The epistolary novel was a window into the world of writing for women, the dominant letter writers of the time, who could use it along with anonymity to bridge the gap between the private women’s sphere of the home and the public world of writing and publishing (Sabiston 2). The epistolary form gave them the ability to take part in the novel and find ways to control and influence a social narrative that had long been (and would continue to be through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) prescribed to them by men, through popular conduct literature like Richardson’s novels or James Fordyce’s *Sermons*, and which was continued and even feminized later in the century by works such as Sarah Stickney Ellis’s 1839 *The Women of England*.

But the shift from epistolary novels to the more common (today) prose ones came quickly and without much difficulty, as Austen herself shows, though it was certainly not final or irreversible. One important difference or consideration in moving from epistolary to prose novels is that point of view and the narrator figure become important. In an epistolary novel, the letter is written by someone and *to* someone—there is a defined audience for readers to identify with, and an “I” for them to consider as the author—even if the “I” changes (as in *Lady Susan*, which features multiple letter writers) or is not personally involved in most of the story they are telling (as in *Frankenstein*, where Watson is hearing most of the story at least second-hand). This first-person window into the tale can be both a way into the text and a way of separating readers from it. The social, economic, and political positions of the letter writer can, depending on whether readers identify with or feel alienated by them, invite readers into the story or keep them just outside it. First person narrators also tend to have the clearest biases, potentially raising questions about their reliability. It is no surprise, then, that Jane Austen, whose narrative perspective relies on readers trusting and agreeing with her as she explores and remarks upon social and moral issues, found it natural to turn to a more disembodied third-person narrator, whom readers can imagine to have similar qualities and experiences to themselves.

Author, Narrator, and Narrative Authority

Conventionally in modern literary criticism, the author has been separated from the text, at least since the rise of structuralism in the twentieth century. Narratologically, this happens by holding the narrator as separate from the author, something which may seem relatively obvious with a specified first-person narrator, but is perhaps less so in cases of unspecified third-person narration, such as that found in the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot. In these two cases, the narrators walk a fine line between omniscience and plot-level drama, obviously being able to

enter into the minds of their characters but being selective about the details presented. We, as readers, are given the inner thoughts and feelings of individuals and the collective at times, though often key details or individuals go un-intruded upon for the sake of the plot (as with Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax in *Emma*). It makes logical sense for Eliot to favor a third-person narration, as her novels jump between perspectives and tell several intertwined stories. *Middlemarch* is famously named for the community it chronicles, described by the narrator as a “particular web” of characters who are “woven and interwoven,” rather than for any one of its characters (133-4). Eliot also does not restrict herself to a third-person narrator; in the very same web passage, she uses “we” and “us” and “I,” though generally the first-person is reserved for narratorial asides and not used within the story/plot events, which the narrator is separated from. Austen, on the other hand, tends to stick to her heroines more closely, letting an individual focalize the narrative, which gives it a viewpoint (as well as reason for certain information to be withheld, as it goes unobserved by the heroine who informs the narrative view) and a humanity that a disembodied third-person voice can lack.

In “Who Evaluates Whom and What in Jane Austen’s Novels?,” Massimiliano Morini points out that while today’s criticism separates author and narrator, Austen herself would have expected readers to conflate the two. He goes on, however, to separate the two, discussing the evaluative authority of the (semi-, or selectively) omniscient narrator, who gives readers exposition and conclusions, social and economic information, and judgments of characters—and is inconclusive as to whether the narrator is (or can be) a character herself. Morini also believes there is “epistemological uncertainty” caused by the narrator’s “evaluative reticence” in moments of the novel that are not expository or conclusionary, and questions the narrator’s omniscience as they seem to be an individual and at time claim not to know things that an all-knowing entity

would (421). I contend that Morini here overlooks the ironic and satirical tendencies of Austen as an author/narrator, and I would push back on taking her claims to “not know” at face value, reading them rather as more tongue-in-cheek. Thus, what Morini views as Austen “dismantling the evaluative authority” of her narrator, I see as part of what has made her novels popular for more than two centuries, and certainly part of why I personally am drawn to them.

In contrast to Morini’s separation of author and narrator, Brian Boyd sets up what he calls an “Optional Narrator” thesis, which brings some valuable perspective (285). He would describe Morini’s approach as complicated, unnecessary critical gatekeeping, and he problematizes the separation (which he refers to as the “Necessary Narrator” thesis) (287). Through a close reading of two scenes in *Emma*, he argues that, ultimately, we read fiction knowing it is fiction, and that “imagination feeds on memory,” meaning that as readers engage with the text personally, we connect with authors; to assume a separate narrator can be less engaging in our social relationship to the text and its author (303). I agree with Boyd’s assertion that it can be reductive to assume the author and narrator are separate, and that we engage with the narrative, socially, as a fictional story. It does not diminish that engagement for the author themselves to be the storyteller. And this engagement is crucial to the social and moral teaching that Austen and Eliot do within their texts.

Narratology provides other ways of understanding the intimate author-narrator relationship. Peter Barry describes narratology as “the study of how narratives make meaning, and what the basic mechanisms and procedures are which are common to all acts of story-telling... not the reading and interpretation of *individual* stories, but the attempt to study the nature of ‘story’ itself, as a concept and as a cultural practice” (222-3). In discussing the complexities of the author-narrator relationship in theorist Gérard Genette’s work, Barry sets up

what he calls the “authorial persona,” in which the narrator is a version of the author/author’s voice—one that the author uses while writing but not, say, in casual conversation (234). In other (though no less confusing) words, the narrator is the author, but the author is not the narrator, at least not perpetually. This is particularly evident if you look across the novels written by a single author—the narrators across Jane Austen’s or George Eliot’s bodies of work have undeniable similarities, but do not use exactly the same voice in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, or in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. This is the perspective on the author-narrator relationship that I take throughout my work with Austen’s and Eliot’s novels.

In the development of the novel, there is a point where dialogue becomes infused and important in the narrative, and “Jane Austen lies at a moment of transition in the history of the novel” for this reason, as well as for being an early user of the narrative technique called “free-indirect discourse” (Burrows 173).¹ In free-indirect discourse (FID), the third-person narrator is able to dip into the minds of characters, and “makes public the private thoughts of individual characters” (Finch and Bowen 5). This technique can be a little tricky to navigate and catch with much, or sometimes any, certainty, for several reasons—as Finch and Bowen point out, Austen-as-narrator remains fairly anonymous and detached from the narrative, “reveal[ing] everyone’s thoughts but her own” (11). Morini, too, notes that with FID it is not always clear whether it is the narrator or heroine (whose mind, in Austen, is most intruded on) speaking, particularly because Austen’s authorial persona is confined to an ethereal space of pure narration (without identifiable characteristics, keeping Austen anonymous as she was in her publishing until her death), and she is not afraid to judge her characters or use her ironic wit when describing them and their lives (425-6). And Austen’s heroines often, through the course of the

¹ Free-indirect discourse, or FID, is also commonly referred to as free-indirect style, and there are several terms which are very similar, though some critics might debate whether they are synonymous, such as the narrated perception Palleres-Garcia writes about in “Narrated perception revisited: The case of Jane Austen’s *Emma*.”

novel, develop to speak, think, and act more like the narrator. FID is further complicated by not explicitly stating when it is a character's thoughts being expressed or the narrator's (its *indirect* discourse), and because on occasion it swaps back and forth between the two quickly—a passage full of a character's thoughts punctuated by a thought of the narrator's before returning to the character, or vice versa, for example (perhaps the *free* in FID). Austen's use of FID is helpful in terms of plot: noting what a given character observes or concludes (perhaps assumes) helps in keeping back plot details and leading readers to specific conclusions for a more suspenseful climax, but it also helps to show the growth of characters across the novel, as their thoughts mature.

In tandem with FID, Oberman discusses the use of “narrated monologue,” in which the heroine's and narrator's voices are heard together, mixing first- and third-person points of view and allowing the two to interact. This “creates a triangulated relationship between narrator, character, and reader,” allowing the narrator to influence and teach readers to better understand the characters as well as helping heroines to develop into narrators with narrator-voices themselves (Oberman 10). Narrated monologue also, in teaching readers and characters to understand others (and their thoughts and feelings) through exposure to them in the narrative, ties into something that is “integral to the novel as a genre”: morality (13). Austen and Eliot, through stylistic techniques such as narrated monologue and FID, as well as through their role and involvement in their stories as the narrator who is the ultimate moral authority within the text, perpetuate their perspectives on the social conventions of the time and teach those who engage with their novels to conceptualize morality as they do.

On Jane Austen and George Eliot

Writing roughly fifty years apart, and in worlds that look quite different—personally, socially, politically, and economically—it is no surprise that there are differences in how Jane Austen and George Eliot write and in what they are teaching their readers. While some social conventions and structures remained at least relatively similar, the years between their writing experienced developments in literature (such as serial publishing, subscription lending libraries, and the growing popularity of the novel, as well as criticism and common themes/tropes changing), science (natural and social), and of course the Industrial Revolution, which led to changes in economic structures that created a middle class, shifted rural and city landscapes through factories, enclosure acts, and changing transportation, and the resulting socio-political changes. Three major categories of difference between the two authors are how they view social change, who (generally) they wrote about, and how they assume moral authority as the narrator. To move chronologically, we begin with Jane Austen.

Jane Austen lived a relatively private life, but wrote abundantly; her works include a hefty collection of juvenilia, six finished novels, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Mansfield Park*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*, and one partial novel, *Sanditon*, left unfinished at her death in 1817. Her first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, was published as “by a lady,” while her next, *Pride and Prejudice*, was published as “by the author of *Sense and Sensibility*.” Her identity as the author was only revealed with the posthumous publication of her remaining finished novels by her brother, in 1817. Austen’s novels are, perhaps, the best-known examples of marriage plot novels from the nineteenth century, or at least the early part of it, marriage being a social and economic affair that was the goal for most women. The other thing Austen’s novels do is make social commentary on the road to the marriage(s), through the

narrator as well as juxtapositions of various characters and situations. What we know of her outside her novels comes, mostly, from the biography Austen-Leigh published after her death and her remaining private writings, including drafts of her novels and some letters.² Inferred from her personal writings, lifestyle, and novels, Austen has conventionally been considered fairly conservative, both socially and politically—perhaps unsurprising for a girl raised by a rural clergyman. She was, however, provided with ample access to education at home, something not entirely traditional for the time, though it still did not afford her the opportunities her brothers had as men. The act of writing and publishing as she did, however, was not particularly conservative for the time; writing is and always has been a public act, and women were meant to be confined to the private home life (Sabiston 2). And Jane Austen, armed with her education, knew what she was doing, her often ironic tone and the subject matter she took on dealing with social politics and economics betraying her as critical of the status quo, if not ready to abandon it entirely. In her writing, Austen used her worldview as an individual and a woman and “brings the novel to full maturity” in developing narrative techniques like FID and in her expertly dealt with social commentary and critiques through her characters and plots (Sabiston 2).

Part of the impression of her general conservatism comes from the fact that her novels center primarily on the landed gentry, a level of the early nineteenth century British middle-upper class, below the aristocracy, that had social, political, and economic prominence (primarily in the country). The landed gentry, though it would wane in power and standing across the nineteenth century, had in Austen’s time estates and the social responsibility that came with them. Even the early nineteenth century, however, was seeing changes to the British class system, with some tradespeople acquiring enough money to purchase estates, and military men

² While we know her to have been a prolific letter-writer, many of her letters were burned by her sister upon her death, and there was a concerted effort by her family members to paint her as unthreatening and apolitical “Aunt Jane.”

making fortunes in conflicts across Europe and the British Empire. Austen's cast of characters, then, includes not just the rural gentry, but also those with whom they would have interacted, from clergy to tradespeople (often relatives, like the Gardiners, or recently-rich friends, like the Bingleys) to military men, and occasionally villainous fortune-seekers or (socially) adopted "less-fortunates" (like Harriet Smith).

Austen's conservatism and practice of writing about a world she knew, having grown up a country clergyman's daughter whose brother was adopted by a wealthy family to inherit their fortune, leads to interesting relationships between the narrator and characters, as she is often sympathetic towards them but also refuses to shy away from judging them harshly, particularly when they deserve it. The landed gentry and aristocracy, in particular, had socio-political responsibilities in Austen's time, from the local economy—the wellbeing of their tenants and the community around their estate—to the politics that they were involved in as some of the only voters and potential members of parliament, to upholding the social order that formed their world. They had real moral authority but also real responsibilities, and Austen is not afraid to hold her characters to high standards. As the narrator, Austen assumes moral authority over her characters, and when she is not using FID to reveal when characters have been perceived to fail socially, she judges them herself through commenting on their inadequacies, both seriously and sarcastically. She also assumes that readers agree with her in her judgments of the characters—Wickham is obviously bad, Emma is obviously misled by her vanity and status—presenting what Mary Poovey refers to as "a set of basic assumptions and values, such as family members share," that gives readers a "common ground" of "shared experiences, assumptions, and values" with the author that they will consistently return to and believe in (204). This assumption that readers already agree with her and understand her point of view

helps Austen to teach her readers the perspective and moral codes she conveys, building the value system of her work with the reader as they come, like her characters, to agree with her more and more.

Two years after Austen's death, in 1819, Mary Ann (Marian) Evans, who published her novels under the pen name George Eliot, was born on a Warwickshire farm to an estate manager. Before turning to novels in the late 1850s, Eliot had a career as a literary critic, working for the *Westminster Review* in London, as well as publishing some poetry and translations. She would go on to write seven novels, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner*, *Romola*, *Felix Holt*, *the Radical*, and of course *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*. Writing later in the nineteenth century, George Eliot's life was rather more public and worldly. An established member of London's literary (criticism) scene, Eliot published plenty of articles and was relatively well-known in her own right as well as in her relationship with George Henry Lewes, her common law husband. Abandoning her father's strict religious beliefs and moving to cosmopolitan London fairly early in her life, Eliot was quite liberal in her thinking, socially and politically, as is evidenced in her writing and personal life. Her works still feature economically fortunate characters in prominent positions—though their money, and social position, is often less secure than that of Austen's characters—but they are not the only characters, as Eliot depicts a lower class that Austen almost entirely leaves out. Often considered something of a social psychologist, Eliot centers her novels around communities—and while they don't often dwell on the dirt-poor or criminal cast of, say, Charles Dickens' fiction, they include a far more varied group of characters than do Austen's novels. In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea and her circle are members of the landed gentry, while the Vincys and their associates represent upper-middle class citizens, including doctors and bankers and clergymen. Eliot does still leave out, largely, the

lowest portions of the lower class: the Garths are the lowest strata of Middlemarch she spends much time with, and they are firmly above people like the tenant farmers, of whom almost the sole depiction in the book is the Dagleys, whose primary narrative purpose is to make a statement about Mr Brooke (revisited in Chapter 2), or to serve as the object of Dorothea's desire to help miserable creatures.

But Eliot's most crucial difference from Jane Austen is in how she assumes moral authority and the ability to pass judgment on her characters. While the landed aristocracy is in the process of becoming less important because of industrial capitalism, its members still play important social, political, and economic roles in Eliot's time, and while she is happy to call into question their worthiness to do so by pointing out shortcomings and character flaws, they still have a responsibility to maintain high moral standards—which Eliot-as-narrator holds them to and judges their abilities to fulfill. Where Austen assumes readers understand the social conventions and agree with her judgments of characters, made through statements, Eliot leads them to agree with her evaluations by asking questions that have readers coming to her conclusion, assisted but ultimately on their own. This is not to say that Eliot never makes moral or prescriptive statements, because she clearly does. Prescriptive tendencies, however, are seen more in specific characters, such as Mirah Lapidoth or Mary Garth, what might be called characters reduced to “mouthpieces,” than in the narrator, who is often more philosophical, representing Eliot as a “[novelist] of ideas” (Burrows 174). Austen teaches her readers how to react, in a prescriptive and hierarchical society, but Eliot's world is changing and will continue to do so, and she cannot (and does not want to) rely on the structures in place to keep everyone in line *ad infinitum*. Eliot, instead, teaches readers how to think in order to keep her moral standards alive within them, to take into worlds perhaps very different from her own. And her moral authority, as the narrator, is

established by reliably leading readers to correct moral judgments, teaching them how to identify them when they encounter similar situations or characters in other novels or even the real world.

Of course, it is nearly impossible to isolate which of these differences are due to the authors being two separate individuals, with different upbringings, social positions, and attitudes, and which could be attributed to the passing of time, and the different socio-political and -economic landscapes that result. Many of the differences likely can be attributed to both. This does not, however, diminish their importance when comparing the texts. It is important to remember, too, that there are some crucial similarities in how their narrators act as moral authorities and impart their viewpoints.

Judgment, Assumption, and Expectation

This project focuses, specifically, on the functions of judgment, assumption, and expectation as tools of characterisation in the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot. The first step, then, is to establish the relationship and differences between judgements, assumptions, and expectations. First, to define each of these terms (definitions come from the *Oxford English Dictionary*):

Judgment, the focus of Chapter Two, is “the action or result of forming or pronouncing an opinion,” based on the available information. Functionally for this project, it is important to recognise that judgments are never neutral--forming an opinion involves placing value on what is being judged, and thus attached to judgment is a positive or negative perspective on the situation or individual in question. Importantly, there is a significant amount of research surrounding moral and ethical judgments in the nineteenth century novel, and particularly those of Austen and Eliot, which gives insight into the ways judgment is used as a tool for characterisation by these authors, and what contemporary readers might have been expected to take away from them.

Assumption, the focus of Chapter Three, is defined as “that which is assumed or taken for granted; a supposition, postulate,” and is often unwarranted or undue in nature. Assumptions are closely related to judgments, as both are formed without complete information; however, for this project, I separate the two by thinking of judgments as based on actual knowledge, however partial or incomplete, and assumptions as based on information that has no discernible basis in fact, more like jumping to conclusions than forming opinions. Assumptions are also less value-oriented than judgments; an example, perhaps, would be useful here. Perhaps the most well-known assumption is the ever-popular first line of *Pride and Prejudice*: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (5). Conversely, the country ball-goers of Hertfordshire judge Mr Darcy as “being unworthy to be compared with his friend,” Mr Bingley, following their interactions with him in which he is revealed as being “proud” and “above being pleased,” and particularly for readers as we learn that he considers Elizabeth Bennet to be “tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt [him]” to dance (12-13). Darcy is judged, negatively, after his manners are revealed in a social setting; while the opening line makes an assumption about all rich, single men, without further knowledge or encounters, that is much less value-oriented (though, of course, being Austen’s trademark satire, there is a judgment to be read between the lines here).

And expectations, the focus of Chapter Four, are “preconceived idea[s] or opinion[s] based on what a person has hoped for or imagined regarding a future event, situation, or encounter.” Expectations are often based, at least in part, on judgements and assumptions, though they do important characterizing work on their own. Specifically for this project, expectations tend to center around characters’ anticipated or conjectured responses from others in regards to themselves, other individuals, or the community at large, such as expectations of marriages or

inheritances. Expectations can be individual or communal, and based on as little as a report of an individual (as in Mrs Bennet's expectation that the single young man moving into Netherfield will marry one of her daughters) or as much as exact knowledge of a situation. Expectations, of readers as well as characters, are also often subverted, which tends to reveal as much about characters as when they are upheld. In short, expectations define reactions, and what is expected by and of characters, by other characters as well as readers, tells as much about them as what they say or do.

Judgments, assumptions, and expectations can all be formed individually or collectively, and are impacted by socio-cultural norms and observations. And, truthfully, they cannot be entirely extracted from one another--what one person views as a judgment another may consider an assumption, and they often inform one another. What is more important than definitively separating judgments, assumptions, and expectations is looking at their implications and what they mean for characterisation within these novels, as well as the ways their usages and significance shifts from Austen, at the beginning of the century, to Eliot, later on.

Chapter 2: Judgment

*“You must give me leave to judge for myself, and
pay me the compliment of believing what I say.”*

Pride and Prejudice 103

Compared to today, judgment was a slightly different beast in nineteenth-century Britain, which had a more prescriptively hierarchical social structure. Notably, your circumstances at birth—particularly how wealthy and stasured your parents were—determined everything from your education and opportunities to your social importance and responsibilities, from treating other people properly to being able to properly engage in social situations, particularly through conversation and aesthetic interests. In the dominant culture, it remained important for the wealthy to be respected and judged as good and worthy, and for women and girls to remain (socially, at least) “pure” to improve their prospects. As judgments are based on the information we have, and inherently assign value (positive or negative) to who or whatever is being judged, it was important that people were perceived as having moral worth and abilities proper to their situation, in order to assure their future social standing and societal well-being. In the early-nineteenth century, it was particularly important that society had confidence in the landed aristocracy and gentry, who were assumed to act as its moral caretakers, though this lessened as the century went on and society became increasingly capitalistic. Thus, when characters judge one another, or when the narrator and/or readers judge characters, they are (implicitly, if not explicitly) commenting on the characters’ morality and deservingness, particularly in relation to their socio-economic status.

In Austen’s and Eliot’s novels, there are two broader bases of characters’ behaviors and judgments of them: on the one hand, social codes and social performances of them, and on the

other, individual perceptions and individually-determined courses of action. Further, we can map across these two broader categories, the social and the individual, three sets of tensions that capture competing priorities for characters and for nineteenth-century society at large. The first is between the expectations of social rank and a personal sense of responsibility and duty, between acting appropriately to your socioeconomically-defined status and acting with respect and as you believe is right towards others. The second tension is between the display of amiable manners and the demonstration of care for others' feelings, between behaving in "gentlemanly" (or "ladylike") or otherwise socially-appropriate ways and recognizing others as individuals and not being self-absorbed. The third, about aesthetics because art was incredibly socially important, is between appreciation based on propriety, taste, and/or common sense, and sensibility and an emotional response to the beautiful or sublime; between refined and reserved taste informed by social expectations and a more Romanticism-style ideal of extreme emotional response to art, tied in many ways to the cult of sensibility. Austen and Eliot recognize, however, that the different "sides" of these tensions are not mutually exclusive, and that individuals must have both to be socially responsible and moral.

Ultimately, though, each writer tends to prize one basis of judgment and action over the other, and that emphasis shifts as the century progresses and social, economic, and political structures change. By tradition, the "long nineteenth century" begins in 1789, with the French Revolution, fourteen years after Jane Austen was born and the American Revolution occurred. In 1790, statesman Edmund Burke published his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, part of a tradition of British responses, conservative and liberal, to the upheaval in their closest neighboring nation (perhaps the other most famous British response is Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, a liberal critique of Burke's *Reflections*). Burke characterizes

the conservative position favored by many at the beginning of the century, attributing “manners,... civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners, and with civilization” to learning fostered and assured by rank and position, the social structures of “[t]he nobility and the clergy” in particular (203). Society is kept functioning and beneficial to everyone by the strict social structures and codes followed by citizens. Convention has “produced a noble equality” which keeps those higher on the social ladder beholden to those below them, who rely on them for their well-being and livelihoods. Burke, like many of his class, fears that without such strict and clearly-delineated classes and behavioral codes society will be subject to “the defects of our naked shivering nature” and devolve into anarchy and violence (201–2). In line with Burke, Austen prioritizes the first category of judgment and action – that is, of social codes and propriety – tending to find social rank, manners and amiability, and aesthetic appreciation based on proper taste to be important bases of social worth and appropriateness. For Austen as for Burke, these things uphold the structure of society, and her protagonists show healthy appreciation and recognition of these as valuable and guiding principles, which are generally supported by their individual perceptions. Indeed, Austen’s characters should find that their individual senses of what is right align with what they have been taught socially.³

As the century progressed, social, economic, and political structures changed. Following the American and French Revolutions, democracy became increasingly common, providing more equality among society, though in Britain voting was still confined to landed men until the early twentieth century (though this group was expanded to include almost eight million voters in 1885 after the third Reform act, roughly a 2000% increase from the eligible voting population in 1831)

³ While I read Austen as aligning with Burke here, in a critique of radical revolution that worried over decimation of social structures, she is more complex than she has sometimes been read. At times, she also agrees with Mary Wollstonecraft, such as in discussions of primogeniture (see Chapter 4) and education, in line with her lived experiences.

(“Getting the vote”). With the Industrial Revolution, capitalism and the class and wealth flexibility that came with it also redefined society, creating a middle class and making the once rigid social structure less reliable as a basis of judgment. Rank alone could no longer define an individual, their education and future, and their responsibilities and behavior. George Eliot, writing *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* between the second and third Reform Acts, did not rely as much on the social codes that Jane Austen found so important. Instead, Eliot prized the second, more individual category of judgment, based on internal codes of morality and responsibility. Eliot in particular highlights the detriments of focusing solely on the first category, which is almost entirely performative in landed gentry characters like Mr Brooke and Mr Grandcourt, who fail because they lack individual senses of responsibility and care for others. However, both Austen and Eliot recognize the bases of judgment to be complex and interrelated, and determinations made based only on either social codes or individual perceptions leads to incorrect judgments and immoral or unworthy individuals. The authors differ primarily on which basis of judgment should be prioritized, and this difference in emphasis is rooted in their individual philosophies and historical contexts.

Judgment and Judging

In Austen’s and Eliot’s novels, everybody generally judges everybody else, but there are certain characters that are judged more harshly than others, and certain characters whose judgements are held in higher esteem by other characters (often for their perceived superiority, moral or social) or the narrator (often in agreement). Two characters who are thoroughly judged within their novels, by other characters as well as by the narrator and readers, are Mr Darcy of *Pride and Prejudice* and Mr Brooke of *Middlemarch*. Mr Casaubon is perhaps judged more harshly by characters and readers, but the narrator is willing to at least try to be sympathetic

towards him, and Mr Brooke provides an interesting and important comparison to Mr Darcy. Both large landowners, Mr Darcy and Mr Brooke take very different approaches to their responsibilities to their communities, which, along with their social performances, impact how they are perceived by others; for both authors, doing their social duty is ultimately more important than their social performance, but both impact and contribute to shifts in how they are judged.

The Meryton assembly is very excited for Mr Darcy's arrival, in his capacity as a young man to provide another dance partner, and only grows more excited upon learning "of his having ten thousand a-year" and a "large estate in Derbyshire" (*Pride and Prejudice* 12). Soon, however, "his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity" and he is deemed "the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world," unworthy of his friend, admission to their society, and, by extension, his entire estate. If this is how he interacts with fellow gentlemen and ladies, his treatment and attention paid to his staff and tenants, one might conclude, will certainly be worse, as they are below him. Should his estate be in disrepair, the Meryton community's initial estimation (founded on their indignation about feeling slighted by him) of his character—however much his closer friends might disagree or rationalize, as we hear of them doing through Jane early on—would be proved true and Darcy would be morally unfit for the social stature and responsibilities which have made him so haughtily proud. Their impulse to see Darcy this way makes the community, and particularly Elizabeth Bennet and, through her, the reader, susceptible to the much more amiable Mr Wickham's opinion of him, readily believing Wickham's tales of having been mistreated by him because it is in line with their initial judgements—and, for readers, because Darcy's thoughts remain unexplored as we experience the novel mostly alongside Elizabeth, and to a lesser extent her family.

Later, following more interactions with Darcy and his social circle, and after reading the letter he gives her after his first proposal, Elizabeth changes her opinion of Darcy (and readers are meant to as well), feeling she has judged him harshly (though perhaps not entirely wrongly, as he was at times proud and rude). Elizabeth learns that while manners can be a fair indicator of “gentlemanliness,” relying on them alone has led her to hasty, unfounded judgments of Darcy’s broader character and fitness for his social responsibilities. She has been prejudiced by her initial impressions of both Darcy and his childhood companion into believing Wickham’s lies about him and refusing to look past them, even when Wickham’s conduct should have led her to questioning his stories. In fact, when Elizabeth reflects upon this, she admits to herself that while Darcy’s manners could be “proud and repulsive” she had never “seen anything that betrayed him to be unprincipled or unjust—any thing that spoke him of irreligious or immoral habits” (*Pride and Prejudice* 195). And upon visiting Pemberley, Darcy’s estate, we encounter high praise of him from the housekeeper who has known him his whole life, calling him “the best landlord, and the best master... that ever lived,” a “good-natured” and “generous-hearted” man who safeguards the happiness and livelihoods of his tenants, servants, and sister (232-3). In seeing his estate well-cared for as well as happily lived on and around, Pemberley becomes, as Lori Mehl asserts, “an outward expression of Darcy’s true worth” as a good and moral man—a man of high character, if occasionally proud (98). In proving a moral man, Darcy proves his worthiness of his estate and social status.

Though not wholly undeserving of the unfavorable judgment he inspired at the beginning of the novel, Darcy, like Elizabeth, has grown and learned by the end. With Elizabeth’s harsh rejection of his first proposal, his eyes were opened to the way his conduct appeared to those he interacted with; not just shy but aloof and proud, insulting rather than coolly disinterested.

Almost exactly the opposite of Mr Darcy as Meryton first meets him, *Middlemarch's* Mr Brooke is amiable and eager to be liked, but lacks self-discipline and neglects his social and familial responsibilities as a landed gentleman. Generally good-natured and seemingly benevolent, Mr Brooke does his best to take care of his nieces, though he is a bit eccentric and suggestible. A spendthrift man generally considered by his community "to have contracted a too rambling habit of mind" in his youthful (socioeconomically privileged) travels, his estate is estimated, roughly, by those around him to be "worth about three thousand a-year"—no Mr Darcy, but plenty respectable enough to give him significant position and responsibility in the community (*Middlemarch* 4-5). While we see Mr Brooke to be well-meaning in his treatment of his friends and nieces, and expressing lofty goals of morality and philanthropy in his run for parliament, the general conversation about and public opinion of him is less favorable, and not without reason. On a business visit to a tenant farm, readers if not Brooke himself have their eyes opened to the derelict condition we can extrapolate to be representative of all his properties: an "old house... two of the chimneys were choked with ivy... grey worm-eaten shutters" on the windows, a description full of moss and mold and broken doors, animals poorly taken care of, and upkeep of the property generally neglected (374). While the tenant, a drunk and belligerent Mr Dagley, does not prove particularly morally worthy himself, the narrator effectively excuses him, as his ignorance can be attributed to the fact that he reads very little (resulting in limited moral education) and, as would reasonably be expected of a poor man who makes his living as a farmer, knows "thoroughly" only farming and his particular farm (378). Brooke, however, is insulted by Dagley, who threatens him with talk of a reform in which "landlords as never done the right thing by their tenants 'ull be treated i' that way as they'll hev to scuttle off," claiming

Brooke to be “a man for the Rinform” which will “send you an’ your likes a-scuttlin’; an’ wi’ pretty strong-smellin’ things too” (377).

The community outside of Brooke’s tenants can obviously see his (mis-) management of them, a topic of conversation among his friends and foes in his race for parliament. The opposition newspaper attacks him and “the management of his estate,” which he has taken entirely into his own hands (rather than paying an estate manager), calling him “retrogressive” and un-philanthropic locally, where philanthropic ideas would truly count (*Middlemarch* 364). And unlike Mr Darcy’s household, Brooke’s friends agree, wishing to each other and to his face that he would take better care of his responsibilities, and remarking that “his character as a landlord stands in his way” of the popularity he both assumes he has and would need to win the Middlemarch seat in government (367). The people of Middlemarch do not choose who is born into wealth and property, but the voters among them determine who represents them in parliament, and they will not choose a man whom they do not deem to be of good enough character, who is neglectful and close-fisted.

For Eliot, a liberal humanist, while Brooke falls short of his good intentions, what Matthew Flaherty describes as the novel’s system of “many-sided evaluation [which] requires flexible critical detachment from specific commitments” allows the narrator and reader to think critically about his character and accept that while he is not perfect, he is not maliciously intentioned (940). Brooke’s character and inclusion in the novel are not simply to paint people like him or any other characters in purely positive or negative lights. The liberal evaluation which allows for flexible, complex thoughts to try to understand others’ perspectives is both a hallmark of Eliot’s realism and philosophy and a way of interacting with and judging the world, which allows us to see Mr Brooke as a character who is both good and bad as well as realistic. If

Pemberley proves Darcy's moral and social worth, Brooke's mismanagement of Tipton Grange calls into question his worthiness of his estate and social position (and ultimately proves him unworthy of a seat in parliament), and while he might mean well he has not acted as he should. The general judgment of Middlemarch is that Brooke is unfit for the responsibilities he has, let alone any more, and while he could fix this through better, less stingy estate management, that he has not proves their opinion true—while maintaining the complexity of the novel's mechanisms of social judgment.

Moral Mentorships

While all characters make judgments (and readers are influenced by them as well as the narrator's commentary on them), some characters' judgments are heard more frequently, or valued more highly by the narrator. Those judgments more highly valued by the narrator are often in line with the narrator's commentary throughout, and generally can go with limited or no remark from the narrator, as the two are in agreement. In the nineteenth century, literature was generally believed to convey to its readers the author's philosophical ideology, and certain characters fulfill this role by holding the same beliefs and serving as role models and guides for both readers and other characters. For instance, in Austen's *Emma* and in Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, morally-sound men influence self-absorbed and impressionable women: Mr Knightley and Emma Woodhouse, and Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth, respectively.

Thirteen years Emma's senior, Mr Knightley does not shy away from telling her what he thinks about her or the others in their social circle, and he is vocal about what he sees as their responsibilities towards others as two socioeconomically-fortunate characters. Donwell Abbey, Mr Knightley's estate, is well-kept, so he is socially and morally worthy of his eminent position in Highbury's society. Mr Knightley's judgment is shown to be based on truth and unbiased (or

at least limitedly biased) observation, and guided by a genuine concern for the health, happiness, and success of others who are his social equals and inferiors, showing him to be a socially-minded and moral man who is a reliable and valuable guide for the citizens of Highbury and readers of *Emma*. The only character who is unswayed by Emma's rank and personality, Knightly is unafraid to tell her the truth as he sees it: her portrait of Harriet that everyone else finds faultless has "made her too tall," her dislike for Jane Fairfax stems from jealousy, and her plans for Harriet Smith are too lofty for the girl's situation (*Emma* 51). Emma, consistently led astray by her refusal to observe what is obvious to others and by friends who idolize and encourage her, makes frequent mistakes that Mr Knightley corrects, though perhaps none so significant as her comments towards Miss Bates.

Early on at the Box Hill Party, which Boyd calls "the moral center of the novel," Emma insults Miss Bates at Frank Churchill's encouragement, telling her that she will have "difficulty" limiting herself to saying "only three" dull things (298, *Emma* 292). Miss Bates and the others quickly understand Emma's thinly-veiled insult, turning the rest of the outing more awkward than it began, and culminating in Knightley's finding Emma before she leaves to reprimand her. He assures her that Miss Bates "felt [her] full meaning" and had talked of it throughout the day, and he calls Emma "insolent" and "unfeeling," explaining to her that the comment amounted to "acting wrong" because the two women are not her social equals (295). A test of moral worth is being able to treat those "inferior" to you with respect, and at Box Hill Emma fails as assuredly as Mr Brooke does in not providing adequate housing to his tenants. The narrator does not need to comment on Emma's failing here, however, as Knightley himself does enough, educating both readers and Emma in his reprimand. Emma sees the error of her ways, and quickly attempts to amend her conduct by paying a visit to the Bateses the next day. Mr Knightley is aware of his

role as a moral arbiter in Highbury and of his influence over Emma, feeling himself bound to tell her the truth as he sees it and remarking to her that he has consistently “blamed” and “lectured” her over the years in his proposal at the end of the novel (337). Emma, luckily for both of them, has listened to and been influenced for the better by Mr Knightley, and will continue to do so when she marries him, having learned over the course of the novel to think of others and see the world more as her husband and friend does. In doing so, she has made herself as worthy of marital felicity and her socioeconomic status as an heiress and mistress of Donwell Abbey, just as Mr Knightley has proved himself worthy of his status.

There are a number of differences between George Knightley and the titular character of *Daniel Deronda*—Daniel is neither a proven estate manager nor set to inherit wealth and rank, and he is far closer in age to the woman he is guiding, Gwendolen. But Daniel, like Knightley, fulfills the role of moral guide to those with whom he interacts. Daniel’s novel opens with the first time he crosses paths with Gwendolen, as she is gambling in Leubronn and catches his eye, inspiring his contemplation of her beauty and (assumed) character; Gwendolen, noticing his gaze, is convinced he is “measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior” (*Daniel Deronda* 6). While this might not be strictly true, Daniel’s buying back of the necklace Gwendolen pawned before going to leave Leubronn, and particularly the note he returns it with—“A stranger who has found Miss Harleth’s necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it”—implicitly judges her (under the assumption that the jewelry has been sold to reconcile her own gambling debts) and recalls an earlier statement from the narrator that “the vice of gambling lay in losing money at it” (15, 4-5). And Daniel is shown throughout the novel to have similar sympathies and moral convictions as the narrator, having a keen sense of righteousness and duty and refusing to write off characters who make mistakes if they seem willing to redeem

themselves—like Gwendolen. Gwendolen, conversely, is shown again and again to be searching for someone to guide her, from her mother to Herr Klesmer to Daniel as she navigates an unfamiliar world of changed socioeconomic situation and marriage to Henleigh Grandcourt.

Gwendolen is not only willing to work on herself, regretting the selfish and self-absorbed actions and attitudes that led to her unhappiness, but she also recognizes Daniel as morally superior to her, from his advice and actions. She seeks him out in the hopes he can teach her, asking him to “tell me what I can do” to improve the “selfish and ignorant” perception he has of her that has, up to now, been not entirely untrue (395). She asks him, explicitly, “What should you do if you were like me?,” and implores that he “must tell [her] then what to think and what to do,” going to find him more than once for his advice and committing herself to trying to follow it (394). And while Gwendolen “shall be better... because [she] has known [him],” Daniel is willing to give her advice which is morally sound and continues to assist her because, as she rightly recognises, he “*can* help” her (401). Daniel proves himself to be a good judge of character over and over: Mirah is worthy of saving and helping, Ezra/Mordecai is worthy of finding and listening to, Grandcourt is worthy of his “disgust,” and Gwendolen is, eventually, worthy of the moral education he imparts to her (382). It is her capacity and desire, in the end, to understand and adopt Daniel’s way of seeing the world which leads to a conversation between the pair, after Grandcourt’s death in Genoa, in which Gwendolen, asking what she “ought to do” that he “think[s] is right,” makes a suggestion that she take nothing but what would keep her mother comfortable from what is left to her in her late husband’s will (672). This proposed action is more staunchly moralist and self-abnegating than what Daniel suggests, which is to take the money, letting her remorse—and newfound morals—guide her spending of what is left to her.

While Daniel does succeed in teaching Gwendolen, it is neither his prize nor hers (however much she might wish it) to marry one another; instead, Daniel marries Mirah, the girl he saves towards the beginning of the narrative and who is plenty good and morally sound on her own. She, unlike Gwendolen or Emma, does not need to be taught to be open-minded and moral in her interactions with the world. This difference from Knightley is, perhaps, in part due to the uncertainty of Daniel's socioeconomic position: where Mr Knightley has wealth and rank guaranteed, displayed in the management of his estate and eventual marriage to heiress Emma, Daniel has neither. Daniel instead finds value in furthering the Zionist cause to which Mirah's brother introduced him, a cause which he is able to claim as his own purpose and through which he will display his morals and worthiness through teaching the world, rather than just an individual. What Daniel's leaving to stake a claim to his own value does, however, unlike Jane Austen's rather tidy conclusion, is leave our heroine in something of a lurch. Unlike Emma, who has Knightley constantly by her side, it seems uncertain whether occasional letters from Daniel would truly be enough to keep Gwendolen moral, worthy, and indeed "better."

It is worth noting that this gendered pattern of moral mentorship is further complicated in Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* by Elinor Dashwood's counsel to her younger sister, Marianne, and in Eliot's *Middlemarch*, in which Casaubon proves a false guide to his young wife, Dorothea. In both instances, aesthetic judgment further defines the younger woman's character.

Art and Aesthetic Judgment

In the nineteenth century, a thorough aesthetic education was not only available to the upper and middle classes but expected, particularly for women but also for men. They were expected at the very least to learn music—often piano and singing—or to draw and paint, if not both and more, with musical instruments and literature becoming more affordable and accessible

and artistic accomplishment establishing itself as a mark of class and education. The importance of this aesthetic education for women lay in its social role as “a cultural institution for young middle-class women,” particularly in its most accessible forms such as learning the piano, an instrument which was increasingly cheap to produce and more readily available than it had previously been (Vorachek 309). Music and art also served to fill the newfound leisure time of middle class women, a disciplinary function that served to “[control] the operations of women’s bodies” as those of higher-class women already were and had been for some time, a function of the ever-present social worry that time and freedom were damaging to women (309). Assisting both society and the individual in discipline and self-discipline, practicing for hours on end, in technique and musicianship, further served to occupy women, and gave them the abilities to perform amateur concerts and partake in social gatherings as musicians and appreciators of music, in addition to proving them worthy of their socioeconomic place.

Art was important generally in nineteenth century society, and no less so in the novels of the time. Nearly every heroine has some education in some form of art, from drawing to playing the piano, though they are not all particularly proficient, and having the ability to appreciate the works of others is crucial as well. The appreciation of the right art is important for everyone, men and women, and some have strong opinions about it—like *Sense and Sensibility*’s Marianne Dashwood. Marianne’s personal aesthetic philosophy is closely aligned with the Romantic movement, the aesthetics of Wordsworth and Coleridge, in which “all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (Wordsworth 240). Thus, the propriety of taste and aesthetic judgment is located within the emotional response of the individual to the artwork, with the response expected to be more violent and overwhelming as the work increases in aesthetic value. Marianne expresses strong opinions herself about the literature, music, and other art she

encounters and enjoys, and her opinions about art and how it should be experienced impacts her judgments of others she encounters, particularly of suitors, including her own Mr Willoughby and her sister's Edward Ferrars.

Acknowledging that she and Elinor are different, Marianne still views it as “a pity... that Edward should have no taste for drawing,” admiring Elinor's work “as a lover” and not as “a person who can understand their worth” (*Sense and Sensibility* 13). Edward, she fears, “has no real taste,” given his emotional restraint in the face of music, art, and books that Marianne loves and “have frequently almost driven [her] wild,” though Elinor disagrees. She assures her sister that her suitor “is by no means deficient in natural taste,” and that his restraint comes from a lack of education and self-assuredness which leads him to “distrust his judgment in such matters” in spite of “an innate propriety and simplicity of taste, which in general direct him perfectly right,” citing him as shy and insecure rather than unmoved (14). “Taste” as a category of art-aesthetic appreciation and standard for judgment was common in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but as a philosophical term proves problematic, as does the “aesthetic,” because it “does not have a fixed definition or stable ideological orientation,” and particularly not in the ways it was being used in the nineteenth century (Bninski 10). Nazar differentiates taste from (aesthetic) judgment through viewing taste as “intuitive” and individual, while judgment is more social and collaborative, but many nineteenth century aesthetics theorists tended to think of taste as at least influenced by education, if not entirely dependent on it, though they seem to agree that it primarily is an individual standard, if a taught one (165). “Natural taste” also became a contested category, something which could be cultivated to provide more social mobility, not just an innate measure of your emotional or socioeconomic worth, as characters like Marianne or *Pride and Prejudice's* Lady Catherine would view it (Bninski 61). Edward, in fact, encapsulates this,

having adequate individual taste but unwilling to profess it socially, as he has not been taught enough to properly judge the social, moral, and pleasurable value of the work to any but his own immediate senses. And this, Marianne can concede, is better suited to Elinor, the “sense” to her sister’s “sensibility,” particularly given Elinor’s warm commendation of him.

Marianne, however, would prefer for herself someone with more sensibility. Her list of requirements includes “spirit” and “fire” in his eyes “which at once announce virtue and intelligence,” “real taste” which “admires as a lover” and “a connoisseur,” and adequate animation inspired by all the right art (*Sense and Sensibility* 12-13). In fact, she states her aesthetic requirements very clearly: “I could not be happy with a man whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own. He must enter into all my feelings; the same books, the same music must charm us both.” And this, in fact, is what draws her to Mr Willoughby. Within hours of meeting him, she has, as Elinor notes, “already ascertained Mr Willoughby’s opinion in almost every matter of importance. You know what he thinks of Cowper and Scott; you are certain of his estimating their beauties as he ought, and you have received every assurance of his admiring Pope no more than is proper” (34). Marianne is drawn to Willoughby’s violent appreciation of all the things she loves, from literature to art to music to nature, and he is easily the most similar character to Marianne, someone she feels immediately intimate with given their shared dispositions and aesthetic judgments. This is, in the end, the wrong choice, as Willoughby abandons Marianne for a wealthier woman, and she ends up with Colonel Brandon, a man against whom she was initially prejudiced based on the violence of her judgements, learned from her aesthetic philosophy and guided by the art and literature with which she is so enamored. Marianne’s overvaluation of sensibility takes Wordsworth’s request, for readers to “decide by his own feelings genuinely, and not by reflection upon what will probably be the judgment of

others” (Wordsworth 263), to an unintended extreme, not only deciding entirely based on her own immediate feelings, in the realm of aesthetics and outside it, but also judging others based on whether they align with her judgments, rather than aligning her judgments with others’ (Wordsworth 264). And in only taking into account her own emotions and experiences when she makes judgments, Marianne is led astray as often as not, a strong-willed and impulsive young woman who learns over the course of the novel that sometimes her initial judgments are wrong.

While Marianne judges Edward Ferrars and John Willoughby, Dorothea Brooke judges herself along with Edward Casaubon and Will Ladislaw, and though she begins the novel with very different aesthetic conceptions than Marianne they end in not dissimilar places. At the beginning of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea does not know or understand anything about art; she recognizes innate beauty, but she does her best to suppress her response to it, based on a conception that to be beautiful without a deeper cause is worthless, unlike Marianne, who freely expresses herself and her artistic views with no deeper or further goals for them. Dorothea’s journey with aesthetic appreciation develops her relationships with both Edward Casaubon, her first husband, and Will Ladislaw, her second. She is drawn to Mr Casaubon because of his scholarly work, a *Key to All Mythologies*, which she views as a worthy cause and great achievement. What she aspires to is work and purpose, wishing Lowick “had a larger share of the world’s misery, so that she might have had more active duties in it” when she first sees the parish (71). In Dorothea’s conception of social duty and work, she rejects aesthetics, from the beginning of the book with her mother’s jewelry to her first interactions with Will, where she outlines the relationship she sees (or cannot see) between art and work:

I am no judge of these things... You know, uncle, I never see the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. They are a language I do not understand. I suppose

there is some relation between pictures and nature which I am too ignorant to feel—just as you see what a Greek sentence stands for which means nothing to me. (73)⁴

Dorothea's point here "may be suggesting that she can't find reciprocity between art and social reality, or she can't see the relevance of beautiful objects in a world of human suffering and injustice," leading her to be aesthetically ignorant because she is too focused on misery and finding ways to benefit society (Federico 402). But she is also intoning that she expects her husband to be educated and to help her to understand the world better as well, conversely to Marianne Dashwood whose first romantic interest rather mirrors her, reflecting her beliefs entirely. Dorothea will be sorely disappointed as Casaubon has no interest in educating her and the work she undertakes with her first husband is confined to reading and transcribing his thoughts, assisting in his work by doing exactly as he says rather than having the opportunity to take initiative or learn anything herself.

Casaubon is an academic, but his young relative, Will Ladislaw, is an artist. Dabbling throughout the book in drawing, music, and writing, Will eventually settles into a role assisting Mr Brooke in his run for parliament through political writing for him, at the newspaper, keeping him in Middlemarch and helping him to find a path and purpose that he, akin to Daniel Deronda, struggled with at the beginning of the book. Through interacting with Will, from their time in Rome on her honeymoon through her uncle's political campaign and her first husband's death, Dorothea is exposed to a new aesthetic philosophy and the power of art. Surrounded by her "never-read books" upon her return to Lowick as she becomes more and more disillusioned with Casaubon, Dorothea has to face the "moral imprisonment" she finds herself in, a marriage which "had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman's oppressive liberty" as she expected it to

⁴ Interestingly here, Will believes Dorothea is judging him to be a bad artist and poking fun at her uncle and himself, though that does not seem to be Dorothea's intention.

(*Middlemarch* 261). Casaubon and his work have not and will not provide her with an avenue to benefit society, because his work is purely egotistic. Will Ladislaw, however, is able to benefit society by finding a balance between aesthetics and the social work Dorothea prizes, first in political journalism and later in politics themselves. What he teaches Dorothea in their interactions and relationship, moreover, is that “[t]he apprehension of beauty is not necessarily opposed to social duty, but may be tightly aligned with it” (Federico 403). Contemporary to Eliot and *Middlemarch* is the detail-oriented realism of Victorian art, which saw scenes depicting and focusing on everyday people and life, much like the web of *Middlemarch* itself, making Dorothea’s assumptions about art and aesthetic philosophy outdated when she rejects beauty at the beginning of the novel, seeing it as antithetical to social purpose. What she learns with Will, and undertakes as his wife, is that she can have both: appreciation for beauty and beneficial social work. She is liberated in her marriage to Will and her work alongside him, hosting and supporting him in his work as a politician as well as their passion for one another and the world around them. But for Dorothea to reap the rewards of her marriage to Will, she first had to learn to appreciate art and see the beauty in the world and representations of it.

For both Marianne and Dorothea, “the main conflict has been between aesthetic... pleasure and duty to one’s fellow human beings,” though they take different initial attitudes to the two sides (Hollander 180). Both characters end in remarkably similar places, but the journeys they take to get there are rather different; perhaps representative of the two authors’ differing philosophies. Marianne Dashwood must become more conservative while Dorothea Brooke becomes more liberal in order to marry their husbands and benefit their communities. Where Marianne has to bring social duty into consideration alongside aesthetic appreciation, Dorothea must do the opposite. In the end, however, both women marry worthy men who benefit the

community and assist through providing support.⁵ And their journeys, learning to better balance aesthetics and social justice and become better judges of art, society, and their roles and places, are crucial to their marriages working and benefiting the couple and their communities. Marianne could not have functionally married Brandon at the outset of the novel, and Dorothea could not have married Will before both learned and grew in the course of the novel to understand themselves and their place in the world. Both women prove to need to reassess their judgments, as their communities value Brandon and Will from the outset, and Marianne's and Dorothea's initial judgments are corrected through the events of the novels to bring aesthetics into conversation with social responsibilities.

⁵ Their husbands, too, are "worthy" in different ways; Colonel Brandon is proved worthy through his social status and ability to be responsible and benevolent to the community he as landlord owns, a more conservative take than Eliot's with Will, who is worthy because he has proved himself to be through convincing the community which then democratically elects him to continue to be responsible for them.

Chapter 3: Assumption

“Imagination is often truer than fact.”

Daniel Deronda 39

Out of the three topics organizing this project, assumption has been the hardest for me to define and conceptualize—it is, in many ways, very similar to judgment, and it is tempting to view incorrect judgments as assumptions and correct assumptions as judgments. There is, perhaps, even an argument for it: what does Elizabeth Bennet know about Darcy to judge him on? Could her perception of his character, for the most part proved incorrect by his actions later in the book, just be an assumption? The argument, of course, is that Elizabeth bases her judgment of him on the information she has of him, from his words and actions in the time she has known him—ranging from disdainfully proud to rude—and feels her judgment is affirmed by its being shared by her community and the accounts she hears of him from Wickham. That is not to say that no assumptions are made in this initial meeting; that Darcy is “a fine figure of a man,” and the expectation of the Meryton assembly that he will be pleasant and likable, are assumptions based on his purported wealth and status (*Pride and Prejudice* 13). Equally, Darcy’s assertion that dancing with anyone but Bingley’s sisters at the ball would “be a punishment” is an assumption, that he will not like anyone he might be introduced to (Elizabeth’s judgment that he is proud is not entirely incorrect). But Elizabeth waited to judge him as “the last man in the world whom [she] could ever be prevailed on to marry” until something of his character had been encountered, though with a bias that excluded the understandings his closer acquaintances had of him from being taken into account (183).

Similarly, does upper-class Middlemarch correctly judge that Dorothea and Will are likely to become romantically involved, especially after Mr Casaubon’s death—or is it just an

accurate assumption? Casaubon's reasons for the codicil barring his widow from marrying his nephew, on penalty of losing the estate, may have been based on reason and observation, though certainly were colored by jealousy if not entirely founded upon it. Casaubon's reasons, ultimately, matter less than the conclusions they inspire, particularly Sir James' assertion that "the world will suppose that she gave him some reason" to be jealous of Will and include the codicil (an assumption, in itself, of what others will assume) (*Middlemarch* 461). Assuming they want to protect her and her image, that the codicil is "framed so as to make everybody believe" Dorothea wants to marry Will leaves her friends in a tough place, whether it is true or not (462).⁶ Her friends assume, on the whole, that this is not true, but they are concerned that the community will assume it is. In short, with limited regard to what Middlemarch might know or feel about the characters of Will, Casaubon, and Dorothea, Sir James and the others are worried about gossip that might be spread to change the general perception of the heiress, though it is obvious that the community holds Dorothea in much higher regard than they do Casaubon (too coldly aloof) or Will (an outsider). Because of Dorothea's passion for projects that will improve lives, the community might be less quick to assume poorly of her than of the men involved. No matter what Dorothea might say ("I shall never marry again"), her friends are well aware "that the world would regard such a sentiment as preposterous" and expect her to remarry, especially given her young age (522). Their own personal feelings color their actions and assumptions on the matter, but as her friends they are generally united (initially, at least) in feeling that keeping Dorothea and Will separate is the best course of action—assuming the worst about Middlemarch's gossip as well as Dorothea and Will.

⁶ The assumption is presumably also that Will wants to marry her, though that is of less importance to *Dorothea's* friends and peers, particularly given the importance of image and purity for upper class women, which is less crucial for men

Because Austen and Eliot's narrators are, to varying degrees, omniscient, they do not make assumptions about characters or the plot of the novel. They can, however, influence readers to do so through withholding information (such as Darcy's true character, as he is observed almost wholly in relation to Elizabeth), and using techniques like FID, along with dialogue and actions, to reveal what other characters are thinking, feeling, and assuming without commenting on the veracity of it. Characters, of course, make assumptions frequently which impact their actions and understandings, and in turn the assumptions and judgments characters make about them. In the nineteenth century, "truth[s] universally acknowledged" (*Pride and Prejudice*) and what "the world would regard" (*Middlemarch*) are no longer sureties, as the socioeconomic scene is changing and "[s]ociety could no longer be taken for granted but must be *theorised*" (Clark, emphasis in original). What individuals know is extrapolated from their own experiences and what information they have, and the thoughts, feelings, and actions of other individuals are, as often as not, *not* what others might expect. Philosopher and economist Adam Smith, in his widely read *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), posits the need for an "impartial spectator," an internal voice which helps to encourage and ensure we act morally (Clark). Because society can no longer be relied upon to keep people and their views in line based purely on rigid hierarchies of social rank, in a newly-capitalist society with more flexibility to move between classes, morals have to be internalized and self-regulated. Since the strict rules and social governance by rank and class are no longer absolute, people act outside of traditional expectations, leading to assumptions being potentially wrong more and more often. These assumptions can be confined to the individual, based on what they conclude or choose to believe, or they can spread to the community, particularly through gossip, which is often largely unfounded. Assumptions,

fundamentally, reveal more about those who choose to believe them than those whom they are about, given their limited foundation in objective information.

Assuming

Though it is sometimes hard to identify whether a thought is an assumption, Emma Woodhouse consistently makes clear assumptions. Armed with her social superiority and a community which by and large views her as someone to be respected and who is more often than not correct and capable, Emma is confident in her assessments of those around her and her abilities (so long as she is the premier young woman of Highbury—her confidence wavers in the face of “really accomplished” Jane Fairfax, of whom Emma is jealous, as she feels her abilities are not on par with those of the regular visitor) (*Emma* 138). Throughout the book, Emma’s major assumptions center around romantic relationships, particularly through her inclination to matchmake her friend, Harriet Smith. Interested initially in Harriet because she is a pretty girl and Emma has recently lost her (paid) childhood companion to marriage, Emma self-interestedly ignores any evidence to the contrary to convince herself and Harriet that “[t]here can be no doubt of [her] being a gentleman’s daughter” (38). Consequently, they must be careful to think and act that way to ensure everyone else is just as convinced as Emma, such as limiting Harriet’s associates to those Emma deems worthy. This belief causes Emma to act on many of her assumptions about romantic interests throughout the book, including by influencing Harriet to reject Mr Martin’s proposal, in spite of all the reasons Knightley judges it a good match, as she views the farmer as of a class “in one sense, as much above [her] notice, as in every other he is below it” for both her and Harriet (37). It also influences her certainty that Mr Elton is interested in courting Harriet (though Knightley, correctly, disagrees; Elton is interested in Emma herself)

and that he would be a good match for her, which is disproved by his intense anger and reactive marriage in the wake of Emma's refusal of his proposal.

Emma's propensity for making assumptions (and particularly incorrect ones) proves her to be self-absorbed and a bad judge of character, as her attitudes are primarily based on superficial characteristics like wealth rather than the individual's moral code. Emma assumes that Frank Churchill will be romantically interested in her when he finally comes to Highbury, by virtue of their relatively similar socio-economic positions, though she is not enthused about the idea and gladly (mentally) gives him up to Harriet following his rescue of her friend from an encounter with thieves. In fact, though she has sworn off interfering, Emma's thoughts jump immediately to matchmaking, it being "not possible that the occurrence should not be strongly recommending each to the other" (265). Upon Harriet's announcing that she will "never marry," Emma is quick to conclude that she was correct and the man Harriet is interested in who is so much her "superior in station" is Frank (269). Harriet, meanwhile, assumes Emma understands that she is speaking about Mr Knightley, who also performed a service for her (dancing with her at the ball when Mr Elton refused to) though perhaps a less grandiose one than Frank's daring rescue. This leads to some confusion and distress when Emma goes to comfort her friend upon the discovery of Frank's betrothal to Jane Fairfax, when they learn that they have mistaken each other and Emma realizes that she herself loves Knightley. She fails to internalize the moral code that prompts Knightley to dance with Harriet and that is, ultimately, the reason both young women are attracted to him. Emma lacks her own "impartial spectator," and she has a fundamental inability for much of the novel to either view others as more than "a merely utilitarian object" or to see herself "in the light in which others see us" (Clark). Her lack of self-awareness leads her to a greater reliance on assumptions and gossip (as in the case of the mysterious piano delivered to

Jane Fairfax, and in all of Emma's matchmaking) to interact with the world around her, and it is only being checked by her (admittedly partial) external "impartial spectator" Knightley, who helps her to understand what she has been missing in terms of the impact of her conduct.

Things are resolved tidily at the end of the novel, as Harriet's parentage comes to light (she is the illegitimate "daughter of a tradesman") and she accepts a second offer of marriage from Mr Martin, who is now a good connection for her (376). Emma, her feelings having been revealed to her in her discussion with Harriet, marries Mr Knightley. Their union functions as a reward for both of them; Mr Knightley for being a good moral arbiter and teacher, and Emma for learning from him. Their marriage ensures that she will be able to continue to do so for the rest of her life. In a world where rank is no longer a steadfast organizing truth, Knightley's position as a moral man, a functional "impartial spectator," proves him worthy of his social position, as he has a morally-guiding imaginative sympathy and an ability to accurately theorize society rather than Emma's corrected strategy of assuming based on biased and partial information. Knightley thereby proves himself worthy of Emma, an heiress in her own right. Though she has ostensibly sworn off matchmaking (and the assumptions that come with it) at the beginning of the novel, it is her own marriage that truly marks the end of it. Having had to grapple with how her interference has put the reputations and happiness of her community and self at risk, Emma's marriage to Knightly signals a recognition that her assumptions and meddling have been damaging. Emma will be giving up matchmaking and attempting to direct the happiness of those around her to experience her own, in marriage to a worthy man who gives her an occupation in running the estate and being a wife, a signal of her maturation and newly-learned ability to listen and gather information rather than jumping to conclusions.

Gossip

Some characters' thoughts are less intruded upon than others', and their assumptions less obvious or individual; the narrator must use a more subtle strategy to reveal their assumptions than explaining their inner thoughts, and that way is often through gossip being spread or believed. Gossip is, at its core, "the way communities narrate their authority" (Finch and Bowen 3). Through who is and *is not* talked about, gossip establishes both the community and a hierarchy within it, contributing to "subtle gradations of class" and "specific gender inequalities" as it watches and regulates behavior socially and privately, reminding individuals that their society serves as an ever-present panopticon to keep them perfectly in their place (Finch and Bowen 7). "Whilst aristocratic rank matters less and less" and morality increasingly defines social superiority, it still "remains a powerful residual ideology," though shifting from valuing familial status to something more akin to capitalistic market value and social competence (Clark). Gossip does away with privacy, making "anyone's business... everyone's" as they are scrutinized and, crucially, *know* they are being scrutinized, leading to worrying about gossip and hearing it impacting an individual's decisions and actions (Finch & Bowen 10). A major form of assumption in which conclusions are broadly drawn based on very little, gossip contributes time and time again to how characters interact and react, and often proves them to consider themselves somehow superior to those they are discussing, or at the very least to have a right to talk about them based on their own social standing.

Reputation, of course, is vital in nineteenth century society, and what is being said about someone could improve their chances or ruin them, whether true or not—though what is being said and believed about someone else undeniably says more about the speaker or thinker than the subject, regardless of truth. As a general rule, gossip is spread by those uninvolved in and often

relatively uninformed about the topic of discussion, though that neither prevents their speaking of it as if they have factual understanding of it, nor its getting back to and influencing those who are gossiped about. The world of nineteenth-century Britain, with the importance it placed on social position and economics, also placed a lot of value on family ties—it is why Harriet Smith’s father tried to distance himself, why Lydia Bennet’s running away with George Wickham would ruin her sisters’ chances, and why Daniel Deronda is only able to fully embrace his friend’s politics and ideals once his mother, and thus his Jewish heritage, is revealed to him. In addition to tangible inheritances of land and money, family can provide an individual with social status and power through being associated with one another, though (as Lydia proves) this can work both ways, with a family’s social standing diminishing if a member is perceived as of lesser worth or as a liability. Such measures of individual, familial, and social worth were expressed in terms of Adam Smith’s philosophy, through which market language was introduced to the common vernacular and applied outside of direct economics. Eligible individuals, particularly women, are on the “marriage market,” and discussions of value and worth are inherently economic: being socially “ruined” was a devaluation of the individual (woman) on the marriage market, and one could marry “up” or “down,” leading to shifts in the value of each individual and their connections (Clark).

Mr Darcy, rich and powerful, inherited much from his parents, in wealth, land, and influence as well as familial connections—in particular to the family de Bourgh, the matriarch of which, Lady Catherine, is his maternal aunt. Impressions of Lady Catherine, for Elizabeth and readers, are obviously colored by her interactions with others, particularly Mr Collins, but Lady Catherine makes quite an impression herself through her grand estate, Rosings Park, upon Elizabeth’s visit, and through her treatment of others, almost all of whom she deems lesser than

herself. Sir Lewis de Bourgh being dead, the estate is left in the hands of his proud and elitist widow, whose daughter, Anne, is set to inherit everything, and is expected to marry her cousin, Mr Darcy, to unite their estates and prestige. Lady Catherine's obsession with image and pride in her rank is evident in everything from her expectation that she will be looked on with awe and her suggestions taken as law to the disdain with which she looks down on the Bennets for their lack of artistic education (in spite of the sisters having more than either de Bourgh women). Particularly elitist are her reactions to the Bennet family estate of Longbourn, along with the reasons that have drawn her there.

Having heard a rumor from the Lucases via the Collinses about their conclusion that Elizabeth will soon marry Mr Darcy (a conclusion presumably reached because he has been visiting the Bennets with his friend Bingley, who is engaged to Jane), Lady Catherine is immediately and fiercely against it. She heads to Longbourn so that she can "make [her] sentiments known:" that the idea of such a match would be disadvantageous to Darcy, that it is abhorrent to her as ignoring her wishes (she favors a "tacit"--assumed--"engagement with Miss de Bourgh"), and that it must be impossible and "a scandalous falsehood" (*Pride and Prejudice* 328, 330). Lady Catherine assumes she has the authority to make such declarations and have them obeyed for a variety of reasons that boil down to her belief in her superiority, of age, rank, and wealth and status (as both a Lady and Darcy's aunt, perhaps the closest he has to a parental authority since the death of his actual parents). As Elizabeth claims, "he is a gentleman; [she is] a gentleman's daughter; so far [they] are equal," and though this is an argument for the lack of scandal in a theoretical relationship between the pair it also brings up an interesting point in regards to Lady Catherine's obsession with rank (331). The title that Catherine values so highly, and which she assumes gives her the authority to control not only her nephew but also anyone

else with whom she comes into contact, is not Catherine's by birth; she married into it, and the grand Rosings Park in which she takes so much pride. Perhaps the two who are equal are Elizabeth and Catherine, who both "marry up" in a sense, Elizabeth to more wealth and Catherine to a title.

As Elizabeth points out, Lady Catherine's appearance at Longbourn is more likely to confirm the rumors than dismiss them, and if she is so certain the account cannot be true a better course of action would be to ignore it. However, Lady Catherine's pride and obsession with image, along with her assumption that she can insult and intimidate Elizabeth into doing what she wants because of her rank, turns into her own downfall. Elizabeth, accurately described by Catherine as an "[o]bstinate, headstrong girl," refuses to "obey the claims of duty, honor, and gratitude," and challenges Catherine's assumption that she must be obeyed because of her rank and status (330, 332). A report of this makes it back to Darcy through none other than his aunt, which "taught [him] to hope" that a second proposal (one he would not have presumed he could justifiably make otherwise) might be more favorably received than his first (340). Lady Catherine, like Emma Woodhouse and Mr Darcy early in the novel, relies on the authority of rank and lacks an "impartial spectator" to help conceptualize herself, others, and how they relate, particularly in the shifting social world she finds herself in. Unlike Emma and Darcy, however, she does not have an externalized one, either in a Knightley-like moral teacher, or an inspired internalization of one, as in Elizabeth's earlier rebuttal that teaches Darcy to know himself and make better-informed assumptions about those with whom he interacts. As it is, Lady Catherine takes less well to Elizabeth's assertion of her individual moral code than does her nephew; Lady Catherine remains "extremely indignant" and sends a letter full of "language so very abusive"

upon receiving the news of the marriage, continuing to view the estate as polluted by Elizabeth and her familial ties (360).

Lady Catherine's attempt to position herself as an authority figure by taking action on this gossip, and her assumption that she will get her way simply because she wants it, show her to be entrenched in a traditional, elitist worldview where her aristocratic title and socioeconomic prominence are enough to gain her respect and control over others, in spite of her rudeness. By contrast, Darcy and especially Elizabeth represent a world where morality and worthy character are beginning to factor into being valued and respected as much if not more than rank and wealth; they are representatives of a "true, domestic picturesque" which is founded on "a moral meritocracy" which will continue to develop throughout the century (Mehl 87). In the end, it is Lady Catherine's assumption that, true or not, she can disprove and end the gossip that brings about the very thing that she fears, a marriage between Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy.

Eliot's Daniel Deronda is another character whose situation in life is influenced by gossip, especially by assumptions that circulate about his identity. Raised as a ward by Sir Hugo, for much of the book Daniel's heritage is an unanswered question, though many conclude that he is an illegitimate son of Sir Hugo. Daniel himself is led to this assumption by a tutor who informs him that the illegitimate children of high-ranking religious figures "were called nephews," and he himself called Sir Hugo his uncle (*Daniel Deronda* 145). In spite of a lack of physical evidence—Daniel does not resemble any of the portraits of Sir Hugo's ancestry in the family gallery—Daniel is "generally suspected to be" Sir Hugo's son by those in their social circle, something which "no one was better aware of" than Sir Hugo himself, who "was pleased with the suspicion" (154). Sir Hugo, in allowing and encouraging this assumption, is shown to be vain and self-absorbed, happy with the idea that Daniel might be thought his son regardless of

the truth and without consideration as to how this might affect the boy himself, an ethically unsound position as it disregards any but his own comfort and self-satisfaction.

Even though it is not true, the belief that Daniel is Sir Hugo's son influences his upbringing and interactions with the world around him, and his awareness of how he is perceived serves him well, leading to him being properly guided by morals and what (partial and biased) information he and others do have. The assumption about his heritage forms part of his immediate distaste for the idea of his becoming "a great singer," while its lack of formal recognition prevents him from forming "intimate friendships" at the prestigious school he attends (149, 153). The belief that he is nonetheless a gentleman, by virtue of birth because Sir Hugo is one, determines both of these consequences: his becoming a professional performer is "not thought of among possible destinations for the sons of English gentlemen," and his education is that of a gentleman, including schools like Eton and Cambridge. Seemingly affirming both sides of the "nature versus nurture" debate, Daniel's interest and abilities in music come from his mother, as he is not, in fact, Sir Hugo's illegitimate son but rather the legitimate son of actress and singer the Alcharisi, while the political and idealist bent that helps him to form the bond between himself and Mirah and Mordecai Cohen (which is the reason for his being glad to discover his Jewish heritage, a reaction that shocks his mother) comes from his upbringing—his education and moral code, and particularly his search for a purpose or career, ingrained in him through the general belief that he is the son of a gentleman. The assumption, which he wanted to believe due to fondness for Sir Hugo and partiality to the way he was raised, contributes to Daniel's character in material ways, giving him a lens through which he looks at and interacts with the world through his education and expectations.

While the gossip around Daniel concerns his parentage—circumstance of birth being socially defining for young men in the nineteenth century—gossip regarding women tends to center around romance and marriage. As in *Pride and Prejudice*, the gossip around the Dashwood sisters of *Sense and Sensibility* concerns the men in their lives, and originates and is spread by sources as close to them as the Lucases are to the Bennets: Mrs Jennings and Sir John Middleton. As good-natured and similarly positioned as are characters such as Sir Lucas, Mr Brooke, and Sir Hugo, the pair fulfill a role as social entertainers and quasi-mentors to Elinor and Marianne upon the sisters' arrival at Barton, welcoming them warmly and enthusiastically. Sir John, offering the Dashwoods a place to live, is described as “friendly” and “good-humoured” with actions to match, and enjoys frequent company and social engagements; Mrs Jennings, his mother in law, is also “good-humoured... talked a great deal,” and is “full of jokes and laughter,” often on the topic of romantic entanglements—gossip which Sir John is happy to participate in (*Sense and Sensibility* 21, 25). The pair are quick to pick up teasing both Marianne and Colonel Brandon about his being “very much in love with” her, which they assume based on his “listening so attentively while she sang to them” (26). They also immediately connect Willoughby and Marianne romantically following his rescue of her and her inquiry after him (admittedly, so do Marianne, her mother, and her younger sister Margaret), and they do their best to uncover information about “the young man who was Elinor’s particular favourite” (44). After learning from Margaret that “his name begins with an F,” this favorite topic of conversation enables them to quickly (and correctly) assume that this man is Edward Ferrars when he comes to visit the Dashwoods, though thankfully for Elinor they do not interact much with him on the visit. The couple with whom they do interact with some frequency is Marianne and Willoughby, and the visit to London for the winter exposes, particularly, the extent of Mrs Jennings’

gossiping; where, in the neighborhood of Barton, it could be passed off as friendly teasing and entertaining notions among well-meaning friends, in London the story becomes more scandalous and potentially harmful.

The careless nature with which Mrs Jennings and Sir John spread this gossip, and their lack of tact in conversation after it has been proven false, shows them, in addition to being good-humored and merry, to be self-absorbed and relatively unobservant, having acted similarly to Emma Woodhouse in fitting information to their conclusions rather than forming them based on the available information. Upon a visit to the Dashwood sisters at Mrs Jennings' house, Colonel Brandon remarks to Elinor that her "sister's engagement to Mr Willoughby is very generally known" and "universally talked about... By many—by some of whom you know nothing about, by others with whom you are most intimate—Mrs Jennings, Mrs Palmer, and the Middletons" (128). As Willoughby distances himself from Marianne and gets engaged to a Miss Grey (who is, of course, wealthy), Mrs Jennings discusses with Elinor the attachment she sees between them, asking after the details of their engagement and informing her that she "tell[s] everybody of it, and so does Charlotte" (134). Of course, this assumption proves incorrect, as the pair are not engaged nor will they become engaged, and the gossip could easily have proved damaging to Marianne socially had it gone much further. Unconcerned with the possibility of Marianne being upset by talk about Willoughby's engagement, Mrs Jennings and Sir John move quickly back to talking about her and Colonel Brandon, looking primarily for entertainment without thought to the emotions or reputations of those whom they are discussing. While they are otherwise well-meaning and kind, their assumptions and propensity for gossip time and time again prove challenging for their young friends.

A community-centered narrative with a vast cast of interconnected characters, it is no surprise that *Middlemarch* is full of gossip and worry about being the subject of it. Nearly all of the major characters are somehow involved in gossip, as its subject (as are Dorothea, Will, Mr Brooke, and Fred Vincy) and/or as its circulators (as are Mrs Cadwallader, Sir James, and Mr Farebrother). But no one's storyline is more defined by it than that of the banker, Mr Bulstrode. Bulstrode, though well-off and relatively generous, is not a great favorite around town. His Evangelicalism, a mysterious past that continues to ostracize him to a relative newcomer even after decades in town, and "a deferential bending attitude in listening, and apparently fixed attentiveness in his eyes" all influence people's opinions of him, which are further based on their own opinions of themselves (*Middlemarch* 116). Over the course of the novel, Bulstrode alienates others through a disagreement over the appointment of the hospital chaplaincy, and thus his peers are all too willing to listen to the stories told by John Raffles, a man from Bulstrode's past who dismays and discomforts the banker by turning up at his newly-bought estate of Stone Court. While Bulstrode has tried to leave behind a morally shady past, the appearance of Raffles brings "the forecast of disgrace in the presence of his neighbors and of his own wife," as Bulstrode assumes Raffles, both unashamed of his past and a drunk who would gladly exploit his former associate, will spread information about their shared history, something the banker tries to avoid through threats and bribery (501). Bulstrode, ashamed of his past and paranoid about Raffles bringing it into his present, has not always lived by the staunch moral code that he prescribes to others now, and he slips into his former ways in trying to avoid his fears and past. Ultimately, he is unsuccessful, finding out that even though Raffles is dead, he has already recounted to Mr Bambridge, who has no love for Bulstrode, the secret of "how he [Bulstrode] came by his fortune" (682).

“[T]his gossip about Bulstrode spread through Middlemarch like the smell of fire,” including details about how he came by his fortune and its connections to Will Ladislaw. From there the gossip rapidly gains force and encompasses other lives, adding an inference from Mr Hawley that Caleb Garth could corroborate, having heard the story from Raffles, and implicating both Bulstrode and Dr Lydgate in having a role in Raffles’ death (683). The reputation of the young doctor is further damaged on the discovery that Bulstrode loaned him money after the death, an act assumed to be intended to “stifle the scandal of Raffles” (685). Middlemarch, on the whole not fans of either Bulstrode or Lydgate, has no qualms accepting a second-hand story from an unknown, biased, and clearly morally-unsound man (based on his involvement in the story being told), and the story spreads through the town, gaining various details and opinions along the way. Described by critic Jennifer Judge as “a substantially satiric novel,” *Middlemarch* is grounded in the philosophical and psychological discussions of the day, particularly about the importance of habit as “the driving force of character,” and the ways in which Eliot subverts the then-common belief that women, whose “minds are more prone than men’s to passive, instinctive forms of habit,” were inferior because of it (159). Men, supposedly, have an easier time breaking free of the passive neural pathways that are habit, leading to them thinking more complexly and thus having free will and a moral superiority that women, who think more instinctively, lack. Theoretically, then, Middlemarch should have been able to understand that Bulstrode, perhaps having created new habitual paths, could have left behind his morally shady past and become a changed man. The people of Middlemarch, however, are shown to be egoistic and, on the whole, creatures of habit, their “perspective... distorted by the lack of empathy that accompanies self-absorbed, habitual thoughts,” and having habitually disliked Bulstrode and Lydgate (who represents change to their society, though he himself has many habits and

ingrained social ideals) opt to follow their initial impressions and do not even consider the possibility of Bulstrode having changed his ways since the time that he was associated with Raffles (Judge 166).

Eventually, this gossip leads to an insistence that Bulstrode either denounce the claims as wholly false or resign from his public positions, including on the hospital board. Lydgate, not liked by virtue of being a reforming new-comer, is guilty by association and for assumedly accepting hush-money to cover up a purposeful death. Their reputations ruined by gossip, the Bulstrodes and Lydgates end up having to leave Middlemarch, a town ready and willing to assume the worst of the men they had never much liked in the first place. The town is, generally, shown to be unwilling to change their initial impressions and as holding others to high moral standards with limited self-reflection on whether the stories are true, if people can change, and how they themselves would measure up under the same level of scrutiny. And it is not, in this case, women who are the primary gossips, but rather men who begin it and take the most action in ostracizing Bulstrode, though women certainly talk about it as well—a statement that it is not masculine or feminine to be habitual or “set in your ways,” but rather social and individual, a condition of being human. Some habits, after all, are social, and character can be as well, or at the very least influenced by what those around us are thinking, as they clearly are in *Middlemarch*. This makes change difficult, as society, Eliot believes, benefits from gradual reforms rather than abrupt changes, part of why the town finds it much easier to continue disliking and distrusting Bulstrode as it has done since he arrived (Judge 175).

Adam Smith’s moral philosophy and ideal of an “impartial spectator” permeated nineteenth-century British ideology, as society became more capitalistic and could rely less on

rank and class as absolute organizing principles. George Eliot's philosophical views are easier to identify and delineate than Jane Austen's, as Eliot wrote about social issues and published reviews throughout her career. Eliot was a liberal humanist; we know how she felt about the Reform Bill (the overarching sociocultural contextual framework for *Middlemarch*) and Zionism (from *Daniel Deronda*), and we know her moral and political viewpoints from what she read, translated, critiqued, and wrote herself. Like Smith, Eliot believed in the importance of imaginative sympathy to morality, recognizing that moral questions are complex and hard to definitively answer correctly, but that it is important to "transcend the limitations of subjective experience" in order to understand the world around us—if not entirely "impartially" like Smith, then at least doing our best to balance self-interest and selflessness, stepping out of oneself to understand other perspectives (Anger 86). Austen's beliefs, on the other hand, are less clear. What we know about her has to be inferred and extrapolated from what we know of her education, background, and beliefs, colored by her family's accounts of her, which were heavily edited to protect her memory and image, and her letters, which are often as ironic as her prose. Smith's philosophy, however, was very popular, and she likely read it, and whether her beliefs are explicitly Smithian or not, they follow along with his theory. Austen's readers learn to internalize others' perspectives by experiencing them through characters who externalize them and through narrative techniques like FID. The assumptions that characters make often point to a failure to imaginatively sympathize with others and internalize an "impartial spectator"-like figure, relying on partial and biased information and self-absorbed thoughts which make it difficult to properly conceptualize other people, the perceived basis in many ways for morality. Without rank and status as the sole basis for defining sociocultural norms, new moral codes have to be written and internalized, codes that find authority in recognizing the importance of

perspective, determine individuals' worth based on their own merits and actions, and reward awareness and respect of others rather than obsession with self.

Chapter 4: Expectation

*“She could hardly determine what her own
expectation of its event really was;”*

Sense and Sensibility 195

In working on this project, I have again and again considered my topics, but it has only occurred to me as I begin work on this chapter that I have always conceptualized them as judgment, assumption, and expectation, in that order. In all of my outlines and notes, from day one, I have started with judgment and ended with expectation. And while that is the order I have written these chapters in, it occurs to me that there is no particular reason for that, and that perhaps expectation could or should have come first, or at least there would be an argument for it. Judgments are heavily based on how people measure up to social norms—expectations for individuals and their behavior based on the situation and their position in society—and assumptions are often based on what is expected from individuals as well. But with three highly interconnected and at times difficult to separate topics, they had to go in some order, and expectations are as much set by assumptions and judgments of characters as judgments and assumptions are based on expectations. Something like the age-old philosophical question of which came first, these three topics inform one another to a degree that makes them nearly impossible to definitively unravel, and I had to start somewhere. And there is one very important type of expectation in nineteenth century society that has been touched on throughout that helps to make this topic make sense towards the end rather than the beginning: inheritances.

The other reason that it makes sense to leave expectations to the end is that they are often about the future, defining reactions rather than centering on conclusions about others and their past and present. Lady Catherine reacts so horribly to Elizabeth’s refusal to roll over and agree

with whatever she wants because she expects instant cooperation given her rank and status. Emma expects Frank Churchill to fall in love with her because their socioeconomic situations are relatively similar, influencing her responses towards him. Rosamond Vincy, upon hearing Lydgate's family is wealthy, sets her sights on marrying the young doctor with the expectation that he will inherit wealth or at least be assisted by his relatives, while he expects her to be the perfect wife, obedient and deferring to him as he assumes she has been taught to. Gwendolen Harleth agrees to marry Grandcourt expecting to be able to trick and influence him to get her way, and expecting him to hold up his end of their agreement to keep her family financially stable. These expectations, often founded on judgments and assumptions, reveal what characters have been taught to expect socially, and their reactions if or when they are proven false range from disbelief to resignation to sullen acceptance, depending on the character and situation. When Mr Darcy's expectation that Elizabeth will accept his first proposal proves wrong, he works to improve himself and his attitude; Lydgate, realizing his wife is shallow and headstrong, resigns himself to bearing the burden of his mistaken expectation for the course of their marriage. It is easier in many ways to identify the expectations at the root of many of those notes above, expectations based on socioeconomic and cultural inheritances, and thus this chapter deals most directly with them.

Inheritances

There are many kinds of inheritance. There is the physical inheritance of features, such as curly hair or blue eyes, or those of money and property, and in the nineteenth century the social rank that came with it (and also, of course, actual titled positions for some). With socio-economic inheritances of money, property, and rank, there are choices and at times complications in the bestowing of the inheritance, something we see time and time again in

nineteenth century novels, though often the choices of the bestower are limited. A protective practice for class distinctions and political/economic status, primogeniture was the law of the time, keeping estates together and preserving family names and ranks by leaving everything to be inherited by the eldest son, a practice that legally was only enacted when the father died without a will but practically was often included in the wills that were written anyway. Many estates were also entailed, to the eldest son or closest male relative, for multiple generations, meaning men didn't always have the ability to disregard primogeniture practices. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke views primogeniture as positive, providing stability for the cultural systems of the time, and because of its protective nature, keeping estates whole and in the hands of the upper classes, as a "protection of liberty"; for him, "[n]atural rights... were in every sense prescriptive and determined by estate and inheritance," and protected by primogeniture practices (Kohl 69-70). Despite Austen's novels' general alignment with Burke's arguments for preserving the British social system, her fiction also registers some of the harms inflicted by those who control others' expectations, particularly for marriage, through the control of inheritances. In both Austen's and Eliot's novels, socioeconomic inheritances and entailed wills repeatedly distort characters' expectations of and behaviors towards others—corrupting effects that Mary Wollstonecraft similarly observed in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*. Newer wealth, entering the family through business ventures or marriage, is often less set in stone, not beholden to primogeniture or entails, which gives parents the ability to provide for daughters and younger sons and, in cases, to redistribute money within their family. Yet as Wollstonecraft suggests and as Austen's and Eliot's novels show, control over the expectation and distribution of wealth also often becomes a tool for manipulatively controlling the will of others.

At the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*, Mr Dashwood dies and the entailed estate falls to his son, Mr John Dashwood, leaving Elinor, Marianne, Margaret, and their mother without many resources or a home, in spite of the elder Mr Dashwood's hopes to be able to provide for them. The women are allowed to stay on at Norland Park while they search for a home within their means, introducing readers to Mr and Mrs John Dashwood and her brother, Edward Ferrars, who forms a close relationship with Elinor that leads her family to expect an engagement. So when the Miss Steeles appear at Barton and Lucy discloses the secret of her long-standing engagement with Edward to Elinor, both the protagonist and readers are shocked. Edward, as we know him, has been reserved and proper and interested in Elinor, not the kind of man to enter into a secret engagement and not with Lucy as we know her, nor the kind of man to lead Elinor on, though also not the kind of man to call it off should he have entered into one, leaving Elinor in distress and quietly heartbroken. Lucy, no more economically fortunate than Elinor, is in a tricky situation regarding the engagement, as she "shall have no fortune" or status to bring to the match, and, concluding Mrs Ferrars to be "an exceeding proud woman," has taken great pains to keep it entirely secret from Edward's family fearing they, and particularly his mother, who controls the finances and Edward's inheritance, would not approve (101).

Lucy's impression of Edward's mother, likely founded on information from Edward himself, turns out to be true, at least in part—Mrs Ferrars is indeed a proud woman who would not approve of her son's engagement to an untitled and economically inferior woman, though in their first meeting she is misguided into insulting and snubbing Elinor over all others, as Elinor faces the same challenges Lucy does in regards to a relationship with the elder Ferrars boy. Lucy is led to feel "distinguished" by the attention paid to her in an effort to express dislike and disapproval of Elinor, Edward's supposed favorite (175). And Lucy's conviction that Edward's family likes

and will approve of her quickly falls apart when they do find out, as they fall into hysterics, kick Lucy out of their house, and threaten to disinherit Edward of the estate he has been brought up to expect, going so far as to take action to settle it upon his younger brother Robert when Edward stands by his engagement, as Robert is the favored son and expected to do as his mother wishes. Edward, we come to learn, is very much what we expected of him, though perhaps was more foolish in his youth, while Lucy is rather more deceptive, ill-mannered, and malicious than we might have thought; Mary Poovey writes that “in jilting Edward for his brother Robert, Lucy conclusively proves herself inherently flawed,” rather than just a good-natured girl whose education left something to be desired (190).

In spite of presenting herself as very attached and committed to Edward, and her insistence to continue the engagement even when he will only have two thousand pounds as his total inheritance (plus whatever he might be able to make as a clergyman should he be able to find a job), Lucy’s swift engagement and marriage to Robert Ferrars proves that a significant amount of her attraction to Edward is based on his expected inheritance, and when it is no longer to be his she follows the money to his brother. In this respect, she has much company, including Miss Bingley, whose interest in Darcy seems largely due to his rank and fortune, and men such as Mr Wickham or even Mr Willoughby, who seek women with fortunes to compensate for their own lack thereof. She also has company in George Eliot’s characters: Rosamond Vincy, who marries Lydgate hoping his wealthy relatives will elevate her and remarries after his death a richer man, and Gwendolen Harleth, who marries Grandcourt, in spite of what she knows about his situation and character from Lydia Glasher, expecting she will be able to control him and his fortune. Gwendolen’s situation is perhaps most interesting in comparison to Lucy’s, as she also goes after the clear heir, following expectations based on primogeniture practices. As a result,

Gwendolen experiences the effects of the societal expectation of complete subjugation to her husband, though her husband dies before coming into the inheritance and leaves her, bar her bearing his son, in destitution.

Lucy, on the other hand, experiences an ironic twist in that the women, specifically Mrs Ferrars, are in control; Mrs Ferrars holds the property in trust, and is able to disregard primogeniture when her older son disappoints, but Lucy is still able to gain the sought-after inheritance. Where Elinor sees Edward as an individual who is compassionate, honorable, and learned, Lucy saw him as a vehicle to socioeconomic privilege, and disregarded him when he could no longer provide that. In marrying Robert when he is set to inherit instead, she goes ahead and disappoints Mrs Ferrars' expectations for him, and this behavior displays her character, "expos[ing] 'a wanton ill-nature' (p. 366), characterized by 'an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest' (p. 376)" (qtd. in Poovey 190). Lucy's actions also serve to expose the characters of her new husband and mother-in-law. Robert is shown to be vain and easily flattered, quickly succumbing to the attention of, at the time, his brother's fiancée, while his mother is obviously biased towards Robert, classist (as she was strictly against Edward's taking orders when he was meant to inherit), and controlling, expecting her sons to make matches that conform to her class-based pride. Austen's representation of the relationships between not only Edward and Robert but also the Dashwood half-siblings suggests that while she might generally appreciate the argument that Burke and other social conservatives made for preserving a system based on primogeniture, she also shares some of the criticism that Mary Wollstonecraft had of it: that it can be unjust in effect, particularly for younger sons and women, and that it can serve to sour sibling relationships. Robert, we can assume, had coveted the inheritance meant for his brother for years, and is more than happy to have it to himself when his brother is disowned.

Edward's expectations and actions were limited by his mother's control over his financial future, and ultimately his disinheritance sets him free to marry and employ himself as he chooses. *Emma's* Frank Churchill finds his actions and heart restricted by someone having control over his inheritance as well, though in his case it is by his aunt and uncle, and particularly by Mrs Churchill, rather than by the mother, as in Edward's situation. Where Edward is restricted in whom he can marry and what he can do—he wants to take orders long before his situation requires it of him—Frank is limited throughout the book in when and where he may go, much to the disappointment of Highbury. Frank is expected to visit again and again—the book opening with his father's marriage, an event which socially merits a visit—but it is repeatedly put off, Frank having to “please who must be pleased,” the “ill-tempered” Mrs Churchill who controls Enscombe and Frank's future, often through (supposedly) sacrificing his own wishes (*Emma* 105, 107). And Mrs Churchill, an invisible character that readers, and Emma herself, only encounter through accounts of her from other characters, seems to expect a lot from Frank, particularly his near-constant presence when she is unwell or out of humor; we can infer that she has strict expectations as to the sort of person he will marry. We learn that Frank has been secretly engaged to Jane Fairfax when the affair becomes public, as he tells his father after securing permission from Mr Churchill after Mrs Churchill's death, consent which “[w]hile poor Mrs Churchill lived... there could not have been a hope, a chance, a possibility” of, as she would have disapproved, which would have set Frank's inheritance at risk (313).

As in Edward's case, this has not prevented Frank from forming a relationship, though his actions throughout the book are less honorable than Edward's, as confirmed by Knightley's disapproval of him. While Frank's attentions to Emma are in line with expectations, given their respective statuses and the lack of knowledge about his engagement, he takes rather too much

pleasure in the joke, taking it too far with Emma and displeasing Jane as well. Jane, reasonably, has expectations that Frank would behave, acting at least neutrally towards herself as well as any other women, when instead he is showy and finds humor in mocking their situation. Becoming frustrated, she breaks off the engagement to take a job as a governess, one of the only ways she can support herself given her socioeconomic situation; in taking this control over her life, she models the “independent” woman that Wollstonecraft would prize, being “able to discern the true value of her own worth and have a degree of knowledge that would enable her to properly assess her surroundings” (Niknam 805). In this case, she discerns that she is being mistreated by Frank in his pseudo-relationship with Emma, and takes action to leave Highbury and his society, going to find work that will give her value and respect, though not the social status she would have had as his wife. Frank is, at least, dedicated to Jane, and chases after her when he realizes she has become frustrated with him and is intending to become a governess, apologizing in a letter to the Westons and Emma for his actions while the engagement was secret. He is, in the end, excused, the expectations of Highbury and Mrs Churchill having put him in an awkward position, and as ultimately no damage is done we are able to look upon the match as Jane, at least, gaining reward and recognition for her moral worth and accomplishments. And Jane herself, having the education and will to make her way in the world without a husband should she need to, provides an example of a woman who is resistant to “a fraudulent marriage culture that enslaved and exploited women in a financial and emotional sense,” forcing Frank to see her as an equal rather than a plaything—as Grandcourt sees Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda* (Niknam 804). Daniel’s situation, as well, makes comments on the importance of education over economic situation at birth and to the ways that we inherit things.

Daniel Deronda is the novel in which it is easiest to see what I think of as cultural inheritance: morals, values, and traditions. Throughout the book, Eliot's titular character discovers a cultural inheritance, or what Marion Helfer Wajngot calls a "spiritual inheritance," in the revelation of his Jewish heritage (34). Daniel's first real interaction with Judaism is through Mirah, whom he rescues in London prior to the *in medias res* opening of the novel. In the search he undertakes to reunite her with her lost mother and brother, he is further exposed to the Jewish community, and crucially to Ezra/Mordecai, Mirah's brother, and his Zionist philosophy. Daniel encounters Mirah at a time when he is feeling disillusioned with his studies at Cambridge, and seeking a purpose and place in the world, which is difficult because of his being situated within and without the world of the English gentleman. Raised as Sir Hugo's ward, Daniel has been educated in the politics and philosophy of upper-class British society, taught to look for ways he can benefit others and specifically influenced by Sir Hugo's sense of responsibility and duty to society and the state, but because he is not the gentleman's legitimate son and given primogeniture laws and conventions, his future lacks economic security or the avenues to take up these responsibilities. Already looking to leave Cambridge, Daniel has the time to search for Mirah's family and, in the process, to learn more about Judaism, particularly through befriending the Cohen family and Mordecai himself, but also through reading and research.⁷ Upon first meeting Mordecai, Daniel purchases a book, the autobiography of Salomon Maimon, a Jewish philosopher and critic of Kant, a philosopher whom Eliot engages with through a Feuerbachian lens that promotes respect and sympathy as moral guides, something Daniel practices through his extreme sympathy for others (Fessenbecker 514). He is also asked in this scene by his future friend if he is "perhaps of our race"—if Daniel himself is Jewish (*Daniel Deronda* 340).

⁷ While the Cohen family Daniel finds are not related to Mirah, Mordecai, whom they have taken in, is in fact her long-lost brother Ezra Cohen.

Stereotypically, there are some physical features held to be rather Jewish, though it is not clear that Daniel possesses them—no other characters verbally assume him to be Jewish aside from, perhaps, Joseph Kalonymos, whom we can infer recognizes Daniel's features as similar to his parents' rather than particularly Jewish. But Mordecai is quite convinced, and he is disappointed to learn that Daniel does not know Hebrew even after being told that they do not share a cultural-religious heritage (352).

While Daniel tells Mordecai he is not Jewish during their first meeting, he later reflects: "what did he really know about his origin?" (415). Crucially for Daniel, Judaism is traditionally passed down the maternal line, meaning that his belief that he could be Sir Hugo's illegitimate son need not conflict with the question of him being Jewish. And Mordecai, searching for a disciple to pass his ideals and knowledge onto and convinced Daniel is Jewish, undertakes to teach the younger man, whom he befriends and sees regularly, imparting to him his Zionist ideology. By the time Daniel receives communication from his mother asking to meet, he is rather wishing and prepared to learn his origin and specifically of any ties to Judaism due to this purpose-giving relationship, accounting for his being "glad" to learn he is "a Jew," which shocks and angers his mother who "secured" him an upbringing as "an English gentleman" instead (550). Consequently, Daniel trades his falsely hoped for economic and social inheritance from Sir Hugo for a cultural and ideological inheritance from his ancestors and Mordecai, though it is at every step informed by the English gentleman's upbringing he received. As critic George Levine asserts, Daniel accepts his Jewish heritage while "preserving the valued culture of the Christianity he grew up with," and the morals and sense of duty imparted upon him by Sir Hugo are applied through his Judaism and actions taken to establish a Zionist nation state (66). In fact, his commitment to Zionism is informed by his British cultural upbringing, which valued the

nation-state as foundational to identity (though for Daniel this is rooted almost wholly in its ability to provide a sense of belonging), as well as the “sense of sympathy and responsibility” he was raised with, which could not find direction in the political avenues Sir Hugo wanted it to because of Daniel’s situation outside of the British system of inheritance (primogeniture). Daniel was only waiting on the revelation of his Judaism to direct the “channeling of these qualities into action in the public sphere” (Wajngot 42). Eliot thereby separates the taught gentlemanly values that Burke believed to be preserved by primogeniture from that system of socio-economic inheritance—a system that, in Eliot’s novels, more often undermines than promotes moral action.

Daniel’s acceptance of his heritage culminates in his marriage to Mirah and their departure for the East in an effort to, ultimately, “[restore] a political existence to my people, [make] them a nation again, [give] them a national centre”—the Zionist mission, to establish a Jewish state in the lands of Israel (*Daniel Deronda* 704). Daniel’s insightfulness, moral worth, and concern for others, taught by his gentleman’s upbringing, is rewarded not through traditional (British) socio-economic inheritance of status and estate but through an inherited purpose that brings with it more traditional rewards of marriage and belonging. Rather than being founded on “universal truths” of birth and economic wealth, expectations, in Daniel’s case and more broadly in the later nineteenth century, are (or should be, Eliot suggests) based on the culmination of education and cultural inheritance. Daniel, a moral and good character, is shown again and again to be so, and his reaction to his heritage (once he becomes accustomed to the idea) proves him to be open minded and cosmopolitan, an attitude “normally associated with the Jew,” presumably because of their statelessness (Levine 65).⁸ His work becomes ensuring that others with whom he

⁸ Admittedly, Daniel’s initial reaction to Mordecai’s assumption that he is Jewish is less open minded, as his limited exposure to Jewish people has left him rather uncomfortable with the idea and people. Through interacting with Mirah, Mordecai, and the Cohen family, however, he becomes much more comfortable with their faith and more receptive to the idea he could be one of them.

identifies have a place to belong, as he has found for himself by bringing into balance the facets of his identity as he claims both his education from his upbringing and his cultural inheritance from his heritage. With a cultural inheritance, the choice is to accept and own it, as Daniel does, or try to ignore and reject it, as his mother chooses to do. However, it is difficult to entirely refuse to pass on a cultural inheritance (or one of physical traits), or to be able to pick and choose who gets to inherit it, a problem that is not faced in the same way with tangible inheritances of wealth and property, which are passed down through legal documents and wills.

Wills

In both Austen's and Eliot's fiction, there is a tension between the legal wills that ensure the passing of position and wealth, supposedly upholding societal structures, and the free will on which moral codes and conduct depend, which actually does so more. Had Mr Darcy been orphaned earlier in his life, it is possible he would have ended up in a situation similar to that of Edward Ferrars or Frank Churchill, with someone like his aunt Lady Catherine, a difficult-to-please woman with many expectations for him, in charge of his fortune. Happily, he was not, and is thus free to make decisions as he sees fit with no regard for Lady Catherine's wishes, though inheritances and specifically wills are still important in *Pride and Prejudice*. The two wills which are most important are that of the deceased Mr Darcy, which has significance to the novel's plot, and that of the alive Mr Bennet, which has social as well as economic significance. Darcy's father's will is important because it made provisions for Mr Wickham, specifically to have the next available living as a clergyman in his gift, and Wickham claims that Darcy refused to give it to him. The reality reveals Darcy to be honorable and Wickham a base liar, as Wickham refused to take orders and Darcy paid him the equivalent of the promised living, which still wasn't enough for his childhood companion. Wickham attempted to seduce

Darcy's younger sister for the fortune she is set to gain when she comes of age, and extorted more money from Darcy in return for marrying Lydia Bennet after nearly ruining her by convincing her to run away with him. Wickham has not lived up to the expectations of his mentor, but the expectations that the elder Mr Darcy had, that a boy like a second son to him would be taken care of, have been fulfilled. As inheritor of the estate, the younger Mr Darcy has fulfilled expectations to take care of the property, individuals, and community, having been raised with the education to do so, and will prove to Elizabeth his worth and responsibility through explanations of his side of the story and the evidence of Pemberley itself, the central conflict of the novel being between Elizabeth's judgment of him and the reality of the situation.

Mr Bennet's will, though it has not yet come into force, is just as important—Longbourn is entailed to the eldest male in the Bennet line (unlike the estates that Edward or Frank are raised expecting to inherit that, based on the threats of the matriarch, have some flexibility in who they go to), and as Mr Bennet has five daughters, the estate will go to cousin Mr Collins upon Mr Bennet's death. Mr Bennet, as the financial manager of the household, has not adequately prepared for this:

When first Mr Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for. Five daughters successively entered the world, but yet the son was to come... (*Pride and Prejudice* 286)

This is a regret of his, as he has spent "his whole income" and left his wife and children without provision after his death, and, as we see in the case of the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*, a son is not guaranteed to take care of his female relations, as Mr John Dashwood is easily

convinced by his wife to do as little as possible for his half-sisters. Circumstantially, this has impacted the Bennets in many ways, from their contempt for Mr Collins to Mrs Bennet's eagerness to marry off her daughters. The Bennet girls' ability to find good husbands is crucial but challenged by their financial situation, and the financial mismanagement of Longbourn, "a household more blessed with daughters than frugality," leaves them disadvantaged: "at worst, the Bennet's shortage of money for dowries and their equivocal social position foretell spinsterhood, dependence on a generous relative, or, most ominous of all, work as a governess or lady's companion" (Poovey 197). Mr Bennet, whatever else he might be, has been an inadequate financial manager and, trapped in an affectionless marriage, has retreated to his individual enjoyments and from his moral responsibilities, spending much of his time in his library and neglecting his estate, wife, and daughters, particularly their education. "Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father's behaviour as a husband," though at times she tries to overlook it, and we as readers cannot be either (*Pride and Prejudice* 221). The narrator, through comments throughout the novel, reminds us that while Mr Bennet is amusing and does take some care of his daughters and estate, he has fallen short of the expectations to fulfill his responsibilities and take care of his family.

The entail also introduces us to Mr Collins, characterized by the narrator and his actions as "not a sensible man", and of whom the Bennets feel, before and after the introduction, that "nothing can clear [him] from the guilt of inheriting Longbourn" (60). Mr Collins himself has many expectations: a clergyman, he expects everyone he comes into contact with to be impressed by his connection to Lady Catherine de Bourgh, his current employer, whom he finds very impressive. He expects to be welcomed at Longbourn, which he visits for the first time in an attempt to reconcile with the Bennet family after a disagreement between his father and Mr

Bennet, and particularly because he has “a plan of amends—of atonement—for inheriting their father’s estate:” to “choose one of the daughters” of Mr and Mrs Bennet to marry, “if he found one of them as handsome and amiable as they were represented by common report”—that is, if they live up to his expectations following the gossip he has heard of them (68). And indeed, after learning of his plan, Mrs Bennet does welcome him, sneakily informing him of her expectation that Jane will soon be engaged to Mr Bingley but that her other daughters are unattached, leading him to set his sights on Elizabeth. And Mr Collins expects that his offer of marriage to the daughter will go as well as his hinting of it to the mother, expecting that Elizabeth has already understood his purpose in coming to visit and will undoubtedly accept his proposal (as Darcy will expect of her at Hunsford). His expectations of acquiescence are made clear when he assures her that “it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour,” and that he will propose again, expecting “to receive a more favourable answer” as her current refusal is “merely words of course” (103-4). This expectation is fairly logical, given Elizabeth’s prospective financial situation in the event of her father’s death, as is Mrs Bennet’s reaction to Elizabeth’s rejection. After all, if one of the Bennet girls marries the heir to Longbourn, the chance of the matriarch and any unmarried sisters being kicked out of the house decreases. This in turn makes Elizabeth’s commitment to marry someone with whom she will be happy or no one at all risky but obviously important to her, as well as a sign of the era’s changing socioeconomic scene, in that she feels that she has the ability to choose her fate.⁹ The fault of the matter of inheritance, however, falls with the Bennet’s ancestors; Mr Bennet did not set up the entail and cannot change it, leaving matters of pride and

⁹ Her success in marrying someone so much wealthier, however, is neither representative of nineteenth century experience nor something to be expected throughout the century, a romanticized Cinderella story that very few women would be able to experience or encounter. It does indicate to me Austen’s forward-looking response to the socio-political situation arising with the Industrial Revolution and political revolutions of the time, as the match is less tied to class and rank than Lady Catherine, as a representative of the “old guard” socioeconomic structure, would have liked.

control out of his hands, unlike Mrs Ferrars and Churchill.¹⁰ And unlike those two matriarchs, he stands by his daughters and their happiness over pride or socioeconomic status, less concerned with the marriageability/marketability of his daughters than his wife, though still more concerned with moral propriety than her, less willing to forgive Lydia and Mr Wickham after their elopement threatens the social status of the family.

Rather more like Mrs Ferrars and Mrs Churchill in the flexibility of their assets and weaponization of that to be inherited, however, are the will-writers in *Middlemarch*, Mr Casaubon and Mr Featherstone. Mr Casaubon's will is interesting mostly due to the codicil banning Dorothea from marrying, specifically, Will Ladislaw, on penalty of losing the estate she married into. Given the assumptions it leads her friends and community to, the codicil also costs her her standing in the community and access to her family, particularly after she follows through with marrying Will. The idea that this *particular* match would be banned proves Edward to be jealous, paranoid, and spiteful, as further demonstrated by the request he makes of Dorothea prior to his death, a request to which she hesitates to give him an answer. Egoistic and paranoid about her relationship towards Will, Casaubon asks Dorothea to promise to "carry out [his] wishes: whether [she] will avoid doing what [he] should deprecate, and apply [her]self to do what [he] should desire" in the event of his death, a pointedly non-specific request to promise to do whatever he might ask of her (*Middlemarch* 454). Dorothea, assuming Casaubon is still entirely devoted to his great work, assumes that is what he is asking about, but still cannot say yes without thinking, and her husband dies without an answer, something she grapples with after the event. However, as Patrick Fessenbecker notes, when the codicil is revealed to her, she "can

¹⁰ Ultimately, as well, it is not their fault that Mr Bennet did not have any sons, and that the entail passes Longbourn to Mr Collins, who has a blind reverence for rank in the place of a personal moral code and thus seems unlikely to prove a good estate manager himself. When setting up the entail, they could not have known what the situation would be or the individuals in the generations to come, and would likely have shared Mr Bennet's hopes that the inheritor would be generous enough to support relatives disadvantaged by it.

see Casaubon for who he is: an egoist” whose request “will be in part an attempt to restrain her from further companionship with Will” because of his jealousy (521). Casaubon is perhaps also insecure about the situation Will had been placed in by their shared ancestors, as Will’s line of the family was written out of inheriting when his mother married someone her family did not approve of.¹¹ Earlier in the book, Casaubon helps Will financially out of a sense of propriety, in a way that leads the community to view him as moral and good, helping out his poorer relatives. Mr Cadwallader claims that Casaubon “went himself to find out his cousins, and see what he could do for them,” and stakes the academic to be of a unique caliber, telling Chettam that “Every man would not ring so well as that, if you tried his metal,” though the story is not as favorable to Casaubon as Cadwallader believes (*Middlemarch* 63). Casaubon did not seek out the Ladislaws, but the idea that he did circulates in the community, and the incorrect information has several implications: first, that the community expects that this is true, either given what they know and have been told about Casaubon, from his actions as a clergyman, landowner, and community member, or because they believe the story could only have circulated if it were. And second, that this is something which proves him to be good, because it is beyond traditional and social expectations of the individual, to seek out and take care of relatives disinherited by and/or because of their ancestors. It also demonstrates the power of performance in nineteenth century society, as all the community needs to know is that Casaubon interacts with and finances Will, or did at some point, and when that changes it does little to change the community’s views of him. Even before his marriage to Dorothea, Casaubon did his best to minimize interactions with the young man, and after it he cut him off, paranoid and jealous when his new bride and relative interacted. The “abominable” codicil further abandons Ladislaw, which is particularly striking

¹¹ A Polish musician, likely Jewish, connecting Will Ladislaw to Daniel Deronda, who serves a similar role in his relationship with Gwendolen as Will does in his own to Dorothea.

after Dorothea requested they try to help him more, ensuring continuing control over his interactions with the estate and widow, and impacts Dorothea's life after her husband's death as an attempt to continue to control her too (466). Pointedly, Will had no expectations of benefitting from Casaubon's will, and Dorothea's only expectations were to be able to benefit the disadvantaged through whatever was left to her, though it "would not be so very distressing" to her to not have inherited her husband's property. Will's and Dorothea's moral codes insulate them from some of the intended effects of Casaubon's manipulative will.

There are many expectations about Mr Featherstone's will, which comes into play before Casaubon's. Through marriage, Mr Featherstone is related to the Vincy's, and having no (known) children of his own, he is generally expected to leave his property to Fred Vincy. The Vincy's "secretly regarded him as Mr Featherstone's heir," allowing Fred to make choices like dropping (failing) out of college, and it is not just his family: "tacit expectations of what would be done for him by Uncle Featherstone determined the angle at which most people viewed Fred Vincy in Middlemarch" (*Middlemarch* 222). This general expectation likely has Middlemarch forgiving Fred's whims and caprices more readily than they would others', as social standards generally allow for more eccentricity in wealthy people, such as Mr Brooke. The expectation that Fred will inherit from Mr Featherstone also results in people more freely lending money to Fred than they might otherwise be willing to, given his frequent losses. Mr Featherstone, hearing of this, finds it to be premature and requests Fred to prove that he has not been borrowing based on his expectations to inherit, the old man trying to manage the community's expectations and adamant that he should surprise them by leaving them unfulfilled or at least in question. Unfortunately for Fred, Featherstone's frequent threats to amend or rewrite his will are not empty, and on the night of his death we learn that he has multiple wills prepared, one of which (presumably the more

recent, as that would take precedent) he wants Mary Garth to burn. Mary, an unwaveringly moral character, refuses, as the two are alone and her doing so “might lay [her] open to suspicion,” if she or Fred benefited from it, as she is known to be fond of the supposed heir (301). Thus, the will Featherstone presumably wanted destroyed before he died is read and followed, leaving almost everything to an unknown Mr Joshua Rigg, and Fred receiving none of the expected land or money which has influenced his actions and the general perception of him throughout his life.

Through upending them, Peter Featherstone’s will exposes the influence of people’s expectations of inheritance, particularly that of his immediate family and Fred Vincy, who are all ultimately disappointed. Kindnesses shown to the old man before his death were largely selfish, stemming from a hope to gain from his death and thus leaving them undeserving of any inheritance. Ultimately, Fred does end up the master of Stone Court, Featherstone’s estate, but he must first learn and grow, the initial disappointment the catalyst for Fred’s *bildungsroman*, a journey of “self-exploration” as he must now find a vocation (Fessenbecker 507). Freed from the distorting effects of Featherstone’s manipulative wills, Fred, like Daniel, must find a moral purpose to which he can devote his will. Egoistic at the beginning of the novel, Fred works with Mary Garth and her father, Caleb, to find a suitable vocation, one which he “freely” chooses and views “as an expression of [his] autonomous self” from “the set... constrained by [his] abilities” (Fessenbecker 507). The profession his family wants him to take up, being a clergyman, is not within his options, as neither he nor Mary believe he is “suited for it.” Instead, Fred undertakes to learn from Caleb his profession, as a surveyor and estate manager, and his “decision to learn how to manage property... is part of the same narrative that sees him learning to see his actions from the perspectives of other people,” via interactions with Mary Garth (Fessenbecker 526). Mary’s moral education and her father’s literal one interrupt the growth of Fred’s egoism, and he

instead learns to understand and sympathize with others along with how to be a good manager and agricultural man, thus proving himself worthy of the estate. And he must have proved himself worthy and responsible ahead of inheriting Stone Court, because the estate on its own, by the latter part of the century, no longer brings with it inherent respect and social prominence, as the unknown Joshua Rigg and unliked Mr Bulstrode find in their time owning the estate before it passes to Fred.

No longer an immature, wasteful gambler who had not proved he could run and take care of an estate before expecting it as his right, Fred is free to come into ownership of Stone Court, though not free of social expectations of him. In the epilogue, Eliot fills readers in on what happens after the novel's conclusion to its principle characters; eventually Fred marries Mary Garth, establishes himself as a farmer, and comes into ownership of Stone Court, saving to purchase "the stock and furniture" in addition to being given the land by Bulstrode. Fred's path "surprised his neighbors in various ways," particularly after he "produced a work on the *Cultivation of Green Crops and the Economy of Cattle-Feeding*," something Middlemarch was "inclined to believe" was actually written by his wife Mary, "since they had never expected Fred Vincy to write on turnips and mangelwurzels" (788). Mary, conversely, published a book "called *Stories of Great Men, taken from Plutarch*," which the town attributed to Fred due to his education, finding it more believable to swap the authors of the two works given their upbringings and the community's expectations for them. And, in the end, George Eliot does not answer for us whether the community of Middlemarch is right or wrong—it is left to readers, with the skills they have developed in reading the novel, to decide for themselves.

Afterword

“Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but where, as in this case, though the conduct is mistake, the feelings are not, it may not be very material.”

Emma 338

The lessons Jane Austen and George Eliot had for their readers were generally applicable as guides to the day and age they were written, couched as they are in the prescriptive social hierarchies of the nineteenth century. Readers were likely to come across individuals who had direct similarities to the characters they read about, or situations that were similar to those in their novels, and readers would thus be able to see direct, real-world applications between what characters experienced and learned and their own everyday lives. But across the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries, society has dramatically altered many of those strict hierarchies, and thus it is harder to see direct parallels between what we read in nineteenth century novels and encounter in the modern world. However, what Austen and Eliot, as authors, impart is not just how to read a specific culture or society, or how to navigate the experiences found in their novels; they work to impart a world-view, teaching their philosophical and epistemological perspectives so that they can be internalized by readers and taken to their own experiences and understandings of the world. As Louis Menand writes in *Dangers within and Without*:

But art and literature are not epiphenomenal to the rest of human behavior; they have cognitive value. They are themselves accounts of human life. A painting of a novel is a report on experience... A nineteenth-century novel is a report on the nineteenth century;

it is not an advice manual for life out here on the twenty-first-century street. But a nineteenth-century novel belongs to the record of human possibility, and in developing tools for understanding the nineteenth-century novel, we are at the same time developing tools for understanding ourselves. These tools are part of the substance of humanistic knowledge. They are what humanists know, and as the tools apply to our understanding of novels, they apply to our understanding of everything in the world of values. (15)

That is, what we take from art and literature is not just how to understand the exact events and individuals depicted—we learn how to understand the experiences and emotions of those we read about, and how to understand ourselves as individuals. We learn how to conceptualize others—to create Adam Smith’s “impartial spectator” to keep us moral, and to practice imaginative sympathy to understand others as individuals in their own right—and how they think, feel, and react in society, in no small part through understanding how they judge, assume, and expect, and the impacts those thought processes have on their actions and understandings. And, in turn, we learn how to recognize the same things in ourselves, to watch to make sure we do not make egotistic mistakes in interacting with and interpreting others.

This learning to understand ourselves and the world is not a “cut-and-paste” of what we read; we cannot bring the nineteenth century novel into the twenty-first century and expect it to work. We do not live in the nineteenth century, nor its novels. The nineteenth-century novel is not, in Menand’s words, “an advice manual for life out here on the twenty-first-century street,” and it would be a gross mistake to treat it as if it could be. However, perhaps the concerns of the nineteenth century are not so far away as they might feel as one reads about balls and entailed inheritances and socio-economic prospects obsessed with dowry and performance. I had thought, at the beginning of writing this project, that maybe my topic didn’t seem particularly applicable

to today, because the nineteenth century is not the twenty-first century, and it can feel so very different. I found myself, in an early early draft, starting a sentence like “perhaps, in the age of social media, it is hard to imagine the importance of public opinion for nineteenth century society; the way that your character is shaped by what people think and see and say about you; the way that who you are is determined by how much you have inherited, and how you have to appear perfect in order to be accepted socially.” Something like that. And I had to stop, because I realized that, while many of the particulars have changed, in many ways what the age of social media has made visible is the extreme importance we still place on what people think and purport to know about us.

With the rise of social media, we are more connected than ever. This has many benefits, but, as we are learning more and more, many drawbacks as well. We see carefully curated “Instagram lifes,” consisting of “heavily curated feeds of perfect-looking photos, which claim to be representative of someone’s life” (Whiting). Only showing highlights that imply perfection, we are led to believe that what we see online is really the perfect life that other people lead, forming our own judgments, assumptions, and expectations about their lives and our own based on what we think. However, as Whiting puts it so succinctly: “Instagram is not real life. You can never know what’s going on behind closed doors, and certainly not behind the screen of a phone.” Similarly to the people of nineteenth-century Britain who placed extreme importance on reputation and performance, people in the twenty-first century present themselves a certain way, particularly online, in order to try to control the ways other people think about them. It reminds me of a scene in Joe Wright’s film adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* (2005), towards the end: the Bennet women are lounging in their home, and someone looks out the window to announce that Mr Darcy and Mr Bingley are approaching Longbourn. Immediately, all of the women stand

up, hurriedly cleaning the room and finding a respectable activity to be sitting there doing. Where they had been lounging and comfortable minutes before, they are now sitting perfectly posed to look up in as ladylike a manner as they can when the men walk in. To preserve their reputation, they have to be “on” all the time around people outside of their family; we, similarly, post perfection, because, much like in the nineteenth century, our public life and reputation is incredibly important to us. Depending on different social norms and rules, what people think and say about us, what they assume and expect from us, is still intensely important to our sense of who we are and how we live our day-to-day lives, and there are many aspects of Austen’s and Eliot’s novels that are relatable despite the differences between our world and theirs.

Just as we found judgments, assumptions, and expectations based on what we see on social media today, we also *express* them online. We have seen, particularly in the last five-to-ten years, the ways in which social media can form an “echo chamber,” including the ways it has an “influence on information consumption and public opinion formation,” particularly through reflecting and amplifying already-held beliefs (Cinelli et al). If social media perpetuates the beliefs we already have about how the world works, can we really see the truth, particularly if all we hear is what we already think or know? Circling back to crucial questions of epistemology and philosophical perspectives, the question becomes, again, can we ever truly understand the world? Can we ever truly know others? The nineteenth-century novel grapples with these questions directly, and in itself literature poses its own questions: how important is it to be able to know others, and is doing our best to understand, while recognizing we never fully know, enough? In exemplifying the ways judgments, assumptions, and expectations bear on character and interactions, and the ways such thoughts can be wrong and, perhaps, corrected, the novels of Jane Austen and George Eliot remind us that while we strive to know others and understand the

world, unlike in novels, we cannot be within everyone else's minds. But through reading, among other things, we can develop the tools to understand ourselves and conceptualize others and what they may be thinking, feeling, and experiencing, in an effort to know the world to the best of our abilities. We cannot take everything we read into our everyday lives, but we can and, in Austen's and Eliot's views, must apply what it teaches us, from critical thinking to reflections on the social structures that the novel at once questions and perpetuates, in order to truly understand ourselves within the human condition, a crucial piece of which is storytelling. As in nineteenth-century novels, judgment, assumption, and expectation play no small part in the way we understand and interact with the world, and are thus important to consider in our contemporary cultural and philosophical contexts.

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