Humor, Characterization, Plot:
The Role of Secondary Characters in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Marriage Novels

Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

Many late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels utilize laughter as a social corrective, but this same laughter hides other messages about women’s roles. As the genre’s popularity widened, writers used novels to express opinions that would be eschewed in other, more established and serious genres. My dissertation argues that humor contributes to narrative meaning; as readers laugh at “minor” characters, their laughter discourages specific behaviors, yet it also masks characters’ important functions within narrative structure. Each chapter examines one type of humor—irony, parody, satire, and wit—along with a secondary female archetype: the matriarch, the old maid, the monster, and the mentor. Traditionally, the importance of laughter has been minimized, and the role of minor characters understudied. My project seeks to redress this imbalance through focusing on humor, secondary characterization, and plot.

Chapter One, “Irony and The Role of the Matriarch,” explores the humorous characterizations of Lady Maclaughlan and Miss Jenkyns within Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853). These novels share the following remarkable similarities: 1) they use characterization to unify unusually-structured novels; 2) they focus on humorous figures whose contributions to plot are masked by irony; 3) their matriarchal characters are absent for large portions of the stories; and 4) despite their absences, these figures’ matriarchal power carries strong feminist implications.
Chapter Two, “Parody and the Role of the Old Maid,” considers two parodies of the spinster in Ferrier’s *The Inheritance* (1824) and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), novels that finally affirm the worth of this marginalized figure. Ferrier’s narrator permits Miss Pratt to contribute to the novel’s love match and offer her congratulations at the story’s end. Towards the conclusion of *The Monk*, Leonella receives the dual rewards of marriage and gifts. Although initially ridiculed, both women act as powerful protector figures to a central heroine.

Chapter Three, “Satire and the Role of the Monster,” analyzes the grotesque characterizations of Madame Duval and Mrs. Freke within Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801). Whereas Madame Duval comes across as hyper-feminine, Harriett Freke falls between genders, complicating essentialist-based notions of identity in the tradition of *Gender Trouble*. Madame Duval acts as a powerful force moving Evelina towards her destiny. Similarly, Mrs. Freke exerts great influence on the narrative. In both novels, the authorial laughter of the satirist serves to initially cloak the importance of these figures, even as it also points to important messages.

Chapter Four, “Wit and the Roles of Mentor and Protégé,” concludes my dissertation with an analysis of mentor and mentee figures in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816) and Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). This exploration of relational networks shows how two different authors acknowledge and modify then-current conceptions about wit, while also differentiating it from other forms of humor.
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INTRODUCTION

This project sprang from an epiphany during my first quarter at The Ohio State University. After reading Susan Ferrier’s 1818 novel *Marriage*, I asked classmates about the unique role that Lady Maclaughlan plays in resolving the plot. Their startled silence led me to further research, and I discovered that critics also overlook this seemingly minor, or secondary,\(^1\) character. The question of why they overlook her crucial contribution resulted in this conclusion: although Lady Maclaughlan is perhaps the novel’s most flamboyant and powerful figure, humor relegates her to a secondary role, which in turn cloaks her importance and procures acceptance for traditionally unacceptable behavior. Her husband-bullying, stentorian tones, and idiosyncratic attire all evoke sympathetic laughter—a laughter that blinds readers to the extent of her power over fellow characters, and even over the narrative itself. However, a close examination of the text reveals her surprising, event-shaping influence throughout the novel. Lady Maclaughlan rules supreme as matriarch of Glenfern, all defer to her opinions, and—most importantly—she determines the outcome of the marriage plot. By the work’s conclusion, Lady Maclaughlan has secured her husband’s entail by seeing it bestowed on the woman of her choice, through the marriage that she machinates. Readers thus obtain

\(^1\) In Jennifer Camden’s 2005 dissertation “The Other Woman: Secondary Heroines in the Nineteenth-Century British and American Novel,” she defines “the secondary heroine” as one who has been forgotten. She further states that this figure exists “outside the primary courtship plot of the novel” (2). While I agree that many important secondary figures have been overlooked, I adapt Camden’s definition slightly to show that secondary figures who appear external to the courtship plot often play a more integral role than critics and readers realize.
the traditional love match at the novel’s end, but engineered by a woman who thereby ensures her own freedom outside of marriage. In addition, Maclaughlan follows her admission to the protagonist, “I wished you to marry him” with the words: “Whether you’ll thank me for that twenty years hence, I can’t tell—you can’t tell—he can’t tell—God knows—humph!” (463). This statement drips with a cynicism undergirded by Maclaughlan’s experience of multiple marriages, thus potentially questioning or undermining the institution of marriage itself. Her contributions to plot progression privilege this viewpoint, while humor masks the extent of her agency and the implications of her actions in a predominantly patriarchal society.

My fascination with the role of Lady Maclaughlan in *Marriage* led me to wonder if other novels utilize a similar technique. What is the relationship among humor, secondary characterization, and plot progression in late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century marriage novels? (I use “marriage novels” to designate those that contain marriage as a major theme, many of which end with a love match.) Also, how do such novels use the intersection between specific archetypes and forms of humor to comment on women’s roles during this time period? Greg Camfield’s *Necessary Madness: The Humor of Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (1997) stresses: “Humor juxtaposes ostensibly incompatible systems of thought to inspire a different order of viewing” (xi). The implications of Camfield’s study stretch across boundaries of nationality to touch the realm of British literature as well. My dissertation shows that humor surrounding prominent secondary characters enables writers to present various viewpoints on marriage and woman’s lives, thus suggesting the existence of
creative alternatives to the norm. In other words, the embedding of humor through characterization makes it a catalyst for potentially subversive thought and action. To quote Henri Bergson, “laughter indicates a slight revolt on the surface of social life” (190). While the relative “slightness” of this revolt is debatable and varies based on context, the idea of laughter as a pointer to potential insurrection underlies my analyses of novels within the Romantic and Victorian traditions. The contrast between male- and female-authored novels in this study proves particularly interesting, as the laughter in the former works manifests an indiscriminateness that provides a marked contrast with the more cautious, calculated humor of the latter. This in turn provides insight into perceptions of gender during the time period, as well as the differing constraints that men and women writers faced. As a new, up-and-coming genre, the novel provided a fresh forum in which women could express their opinions; its connection with conduct book

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2 As Regina Barreca points out, “women writers have traditionally used comedy to subvert existing conventional structures” (4). This fact alone makes humor an important area of study. My dissertation not only seeks to merge feminist criticism with humor, which alliance is long overdue and has oft been sacrificed to first-wave feminism’s emphasis on anger, but also examines marriage as perhaps the most conventional of those “conventional structures” that Barreca references.

3 The word “subversive” is notoriously overdetermined. In this instance, I use it to refer to ideas that oppose, contradict, or question a predominant societal viewpoint.

4 This statement falls within Bergson’s chapter on “The Comic in Character,” which also highlights the corrective function of laughter. Of humorous persons it states: “Any individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting in touch with the rest of his fellow-beings. It is the part of laughter to reprove his absentmindedness and wake him out of his dream” (147). In short, Bergson suggests laughter often springs from anomalous behaviors and ultimately works towards eradicating those same behaviors.

5 Focusing strongly on the eighteenth-century works of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, Ian Watt’s seminal Rise of the Novel connects the emergence of this new genre with changes in the reading public (35). Watt cites a specific parallel between the rise of the middle class and the rise of the novel (54).

6 As a response to Watt, Nancy Armstrong insists that his work overlooks the fact that “the majority of eighteenth-century novels were written by women” (7). She further claims, “I know no history of the English novel that can explain why women began to write respectable fiction near the end of the eighteenth century, became prominent novelists during the nineteenth century, and achieved the status of artists during the modern period.” Overall, Armstrong’s comments emphasize what has now become a well-established perspective on the key place that women novelists have won in the canons of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature.
literature contributed an association of femininity and gentility that sanctioned this form of writing as a possible profession for women. Nonetheless, increasing acceptability did not entirely obliterate the dangers for authors, whether male or female, who crossed lines of propriety. Two protective techniques—placement of subversive or deviant characters in a secondary role and the presence of humor—helped writers, especially women writers, to avoid the sort of umbrage raised by serious, directly subversive, treatise-type works in the tradition of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

Unfortunately, the versatility of “humor” and its related terms complicates precise explanations of this phenomenon. To facilitate my discussion of humor in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British novels, my project develops definitions within the context of specific narratives, which enables me to answer the question of how humor functions to creatively communicate ideas through secondary characters. My four dissertation chapters indicate that irony, parody, satire, and wit make distinctive and surprising contributions to narratives, thus revealing alternatives to traditional readings of minimized secondary characters. While critical discussions of satire and irony are prevalent—legitimized by noteworthies such as Ronald Paulson and Wayne Booth—

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7 A passing comment by Claudia Johnson reiterates this close relationship between genres, which is also well accepted by the majority of scholars. Of Fanny Burney, and in the context of her discussion of *Camilla,* Johnson notes that, while the author can be understood as satirizing propriety, her novels make contributions to conduct literature (164). This statement in turn links with my previous comments about the corrective role of humor.

8 Richard Polwhele’s poem “The Unsexed Females” epitomizes one of many examplars that mock Wollstonecraft’s treatise. In addition to referencing *A Vindication* directly, Polwhele includes allusions to the infamous authoress’s scandalous affairs with Fuseli and Imlay (lines 131 and 156), terming Wollstonecraft an “intrepid champion” without decorum (lines 63-64). As Nina Auerbach explains, the term “public woman” may allude both to public performers and prostitutes (205). In the context of her discussion of Aphra Behn, Barreca’s *Last Laughs* further clarifies that “a woman’s publication implied a public woman”—i.e. a prostitute (27). Writers coming well after Behn still faced lingering associations between their increasingly respectable profession and the taint of immorality, which explains certain rhetorical posturings in female-authored prefaces, as well as women’s more cautious use of humor to explore gender issues.
parody and wit have received less attention. Paulson’s study *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (1967) evoked a number of responses, bringing the relationship between satire and novel-as-genre to the critical eye, and scholars have long acknowledged the important role of irony in works of Romanticism in particular. However, my research on parody isolates the deep-seated tendency to subordinate it to satire, rather than treating it as an equally valid form of humor that was oft-utilized in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. The subject of wit has similarly fallen by the wayside, despite the fact that it becomes the subject of much discussion during this same period. My four dissertation chapters grant these four key techniques of humor an equal status with one another, seeking not only to define them, but also to show how they function within Romantic and/or Victorian novels. Each analysis begins with basic explanations of humor provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, using various critical works to both expand and hone each definition within the context of the works being discussed. For example, several of the *OED*’s definitions of irony correspond in their emphasis on incongruity and contradiction. It is my contention that a number of novels use these two outworkings of irony to advantage, as a means of embedding messages within the fabric of texts, in the very manner embodied by the figure of Lady

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9 John Clark, Glenn Hatfield, John Preston, and J.D. Josipovici are among those who respond to Paulson’s work.
10 The listing of titles that deal with this subject is truly impressive. A brief sampling includes the following: *The Feminine Irony: Women in Early Nineteenth-Century English Literature* (Lynn Agress), *Shandyism: The Character of Romantic Irony* (Peter Conrad), *The Comedy of Romantic Irony* (Morton Gurewitch), and *A World of Possibilities: Romantic Irony in Victorian Literature* (Clyde Ryals).
11 Robert L. Mack discusses this phenomenon in his *Genius of Parody* (37).
12 The late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witness a ubiquitous range of allusions to wit: for example, Ferrier’s novel of manners *Destiny* describes wit as “a natural talent that may be turned to good account” (156); Charles Lamb’s *Essays of Elia* suggests that “the greatest wits” are “the sanest writers” (226); and Ann Radcliff contrasts wit with truth in her Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (174).
Maclaughlan. In this way a novel such as *Marriage* both reaffirms and questions the very institution of marriage itself; this is irony at its best.

Through the medium of contrast—or more specifically, through their differentiation of irony from satire—the writings of social satirist George Meredith add an additional dimension to the foundation begun by the *OED*. Meredith’s “Essay on Comedy” identifies derision as a point of departure between the two forms of humor: “If you detect . . . ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire” (42). Several aspects of this statement prove helpful in my analyses—i.e. Meredith’s emphasis on ridicule and his elevation of the readerly role. First, identifying ridicule as a by-product of satire separates this manifestation of humor from all others, including irony: satire utilizes mockery, while other forms of humor may or may not, depending on context and situation. Secondly, Meredith’s statement is strongly “you-centered,” or focused on the reader. In the case of irony, as with many types of humor, the role of the reader is crucial, but few forms of humor elevate an audience to the same extent that irony does. To follow irony’s sinuous twists and turns, the ideal reader must manifest an ability to discriminate among various levels of meaning. Wayne Booth adds yet another dimension to my exploration of humor in his seminal *Rhetoric of Irony*, specifically its discussion of stable and unstable irony, which I explore in more detail within Chapter One. According to Booth, readers undergo a similar mental process when grappling with both forms of irony; in both cases, they must reject a literal or surface meaning before considering other possibilities (10). However, the end products of this process differ. As evidenced by my first chapter, *Marriage* and *Cranford* contain large tracts of stable irony. Their texts overturn a surface meaning in order to point to a limited
set of potential meanings. From one perspective, this is less ruthlessly destructive than unstable irony, which is highly deconstructive in nature and can leave readers in confusion, staggering about and grasping for understanding in the ever-shifting sands of meaning. The gentler nature of stable irony, however, fits both the atmosphere of my chosen novels and the apparent purposes of their writers. In both cases, the authors’ construction of matriarchies within the texts are strongly grounded in sympathy—the sympathy of various characters for one another, and the sympathy that the novels seek to evoke from readers themselves. Ferrier’s and Gaskell’s usage of irony contributes to the construction of two very different matriarchies, even as they both embed their texts with subtle communications about the spectrum of possibilities for women’s roles.

As with each successive chapter, the discussion of parody in Chapter Two builds upon that of irony in Chapter One. Critics such as Robert L. Mack and Linda Hutcheon explain the unfortunate trend to subordinate parody to other forms of humor. They additionally isolate a tendency to view parody as “parasitic” in nature (Mack 15; Hutcheon 3). The pairing of “parasitic” with “parody” proves humorous, as my second chapter addresses prevalent eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions of the old maid (including her parasitical tendencies!) and the ways in which The Inheritance and The Monk both imitate and modify these conceptions in order to render them parodic—thus communicating more empowering perceptions of the spinster’s societal potential. In devoting a full chapter to parody, my dissertation seeks to grant it equal standing not only with wit, but also with irony and satire. Though parody may work hand-in-hand with

13 Stable ironies are those that are “fixed, in the sense that once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (Booth 6).
other techniques of laughter, discriminating readers should avoid the tendency to either subordinate it to or confuse it with other faces of humor. As its defenders have pointed out, many have falsely situated parody as a minion of satire, thus identifying it as “an essentially conservative force in literary tradition” (Kent and Ewen 12), or one that ridicules in order to maintain the status quo. However, as noted previously, it is satire that claims the distinction of a continual relationship with ridicule. Parody may, or may not, mock and as such should be treated as a distinct form of humor. This serves as one rationale behind my choice to grant parody equal standing with other forms of humor.

From a different perspective, the sheer number of parodies—from strongly parodic eighteenth-century works like *Joseph Andrews*, to works of Romanticism like *Northanger Abbey* and *Nightmare Abbey*, to parodic treatments of Victorian life/culture like *The Picture of Dorian Gray*—calls for a revaluation of parody’s importance and its placement within a hierarchy of humor. In fact, within the Romantic Era alone, David A. Kent and D. R. Ewen point to “swarms” of published parodies and go so far as to class “parodies written by and about the Romantic poets” as the “most important form that literary satire assumed in the period” (13). Although this particular phrasing reiterates the unfortunate tendency to subordinate parody to satire, with which I must disagree, it correctly highlights the importance of the parodic form. As with all terms of humor, the word “parody” is subject to misunderstanding. Building on the critical work of Margaret Rose and others, my second chapter seeks to develop a concrete definition of the term, thus offering four characteristics of parody, which are as follows: parody 1) involves imitation and modification, 2) breeds ambivalence, 3) performs more than one task simultaneously, and 4) may or may not involve ridicule. The first and fourth of these
traits appear fairly self-evident, while the second and third are developed further within the textual discussion that follows within the chapter itself.

Satire differs from irony and parody in subtlety, or rather lack thereof, but to underestimate its ability to mask and unmask various messages would be a grave error. The overt nature of satire, along with its deliberate exposure of a target to ridicule, may lead readers to stop short of considering its full communicative potential. Secondary characters become the butt of biting satirical attacks leveled primarily at their grotesque physical characteristics, but these attacks may blind readers to other implications within the texts. As hinted earlier, in its ability to reinforce the status quo through mockery, satire tends to be viewed as an essentially conservative force which uses laughter as a deterrent from socially unacceptable behaviors. How does this perspective align with viewpoints such as Freud’s, commonly dubbed “aggression theories of humor,”¹⁴ which see the dangerous potential of laughter to lash out against authority? My analysis of two key novels of Romanticism identifies renderings of grotesque monstrosity as the key to the mystery, thus linking with the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin. The very extremes manifested through satirical portrayals raise Bakhtinian notions of carnival, which in turn evokes inversion, role reversal, and disruption of hierarchy.¹⁵ As my third chapter acknowledges, Mary Russo has highlighted Baktin’s failure to pursue “the social relations of gender,” along with a corresponding lack of interest in the female grotesque, which figure she describes as “repressed and undeveloped” (63). This very void

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¹⁴ Camfield also uses this phrasing to point out the long-standing domination of such theories (6). He affirms that “comedy can skirt seriousness simply to disrupt it,” additionally acknowledging that laughter may contribute to tension management, noting in turn the “divided sympathies” of those laughing (14).

¹⁵ Within their first chapter’s discussion of Bakhtin and the marketplace, Stallybrass and White refer not only to inversion, but also to “demonization” and “hybridization” as processes that occur at the fair. The second-listed of these terms, demonization, ties in with my own exploration of satire and the grotesque.
reiterates the need for further discussion of secondary characters like those in the novels of Frances Burney and Maria Edgeworth. As these novelists mock with a vengeance, their satirical techniques unleash a violence that, while protected and sanctioned due to the unconventionality of its primary targets, ultimately turns against other targets as well. Satiric renderings in novels thus manifest the potential, despite their apparent simplicity and straightforwardness, to effect much more than behavioral deterrent.

My concluding chapter, Chapter Four, not only identifies predominant, gendered, negative connotations associated with wit during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but also seeks to differentiate between two types of wit: the irony-dependent wit of *Emma* and the satire-rife wit of *Nightmare Abbey*. Sigmund Freud’s *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* explains that the “desire to impart” separates wit from “the comic,” which can be enjoyed in solitude, thereby highlighting a strong connection between wit and the intellect since wit requires another to support (Freud 222), or acknowledge its effectiveness. This in turn can only occur after the conclusion of a mental process on the part of the observer-reader (222). As its second definition, the *OED* describes wit as “the faculty of thinking and reasoning in general; mental capacity, understanding, intellect, reason.” Subsequent definitions connect it with common sense and wisdom, as well as cleverness. My analyses of both novels demonstrate how manifestations of wit often rely heavily upon other forms of humor, but they also show how various authors may use wit to absorb readers into their own perspectives on various topics, from wit itself to the unrealistic conventions of the romance novel.

Overall, behind its discussion of humor, secondary characterization, and plot, my project has very specific underlying assumptions: 1) that minor characters play a more
important role than critics have traditionally acknowledged, 2) that laughter performs a crucial function in narratives and is thus worthy of study, 3) that a work can be both humorous and feminist, and 4) that feminist criticism and narratology are compatible. Anna Udden’s *Veils of Irony* (2000), a discussion of narrative techniques in female-authored novels of the 1790s, suggests that critics’ stereotyped notions of women authors served a veiling function, in turn enabling these same writers greater freedom in their craft (75). Udden places characterization at the very center of narrative; because one of the early novel’s primary purposes was didactic in nature, readers received instruction through identification with the heroine (58). While this study of late eighteenth-century novels rightly highlights the importance of characterization and its connection to key messages, its focus rests on the role of the central protagonist—which in turn reiterates a deep-seated, albeit traditional bias. Historically, secondary characters have been understudied, but some seek to shift the critical gaze. Written several years after Udden’s work, *The One Versus the Many: Minor Characters in the Space of the Novel* (2003) cites the proliferation and integration of minor characters into the novel as a major triumph of the nineteenth-century (Woloch 1). Woloch’s work seeks to redress the imbalance between the large spaces these characters occupy and the limited attention paid them in criticism. Among the very useful observations that Woloch makes is his identification of two “pervasive extremes of minorness in the nineteenth-century novel,” named as “workers” and “eccentrics” (25). “Worker” characters play an essentially flat, functional role, while “eccentrics” exist for the purpose of disruption; whereas the former are “smoothly absorbed,” the latter “grate against” their prescribed positioning (25). Though some might dismiss these designations as sweeping generalizations, such marked
distinctions provide helpful starting points for discussion. Woloch’s research supports my interpretation of specific secondary characters as being disruptive, like Miss Pratt in *The Inheritance* or Leonella in *The Monk*, but it also raises fresh questions. Might a character fulfill both of the specified surface functions, appearing as a flat character who additionally disrupts, while simultaneously achieving other purposes—i.e. still being “absorbed” into the narrative? Is it possible that a character’s eccentricities disrupt, but further rather than oppose plot progression? As evidenced in the following chapters, the results of my project yield a resounding affirmative to these questions.

Similarly to Woloch’s study, David Galef’s *The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters* (1993) acknowledges the worth of traditionally undervalued minor characters in its insistence that “understanding how an author deploys minor characters helps one understand how the work is put together” (1). Galef recognizes the inherent challenges of categorization while raising the distinctly humorous question “are corpses characters?” to illustrate the difficulty of differentiating among major and minor characters and reveal the artificiality of such distinctions (12). Nonetheless, Galef seizes the opportunity to define three types of minor characters: cameos, bit parts, and minor roles. The last make a major contribution to plot and theme, while the former two appear only as a name, or—in the case of bit parts—as a name coupled with a brief description (12). But the difficulty remains: how does one determine which character falls into which category? It is my contention that humor masks many crucial contributions of secondary characters, making the term “minor” a misnomer. That so many critics overlook this phenomenon suggests either a conscious or unconscious devaluing of humor’s true importance, perhaps even a critical bias against it. Galef’s system of
classification, therefore, may inadvertently continue the trend of understating the importance of some characters. As my project pursues the relationship between humor and characterization, I uncover many ways in which minimized secondary characters make major contributions to plot progression and resolution, as well as other ways in which the text affirms the importance of individual characters. These contributions alone call for a re-consideration of the hierarchy of importance, in terms of characterization, and support the need for further researching of secondary characters.

A number of other critics—among them Regina Barreca, Audrey Bilger, and Gabriella Castellanos—have pursued the relationship between humor and gender in British novels. Barreca explains that feminist criticism has tended to avoid focusing on comedy, in part due to a need to establish its legitimacy in the face of scoffers (Last Laughs 4). Her work shows the influence of first-wave feminism in its attempts to link humor with anger; while legitimate, this approach stops short of considering the full panoply of possible implications for humor, such as its connections to narrative construction. Whereas Last Laughs aims to explore the intersection between comedy and female writers, Bilger’s work focuses more directly on the intersection between comedy and feminism, while Castellanos’s emphasizes the carnivalesque aspects of Jane Austen’s narratives and her feminism. Each of these critics tends to focus on female-authored works, while my own project discusses male and female characters within both male- and female-authored novels of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. As indicated previously, this choice is important since it offers insight into historical and cultural perceptions of gender and the ways in which novels engage with them. Gendered characterizations often give rise to laughter, which makes feminist and cultural
criticism extremely relevant to this study.\textsuperscript{16} That the project itself relies so heavily on
gender-based stereotypes is not to condone the stereotypes themselves, but rather to show
how novels in both the Romantic and Victorian traditions tap into notions surrounding
women, pair them with humor, and then use laughter to add their own spin to messages
about women’s roles and/or conceptions of gender more generally. Overall, my analyses
of both male- and female-authored novels find these messages to be both positive and
empowering. \textit{Marriage} and \textit{Cranford} carry on a discussion of the benefits of strong
leadership by powerful women, and of matriarchal societies based on sympathy; \textit{The
Inheritance} and \textit{The Monk} explore the qualities of spinsters that make definitive narrative
and societal contributions; \textit{Evelina} and \textit{Belinda} show that even the most ridicule-charged
representations of monstrosity carry potential for addressing issues regarding the
treatment and role of women; and, lastly, \textit{Emma} and \textit{Nightmare Abbey} tackle the task of
re-defining and shaping language itself in order to show the fluidity of conceptions of
gender.

In addition to feminist criticism, the intersection between secondary characters
and plot adds another highly relevant critical approach to the mix: narratology. Ruth E.
Page locates the beginnings of feminist narratology in the mid-1980s. She notes that
some feminists remain suspicious of narratology’s traditional focus on universals, and
some narratologists consider feminist criticism to be irrelevant (3-5). However, like
Page, critics from Susan Lanser to Anna Udden insist on the compatibility of the two
approaches, and I too believe in the possibilities of a partnership between feminist

\textsuperscript{16} In \textit{Literary and Linguistic Approaches to Feminist Narratology}, Page defines a feminist approach to texts
as one that seeks to “interrogate gender relations” (9), and an understanding of cultural context and period
enhances the effectiveness of such an interrogation.
criticism and narratology. Narrative studies such as Patrick Hogan’s *The Mind and Its Stories: Narrative Universals and Human Emotion* (2003) make notable contributions to understanding the roles of humor and emotion in texts, and this subject should be studied further. For instance, in Hogan’s focus on narrative universals, he posits the existence of narratives for every emotion. If this be the case, might there not also be narratives for every type of humor? Hogan emphasizes the important connection between emotion in literature and cultural understanding: “emotional reactions to literary works [including laughter]... clearly tell us about what moves people in a particular culture” (2). 

Contrary to common perception, laughter is significant. At the very least it offers insight into a culture’s values and perceptions. Understanding an author’s use of humor and its connection to narrative construction proves crucial to literary interpretation.

As stated, the importance of laughter has been minimized, and the role of minor characters understudied. My project seeks to rectify this imbalance in its emphasis on humor, secondary characterization, and plot. Beginning with *Marriage* and *Cranford*, Chapter One focuses on Irony and the role of The Matriarch; similarly, Chapters Two, Three, and Four each focus on two primary texts to consider major secondary figures and a corresponding type of humor. In its exploration of humor and secondary characterization, my project employs feminist and cultural criticisms, narratology, and close readings of eight primary novels, thematically organized: Chapter One addresses Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1851); Chapter Two examines *The Inheritance* (1824), also by Ferrier, and Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*

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17 Hogan articulates his primary thesis as follows: “the central contention of this book is that anyone who pays attention to this body of literary data by examining it cross-culturally cannot help but be struck by the uniformity of narrative structures and of the emotions and emotion ideas that are inseparable from these structures. More exactly, there are extensive and detailed narrative universals” (2).
Chapter Three explores Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) and Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801); Chapter Four analyzes Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816) and Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). My choice of novels reflects a mix of well-known and lesser-known, as well as male- and female-authored works. Susan Ferrier holds an honored place in the discussion, as the inspiration behind the project, and as a reflection of my commitment to forgotten women writers. In its entirety, this project explores the crucial contribution of laughter to narrative meaning. It additionally highlights the potentially unstable, shifting, ambiguous nature of humor and its close alliance with paradox. Each of my dissertation chapters focuses on one specific type of humor—irony, parody, satire, and wit—in conjunction with secondary female archetypes, which fall into one of four categories: the matriarch, the old maid, the monster, and the mentor/mentee. It is my hope that this project will encourage a shift in critical focus to long-overlooked characters, while drawing attention to the beauty, importance, and communicative power of laughter.
CHAPTER 1
IRONY AND THE ROLE OF THE MATRIARCH IN MARRIAGE AND CRANFORD

In the context of the larger dissertation project—which will address four specific recurring minor characterizations, or archetypes, in novels of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—my first chapter traces the influence of The Matriarch within Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* (1818) and Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853). These works, one Romantic and one Victorian, each present fascinating images of matriarchies that are unified by a central character who is absent, and thus silent, during a large portion of the story. The similarity of shared silence points to yet another crucial connection: the novels’ strong reliance on irony.

Chapter One explores the most important of these ironies in conjunction with minor characterization, specifically that of The Matriarch. Ferrier’s and Gaskell’s narrative techniques mirror each other in at least one essential respect. Both writers center their narratives around event-shaping matriarchs who exert a powerful influence on plot, yet both also mask the true power of these same matriarchs through laughter—or rather through humorous characterization that elicits laughter from readers. Along with careful analysis of the novels themselves, their critical histories support this claim, for the figures of Lady Maclaughlan and Miss Deborah Jenkyns have been strangely overlooked.

In order to establish this disjunction between attention and importance, each segment of this chapter will offer a brief overview of the respective novel’s critical
history, and also review critical perspectives of the character to be examined. It will then seek to answer essential questions that continue to inform future chapters: 1) What function does this character fulfill within her society?, 2) How much power does she wield over her narrative and/or the narrative as a whole?, 3) How has laughter worked to mask the extent of her power?, 4) What is the significance of this character within her own plot?, and 5) What overall conclusions can be drawn from examining two such characters within different novels?

These questions are important for the reasons outlined in the dissertation introduction. Overall, this project has very specific underlying assumptions: 1) that minor characters play a more important role than critics have traditionally acknowledged, 2) that laughter performs a crucial function in narratives and is thus worthy of study, 3) that a work can be both humorous and feminist, and 4) that feminist criticism and narratology are compatible. Fueled by these presuppositions, Chapter One begins with the flamboyant figure of Lady Maclachlan, and ends with the equally distinctive Miss Deborah Jenkyns. Despite very deliberate attempts to ally humor with characterization (attempts which sometimes make Maclachlan and Jenkyns the butt of a joke), Ferrier and Gaskell offer ultimately sympathetic portrayals of these figures. My first chapter seeks an understanding of the process that leads to this end, as well as its significance and its role within the larger context of nineteenth-century studies.
**Susan Ferrier’s Forgotten Marriage**

The phrase “momentary resuscitation” describes the state of Susan Ferrier studies in the twentieth century. As part of their search for forgotten women writers, critics of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s re-discovered Ferrier’s 1818 novel *Marriage* and sought to explain why—despite its consistent popularity during the nineteenth century—the work lapsed into sudden obscurity. Three times, Mary Cullinan’s *Susan Ferrier* (1984) cites “unevenness” as one of *Marriage’s* key flaws. This seems to be the major charge against the work, along with that of heavy-handed didacticism. In “Susan Ferrier Reconsidered” (1985), Herbert Foltinek comments on this apparent failure through a comparison of Ferrier with Jane Austen: “Both endeavored to affect the moral sense and social awareness of their readers. But where the former could only intermittently escape from trite didacticism, the latter seems to rise above it without effort” (140). It is a truth universally acknowledged . . . that all nineteenth-century novels must be judged against the unerring standard set by Austen’s tightly woven plots and subtle humor. Even during her lifetime, Ferrier felt the weight of this august competitor, as acknowledged by the

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18 In 1985, Herbert Foltinek noted that “Ferrier has attracted little scholarly interest over the years,” though he also claimed that “her first and best work still enjoys a modest popularity” (131). Since the mid-1980s, however, interest in Ferrier has declined still further.
19 Wendy Craik points out that Walter Allen, Ian Watt, and Richard Church fail to even mention Ferrier. In passing, “She rates a paragraph and a quotation from Walter Allen, and from Ian Jack” (331).
20 The first line of Mary Cullinan’s “Preface” in *Susan Ferrier* (1984) states: “The works of Susan Ferrier (1782-1854) were read by large Scottish and English audiences during her lifetime and remained standard literary fare during the nineteenth century.”
21 Cullinan says of Ferrier, “Her writing is uneven, but at moments it is brilliant” (“Preface.”). Other references to “unevenness” can be found on pages 46 and 119.
22 Nancy L. Paxton provides a concise overview of this critique: “Modern critics, including Herbert Foltinek and Nelson Bushnell, are colder in their assessment of *Marriage*. They see all three of Ferrier’s novels as flawed by her didacticism” (18). Bushnell’s exact words on the novel’s structure are as follows: “The author seems to have sensed a casualness of design in this story and has made a few half-hearted attempts at coherence, introducing the Scottish volume with an English scene, returning to England in the interpolated history of Mrs. Alicia Douglas . . . , and interlarding the English volumes with news from Scotland” (225).
opening lines of her second novel *The Inheritance*, which mirror those of *Pride and Prejudice*.\(^{23}\) Her title as “the Scots Jane Austen” further links her with her rival,\(^{24}\) anticipating the prodigious shadow that would later eclipse *Marriage* altogether. Clearly no small task, the rescue of Susan Ferrier thus falls to the twenty-first century. To this end I argue for a completely different standard of value measurement in the first half of Chapter One: the Test of Character.

Nelson Bushnell’s “Susan Ferrier’s *Marriage* as a Novel of Manners” (1968) cites the alternation of Scottish and English settings as one of Ferrier’s few “half-hearted attempts at coherence” (225), a statement that coincides with structural concerns like Cullinan’s. This argument, especially its insistence upon half-heartedness, has a measure of merit for those who insist on unified setting as a locus of the balanced plot and a source of narrative coherence. From such a perspective, *Marriage* is hopelessly flawed: it opens in London, switching to Scotland in Chapter II, following Lady Juliana back to London in Chapter XXI, re-focusing on Glenfern in Volume II, and finally following the novel’s true protagonist Mary first to London and then back to Glenfern. But Bushnell himself hints at another, much more revolutionary approach to the problem of plot in Ferrier: “A more powerful and basic type of coherence is achieved by the persistence of certain types of character” (226). Surprisingly, he omits the strongest support for this statement, the figure of Lady Maclaughlan. Bushnell does record related but failed attempts at plot unification, such as the apparently random prophecy that a “branch from the Glenfern tree” will “help to prop Lochmarlie’s walls” (Ferrier 113), and the Lennox-

\(^{23}\) In addition, Loraine Fletcher insists that *Persuasion* exerted a strong influence on Ferrier (70).
\(^{24}\) Craik states half-humorously that Ferrier would have greatly benefited “if no critic had ever heard of Jane Austen” (322).
Maclaughlan feud, which he terms “a wasted opportunity to enhance coherence” (226). Nonetheless, he overlooks the fact that one unique character, rather than “manners-born characters” who “occasionally affect the course of the story” (226), weaves order from the seeming chaos of events throughout Marriage’s three volumes. Lady Maclaughlan is far more important than anyone realizes. Not only does this behind-the-scenes plotter secure her husband’s entail—by seeing it bestowed on the woman of her choice through the marriage that she machinates—but she also escapes the scrutiny of characters within the novel and all but the most discerning readers, a phenomenon with startling significance that has yet to be explored. In this oversight is found Marriage’s inescapable irony.  

To understand the remarkable, redemptive part that Lady Maclaughlan plays, one must first recall the novel’s cover story, or the ways in which the plot of Marriage initially supports the charges brought against it. As I use the term here, “cover story” refers not to subversion in the tradition of The Madwoman in the Attic, but rather to the novel’s basic storyline, which focuses attention on central protagonists rather than minor characters, who may in actuality wield a remarkable amount of power. The first chapter of Volume I introduces the Earl of Courtland and his lovely young daughter, Juliana, along with the novel’s first embedded marriage tale.  

As a notoriously tricky term, my usage of “irony” requires further explanation, a task which I will address after the following brief plot overview. Ian Jack identifies the theme of Marriage as “the harm caused by unwise marriages, prudent or imprudent, and the importance of a girl’s early upbringing in helping her to make a wise choice of a husband” (237). Cullinan shifts the focus slightly to consider the characters themselves, though she agrees about the thematic importance of marriage: “Marriage purports to be about marriage—the pages are filled with marriages of every description—but it is more accurately concerned with women who are married, women who are considering getting married, and women who have never married” (52).
her handsome Scots lover, Henry Douglas, after which they travel to his ancestral home at Glenfern Castle in Scotland. But Ferrier quickly unseats readers’ expectations to reveal that selfishness and vanity undergird Juliana’s marital choice, not love. By the end of Volume II she leaves Juliana as a discontented, penniless mother of twins who expresses more affection for her lapdogs than for her own flesh and blood. Ferrier quickly unseats readers’ expectations to reveal that selfishness and vanity undergird Juliana’s marital choice, not love. By the end of Volume II she leaves Juliana as a discontented, penniless mother of twins who expresses more affection for her lapdogs than for her own flesh and blood. 27 Juliana abandons one daughter, Mary, with her husband’s relatives in Scotland, while she and the other, Adelaide, return to England to live in luxury with Juliana’s brother, now the Earl of Courtland. Not until the first chapter of the second volume do readers officially meet the actual heroine, seventeen-year-old Mary, whom Ferrier introduces as “the neglected daughter of Lady Juliana Douglas” (157). Sensible, sweet, pious, and somewhat boring, 28 Mary journeys to England, where she proves her virtue on countless occasions in the face of her unreasonable parent. Volume III of Marriage begins in an odd place, as Ferrier drags readers along with Mary and her cousin, Lady Emily, to visit a distant relation whose quirks are meant to add humor to the story. While such flights of caricature do succeed in this goal, they appear tangential to the basic plot, which in turn provides more fodder for charges of long-winded, winding narration. 29 Ultimately, after many leisurely rambles, Ferrier ends her novel with the long-awaited love match between Mary and Colonel Lennox, whom the protagonist meets during a charitable visit to Lennox’s mother. This visit occurs due to an interference that seems entirely innocuous

27 Fletcher fittingly notes the connection between Ferrier’s didactic commentary about “the paganism of aristocratic English society” and the names of Juliana’s three dogs: Venus, Pluto, and Cupid (62).
28 Though Paxton sees Mary as an “active rather than a passive heroine” (26), she acknowledges Mary’s tendency towards conventional femininity, particularly in Mary’s relationship with her mother (26). Cullinan calls Mary “a fairly uninteresting (and sometimes irritating) model heroine” (60).
29 Foltinek acknowledges that that novel seems “rambling at times” (134), though he also states that “its structural unity is never lost sight of” (134).
at the time, but in light of later events acquires more importance. Mary receives a sacred trust from Lady Maclaughlan to bear a letter from her to Mrs. Lennox, which incident introduces Mary to her future mother-in-law. Bushnell rightly identifies Lady Maclaughlan as the instigator behind Mary’s meeting of her future husband (226), but he underestimates her overall importance as a covert center of irony and weaver of the ultimate *Marriage* plot.

I will return to the latter claim after a brief foray into the issue of irony. The choice to focus on Ferrier and irony is not the instinctive one—again, due to the impulse to contrast Ferrier’s humor with Austen’s. Critics instead remember Ferrier for her satire, and suggest that her novels lack the finesse of Austen due to their loose structure and tendency towards moralizing. A passing reference by Marshall Walker in *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (1997) pinpoints Ferrier as a satirist of Scottish-English prejudices. Douglas Gifford similarly identifies the coexistence of Ferrier’s didacticism with “vigor and hilarious social satire” (581), while Ian Jack focuses on her love of caricature and concludes, “Artistic delicacy was a quality with which Ferrier was too

30 A response to Ian Watt’s *Rise of the Novel*, Ronald Paulson’s seminal work *Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England* (1967) identifies satire as a forbearer to the novel. This perspective places it within to an older tradition, often considered to be under-developed and contrasted with Austen’s highly developed works. Critics typically associate satire with eighteenth-century writers like Smollett; this perspective has proved detrimental to Ferrier. 

31 Foltinek poses this question: “Why is it that even in her first novel lively scenes are never sustained for long, that epigrammatic reflections are always superseded by prolonged sections of insubstantial and rambling moralizing?” (140). There is some disagreement on this issue. For example, Cullinan disagrees with Paxton: “Paxton’s conclusion that Ferrier is not seriously concerned about a moral message in her writing contradicts a fundamental aspect of Ferrier’s character that takes traditional morality very seriously” (42).

32 Walker’s statement runs: “Susan Ferrier satirized prejudice in the attitudes of the Scots and the English towards each other and in the social and sexual clichés governing current views of marriage” (171).

33 Craik offers a contrary perspective on the issue of Ferrier and satire. She insists, “nor is she is any real sense a satirist. The ridiculous arouses her delight; folly, providing it is ludicrous, her mirth. She exposes and exploits them. She does not make them serve any moral end . . . . her didacticism flourishes quite apart from her humour” (323).
little concerned‖ (238). Such characterizations of Ferrier’s work prove problematic.

Even as critics categorize Ferrier as a satirist or caricaturist, they fail to define their usage of these labels, which presupposes a shared taxonomy of humor.34 Granted, this move is not entirely without merit: in the case of satire, readers typically assume an overt form of humor—often set in opposition to irony, which is considered less corporeal and thus more subtle. Yet such definitional omissions prompt a specific series of consequences: they encourage readers to dismiss the presence of irony in Ferrier, overlook the interaction of irony with satire, and underestimate the true importance of minor characters, in this case the figure of Lady Maclaughlan. The terms “satire” and “irony” are notoriously slippery and overdetermined.35 However, the *Oxford English Dictionary* offers a helpful starting point of differentiation between the two, which I will develop further within my discussion of *Marriage* itself. Whereas the majority of *OED* entries pair satire with the overt ridiculing of vices and follies, its definitions of irony highlight incongruity and contradiction. Satire very often acts in a heavy-handed fashion, employing mockery for didactic aims; in order for it to be truly successful as a deterrent, there must be distance between an audience and the target of the satire. George Meredith explains this distancing effect in the following manner: “If you detect the ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire” (42). The word “chilled” in this explanation captures the sort of emotional withdrawal that satire prompts, where a reader disengages from the target of satiric ridicule. Irony, as

34 Francis Russell Hart makes an excellent observation about Ferrier criticism in this respect: “Critics commonly speak of Ferrier as a caricaturist, without indicating how caricature is to be identified or judged” (60). He points out that caricature is an important aspect of her “fictional method” (60).

35 Wayne Booth’s “Preface” to *A Rhetoric of Irony* acknowledges the lack of definitional consensus among critics.
suggested, tends to act in a more subtle fashion in its engagement of the mind through pushing readers to grapple with a text and acknowledge its various interwoven contrasts. To illustrate his explanations further, Meredith immediately contrasts the above description of satire with irony, stating: “If, instead of falling foul of the ridiculous person with a satiric rod, to make him writhe and shriek aloud, you prefer to sting him under a semi-caress, by which he shall in his anguish be rendered dubious whether indeed anything has hurt him, you are an engine of Irony” (42). In this explanation the word “anguish” comes across as hyperbolic, since irony may or may not employ ridicule as an attack; nonetheless, the word “dubious” highlights my earlier point about irony’s association with contradiction, as a more indirect form of humor which requires a higher level of discrimination to distinguish various levels of embedded messages in texts.

In the case of Marriage, Ferrier merges the two, using satire to mask an underlying and pervasive irony which points to messages that tend to be overlooked. Prior to examining the author’s deployment of irony in the text, along with its relationship to Lady Maclaughlan’s positioning within Marriage, it proves helpful to first consider the roles assigned to this character by critics. Views range from the notion that Maclaughlan is “a covert attack on conventional ideas of femininity” (Anderson and Riddell 191), to “a manners-born character” who briefly influences the storyline (Bushnell 226), to a flat and lifeless “hypochondriac” figure (Paxton 22), or a rude “rural bluestocking” with despotic tendencies (Hart 58, 60). Despite the clear disparity in viewpoint, some consensus does exist—for example, that this character contributes a unique, Ferrieresque humor to the novel, and that she is one of the author’s most
memorable personalities.\textsuperscript{36} When Cullinan writes of \textit{Marriage}’s earthy vitality,\textsuperscript{37} she might well have had Lady Maclaughlan in mind, for this one figure serves as the life and soul of the novel. And this is the central irony-rife contradiction in \textit{Marriage}: without Lady Maclaughlan, there would be little plot and no resolution, yet critics write her off as a rough caricature that provides comic relief from Ferrier’s moments of moralizing.

Of all perspectives on this figure, Herbert Foltinek’s draws closest to the truth when he identifies Lady Maclaughlan as a “tutelary figure” (141), or secret mentor to central protagonist Mary. Foltinek thus inserts Maclaughlan into the fairy-tale tradition; she serves as guide to “the Cinderella-like heroine” and foe to “the evil fairy,” Mary’s mother Lady Juliana (141). His approach has validity in light of Bushnell’s comment, noted earlier, which identifies Lady Maclaughlan as the impetus behind Mary’s meeting with her future husband (226). However, it stops far short of considering the consistent, event-shaping agency that Maclaughlan exercises throughout the novel, as well as her function as a truth teller. To this—the central argument about \textit{Marriage}—I now turn.

Fittingly, my discussion begins with Ferrier’s own introduction to her character. In the midst of its humorous treatment of the husband domination theme, this scene perfectly illustrates the subtlety of Ferrier’s irony—and its relationship with satire—which in turn forecasts the masterful method in which Lady Maclaughlan remains both before \textit{and} behind the scenes, while shaping the primary marriage plot from within.

\textsuperscript{36} Craik writes of Ferrier, “Her general claims, not only to fame, but to being read a century and a half after she wrote, rest upon the very little historical sense needed to relish her, because she writes best about characters—and eccentric ones at that—and because she is at her best in the comic sides of a novelist’s business” (322).

\textsuperscript{37} Cullinan offers Ferrier high praise after acknowledging \textit{Marriage}’s unevenness: “But \textit{Marriage} possesses a vitality, an earthiness, and a sense of humor ranging form the madcap to the cruelly satiric that are unsurpassed by any British woman novelist before her” (46).
“Bring him in—bring him in, Philistine! I always call my man Philistine, because he has Sampson in his hands” (Ferrier 43). These words mark the first distinct impression of Lady Maclaughlan in Marriage. Prior to Maclaughlan’s grand entrance at Glenfern, the name of this “exemplary, virtuous woman” has surfaced numerous times in the story (31), yet the initial encounter still proves surprising. Ferrier describes her character’s imperative tones as “loud, but slow and well modulated” (43), a fitting delineation of the woman behind the narrative; though the vocal volume distracts, other characteristics suggest that there is much more to Maclaughlan than meets the eye. In this description, even the words “slow” and “well modulated” communicate a deliberateness that belies initial misimpressions of carelessness. Lady Maclaughlan’s humorous flamboyance advertises a powerful presence. It also masks an equally astounding, event-shaping agency that influences the outcome of the novel’s marriage plot, which culminates in the memorable words of Maclaughlan to her chosen protagonist: “You are going to be married to Charles Lennox. I’m glad of it. I wished you to marry him” (463). In speaking this words, Maclaughlan not only makes a direct statement of fact, but also indirectly points to her own power and positioning as one who brings the marriage to pass.

When Maclaughlan first arrives at Glenfern, her “loud, authoritative” accents and flamboyant attire make her laughable (44), almost a caricature. The very fact that she first appears in this hyperbolic, strongly exaggerated fashion in fact hints at her importance. If caricature is indeed a weapon to be used against authority figures, as

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38 Approximately 12 direct references to Lady Maclaughlan occur prior to her memorable appearance at Glenfern on page 43. One of the Glenfern aunts, Miss Jacky, refers to Maclaughlan as a “virtuous woman” (30), and also states that her character “is far above the reach of calumny” (31).
Sigmund Freud suggests, then the text itself reaffirms Maclaughlan’s potential to power. Humor reinforces her status as a minor figure, even as it detracts attention from two key aspects of her characterization: her domination of Sir Sampson and her domination of the plot, intertwined actions that mirror one another. The sort of misdirection in this first scene epitomizes a major narrative technique that Ferrier utilizes throughout the novel. Lady Maclaughlan’s allusion to Philistine and Sampson, quoted above, reveals a colorful, boisterous personality that entertains while it distracts from the unusual relationship between Maclaughlan and her spouse, Sir Sampson. What is the story of Samson without Delilah the *femme fatale*? A powerful Delilah figure with dangerous potential, Lady Maclaughlan exercises extreme control over Sir Sampson, even over his very life, for she oversees his medical needs. As she herself puts it, “he must take what I give him” (47). The power of choice, so often relegated to the male domain in nineteenth-century society, is thus appropriated by a woman. From the time of her arrival onward, Lady Maclaughlan absorbs readers’ attention. The focus rests on her garb and her comments, yet she exudes a strong, steady sense of agency as she orders people about and determines the every movement of her husband. Simultaneously, the glitz and glamour that surrounds the more bodily, satiric aspects of Ferrier’s humor—her descriptions of Maclaughlan’s clothing, for instance—tend to distract from more subtle, ironic aspects of the text, as this first scene indicates, and as I will further clarify below.

After telling a servant to bring Sir Sampson in, Lady Maclaughlan decides where he will be seated, a position which the narrator contrasts with her standing posture.

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39 *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* notes the link between caricature and exaggeration (324). Freud also associates caricature with parody and travesty, links it with degradation, and identifies it as a weapon used against those in authority (322).
Maclaughlan responds to her hosts’ invitations with short, powerful statements that emphasize the word “I”: “‘I choose to stand—I don’t like to sit—I never sit at home—Do I, Sir Sampson?’ turning to the little warrior, who, having been seized with a violent fit of coughing on his entrance, had now sunk back, seemingly quite exhausted, while the Philistine was endeavouring to disencumber him of his military accoutrements” (43).

This merging of dialogue and narration shows the delicate balance that the author strikes between a subversive irony—in this case, a reversal of gender roles—and a more satiric reinforcement of the status quo, which pokes fun at Lady Maclaughlan, thereby dismissing her as an eccentric. As the more overt form of humor, satiric description here prompts indiscriminate laughter, poking fun at both Maclaughlan and her husband, while turning conscious focus away from the iconoclastic implications of the former’s words. Lady Maclaughlan determines to stand, just as she controls her husband’s physical body. In contrast to the angelic and stationary domestic woman, Maclaughlan also chooses mobility; her friendship with the aunts of Glenfern prompts a visit, and she decides both mode of arrival and time of departure.

Although descriptions and dialog highlight the contrast between Lady Maclaughlan’s agency and her husband’s weakness, Ferrier undermines this message with yet another level of irony. As indicated previously, the term “irony” has long been a source of frustration, and there is widespread disagreement over its definition. Wayne Booth fittingly calls irony “the mother of confusions” and states: “There is no agreement among critics about what irony is, and many would hold to the romantic claim . . . that its

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40 Once again, I here acknowledge the traditional usage of “satire”; this term will be further defined and clarified below.
very spirit and value are violated by the effort to be clear about it” (ix). In his seminal work on irony, Booth identifies a rejection of the literal, or apparent meaning as the first step in the reconstruction of stable ironies (10), a move which connects with the OED’s emphasis on incongruity, contradiction, and contrast. An analysis of Marriage’s initial husband-bullying scene suggests that the rejection described by Booth occurs due to the discerning reader’s acknowledgment of incongruous, contradicting, or contrasting impulses at work within the text. At the moment described above, the narrator emphasizes the word “Philistine,” which underscores a disjunction between the perspectives of character and narrator, and moves readers away from direct identification with Lady Maclaughlan, due to the idiosyncratic nature of Maclaughlan’s sense of humor. One brief use of narrative italics thus diverts readers from looking through the eyes of Lady Maclaughlan, to looking at the entire scene and the character herself from the outside. One recorded and clearly eccentric statement enables the narrator to build a more distant platform from which the authorial audience can view the situation. This lengthening of distance links once again with the initial, overt satire of the scene, which apparently reifies the status quo: Lady Maclaughlan again becomes an odd and overbearing woman with a quirky sense of humor that the author does not completely endorse. In short, Ferrier’s commentary on her character’s oddities diverts the focus to overt satire, and away from the implications of ironic, reversal-rife undertones. This tactic may avert attention for the time being, but it does not obliterate the implications of

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41 Stable ironies are those that are “fixed, in the sense that once a reconstruction of meaning has been made, the reader is not then invited to undermine it with further demolitions and reconstructions” (Booth 6).
Ferrier’s irony, which points to other potential meanings and hints at the possibility of lurking instability, or the potential to create further alternative meanings.

The novel’s introduction to Lady Maclaughlan shows Ferrier’s tendency to merge satire and irony, using the former to mask implications of the latter. In such instances, satire that should reinforce traditional patriarchal values by making fun is undercut by irony. Other aspects of Ferrier’s descriptive narrative, such as her martial imagery, illustrate this delicate relationship between ironic disruption and satiric re-establishment. For example, the reference to the “little warrior” in his “military accoutrements” draws a parallel between Sir Sampson and the diminutive Napoleon Bonaparte. Ferrier’s Bonaparte has his Josephine as well, but she proves the more dominant of the two. To a certain extent, the author is utilizing existing stereotypes of the shrewish wife, but her technique does not ultimately condone them or affirm their truth. Instead, they simply serve as an avenue whereby Ferrier may explore other, alternative roles for women. Her embedded reversal of dominant stereotypes, by incorporating a stock character that proves to be highly developed and wield a great deal of power, also has the potential to upset traditional gender roles. Ferrier accentuates the husband-wife disparity still further by naming her character “Sir Sampson,” a paradoxical artistic choice that leads Carol Anderson and Aileen M. Riddell to describe him as “a shrunken parody of the Highland warriors of Jane Porter or Scott, or the dashing heroes of Joanna Baillie or Byron” (191). Ferrier uses innumerable such details to contrast the actual physical and mental weakness of this character with his wife’s strength. At various points throughout *Marriage*, the author recalls this initial encounter with Lady Maclaughlan—and with it, the contrast between male weakness and female power—through a continuance of martial imagery.
In this initial case, the imagery belittles the unwarlike Sir Sampson and foregrounds his truly intimidating wife. In later instances, martial references resurface to prompt laughter, but also to reaffirm the strength and cunning of the ultimate strategian: Lady Maclaughlan.

Ferrier’s introduction to Lady Maclaughlan offers a prime example of the interaction of satire and irony in *Marriage*. It also pushes the discerning reader to look more closely at this particular figure, which impulse the novel repays in full. A proper understanding of Maclaughlan’s role in the narrative reveals her to be the strongest unifying force behind the story, and her character bears direct responsibility for its successful resolution. This is perhaps the deepest, most pervasive irony of the whole novel. At first glance, Maclaughlan appears to be a minor character, but a closer look forces a revaluation of her importance and corresponding exposure of the novel’s central irony. The women of Glenfern—ridiculous though they may be—sense Maclaughlan’s matriarchal power, acknowledging her leadership in all things; none dare contradict her, even regarding the day of the week. For example, though Lady Maclaughlan’s letter to Miss Grizzy clearly invites the family to visit on Tuesday, the former insists: “Even if it had been written Tuesday, you might have had the sense to know it meant Thursday. When did you know me to invite any body for a Tuesday?” (106). Conceding Lady Maclaughlan’s position of absolute authority, Grizzy responds, “I declare it’s very true; I certainly ought to have known better. I am quite confounded at my own stupidity; for, as you observe, even though you had said Tuesday, I might have known that you must have
meant Thursday” (106). A key indicator of minorness according to Alex Woloch,\textsuperscript{42} this repetition of Lady Maclaughlan’s words emphasizes her important status, while also placing Grizzy in a subordinate role. In such instances, a shift in focus from the heroine to a purportedly “minor” character like Maclaughlan enables readers to see an embedded hierarchy within the novel. The subordination of other characters to Maclaughlan points to her importance within the Glenfern society and suggests that she wields more power than one might initially assume from her laughter-evoking appearance and personal characteristics.

In fact, Maclaughlan may be the only reason that Grizzly features in the story at all. The narrator says of her, “she was merely distinguishable from nothing by her simple good nature, the inextricable entanglement of her thoughts, her love of letter writing, and her friendship with Lady Maclaughlan” (41). Grizzly’s relationship with the novel’s matriarch clearly adds to her status within the text, ensuring that she does not suffer the fate of so many other minor characters, who simply drop out of the narrative altogether. Her primary function within the novel’s first volume is to wish (repeatedly) that Lady Maclaughlan were present: actually, she is the first to reference this character and continues to foreshadow her friend’s coming, raising readers’ anticipation of this event. Miss Grizzy is still present to provide comic relief in the third volume, but only at the behest of Maclaughlan, who permits her friend to accompany her to England: “Sir Sampson and Grizzy were so much upon a par in intellect, that they were reciprocally happy in each other. This the strong sense of Lady Maclaughlan had long perceived, and

\textsuperscript{42} The One Verses the Many identifies repetition as “the horizon and boundary of Dickensian minorness” (167). Woloch notes that minor characters tend to repeat themselves both within a scene and on a later occasion(s).
was the principal reason of her selecting so weak a woman as her companion” (373). This moment of clarification once again locates Grizzy’s sole importance in relation to Lady Maclaughlan, while also touting the latter’s intellect and sense. The final seal of authorial approval is granted to Maclaughlan with the acknowledgment that, “in justice to her Ladyship’s heart, as well as head” (373), she possesses a strong sense of partiality for her friend.

At Glenfern, the matriarchal authority of Lady Maclaughlan is unquestioned, and her opinions reign supreme on all matters—from expected longevity, to cleverness in offspring, to diseases (62; 163; 180). Even Miss Grizzy, considered to be her close friend, fears to disagree with her (50),\(^\text{43}\) since the code of the Maclaughlanites consists in idolizing their acknowledged leader.\(^\text{44}\) If *Marriage* presents a sort of matriarchal society where only women play prominent roles, then Lady Maclaughlan is head matriarch, a view reinforced by the “loud authoritative tone” and “stern imperious manner” she perpetually adopts (44; 45). As the eldest of the three Glenfern aunts (39), Miss Jacky leads in Lady Maclaughlan’s absence, but she quickly abdicates her role to serve as one of Maclaughlan’s “handmaidens” when the opportunity arises (48). Her emotional encomium prior to the anticipated arrival shows Maclaughlan’s sway over the Glenfern coterie: “Lady Maclaughlan’s character, luckily, is far above the reach of calumny . . . . a woman of family—of fortune—of talents—of accomplishments!—a woman of

\(^\text{43}\) Maclaughlan sternly reprimands the Misses Douglas, who appear in disarray at dinner time after riding and running races, which places Grizzy in a dilemma: “Miss Grizzy was in the utmost perplexity, between her inclination to urge something in extenuation for the poor girls, and her fear of dissenting from Lady Maclaughlan, or rather of not immediately agreeing with her” (50).

\(^\text{44}\) Towards the end of the novel, the narrator identifies Grizzy as a “Maclaughlanite” (464), and earlier states of the Glenfern aunts: “Their moral virtues were much upon the same scale; to knit stockings, scold servants, cement china, trim bonnets, lecture the poor, and look up to Lady Maclaughlan comprised nearly their whole code” (160).
unblemished reputation!—of the strictest morals! sweetest temper! Charming heart! Delightful spirits! So charitable! Every year gives fifty flannel petticoats to the old people of the parish—”” (31). The series of exclamation points in this utterance highlights their hyperbole, showing them to be satirical in nature, but they also uncover a co-existing irony that showcases the extent of Maclaughlan’s influence. In terms of personal qualities, Maclaughlan’s typical bluntness again places her in the role of truthteller, permitting the narrator to relay situational facts very directly, as when the character says to Lady Juliana, “Your mother was an heiress, your father married her for her money, and she married him to be a Countess, and so that’s the history of their marriage—humph” (44). This alignment of the perspectives of narrator and character could be considered authorial sanction for the statement, and also the character. Yet here as elsewhere, Ferrier uses laughter to excuse a straightforwardness normally attributed to lack of decorum. Her narrator soon undermines the previous endorsement of Maclaughlan with a wink at the audience, terming the character’s words a “well-bred harangue” (44). Ferrier thus overcomes objections while also commenting on the mercenary nature of the marriage market.

As for her interaction with men other than her husband, even the Laird of Glenfern admits that, “though she is a little free in the gab,” “Leddy Maclaughlan is a very decent woman” (32). The laird’s nephew Major Douglas may call her an “insufferable pest” (30), but Maclaughlan’s power at Glenfern far outshines his, another example of the close interaction of satirical description with underlying ironies. His best

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45 B.G. MacCarthy describes her as “the terrific Lady MacLoughlin who speaks unvarnished truths and strides rough-shod over all mealy-mouthed efforts at politeness” (458), thereafter identifying this very scene as an exemplar of the tendency.
recourse is to attempt a retreat from Glenfern, which the laird overrules with a request that he remain and treat the Maclaughlans “discreetly” (32), a distinctly laughable statement in light of Lady Maclaughlan’s tendency towards indiscretion. Through Major Douglas and others, Ferrier’s narrator reveals the author’s awareness of the potentially negative responses from her readers that her satire elicits. Nonetheless, the narrator reinforces the worth and credibility of Lady Maclaughlan by saying, “in spite of her ridiculous dress and eccentric manners, an air of dignity was diffused over her whole person, that screened her form the ridicule to which she must otherwise have been exposed” (45). This statement models the response that Ferrier expects from her audience. The author tinges most of her work’s messages with humor, not even excluding Lady Maclaughlan from her biting satire, but her characterizations of this figure still demand respect. This leads readers to credit Maclaughlan’s disdain with some merit—even when she evidences disapproval only by an emphatic “humph.” Similarly, while Lady Maclaughlan’s dress elicits laughter, outward accoutrements cannot outweigh the evidence provided by her physiognomy. Her facial features are “finely formed, marked, and expressive” (45), which indicate both sense and sensitivity—crucial attributes of a nineteenth-century heroine. The narrator admits that Maclaughlan is not prone to betrayals of feeling (45), but she too feels grief on the occasion of the laird’s death and seeks to ameliorate the sorrows of her friends (170).

Even more importantly, Lady Maclaughlan’s control extends beyond the Glenfern matriarchy; a powerful force behind the plot, she proves instrumental in Marriage’s resolution. This protracts her influence from the fate of the characters themselves, to the
fate of Ferrier’s audience. Though some men—most notably Scott⁴⁶—did read women-authored novels, these works had an even stronger following of women (Agress 16): “Indeed, to many female readers the novel provided all the information on how a woman should conduct her life” (17). Thus, in determining the novel’s outcome, Lady Maclaughlan expands her authority from the sphere of Glenfern to the sphere of Ferrier’s readership, establishing quite another sort of matriarchy. If marriage is seen as the ultimate reward in nineteenth-century society and in the novel of manners, and if Lady Maclaughlan confers that reward, then she again assumes a position of authority to determine acceptable behavioral patterns—a revolutionary prospect in Ferrier’s time.

In retrospect, the first subtle indication of Lady Maclaughlan’s contribution to the novel’s resolution appears shortly after her introduction at Glenfern. Miss Grizzy says to her nephew, “Henry, I assure you, Lady Maclaughlan takes the greatest interest in every thing that concerns Lady Juliana and you” (47), an interest that presumably extends to Mary at her birth.⁴⁷ In the second volume, Grizzy makes a similar statement of Maclaughlan: “she has such a regard for our family, she would go any lengths for us” (165). Though a hint of narrative humor often accompanies Grizzy’s words, Lady Maclaughlan’s later actions (as writer of the letter that introduces Mary to her future mother-in-law) invest this statement with strong importance. Immediately after Grizzy’s

⁴⁶ In his introduction to St. Ronan’s Well, Scott alluded directly to Ferrier’s work: “The ladies, in particular, gifted by nature with keen powers of observation and light satire, have been so distinguished by these works of talent, that, reckoning from the authoress of Evelina to her of Marriage, a catalogue might be made, including the brilliant and talented names of Edgeworth, Austin, Charlotte Smith, and others whose success seems to have appropriated this province of the novel as exclusively their own” (5).

⁴⁷ Of Mary, “Lady Maclaughlan pronounced (and that was next to a special revelation) that the girl would be handsome when she was forty, not a day sooner; and she would be clever, for her mother was a fool” (163).
above declaration to Henry, Maclaughlan directs the following tirade at him: “So your wife fell in love with you, it seems; well, the more fool she, I never knew any good come of love marriages” (47). This seemingly anti-romantic statement actually communicates Maclaughlan’s willingness to meddle in others’ affairs, and even serve as matchmaker when an opportunity presents itself—which she does when Mary leaves for England. The novel does not cite Lady Maclaughlan as the direct impetus behind the departure, but she does reflect positively on the quality of English air, also remarking on the “great many dissipated young men in England” (182), comments that contain noteworthy implications. First, readers understand the power borne by Lady Maclaughlan’s opinions at this point; her views carry considerable weight with the Glenfern inhabitants, so she likely influenced their decision to send Mary away. Secondly, her statement about England’s young men could indicate anxiety if she already considers Mary a possible match for Colonel Lennox. Though these proofs initially seem tenuous, hints regarding Lady Maclaughlan’s machinations gather strength as the plot progresses.

Perhaps loath to place an outspoken, non-stereotypical female character overtly in such a dominant role, Ferrier insinuates Lady Maclaughlan gradually into a position of power. When she first introduces Maclaughlan, the description is laughable:

Out of this equipage issued a figure, clothed in a light coloured, large flowered chintz raiment, carefully drawn through the pocket holes, either for its own preservation or the more disinterested purpose of displaying a dark short stuff petticoat, which, with the same liberality, afforded ample scope for the survey of a pair of worsted stockings and black leather shoes, something resembling buckets. A faded red cloth jacket, which bore evident marks of having been severed from
its native skirts, now acted in the capacity of a spencer. On the head rose a stupendous fabric, in the form of a cap, on the summit of which was placed a black beaver hat, tied *a la poissarde*. A small black satin muff in one hand, and a gold-headed walking-stick in the other, completed the dress and decoration of this personage (42-43).

Ferrier pours large quantities of creative energy into this portrait and her later description of Lady Maclaughlan’s dinner garb, which proves equally laughable. In this excerpt, however, the author taps into a common device, which Henri Bergson explains in his essay *Laughter*. Bergson first acknowledges the ease with which clothing becomes ridiculous, then asks readers to imagine an “eccentric individual” dressed in outdated fashion. This, he explains, draws attention away from the individual to the clothing, which in turn bring “the laughable aspect of fashion . . . out of the shadow into the light” (85). Ferrier’s reference to the faded red spencer is an example of this technique. Though spencers were not uncommon throughout the 19th century, Lady Maclaughlan’s clearly recycled jacket suggests outdatedness, which is accentuated by the unusual pairings in her overall ensemble. A simple, seemingly straightforward description of garb points once again to the close relationship between satire and irony within *Marriage*. The unfashionable dress of Lady Maclaughlan places her at the center of ridicule, but it also

48 The description reads: “The masculine habiliments of the morning had been exchanged for a more feminine costume. She was now arrayed in a pompadour satin negligee, and petticoat trimmed with Brussels lace. A high starched handkerchief formed a complete breastwork, on which, amid a large bouquet of truly artificial roses, reposed a miniature of Sir Sampson, *a la militaire*. A small fly cap of antique lace was scarcely perceptible on the summit of a stupendous frizzled toupee, hemmed in on each side by large curls. The muff and stick had been relinquished by a large fan, something resembling an Indian screen, which she waved to and fro in one hand, while a vast brocaded work-bag was suspended from the other” (49). Ferrier’s insistence on the less masculine appearance of Maclaughlan’s garb is undermined by descriptions of the “complete breastwork” and military miniature; once again, the martial imagery is unmistakable.
strikes at the supposed universality of social convention, additionally juxtaposing the
notion of Maclaughlan’s outdatedness with her actual influence over individuals’ lives
and the overall narrative.

Continual elicitation of laughter contribute to Lady Maclaughlan’s disguise as a
minor character, masking her true prominence in the novel. As indicated earlier, her
power over her husband might be considered unacceptable, were either character less
ridiculous. At one point Grizzy inquires into Sir Sampson’s medical options, wondering
what he “could take.” At this juncture Lady Maclaughlan responds, “Could take? I don’t
know what you mean by could take. He couldn’t take the moon, if you mean that” (46).
As the laird snidely comments of her medicinal remedies for Sir Sampson: “She’s doing
all she can to send him there [the grave], as she has done many a poor wretch already,
with her infernal compositions” (31). This symbolically attributes to Lady Maclaughlan
an almost supernatural power over life and death, an idea reinforced by the otherworldly
description of her with the smoking cauldron—actually described as an “enormous
kettle,” during the surprise visit from Glenfern (105). Twice in the novel, Maclaughlan
asks the Glenfern ladies, “Do you know yourselves?” (105; 109), instances of verbal
irony that reiterate an authoritative role reminiscent of the three witches in Macbeth.49
Like the idea of the shrewish wife that Ferrier taps into when introducing Maclaughlan,
the association between this character and the witch figure utilizes misogynistic
stereotypes for its own ends. On the surface it seemingly undermines Maclaughlan’s
dignity, but her words work against her appearance in their insistence upon truth. In
calling the women to self-knowledge and self-examination, Maclaughlan again reiterates

49 Ferrier alludes to Macbeth directly in the third chapter of volume two (168).
her claim to truth and her insistence upon its value; just as she speaks direct truths to others, so also does she protect what she sees to be truth through her actions, specifically the shielding of her husband’s entail and the rights of Colonel Lennox, the future spouse of the novel’s true protagonist.

Whether or not Lady Maclaughlan exercises her power over Sir Sampson to end his life is uncertain. However, in conjunction with other events in the novel, Sir Sampson’s death immediately after Mary’s wedding seems odd. The narrator exclaims, “when the marriage ceremony was scarcely over, arrived the accounts of the death of Sir Sampson Maclaughlan!” (467). Mary’s union with Colonel Lennox solidifies Lady Maclaughlan’s security, due to the lady’s relationship with her, for Colonel Lennox inherits Sir Sampson’s property—a circumstance Lady Maclaughlan carefully ensured. Able to manipulate Sir Sampson in every respect, Lady Maclaughlan “contrived to prevent him from ever executing a new entail. She had known and esteemed both General and Mrs. Lennox before her marriage with Sir Sampson, and she was too firm and decided in her predilections ever to abandon them; and, while she had the credit of sharing in all her husband’s animosity, she was silently protecting the lawful rights of those who had long ceased to consider them as such” (462). Lady Maclaughlan’s “silent protection” stands in stark contrast to the outspoken nature that Ferrier presents throughout the novel, but connects with momentary “discrepancies” in characterization, which serve as embedded clues in the narrative. Descriptions of Maclaughlan’s voice and physiognomy, referenced earlier, suggest depth and insight that other, more flamboyant depictions suppress.
Protecting the Lennoxes clearly works to Maclaughlan’s own benefit—based on the benevolence of the couple, mentioned at the novel’s end, and her connection with the protagonist. As Grizzy points out, Maclaughlan had always favored Mary (468). Grizzy follows this conclusion with the unwitting remark to Mary: “Not but what I must always think that you had a hand in dear Sir Sampson’s death. Indeed, I have no doubt of it” (468). On the surface, Grizzy refers to Sir Sampson’s decline when he learns of Mary’s attachment to his enemy, but her comments have other implications. Sir Sampson’s death frees Lady Maclaughlan of her sickly, peevish charge, and its timing ensures that she will never want, since her protégé is now the lady of the house. Previous events in the novel complicate this issue still further, arousing the suspicion that Lady Maclaughlan masterminded the marriage of Mary with Colonel Lennox. Grizzy issues an enigmatic statement to Mary during her visit to London: “to tell you a secret, Lady Maclaughlan has a husband in her eye for you—We, none of us, can conceive who it is, but, of course, he must be suitable in every respect” (192). No other reference to this mysterious suitor surfaces during the novel, leaving readers to wonder the purpose of such an interjection in the plot. Also, Lady Maclaughlan’s refusal to reveal the prospect’s identity raises the question of whether she considered Colonel Lennox a possibility, but avoids antagonizing her husband by mentioning his name. This silence forms a glaring contrast to her usual outspokenness about most matters, as well as her utter disregard for patriarchal-based decorum. Instead she quietly sows the seeds out of which grow the desired outcome; she gives Mary a letter for Mrs. Lennox, “with the strict injunction to be the bearer of it herself” (262). Aware of Mary’s compassionate nature, Lady Maclaughlan must realize the probable outcome of her interaction with Mrs. Lennox, who is blind and destitute.
She must also know of Mrs. Lennox’s strong attachment to her only remaining son, whom she would naturally mention, thus arousing Mary’s admiration of his character.

When Grizzy arrives in London, Mary receives a letter from her, in which is indicated Lady Maclaughlan’s awareness of the consequences attending Sir Sampson’s failing health: “she is not at all Sure how long Sir Sampson may live” (368), writes Grizzy. A woman such as Lady Maclaughlan—particularly one who had been through two prior marriages—must have given thought to her plight upon her husband’s death. The narrator indicates Lady Maclaughlan’s awareness of the specifics behind Sir Sampson’s entail, as mentioned earlier. Were she truly contemplating a match between Colonel Lennox and Mary to ensure her position, Maclaughlan would have desired to speed events along, which might account for her London trip, and also her encouraging Mary to think on matrimonial matters. Speaking of Bella’s and Betsy’s marriages, Grizzy says in the same letter: “in case it has not reached you, Lady Maclaughlan is of opinion that the Sooner you are made Acquainted with it the Better, especially as there is no doubt of it” (368-369). Once again, these indications seem tentative bases on which to build an argument, but they gain strength in conjunction with later events. Toward the novel’s end, Mary turns to Lady Maclaughlan to explain the enigmatic family feud between the Maclaughlans and Lennoxes, for she recalls that Lady Maclaughlan precipitated her introduction to Mrs. Lennox (459). During their conversation, Lady Maclaughlan says, “I know all. You are going to be married to Charles Lennox. I’m glad of it. I wished you to marry him” (463). How long Lady Maclaughlan had desired this, readers do not know, but her statements open the matter to speculation.

Maclaughlan’s comments at this point seem somewhat disparaging, but the narrator
offers insight into the true state of matters: “Mary was too well accustomed to Lady Maclaughlan’s style, not to comprehend that her marriage with Colonel Lennox was an event she had long wished for, and now most warmly sanctioned” (463). The word “long” proves suspect, again prompting inquiry on Maclaughlan’s interference in the chain of events. That Maclaughlan approves of the match between Mary and Lennox is beyond doubt. Even Grizzy sees this finally, and when “convinced of Lady Maclaughlan’s approbation of her niece’s marriage, she could think and talk of nothing else” (464).

Though Lady Maclaughlan adopts a number of roles in this novel—the matriarch of Glenfern; the Macbeth-like, cauldron-stirring witch of Lochmarlie; the widow of three husbands; and the shaper of plots—one fact remains certain: she holds power and influence greater than that of the male characters.50 Also, her positioning at the novel’s end leads readers to question matrimony as a reinforcement of patriarchal values. 

*Marriage* does end with the happy union of Colonel Lennox and Mary, but this utopian veneer only partially obscures a very different story. A new life begins for Lady Maclaughlan not when she marries, but when her husband dies. Careful textual analysis uncovers her contribution to the circumstances of her new life; she chooses the recipients of her husband’s wealth, while ensuring her own position in the process. Though Mary does gain the fairy-tale ending, Lady Maclaughlan herself undermines Mary’s high expectations. She follows her admission, “I wished you to marry him” with the words: “Whether you’ll thank me for that twenty years hence, I can’t tell—you can’t tell—*he*

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50 In Volume II, when discussing the aunts of Glenfern, Ferrier admits that there are “creatures of the same sort in the male part of the creation,” but says, “it is foreign to my purpose to describe them at present” (176).
Maclaughlan’s statement drips with a skepticism undergirded by her experience of multiple marriages. Her positioning within the novel, as well as the positioning of others within the matriarchy, raises questions about the societal institution of marriage itself. The Glenfern spinsters, though unmarried, still seem perfectly happy, perhaps even more contented than the novel’s other characters (Cullinan 53); this contributes to a highly sympathetic characterization, an issue which will be discussed further in my analysis of Cranford. While they are admittedly comic, readers do not find Glenfern’s old maids to be “ hungrily and hopelessly swarming around bachelor heroes,” unlike many spinster types in typical Victorian novels (Auerbach 109). Also, the character of Emily offers satirical comment upon those who have “succumbed to the manners of the day” (Cullinan 62), a sentiment reminiscent of Woolf’s discussion of “the spirit of the age” in Orlando, which might be described as “the code of an era, the way womanhood was being ‘written’ at the time” (Little 179). Such references acknowledge the artificiality of societal conventions, both their transience and their separateness from an objective or metaphysical standard of truth.

Undoubtedly, Susan Ferrier’s Marriage adds much to the study of nineteenth-century literature and feminist studies. Lloyd Brown alludes to the trend of treating the novel’s feminist tendencies as “a coherent body of opinions held by the novelist on the identity and social functions of women” (322). He later emphasizes, speaking specifically of Jane Austen, that “we need not begin with the assumption that we must establish complete parallels with the facets of the twentieth-century feminists’ revolt” (324). Though Austen and Ferrier belong to an earlier century, this excludes neither of
them from relevance to the current one. To add to Vivian Folkenflik’s conclusion, not only would it “be the ultimate irony if feminists today were to censure rather than value them” (242), but it would perpetuate those very injustices that first-wave feminist Lynne Agress disclaims. As she points out, “There were actually hundreds of women writing and publishing during the period from 1780 to 1825, yet very little has been said about them or their work, or about the insights that they provided into the condition of woman at the time” (15). *Marriage* contains powerful subtleties of plot and characterization that support this view. Prior to the twenty-first century, such aspects of this work have been largely ignored, perhaps in part due to their hidden nature. Fortunately, this trend has long been experiencing a reversal: “Because so many of the lost or concealed truths of female culture have recently been retrieved by feminist scholars, women readers in particular have lately become aware that nineteenth-century literary women felt they had things to hide. Many feminist critics, therefore, have begun to write about these phenomena of evasion and concealment in women’s writing” (Gilbert and Gubar 75). Such critics, however, have avoided dealing with the ways in which humor contributes to both concealing and revealing specific, often empowering messages. Ferrier contributes to this discussion through her use of irony to envision a strong matriarch and corresponding matriarchal society in the midst of a patriarchal system. Just as Austen’s novels show awareness of fiction’s rhetorical influence, so does Ferrier’s *Marriage* reflect a self-conscious sense of its power and the power of its readership. Lady Maclaughlan shapes the novel’s plot from within, inviting readers to follow her example.

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51 In context, Gilbert and Gubar refer specifically to *Love and Friendship*, which they say “displays Austen’s concern with the rhetorical effects of fiction” (118).
with their own life’s story. When the focus shifts from the central protagonist to the *Marriage*’s powerful but semi-secret matriarch, an entirely different narrative—and with it, entirely new possibilities—begin to unfold.

**From Marriage to Cranford: A Difference and Several Similarities**

Whereas *Marriage* (1818) met with widespread indifference during the twentieth century, the fate of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* (1853) has been far more dramatic. The work was an instant success both in serialized and in novel form (Collin 59), and its popularity never waned to the extent of Ferrier’s. In 1987, Patsy Stoneman noted that *Cranford* had been reprinted at least once each year since its initial appearance (87); by 1997, besides being translated and dramatized, *Cranford* had gone into about 200 editions (Croskery 199). Despite this admirable persistence, however, *Cranford* has not escaped the flames of critique altogether. In fact, there are several notable parallels between this novel’s critical history and the history of *Marriage*. Similarly to *Marriage*, the structure of *Cranford* has long been a source of contention. Critics have dealt with—and dealt out—charges of plotlessness and lack of unity from the nineteenth century onward (Case 200). Margaret Tarratt aptly summarizes this phenomenon in the first line of her 1968 essay: “*Cranford* presents something of a problem for the critic since it is not clear whether it has a ‘structure’ at all” (152). She cites the stage of the Browns’ deaths and

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52 Dorothy W. Collin’s “The Composition and Publication of Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford*” (1986) records that the novel was originally published in 8 parts between the years of 1851 and 1853 in the periodical *Household Words* (59). The first part was published on 13 December 1851, and in 1853 it was published for the first time as a whole.

53 Collin references not only “the immediate popularity of the first ‘Cranford’ paper,” but also “the writer’s increasing ability to pull in readers” (59). Though *Cranford*’s popularity suffered less than *Marriage*’s, Kate Flint notes that Gaskell did pass out of fashion for a time, like “so many mid-Victorian writers” (60). In the 1950s, however, Gaskell came to be viewed as a “Social Problem novelist” (60), which revived interest in her works.

Miss Jessie’s marriage as a “point of rupture” in the novel, but sees Cranford’s thematic consistency as a redeeming factor (152).

Martin Dodsworth’s oft-referenced “Women Without Men at Cranford” (1963) also glosses the common structural critique and summarizes this viewpoint (with which Dodsworth later disagrees)55 as follows: “The short story that now forms the two opening chapters was originally all that there was to be of Cranford; the rest is a happy accident” (132).56 More recent Cranford studies continue to address structural concerns, although the notion of the novel’s being structurally flawed falls by the wayside as critics seek further explanation. For example, Natalie Meir’s 2006 “Household Forms and Ceremonies: Narrating Routines in Elizabeth Gaskell’s Cranford” offers a unique glimpse into rituals of eating in Cranford. Meir briefly references Tim Dolin on structural unity,57 but then focuses on the novel’s narrative methods to argue that Cranford’s sketches “are organized by means of the ongoing theme of eating rituals, and its plot is focused primarily on characters struggling with social conventions” (1). This emphasis on characters apparently disagrees with Dodsworth’s earlier conviction that “the force of the novel lies in plot, however, not in character” (133),58 a statement that I

55 Specifically, Dodsworth records the tendency to characterize Cranford as “charming” and “delicate” and thus write off structural concerns. He terms this “the sort of delightful insipidity to which the novels of Jane Austen have often been reduced” (132). Margaret Case Croskery calls Cranford “perhaps the most charming of Gaskell’s works,” and alludes to John Gross’s early warning that this very charm could inhibit critical appreciation of her work (198).
56 The “happy accident” to which Dodsworth refers is Dickens’ insistence that Gaskell continue her contribution to Household Words. In Collin’s words, “Dickens gave her the freedom of his columns for as many ‘Cranford’ papers as she cared to write. Commercial success was rightly his touchstone. When he found a rich vein he exploited it to the utmost” (60).
57 Dolin’s exact words in his article “Cranford and the Victorian Collection” (1993) are as follows: “Elizabeth Gaskell’s Cranford (1853)—no loose, baggy monster, let us admit it—is not the book that comes to mind when we invoke the Victorian novel” (180).
58 Dodsworth’s entire first paragraph represents a traditional viewpoint of Cranford, with which he disagrees. Part of this disagreement is with this viewpoint, referenced above: “The fiction is tender and reminiscential, and depends not on plot but on character. Its want of structure is no fault, since only the
will later challenge: it is my contention that Cranford’s characters—particularly the figure of Miss Jenkyns—make valuable contributions to plot unification. The two prove inseparable.

One major strength of “Household Forms” is its move past the traditional emphasis on imperfect structure to consider links between Gaskell’s novel and other genres, specifically the social instruction handbook. Though not revolutionary in nature, this creative approach enables Meir to find method behind the seemingly episodic narrative of Cranford. Along with Meir, I find narratology to be a particularly useful approach to this novel: a close look at the construction of Cranford’s narrative reveals new insights into the work. For example, it turns attention to the homodiegetic narrator, Mary Smith, who has been so often overlooked. It also raises questions of how exactly she and others function in the story. Which characters wield the most power over, and within, the narrative and how do they influence the work’s messages? How does Gaskell’s use of irony affect these messages, as well as readers’ perspectives of the overall story? In order to answer these questions, I will discuss the Cranford matriarchy and its treatment of key characters, beginning with the intimidating Miss Deborah Jenkyns. More than any other figure, Miss Jenkyns serves as an important force behind the plot of Cranford, and this forges one of the most unusual links between Ferrier’s and Gaskell’s novels. As noted in the chapter introduction, both works, one Romantic and one Victorian, present fascinating nineteenth-century images of matriarchies that are vestige of plot is required to present the characters, whose descent from the eighteenth-century sentimental comic novel is obvious” (132).

59 Mexican novelist Laura Esquivel’s novel Like Water for Chocolate (1989) offers one example of an earlier work that features the theme of self-expression through cooking.

60 Eileen Gillooly locates Mary Smith as the “generative source” of Cranford’s humor, but notes that she is “curiously overlooked” in the majority of discussions (117).
unified by a central character who is absent, and thus silent, during a large portion of the story. Whereas Lady Maclaughlan is alive and working behind the scenes throughout *Marriage*, Miss Jenkyns dies early on in *Cranford*. However, despite her untimely disappearance, Miss Jenkyns’s physical absence does not prevent her from exerting a powerful influence on the narrative as a whole.

The implications of gender and its representations must be addressed when dealing with nineteenth-century novels like *Marriage* and *Cranford*, where women predominate and men play a subordinate role to more powerful, or enduring, female personalities. Much of *Cranford*’s humor springs from its handling of a matriarchal society populated by women. Overall, however, a gentle irony permeates *Cranford* and performs quite a different function from that of scathing satire. Similarly to *Marriage*, it ultimately provides a sympathetic portrayal of key figures which, in Gaskell’s work, serves to overturn class critiques. The novel’s epic opening immediately taps into this concept: “In the first place, Cranford is in the possession of the Amazons” (1).61 As readers’ first introduction to the inhabitants of Cranford, this is also their first glimpse into the dense layers of irony so characteristic of Elizabeth Gaskell. The historical Amazons are long gone—if they ever existed at all—but they leave behind them an enduring mythos, upon which Gaskell builds a new Amazonian society. She populates this society not with virile young women warriors, but rather with middle-aged, prim

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61 Coral Lansbury acknowledges that Cranford’s opening lines “are as well known as any passage in literature, but it is often forgotten what a challenge is put to society in them” (72). This statement touches on a major emphasis in this chapter—the power of laughter to mask various layers of meaning.
widows and old maids who adhere to a “strict code of gentility” (64), a phrase with irony-rife overtones, since this purportedly ironclad code is often broken. Into the latter category of spinster falls the infamous Miss Deborah Jenkyns, reigning matriarch of Cranford.

According to Jane Spencer, “Critics who take the Amazonian reference seriously either, like Dodsworth, focus on Cranford’s militant hostility to men, epitomized by Miss Deborah Jenkyns, or, like Tarratt, Wolfe, and Auerbach, focus on the caring community of women, epitomised by Miss Matty” (88). In contrast to those above-referenced critics, my essay refuses to “take the Amazonian reference seriously” in the sense that it does not bypass the work’s laughter, instead acknowledging the equal validity, as well as the interconnectedness, of humor and seriousness in Gaskell’s work. Rather than opposing a militant Miss Jenkyns with a caring Miss Matty, I argue that Miss Jenkyns serves as the driving—and ultimately sympathetic—force behind the construction of the Cranford matriarchy. The initial supremacy of Miss Jenkyns, at least, remains unquestioned by critics and Cranfordians alike. For instance, Martin Dodsworth calls her “the women’s leader” in his discussion of her disagreement with Captain Brown over the merits of Dr. Johnson (133). In the more recent essay “‘Heroic Pioneers’: The Ladies of Cranford” (2007) Caroline Huber makes an important observation about Miss Jenkyns’s post-mortem influence: “although dead for most of the narrative, [she] continues to be a controlling force in Cranford society” (40). This force appears most markedly in the reactions of Miss Matty, who attempts rigid adherence to her elder sister’s guidelines not

62 The verbatim reference is as follows: “Still, it was not a settled thing that Mrs. Fitz-Adam was to be visited, when dear Miss Jenkyns died; and, with her, something of the clear knowledge of the strict code of gentility went out too” (64).
only before, but also after Deborah’s death. Narrator Mary Smith reports, “Miss Jenkyns’s rules were made more stringent than ever, because the framer of them was gone where there could be no appeal. In all things else Miss Matilda was meek and undecided to a fault” (26). The other inhabitants of Cranford also feel loss, which reiterates the extent of Miss Jenkyns’s sway in their community, becoming painfully apparent during the visit to Miss Pole shortly after the former’s passing: “Miss Jenkyns had so long taken the lead in Cranford, that, now she was gone, they hardly knew how to give a party” (24). The physical absence of Miss Jenkyns in Cranford, however, does not banish her presence from the rest of the novel. As Natalie Meir insists, “Miss Jenkyns’ role as arbiter of propriety accounts for much of the novel’s humor” (8), and this humor permeates Cranford’s society even from the grave, a point to which I will return after discussing the fraught relationship between irony and Miss Deborah Jenkyns.

Towards the beginning of Cranford, Gaskell uses the figure of Miss Jenkyns to shape the picture of Cranford, or readers’ understanding of it. Irony serves a key function in this shaping process—through disjunction and contrast, the text constantly works to unsettle the surface meaning of various statements in conjunction with Cranford’s dictatorial, yet lovable matriarch. Of all the town’s inhabitants, the aura that Miss Jenkyns projects most closely approximates that of an Amazonian warrior, and this fact reveals one underlying irony of the novel’s opening statement. Laughter springs from the disparity between the notion of warlike Amazons and a town of old-fashioned women who prize their gentility. This leads readers to instinctively reject the comparison, but acknowledge the humorous side of Cranford as an unwarlike matriarchal society. Yet—similarly to Lady Maclaughlan, matriarch of Glenfern—Miss Jenkyns’s dress and
demeanor often carry distinctly martial overtones: the bonnet she wears to Captain Brown’s funeral resembles a helmet (18), and she is described as standing over Miss Jessie “like a dragoon” as the latter finishes an aptly-named meal of arrow-root (20). Jane Spencer notes the militancy of such references, emphasizing that they “suggest the war between masculine and feminine” (83). While this scene undoubtedly derives much of its humor from the juxtaposition of the male Captain Brown with a warlike woman, it is important to move beyond the immediate situation to consider Miss Jenkyns’s characterization overall, and with it the authority granted to the spinster figure by the narrative. Laughable though individual descriptions of Miss Jenkyns may be, together they convey a sense of confidence and power that should be considered within the context of the entire narrative.

For example, Miss Jenkyns does not back down when faced with Captain Brown as an opponent: she meets him with dignity when defending her favorite Dr. Johnson and refuses to give quarter. This trait is an important aspect of her characterization, which has implications not only for one moment, but for the story as a whole. From one perspective, the very rigidity of Miss Jenkyns’s personality, so apparent in the scene above, could be used to argue against authorial endorsement of this character’s matriarchal authority. Nina Auerbach raises just such an idea when she casts Miss Jenkyns’s death as “the end of the severe patriarchal code which Deborah inherits from her remote, adored father and enshrines throughout her life” (82). But laughter at traits like her indefatigable support of Johnson—whom Gaskell presents as pompous and passé—is offset by sympathetic renderings of Deborah throughout the novel, both before and after her death. In the first chapter, she may wear a “hybrid bonnet, half-helmet,
half-jockey cap” (18), a reiteration of her martial leanings, but she also supports Miss Jessie with an “invaluable,” “tender indulgent firmness . . . , allowing her to weep her passionate fill” at the funeral of her father (18). In fact, Deborah shows a consistent compassion, and surprising flexibility, that critics rarely reference. Besides the strength she shows at the funeral and her kindness towards the Brown children, the narrator records her deeply felt, corporeal reaction to the news of Captain Brown’s death: “She looked very ill, as if she were going to faint, and signed me to open the window” (16). Shortly thereafter, upon hearing that Captain Brown was reading “Pickwick” immediately prior to his demise, she sighs then calls him a “poor, dear, infatuated man” (17), which also suggests a modification of her previously stern judgment of him. Miss Jenkyns’s very evident compassion, manifested even to the point of related emotional and physical pain, then translates immediately into action when she says, “Matilda, bring me my bonnet. I must go to those girls. God pardon me if ever I have spoken contemptuously to the Captain!” (17).

A disagreement over Johnson pales in comparison with such self-sacrificing care for the daughters of a man Miss Jenkyns disliked. In actuality, the novel’s lack of authorial endorsement of Miss Jenkyns in the Johnson incident springs more from a disagreement over literary taste than a judgment of the character herself. Although the work overrides her false pretentions to literary authority, Miss Jenkyns’s characterization and reactions reveal a strong compassion, of the sort which Adam Smith describes as “the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner” (9). The ideas propounded in Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), published a full century before *Cranford*, had made their mark.
on Victorian thought, and Gaskell’s readers undoubtedly recognized the strong sensibility that Miss Jenkyns manifests in the above description. According to Smith, true compassion participates in others’ sorrows by means of the imagination (9). Through one brief reference, then, Gaskell ennobles her character by communicating a much larger heart (stronger compassion) and broader mind (more expansive imagination) than prior humorous references would suggest. As though this were not enough evidence of compassion and corresponding validation of worth, the narrator first shows Miss Jenkyns’s willingness to open her home to Miss Jessie after the death of Miss Brown, then documents her remarkable alacrity in advancing a love match between Miss Jessie and Major Gordon. While most see Matty as the more sympathetic, less rigid of the two Jenkyns sisters, it is she who evidences “outraged propriety” at discovering Major Gordon with his arm around Miss Jessie’s waist. Deborah manifests the exact opposite reaction when she calls this the “most proper place in the world for his arm to be in” and orders, “Go away, Matilda, and mind your own business” (22). Miss Jenkyns’s prickly exterior serves its purpose in providing structure and strength to the women of Cranford, as well as backbone when needed, but moments like this reveal a greater depth and complexity to her characterization than critics have traditionally recognized.

Prior to her very deliberate response to Miss Matty, Miss Jenkyns shows pleased excitement upon her surprise introduction to Miss Jessie’s lover. She not only serves as

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63 Smith further states: “It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his [other men/our brother], which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and make them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels” (9).
Major Gordon’s messenger to announce him to the bereaved daughter of her former enemy, but she also does her best to smooth the way for a romantic understanding to occur between them. As calmly as possible, Miss Jenkyns feigns normality at Miss Jessie’s request to admit her lover. She then attempts to make the former comfortable, and evacuates the premises on a pretense so that the couple is left unchaperoned (21). Her intervention undoubtedly speeds their happy nuptials. Indeed, Dodsworth states this contribution more directly in his brief plot summary of Cranford, when he relays that “Miss Jenkyns lives to marry off the younger [Brown daughter], Miss Jessie, to the lover whose hand she had previously refused so that she might attend her sick sister” (133).

Gaskell’s sympathetic rendering of Miss Jenkyns does not end at the character’s death; she continues to exert a strong influence on the story, particularly its characters and its humor, even after her passing. Narrator Mary Smith locates Miss Jenkyns as a force behind the creation of the narrative when she acknowledges, “I thought that probably my connection with Cranford would cease after Miss Jenkyns’s death” (23). Without this character’s annual invitations to visit, Mary would have no story to narrate, and she dreads “the changed aspect of things” when she thinks of returning. But Misses Pole and Matty step forward to fill the gap. Both send letters to invite Mary back to Cranford. This is not to say, however, that either of them succeeds in filling Miss Jenkyns’s newly vacated position as matriarch, as neither possesses the unique mix of qualifications that made Deborah their acknowledged leader. This in turn raises two related questions about the Cranford matriarchy: whom does Gaskell choose as Miss Jenkyns’s successor, and what continues to hold the plot together?
Critical perspectives differ on the issue of succession. While Patsy Stoneman sees Mrs. Jamieson as the new “social arbiter” (89), Margaret Tarratt divides leadership between Miss Pole and Mrs. Jamieson.\textsuperscript{64} Disagreeing with these views, Nina Auerbach calls Matty and her sister “Cranford’s unofficial queens.” She thus places leadership in the hands of Miss Matty at Deborah’s death and suggests that her inheritance of the title “Miss Jenkyns” brings a measure of unity to the narrative (81-2). She also states: “With Matty’s ascension, the town becomes feminine as well as female; but if it loses its Amazonian veneer, the essence remains . . . . By the book’s definitions, the more womanly sister is also the more Amazonian” (83). In agreement with Auerbach, Rae Rosenthal cites Deborah’s death as proof that her character “does not constitute the focus of the novel,”\textsuperscript{65} and juxtaposes Matty’s “feminine soul” with a corresponding lack in her sister (81).\textsuperscript{66} Some textual evidence does support the idea of Miss Matty as the new locus of authority—for example, the incident in chapter eight when Miss Pole calls on a pretext in order to enquire about the proper address for Lady Glenmire. Nonetheless, such viewpoints tend to overlook the complexity of Miss Jenkyns’s sympathetic characterization, as well as her strong, continuing influence on the rest of the narrative. While I agree that Cranford’s “Amazonian essence” remains intact, much of this can be traced back to Miss Jenkyns herself, whose matriarchal influence continues to be felt long after her demise. The issue of inheritance thus becomes significant, as Matty’s authority is likely enhanced by her biological connection to her sister. In a community populated

\textsuperscript{64} Tarratt’s description is as follows: “The moral and social leadership of Cranford society is now split between the energetic feminist Miss Pole by virtue of her personality, and the indolent and supercilious Mrs. Jamieson by virtue of her social status” (155).

\textsuperscript{65} Tarratt also identifies the experiences of Miss Matty “as the focal point of the narrative” (155).

\textsuperscript{66} In addition, Rosenthal refers to “the transition from Deborah to Matty” (83), and says that Matty’s “expressly feminine mode of governance further distinguishes her from her sister Deborah” (81).
primarily by single women, procreation does not determine inheritance, which removes the necessity for marital relationships and hints at alternative models for the passing of authority. This circumventing of marriage, procreation, and traditional models of inheritance, in association with sympathetic portrayals of a female society, points indirectly to the unfortunate position of powerlessness that women often experienced in the majority of nineteenth-century communities, where a woman’s chief value was located in marriage. But *Cranford*’s rendering of a matriarchal community where women ultimately work together to affirm one another’s worth reiterates the possibility for change; it additionally suggests the tenuousness of patriarchal-based beliefs regarding women’s value, thus highlighting the difference between perception and truth.

Recognizing Deborah’s leadership role within the *Cranford* matriarchy, Tarratt makes the following statement: “To disregard Miss Jenkyns’s individuality involves disregarding the fact of her death early in the novel and the important implications of this event. It is only *after* this has happened that the true significance of her role is established” (155). Constant references to Miss Jenkyns’s name show that her memory and her power continue long after her passing. In *Scheherezade in the Marketplace* (1992), Hilary Schor indirectly provides support for this stance when she references Mary Smith’s “‘authorial’ relation to the novel” (118).67 Granted, she admits that Mary possesses limited power in this respect: “At no point would Mary Smith be able to locate herself enough outside either the novel or the town of Cranford to comment on it as ‘chronicler,’” yet Schor contrasts Mary with Esther Summerson of *Bleak House*, who—

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67 Schor considers *Cranford* to be Gaskell’s “most original experiments with narrative and social observation” (83).
unlike Mary—has an “entirely privatized voice” and cannot locate herself in relation to the entire story (118). If Schor proves correct, then the narrator’s “honest praise” of Miss Jenkyns at the beginning of Chapter Three, and correspondingly sympathetic portrayal, could be seen as authorial endorsement of the character (23), since Mary’s ironized perspectives correspond most closely with the author’s.

Mary’s narrative technique continually reveals the soft heart that beats beneath Miss Jenkyns’s stern image. Through Mary, Gaskell documents Miss Jenkyns’s faults as well as her virtues, yet the sympathy at the heart of Deborah’s characterization far outweighs her shortcomings, and her influence works overwhelmingly for good both before and after her death. Negative critical perspectives on this character abound, but this is by and large the result of the unfair contrast that has arisen between the gentle Miss Matty and a character who disappears early on in the narrative. Rosenthal illustrates just such an approach when she contrasts Miss Jenkyns’s use of “patriarchal tactics—intimidation, aggression, and open directives” with her sister’s “expressly feminine mode of governance,” which is characterized by “indirectness” (81). However, moments of sympathetic portrayal undermine this harsh outlook on Miss Jenkyns, a stance essentially contrary to the author’s narrative approach. In fact, Croskery draws a parallel between Mary’s “moral sympathy” and Eliot’s views on “the nature of sympathy” (216): she goes so far as to suggest that “Cranford is no more a tale of provincial life than is George Eliot’s Middlemarch (1871-72). In Cranford Gaskell writes with, of, and through the sympathy that George Eliot writes about” (217). The power of this code of sympathy clearly outweighs the community’s code of gentility, as when the women of Cranford first give tacit consent that Mrs. Jamieson and Lady
Glenmire should be ignored at church, but later decide to attend Mrs. Jamieson’s party. Once again, irony is at work as the narrator provides direct evidence that Miss Pole wants to show off her new hat, the true motivation behind her lecturing of Matty on “Christian duty” in the novel’s eighth chapter. But the lecture itself rests upon the presupposition that sympathy is the guiding force for the women’s conduct, which in turn highlights the importance of this same sympathy. According to Croskery, this sympathy is, metaphorically speaking, “what makes the novel tick.” It permits Gaskell to continue the story long after it should have concluded (217), for as history attests, the author did not set out to write a novel.68

And just as the novel’s textual history brings perspective to Cranford’s unusual structure, so also does it shed light on Miss Jenkyns’s abrupt absence from the story. Traditionally, critics have often taken death as an authorial rejection of a specific character—due to some Shakespearean “tragic flaw,” the writer had him or her killed off. Not so in the case of Miss Deborah Jenkyns. Her absence, like Captain Brown’s, performs important narrative functions. As Gaskell herself admitted, she intended only to write one Cranford paper and thus killed Captain Brown very unwillingly.69 He is a truly likeable character, but his death contributes to the development of Miss Jenkyns’s sympathetic characterization, which process the death of the character herself partially completes. Of course, the deaths of both this character and Miss Jenkyns also introduced

68 Croskery is acknowledging Gaskell’s intent, prior to the intervention of Charles Dickens, to end the story of Cranford after Miss Jessie’s marriage.
69 Collin cites Gaskell to suggest that killing Captain Brown was the author’s only regret regarding publication in Household Words (60). Dodsworth describes this narrative event as having “a great shock” on readers: “Ruskin ‘flew into a passion at Captain Brown’s being killed and wouldn’t go any further’ . . . . John Forster could only forgive his killing by reflecting that only so was the touching scene of Miss Brown’s death made possible” (134).
specific side-effects, such as the serious structural challenges to which Croskery and others allude (205), but Gaskell finds a unique means of overcoming this challenge: she uses Mary’s narrative voice to immortalize her matriarchal favorite through discoveries that Mary relays about this character’s past.

As indicated earlier, Miss Jenkyns’s kindness towards the Brown sisters makes her an ultimately sympathetic figure. Details that Mary relays later suggest an even stronger authorial support for this character, as readers gain insight into the making of Cranford’s matriarch. One of her chief, sympathy-related qualities is loyalty, which is perhaps best illustrated by her behavior after her brother’s disappearance and her mother’s death. Miss Matty tells Mary in Chapter Seven, “Deborah said to me, the day of my mother’s funeral, that if she had a hundred offers, she never would marry and leave my father . . . . She was such a daughter to my father, as I think there never was before, or since. His eyes failed him, and she read book after book, and wrote, and copied, and was always at his service in any parish business” (58). That Miss Jenkyns never had to choose between father and lover does not diminish the steadfast loyalty and self-sacrifice that she manifests for the sake of her family (58), and Gaskell also offers insight into Deborah’s development as a leader. If Miss Jenkyns prizes Johnson a little too much, her idolatry likely has its roots in the love she bore her minister father—if she takes her cue from Deborah the prophetess, as Mary secretly suspects (12), this may spring from the need to support her family in the wake of tragedy. The Deborah of Biblical literature is a fearful character, yet far from coveting either her leadership position or her father’s favor during Peter’s brief return, Cranford’s Deborah would simply smile and “say that she was quite put in a corner” (59): this is not the behavior of a power-hungry tyrant. Details that
Mary notes after Miss Jenkyns’s death thus connect with earlier cues to form a coherent picture of strong generosity that belies an intimidating, and oft-misunderstood, exterior.

A second aspect of Miss Jenkyns’s past action offers further insight into not only her characterization, but also her continuing influence on the Cranford community after her death. Odd though this statement seems initially, Miss Jenkyns manifests the strongest sympathy-based action in the first two chapters of Cranford. Miss Matty, whom people typically consider to be the kind-hearted one, plays a much more minor role than her sister. In fact, Miss Matty’s name does not surface until the second chapter, when Mary names her as a correspondent. All readers know of Miss Matty prior to Miss Jenkyns’s death is that she defers to her sister, only “now and again venturing into an opinion of her own” (14), spells poorly (13), chases sunbeams from the new carpet with Mary (14), and manifests emotion when she speaks of the Browns’ suffering (14). But Mary cites Miss Jenkyns as the one who gives Miss Brown a cloves-filled apple for her sickroom (15), and Captain Brown even calls to thank her for many thoughtfulnesses, about which Mary admits, “I did not know until then that she had rendered” (16). Even this small bit of information suggests a greater complexity of characterization than most acknowledge. Despite her rather brazen personality, Miss Jenkyns is not one to trumpet her good deeds in the street. Instead, she leads by example, which example has a lasting influence on her sister after her death.

Mary records one side-effect of Miss Jenkyns’s passing when she says, “and, with her, something of the clear knowledge of the strict code of gentility went out too” (64). Here as in other instances, the sense of irony that Gaskell conveys through Mary’s words has multiple layers that open the potential for misunderstanding. The strict code of
gentility is unwritten, existing primarily in the minds of its adherents, who are admittedly quirky: Gaskell tells us from page one that “each [Cranfordian] has her own individuality, not to say eccentricity, pretty strongly developed” (1). In context, readers understand that this increasing uncertainty regarding mores is not entirely negative, because it leads Cranfordians to greater inclusiveness when they decide to visit the former Miss Mary Hoggins, now Mrs. Fitz-Adams. Mary reveals the dark underside of Cranfordian class-consciousness, which springs from the code, through the following declaration: “Soon after Miss Mary Hoggins married Mr. Fitz-Adam, she disappeared from the neighborhood for many years. She did not move in a sphere in Cranford society sufficiently high to make any of us care to know what Mr. Fitz-Adam was. He died and was gathered to his fathers, without our ever having thought about him at all” (63). While this statement carries clear patriarchal overtones, its chief end is to acknowledge a strongly snobbish aspect of the code, to which Miss Jenkyns undoubtedly contributed. But critics tend to over-emphasize the latter association at the expense of others.

Laughter often leads one to undervalue, or at least overlook, issues that underlie the humor—indeed, humor all too often serves as a distracter from core ideas. In poking fun at the abstract, formless “code of gentility” embodied in Miss Jenkyns, Gaskell draws attention to a surface manifestation, to matters of conduct that come across as laughable and imperfect, but spring from quite serious causes. Despite its negative manifestations, this same strict code of gentility at which readers chuckle serves an important function during Miss Jenkyns’s lifetime, and still plays an important role after her death. The
ladies of Cranford are poor.\textsuperscript{70} As readers, we laugh at their harmless hypocrisies and stringent stinginess: at Mrs. Jamieson who purportedly eats seed-cake to spare Miss Barker’s feelings (66), or at an “elegant economy” that leads inhabitants to utilize “fragments and small opportunities” (3), such as rose-leaves that are “gathered ere they fell” (15). Depending on our inclination, we laugh, chuckle, or roar at such situations because Gaskell has Mary provide us with additional information that overturns the surface message. She leads us to suspect that Mrs. Jamieson eats “three large pieces” of Miss Barker’s seed cake because she enjoys them, not simply to mask the latter’s ignorance of the code.

At the same time, incidents from the eating of cake to the making of pot-pourri show the interconnectedness of sympathy and the code. Much cruelty and thoughtlessness is averted because of Cranford’s idea of gentility: for most Cranfordians, the “elegant economy” that accompanies the code is a means of preserving self-respect, both theirs and others’. They do not speak of money, but instead embrace a “kindly \textit{esprit de corps},” which leads them to “overlook all deficiencies in success when some among them [try] to conceal their poverty” (3). The dual meanings of the French phrase \textit{esprit de corps}, or “spirit of the corps,” proves a particularly apt description of Cranfordian gentility. Its first and most immediate sense refers to unity or common spirit within a group, while its connotations stretch much further to link with Cranford’s Amazonian side. According to the \textit{OED}, the word “corps” also refers to “a division of an army, forming a tactical unit,” or “a body of troops regularly organized.” This definition, 

\textsuperscript{70} Of course, the Cranford community reflects a range of financial statuses, though the text indicates that some of its residents fear poverty. Reflected assessments of poverty and wealth offer insight into Gaskell’s ideal readership.
of course, ties in with the martial imagery associated with the authority, and even military garb, of Miss Jenkyns the Cranfordian matriarch.

The code’s emphasis on frugality both encourages those lacking in funds not to live beyond their means, and keeps those with greater or growing means—as in the case of Mrs. Fitz-Adam, of the rising middle class—from shaming the former group. The incident of Miss Matty’s financial ruin perfectly illustrates the sympathetic harmony that the code perpetuates. Despite their differing classes and financial statuses, both Mrs. Forrester and Mrs. Fitz-Adam engage in remarkably uniform behavior; their concern for Miss Matty and others actually disregards externals, causing a cross-class leveling that prompts a similar outcome. In effect, both women “lower” themselves to speak to one formerly considered a child, the narrating Mary, whose maturity has only recently been acknowledged. Mrs. Forrester reveals the state of her finances to Mary because she feels embarrassment and sorrow that she cannot give more to Miss Matty. As Mary expresses it, “She did so wish she was rich . . . ; and this wish she kept repeating, with no thought of herself in it, only with a longing yearning desire to be able to heap up Miss Matty’s measure of comforts” (139).

This same sort of concern surfaces in the case of Mrs. Fitz-Adam, who also waylays Mary after the eventful meeting. In contrast to Mrs. Forrester, Mrs. Fitz-Adam has not recorded the full amount that she desires to provide, for fear “she never could look Miss Matty in the face again if she presumed to be giving her so much as she should like to do” (139). The issue of class (and with it, self-interest) arises here, and in other

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71 Eileen Gillooly points out that Mary is first called “Miss Smith” during the meeting where Cranfordians discuss Miss Matty’s future. Specifically, she states: “by including her in their meeting, the Cranford ladies acknowledge for the first time Mary’s maturity; in calling her by name, they both confer upon her a legible identity and affirm her existence as a quasi-participant in Cranford society” (117).
places as well, as a sort of red herring; it thus distracts readers from the more important issue, that of boundary-traversing sympathy. As one might expect, modern-day critics avoid endorsement of an apparently outdated, undemocratic class structure, which a “code of gentility” seems to suggest. Gillooly, for example, makes the following statement: “Largely derived as it is from their adherence to a ‘strict code of gentility’, Amazonian authority amounts to little more than the enforcement of class snobbery, a slavish devotion to rules, empty rituals, and archaic forms” (122). In general, critics tend to become overly caught up in the baggage surrounding the idea of class, rather than considering the implied author’s perspective on Cranford, the norms of the time, and the surprisingly progressive side of Cranfordian society. Gaskell’s gentle irony permeates *Cranford* and performs quite a different function from that of scathing satire. It ultimately provides a sympathetic portrayal that overturns class critiques. Deviating from the common critical tendency illustrated above, Kate Flint emphasizes Cranford’s “social solidarity” (33), and notes the evolution of it structure, for despite “the stress which the Cranford ladies habitually place on the importance of class distinctions, it is in fact Miss Matty’s loyal servant Betty and her new, labourer husband who offer her a home” (33). However, Flint also hints at the incompleteness of this change, since the co-habitation of destitute mistress with former servant never becomes necessary.

Though Flint reflects a more balanced perspective on class in *Cranford* than does Gillooly, her viewpoint still places an over-emphasis on concrete action or events, rather than the sympathy underlying characterization. Coral Lansbury hits closer to the mark through her general observation about tendencies of Gaskell’s time: “And when everyone was keeping servants in their place or complaining about the delinquencies of the lower
orders, Cranford society had nothing to say on the subject since it tended to live as a family with its servants” (73). Still, as with other perspectives, this view places an overly strong focus on external action, rather than the underlying impulses to which readers are privy. Through Mary, Gaskell provides some insight into the motivation behind actions, a move that overrides other considerations. This is not to deny that some amount of self-interest lies behind both seemingly generous actions and class considerations: Mrs. Forester does not want Mary to think that, despite her exalted status as a former Tyrrell, she chooses not to help Matty, and Mrs. Fitz-Adam, as a former “country girl” who idealized “the rector’s daughter,” fears to place her relationship with Miss Matty in jeopardy (139). But as suggested, the deeper issue revolves around inescapably sympathetic characterizations. Mary’s descriptions show that the women’s most pervasive concern ultimately stems not from self-interest, but from love. Mrs. Forrester—like Miss Jenkyns regarding the Brown family—feels an almost physical pain that she cannot “heap up Miss Matty’s measure of comforts,” and Mrs. Fitz-Adam wants to prevent Miss Matty from any further sorrow that might result from reminders of her father’s death and diminished finances. Though their concerns appear intertwined with selfish considerations, a much deeper motivation draws these figures to speak, thus paradoxically equalizing them while shivering the foundations of the very same class structure. Their shared action suggests a leveling brought about by sympathy, the same sort of sympathy for which Miss Jenkyns had set the precedent.

Mrs. Fitz-Adam herself uses this term when she describes her early interactions with Matty: “I have loved her ever since, though perhaps I had no right to do it; but if you can think of any way in which I might be allowed to give a little more without any one knowing it, I should be so obliged to you, my dear” (139).
On one level, Miss Jenkyns lives on through the kindnesses which her initially laughable “strict code of gentility” perpetuates. On another, less apparent level, she survives through facets of her personality that Gaskell memorializes in three prominent characters: Miss Matty, Miss Pole, and Mrs. Jamieson. Before considering the connection between Miss Jenkyns and other figures, however, it proves fruitful to take one final look at the matter of her characterization. Thus far, I have demonstrated that Miss-Jenkyns-as-matriarch exerts an overwhelmingly positive influence on Cranford, both before and after her death. I have also suggested that no one character succeeds her as leader, and this point deserves fuller exploration. But first, to briefly reiterate, Miss Jenkyns’s most prominent characteristics are her dominant personality, her sympathy, and her matriarchal/leadership role. When writing of Dickens’s flat characters in The Supporting Cast: A Study of Flat and Minor Characters (1993), David Galef describes them as having “unusual vitality” (3). He also insists that minor characters, “if fashioned right, also have a singular aspect: their remarkable persistence in the reader’s memory” (5). Purportedly “minor” characters like Ferrier’s Lady Maclaughlan and Gaskell’s Miss Jenkyns provide ample proof of this point, and the structure of their respective novels also bears this out. In the first part of this chapter, I traced Lady Maclaughlan’s remarkable, albeit hidden, influence on the plot and outcome of Marriage. In the previous portion of this argument, I discussed Miss Jenkyns’s important role and influence within the Cranford society. Though some would suggest that her death undermines my argument, I propose that this event actually strengthens it. In fact, the figure of Miss Jenkyns proves so enduring that Gaskell resurrects facets of her personality in a particularly exaggerated manner. Thanks to Mary, Miss Matty appears to
be the focal point of *Cranford* after her sister’s death, but this is arguably due to her relationship with Miss Jenkyns, whose name she even inherits.

Of these three traits, sympathy remains the fulcrum of the novel. As noted, both Miss Pole and Miss Matty invite Mary back to Cranford in Chapter Three. These two characters, along with Mrs. Jamieson, seem to hold the most societal sway in the wake of Miss Jenkyns. Mary documents a whole host of kindnesses enacted by the timid but sympathetic Miss Matty—from the giving of sovereigns to Mr. Dobson (124), to her generosity towards children (148), or her care for Mr. Johnson’s business (144). Each of these instances reflects a willingness to sacrifice personal gain for the sake of others, a trait which her sister—contrary to common assumptions—possessed in abundance. As for Miss Pole, her character seems to have absorbed the more dominant traits associated with Miss Jenkyns. Shortly after Deborah’s death, Mary receives two letters inviting her back to Cranford. The first of these comes from Miss Pole, whom Mary explains “had always come in for a supplementary week” after the yearly visit to Miss Jenkyns (22). Mary then describes the second of her two letters, an invitation from Miss Matty, as “circuitous” and “humble” (22). Clearly, Miss Pole does not hesitate to take the lead in inviting Mary back, despite Miss Matty’s superior claim to do the inviting. This sort of Jenkynsian boldness appears even more blatantly in other instances, perhaps most markedly in the case of Signor Brunoni. When the Cranfordians assemble to see his conjuring, Miss Pole engages in “energetic speeches” (87), defiantly attempting to uncover the source of the tricks. Her behavior is so blatant that Mary admits, “If ever I saw a man frown, and look enraged, I saw the grand Turk frown at Miss Pole” (87). Miss
Pole’s aggressive rationalism in this instance proves strongly reminiscent of the deceased Miss Deborah.

While Miss Matty most strongly displays Miss Jenkyns’s sympathy and Miss Pole her dominant personality, Mrs. Jamieson holds the official matriarchal role—nominally, at least. As the sister-in-law of the late Earl of Glenmire, hers was the acknowledged social superiority before Deborah’s death, but her position gains power with the sympathetic, dominant, matriarchal Miss Jenkyns now deceased. The name of Mrs. Jamieson surfaces only briefly prior to the passing of Miss Jenkyns, and she could not be said to play a major role in the rest of Gaskell’s work. However, her name does appear more often, which helps in part of fill the gap left by Deborah’s absence. During the visit to Miss Betty Barker the Cranfordians follow Mrs. Jamieson’s lead when she accepts a glass of cherry-brandy (68), and she flaunts her social superiority when she later forbids the ladies of Cranford to visit her sister-in-law (71). These sorts of actions would perhaps have been considered within her social right during Miss Jenkyns’s time; however, as such a dominant character, Deborah would also have had strong sway over opinions on these same issues, and might have prevented the latter situation from occurring at all. In light of Miss Jenkyns’s acknowledged (and somewhat intimidating) leadership role, it is difficult to imagine such brazen temerity during her lifetime. Thus, Mrs. Jamieson’s power does increase, along with her importance, as she and other characters fill the gap left by Cranford’s acknowledged matriarch. And yet her power is far from absolute. She alone does not become the novel’s center, but instead shares it with Miss Pole and Miss Matty. Through each of these characters, Gaskell memorializes one trait of the absent Miss Jenkyns. This choice in turn raises two related questions: What is the significance
of the dilution and dispersion of matriarchal authority, and what does this phenomenon ultimately contribute to readers’ understanding of the role of Miss Jenkyns? No single character possesses the abilities that Gaskell concentrates in this woman, whom some readers initially find to be at least unsympathetic, if not controlling. From a political standpoint, the novel could be discussed as moving from a centralized, monarchial form of government to a sort of oligarchy which, though more democratic in nature, lacks the efficiency of the original system, concentrated as it was in one figure—not a man, but rather a powerful and authoritative woman. By eliminating Miss Jenkyns, chronicling the after-effects of her absence, and building upon her ultimately sympathetic characterization through the technique of irony, Gaskell comments upon the positive possibilities of leadership concentrated in the person of one strong and enduring female figure.

To return to its overall goals, this chapter has examined one Romantic and one Victorian novel in order to trace related phenomena and draw conclusions that contribute to nineteenth-century studies. What are the major parallels between *Marriage* and *Cranford*, and what is the significance of these parallels? Despite their differing authorship and widespread dates of publication, *Marriage* and *Cranford* share the following remarkable similarities: first, their writers utilize characterization as a device to unify novels with unusual, non-traditional structures; secondly, these works revolve around humorous, matriarchal figures whose significant contribution to plot is masked by strong doses of irony; thirdly, yet no less remarkably, both of these figures are absent for large portions of their respective story; and finally, despite their absence, these characters’ powerful positions carry strong feminist implications, which suggest alternate
ways of viewing women’s roles. While this chapter only begins to address potential implications of these findings, it has much to contribute to narratological and/or feminist studies such as David Galef’s *The Supporting Cast* (1993), Alex Woloch’s *The One Vs. The Many* (2003), and Alison Case’s *Plotting Women* (1999). For instance, Galef insists that an understanding of an author’s use of minor characters enables an understanding of a work’s overall construction (1). He divides secondary characters into three divisions: cameos, bit parts, and minor roles. Whereas cameos play the briefest of parts in the narrative, perhaps surfacing only as a name or a glimpse, bit parts usually include at least a brief description, and minor roles contribute somewhat to a narrative’s plot or thematic emphases (3). Based on Galef’s paradigm, both Lady Maclaughlan and Miss Jenkyns would be classified as filling minor roles. However, as this chapter has shown, certain narrative techniques may serve to mask the true importance of a character within the narrative structure, which in turn may skew such attempts at classification. A greater awareness of laughter’s ability to camouflage characters’ roles within plot contributes to a better understanding of the text as a whole, and leads readers to re-consider their evaluation of various figures. A close look at Ferrier’s and Gaskell’s pairing of irony with characterization challenges the very classification of Maclaughlan and Jenkyns as minor characters, since they play such an important part in the structuring of their respective novels—and even the matter of plot resolution, in the case of Lady Maclaughlan. Re-defining characters’ importance based on an awareness of this tendency could lead to a drastic re-consideration of various novels’ primary messages. It is not men, but rather powerful women, who bear direct responsibility for bringing order to the matriarchal societies of Glenfern and Cranford. Their roles within these novels
thus challenge the boundary between fiction and reality, as discerning nineteenth-century readers consider alternative possibilities for their own lives within a predominantly patriarchal society, whose laws favor men.

Like Galef, Alex Woloch questions the hierarchy that has historically devalued the study of characterization, especially that of minor figures. Besides grappling with the paradoxical fact that minor characters play such an important part in works such as Dickens’s, he also identifies the disappearance, or absence, of characters as significant and raises the question of whether this occurrence causes either tension or relief. Despite differing reasons for their absences, the disappearances of Miss Jenkyns and Lady Maclaughlan produce both effects. They cause a certain amount of relief because absence, like laughter, qualifies authorial endorsement of their dominance and thus completes the masking function; readers tend to overlook the strong feminist implications of their importance within the plot. For instance, both authors compare their strong female characters to powerful Biblical figures: Delilah in the case of Lady Maclaughlan and Deborah in the case of Miss Jenkyns. This decision emphasizes the strength and potential of women, even within a patriarchal societal framework. But in the authors’ alternative versions of the stories, these women live within essentially matriarchal societies. Ultimately, these characters’ absence also causes relief because it diverts attention to other characters, who could not develop further otherwise. However, their absence causes tension on a critical level, because it also highlights the very paradox established previously—the disparity between their absence and their true importance within the plot. Though instinct is to classify them as minor characters, they exert a major influence on the narrative.
As for the third above-referenced study, *Plotting Women*, it deals not so much with minor characters, but more with the problematic relationship between women’s narration and power. Case suggests that narrative framing, or the way that a writer unfolds a narrative, provides insight into issues of gender. Her primary argument states, “Feminine narration . . . is characterized by the restriction of the female narrator to the role of narrative witness; that is, by her exclusion from the active shaping of narrative form and meaning” (4). Though I have focused less on the issue of narration and more on that of minor characterization, my study meshes with Case’s in the sense that it deals with a device that helps narrators avoid charges of what Case calls “plotting” and “preaching.” Masked messages can be subtly communicated through minor characters, thus minimizing potential risks to both narrator and author (by extension). The fact that Ferrier and Gaskell utilize entirely different narrative approaches does not undermine this application, but rather strengthens it, since the characterization device I have identified stretches across boundaries of narrative approach. Whereas *Marriage* utilizes a hetrodiegetic (third-person omniscient) narrator, *Cranford* relies upon the homodiegetic (first-person) narrator Mary, who also claims a place within the story world. Despite differing narrative approaches, both novels use central-matriarch-as-secondary-character to organize their narratives and hint at an alternative to patriarchal society, a matriarchal society ultimately grounded in sympathy.
CHAPTER 2
PARODY AND THE ROLE OF THE OLD MAID IN THE MONK AND THE INHERITANCE

Towards the beginning of Matthew Lewis’s The Monk (1796) Leonella exclaims to Don Christoval, “Oh! Jesus! my lord, I swear you quite overpower me with your gallantry! But I promise you that I am too well aware of the danger of such expeditions to trust myself in a young nobleman’s power! No, no; I have as yet preserved my reputation without blemish or reproach, and I always knew how to keep the men at a proper distance” (17). Don Christoval then replies, “Of that, Segnora, I have not the least doubt.” His response, however brief, comments eloquently on the subject of Leonella’s personal charms—or lack thereof. That the text pokes fun at Leonella cannot be denied. In this particular instance, she quite overlooks the dual meaning of her own words, though Don Christoval suffers no illusions on that point. The Monk clearly revels in caustic humor and, as its colorful representation of spinsterhood, Leonella is not immune to attack. Her words to cavalier Don Christoval during their first (and only) meeting at the Church of the Capuchins attest Lewis’s keen talent for satire. In the space of a few short lines the author attributes to his character garrulosity, flirtatiousness, and vanity, to name just a few stereotypical qualities of the old maid.\(^7\) The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were rife with such commentary on spinsters, both written and

\(^7\) In “Lustful Widows and Old Maids in Late Eighteenth-Century English Caricatures” Cindy McCreery notes, “As old women were satirized more than young women for their barrenness, vanity, and interest in men, unmarried women were censured more harshly than married women” (114).
pictorial, and often harsh in nature. As Cindy McCreery points out, the latter eighteenth century made both old maids and widows the butt of caricature, and aging women (like Leonella) “received a double dose of criticism” when they manifested behaviors considered deviant (113). *The Monk* shows strong awareness of derogatory notions surrounding the figure of the old maid. Nonetheless, a balanced interpretation of the text depends upon keeping Lewis’s overall project in mind, since *The Monk* is strongly parodic in nature and mocks the conventional ideas embedded in romance novels—for example, the necessity of a happy ending, or even the existence of one true love. A careful examination of the novel as a whole, along with individual scenes, suggests that its satirical portrayal of Leonella masks a deeper parody—or imitation and modification\(^\text{74}\)—of common stereotypes surrounding the spinster. This phenomenon points to the possibility of a more widespread, and empowering perspective on the role of the old maid in society.

In addition to the character Leonella in *The Monk*, this chapter will examine another oft-overlooked spinster figure who has received little critical attention, Miss Pratt, in Susan Ferrier’s *The Inheritance* (1824). Though more conventional and less broadly parodic in nature, Ferrier’s novel contains not one but *three* silly old maids: Lady Betty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Becky Duguid. Of the three, Miss Pratt possesses the most tremendous subversive potential, as well as development, and thus receives the most attention in my analysis. Similarly to Chapter One, Chapter Two seeks to further studies of secondary characterization, humor, narrative, and at least one lesser-known novel, by

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\(^{74}\) The *OED*’s first dictionary definition of the noun “parody” cites it as a “literary composition modelled on and imitating another work.” Imitation is thus key to the project of parody. The next section will offer a more in-depth exploration of parody.
Susan Ferrier. Of all four chapters, the pairings in my second most insistently call for justification. Why pair Susan Ferrier’s *The Inheritance* with Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*? As acknowledged in my previous chapter, Ferrier’s first work met with censure due to strong doses of didacticism that a twentieth-century audience found difficult to swallow, and this tendency contributed to its obscurity. In short, the disparity between Ferrier’s highly moralistic corpus and *The Monk* could hardly be greater. With the publication of his salacious first novel, Matthew Lewis became infamous—thereafter to be known as “Monk” Lewis. His work displays a full panoply of not only hypocrisy and deceit, but also extra-marital sex, murder, rape, and incest. Despite its almost instantaneous “best-seller status,” the subject matter of *The Monk* garnered such negative attention that Lewis was forced to withdraw his third edition and alter his fourth (MacLachlan x). Surely Miss Ferrier would have been highly incensed to hear her *Inheritance* paired with such a work! Though that may well be the case, the array of minor characters in the novels makes them a worthwhile joint study, due to their similar, highly parodic treatment of the spinster figure, as well as an accompanying social critique of romance conventions. In both *The Inheritance* and *The Monk*, the spinster initially serves as the butt of ridicule, yet events within the narratives themselves point to an ultimate redemption of the old maid.

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75 Several texts attest that there was a 1795 edition of *The Monk*; however, the first edition underwent limited circulation and was reissued in 1796 (MacLachlan ix).
76 In addition, MacLachlan states: “Some printed copies of *The Monk* dated 1795 have been found, but this edition was not widely circulated and was reissued, with a new title page and a new year of publication, in March 1796. Four months later there was a favourable review in the *Monthly Mirror* and in October another in the *Analytical Review*. In the same month a second edition appeared, suggesting that the first had sold very well” (ix).
Specifically, this chapter will examine the functions of two old maid characters, Miss Pratt and Leonella, within their narratives. A careful consideration of each woman’s role sheds additional light on the phenomenon identified in Chapter One. As with Lady Maclaughlan and Miss Deborah Jenkyns, it seems instinctive to classify Miss Pratt and Leonella as minor characters, yet they play a crucial part within their respective plots while avoiding the conventional behavior expected of a central heroine. Such an acknowledgment raises the question of why this is the case, as well as how it comes to be the case, which in turn prompts investigation into narrative techniques and the issue of humor—of parody in particular. Once again, laughter signals an avenue of enquiry and potential for uncovering alternative messages to those accepted as mainstream. Both Miss Pratt and Leonella act as overt representatives of spinsterhood, a commonly ridiculed segment of society; as such, in both novels these characters also act as an initial foil to the romance plot. Parody-as-device thus serves as a primary key to unlock the mysteries of Ferrier’s and Lewis’s novels, for both writers offer society a looking-glass in which to view its own printed perspectives on the old maid. Beginning with a brief overview of spinsterhood in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Chapter Two will consider the connection between parody and the old maid figure, first within The Inheritance and then within The Monk. As indicated previously, my approach will utilize tools provided by narratology and feminist criticism in order to explore the interaction among secondary characters, laughter, and narrative construction.

The figure of the old maid is, as a number of critics have pointed out, a ubiquitous one in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature. In her work Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England (2005), Amy Froide traces this subject back still
further, noting that unmarried women were already the subject of thought and discussion in the 1600s. Indeed, “Modern historians have had a tendency to write as if ‘spinsters’ were a new ‘problem’ in the nineteenth century. Contrary to such assumptions, these women emerged into the popular consciousness as early as the second half of the seventeenth century” (8). This claim, which Froide supports using a range of documents across genre, makes the examination of “the old maid figure” in all periods that much more important. The trajectory of my own study forces the following initial question: “Why do so many novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contain a stereotype-based caricature of the old maid?” A glut of available statistics, along with other sources of information, offers insight into such satirical portraits of spinsterhood. Mary Poovey, for one, cites the 1851 Census to suggest that as many as 42% of women between the ages of twenty and forty were single (4), while Bridget Hill places the number of single women over age twenty-five that year at one million! (2). Froide pursues the issue as well, claiming that 20% of adults in early modern England never married (2), and that “singlewomen comprised on average 30.2 per cent of the adult female population” from 1574 to 1821 (3).

Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that the term “spinster” did not acquire negative connotations until the end of the seventeenth century (Froide 154), while the pejorative

77 Nina Auerbach alludes to the spinster’s “incarnation in statistics,” stating: “Studies of the Victorian spinster abound in stark statistical tables or ominously swelling percentage charts indicating her inexorable proliferation, a creature born less of feminist ideology than of the Malthusian march of numbers” (113).
78 Froide refers to the period falling between 1575 and 1700 (2).
79 She traces the history of the term “singlewomen” which term she defines as “women who had never married” (Bennett and Froide 2), back to the Middle Ages in her sixth chapter. Though sometimes used to refer to prostitutes, it was used as a synonym for “spinster” in the early modern period (159).
80 This pejorative association, of course, roughly corresponds with the time period during which The Monk was published in the late eighteenth century. The 1851 census raised awareness of the growing population of unmarried women, but this is not to say that spinsters were not considered a threat prior to mid-century.
usage of “old maid” became common around the same time period (Mendelson and Crawford 166). To some extent, this mentality in its extreme manifestations may be considered a hyper-reaction to intertwined historical, political, and religious events of the sixteenth century. The 1517 Protestant Reformation prompted great changes in European notions of marriage and singleness. In fact, the 1530 Augsburg Confession, which William R. Russell terms “the historical Magna Charta” or “founding document” of Lutheranism (389), offers some insight into these ideas in its Article XXIII “Of the Marriage of Priests” and Article XXVII “Of Monastic Vows.” The first of these articles insists that “God has given commandment to honor marriage” and further cites Cyprian on the subjects of chastity and marriage for women (para. 5). Article XXVII expresses a similarly high view of marriage, also speaking against the notion of celibacy as superior to other states:

For Christian perfection is to fear God from the heart, and yet to conceive great faith, and to trust that for Christ’s sake we have a God who has been reconciled, to ask of God, and assuredly to expect his aid in all things that, according to our calling, are to be done; and meanwhile, to be diligent in outward good works, and to serve our calling. In these things consist the true perfection and the true service of God. It does not consist in celibacy, or in begging, or in vile apparel. But the people conceive many pernicious opinions from the false commendations of monastic life. They hear celibacy praised above measure; therefore they lead their married life with offense to their consciences. (para. 17)

81 For the purposes of this study, I use the terms “spinster” and “old maid” interchangeably.
Opposed as much of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England was towards the teachings of Roman Catholicism, it stands to reason that many would view the single state with suspicion. As Ian Watt has argued in his discussion of *Pamela*: “The idealization of marriage is . . . distinctly Protestant, since in Roman Catholicism the highest religious values are connected with celibacy” (155). However inadvertently, the religious rationale for marriage contributed to corresponding, often negative viewpoints on singleness—doubtless also connecting with concerns about inheritance, laws of primogeniture, and the financial burdens associated with unmarried women—to culminate in an instinctive devaluing of spinsters in popular thought.

Though it proves difficult to identify a definitive source of the increasing negativity towards unmarried women, verbal and pictorial representations of spinsters tended increasingly towards satire as the eighteenth century progressed (Froide 174). The instinctive conclusion is that eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British society viewed this growing population of unmarried women as a threat to societal norms or mores, and thus used harsh portrayals as a means of fighting back; the growing presence of spinsters—especially well-adjusted spinsters, content in their single state—could be said to undermine assumptions of marriage and childbirth as the natural goal of womanhood. While the prevalence of spinster caricatures has been well documented, their overtly satirical overtones too often deter readers from more careful analysis. In actuality, some of these same representations actually *parody* printed stereotypes associated with the idea of the old maid, or spinster figure: laughter thus once again

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82 Froide links this increasing negativity to an increase in women’s ability to make choices: “It is probably no coincidence that, as singlewomen became more independent and powerful, popular depictions of them became more pejorative. After all, if women who never married were successful in life, this might encourage other women to remain single” (180).
performs a masking function that prevents readers from considering possibilities beyond direct satire, an issue which this chapter will explore further. However, before engaging in textual examination, it proves worthwhile to offer an overview of parody which elucidates my own usage of the term.

In his 2007 *The Genius of Parody*, Robert L. Mack states: “It should be stressed that until the advent of the analytic criticism of the late 1960s, little if any serious attention had been paid to the status of parody as an identifiable mode or genre at work (or even at play) within the valued traditions of English literature” (18). Mack chooses to discuss parody in the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries, as his subtitle indicates, but his comment holds relevance for the study of parody across periods. Despite the widespread tendency to belittle parody, or at least subordinate it to satire, this device proves quite important to studies of Romanticism. For example, David A. Kent and D.R. Ewen point to “swarms of parodies published during the Romantic period” (13), and proceed to argue that, with the exception of the highly satiric *Don Juan*, “the parodies written by and about the Romantic poets are the most important form that literary satire assumed in the period” (13). Works such as Kent and Ewen’s document a current trend to grant parody greater equality with satire. Nonetheless, the typical viewpoint of parody

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83 The subtitle is “Imitation and Originality in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century English Literature.”
84 Both Linda Hutcheon and Mack acknowledge the characterization of parody as a “parasitic” activity. Hutcheon insists that parody “has need of defenders” and goes on to say that it “has been called parasitic and derivative” (3). Mack begins his second chapter with a very pointed statement on the subject: “The stigmatization of literary parody as an essentially parasitic activity, and the concomitant denigration of parodic reference as an authorial technique manifestly unworthy of serious critical scrutiny, exerted the force of profoundly influential stereotypes within our literary culture for an extraordinarily long time” (15).
85 Mack references the “traditional subordination of parody for satire” (37). He notes that Edward and Lillian Bloom, among others, treated parody as “a ‘strand’ of satire” (37).
as satire’s minion often leads critics to over-emphasize its tendency towards ridicule;\(^\text{86}\) they thus align it with conservativism and control,\(^\text{87}\) which in turn obscures other functions and related possibilities.\(^\text{88}\)

Even so, some critics begin to re-consider the hierarchically troubled relationship between satire and parody. In her *Theory of Parody* (1985), Linda Hutcheon acknowledges that “even the best works on parody tend to confuse it with satire” (16); she references Margaret Rose’s *Parody//Metafiction* (1979) as an example of this tendency (20), and later concludes, “The lesson of much parody theory today is that we must be very careful to separate parody from satire” (104). While Rose’s earlier work may indeed overlook the distinction between the two, her *Parody: modern, ancient, and post-modern* (1993) is careful to differentiate. Rose acknowledges that parody often has satiric aims (80), but insists on “several distinct differences between parody and satire—such as the way in which the parody may make its target contribute to its own text” (86). She also makes the startling claim in both works that “parody need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target” (*Parody//Metafiction* 33).\(^\text{89}\) This communicates an important truth: although parody can rely heavily upon satire, the two devices do not

\(^{86}\) In her “Foreword,” Hutcheon cites “the long tradition of invoking parody as a retentive, conservative force used to ridicule and thus control innovation” (7). Kent and Ewen concur with this observation, noting that handbook definitions of parody both link it with satire and define it as “an essentially conservative force in literary tradition” (12). The expansion of this viewpoint that they suggest involves another facet of parody, that of “playful and respectful imitation” (12).

\(^{88}\) The first definition of “parody” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites a “literary composition modelled on and imitating another work, esp. a composition in which the characteristic style and themes of a particular author or genre are satirized by being applied to inappropriate or unlikely subjects, or are otherwise exaggerated for comic effect. In later use extended to similar imitations in other artistic fields, as music, painting, film, etc.” The association of parody with satire here gives an idea of the deeply engrained association between these two concepts. See also my definition of “satire” in Chapter One.

\(^{89}\) In the later work *Parody: ancient, modern, and post-modern*, the same quotation appears verbatim, but with a few additional words added: “It has already been seen that while parody is accompanied by a comic effect it need not necessarily ridicule the work of its target or ‘parodee’” (47).
always co-exist. In keeping with this distinction, Hutcheon cites the versatility of parody and suggests that its “range of intent is from respectful admiration to biting ridicule” (16). The word “intent” may unfortunately serve as a misnomer, since it raises the issue of authorial intent, which is not always relevant; however, as Wayne Booth argues very convincingly, it is “all too easy to retreat into the cowardly doctrine that the author’s intentions . . . do not interest us” (56). My own study of parody reaches beyond intent to pinpoint functions and effect, which makes Hutcheon’s statement particularly relevant: it infers not only that parody has many functions, but also that its end result is not always to mock or satirize the referenced text, object, or person. 

This chapter embraces a similar perspective on the broad spectrum of potential parodic functions. It begins with the presupposition that parody is not synonymous with satire, and that it involves both imitation and modification, as suggested earlier. How then, do I define the term “parody”? Like “irony,” the abstract nature of this overdetermined word breeds confusion, which makes a clear, yet flexible definition all the more important. Rose’s chapter “Ways of defining parody” contains this key statement on reader reception: “While many commentators on parody have claimed that a parody will not be recognized as such once its target, the parodied work, has been forgotten, the embedding of the parodied text within the text of the parody both contributes to the ambivalence of the parody which derives from its ability to criticize

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90 Homi Bhabha makes a similar argument, in which he states: “To recognize the stereotypes as an ambivalent mode of knowledge and power demands a theoretical and political response that challenges deterministic or functionalistic modes of conceiving of the relationship between discourse and politics, and questions dogmatic and moralistic positions on the meaning of oppression and discrimination. My reading of colonial discourse suggests that the point of intervention should shift from the identification of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the processes of subjectification made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse” (88).
and renew its target as a part of its own structure and ensures some continued form of existence for the parodied work” (my emphases, Parody 41). While Rose cites neither the novelist nor her work directly, it could be said that Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* offers the quintessential example of this phenomenon, as the novel criticizes the excesses of the Gothic genre, while also incorporating Gothic elements into its own structure. For example, consider the manner in which Austen, through her character Henry Tilney, ridicules the characteristics of the Gothic in his humorous description of the abbey (150), prior to the visit of Catherine Moreland. Austen again references these very characteristics when Catherine encounters a mysterious manuscript within “high, old-fashioned black cabinet” (159). Catherine’s romantic expectations are deflated when she discovers its contents to be no more than a washing-bill. In this way, the novel memorializes aspects of the Gothic genre—while simultaneously ridiculing them and using them to further the purposes of the *Bildungsroman*, which charts the heroine’s development from innocence to experience as Austen simultaneously uses Gothic tropes to speak against moral corruption, epitomized by Henry Tilney’s father.

Overall, Rose raises several very useful ideas in her work. Despite what many critics have traditionally believed, the end result of parody is not always to simply poke fun: such an assumption underestimates the true complexity of this device, as well as its multivalent functions within a text. Instead, one important characteristic of parody is its ambivalence, and another is its potential to perform multiple tasks at the same time, including the powerful appropriation of accepted tropes such as the Gothic. Even the etymology of the word itself highlights the former trait. While “odos,” or “song,” alludes to the original form of parody in ancient Greece, “para” boasts the dual meanings of
“against” and “beside.” At times, parody’s primary purpose may indeed appear to be ridicule, but it may simultaneously undermine this same outcome with other, less apparent messages. The two functions very often co-exist. Therefore, parody is a device that 1) involves imitation and modification, 2) breeds ambivalence, 3) performs more than one task simultaneously, and 4) may or may not involve ridicule. Due to their complexity, the inter-relationships among these traits require further explanation. As its first and most obvious function, parody borrows an external idea, concept, or text and modifies it to achieve a certain end or ends; in doing so, as stated in point three, it thus performs more than one task simultaneously—tapping into both the ideas associated with the borrowed material and adding its own layer(s) of meaning, which may or may not result in the ridiculing of a specific target. This in turn may be said to engender ambivalence, defined as the “coexistence” of “contradictory emotions or attitudes towards a person or thing” (OED). Two aspects of this definition in turn prove significant: first, the idea of “coexistence,” and secondly, the presence of “contradictory emotions.” The ambivalence permitted by parody-as-technique uses contradictory emotions in order to communicate key messages to readers.

Nina Auerbach’s seminal work Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth (1982) provides a fitting transition from my discussion of parody to that of the parodied old maid figure in The Inheritance and The Monk. In her discussion of the Victorian cultural imagination, Auerbach explores images that fall into three categories: the angel/demon, the old maid, and the fallen woman. Ultimately, she sees these

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91 Hutcheon notes that the first definition of “para” to mean “counter” or “against” likely led to the strong association between parody and ridicule. She says that this definition “presumably the formal starting point for the definition’s customary pragmatic component of ridicule: one text is set against another with the intent of mocking it or making it ludicrous” (32).
archetypes as empowering, and chooses to deviate from the traditional emphasis on their derogatory portrayal. Auerbach’s discussion of the old maid figure raises three important issues. First, Auerbach acknowledges the common, contemporary nineteenth-century perspective of old maids as both “unwanted” and “grotesque” (109). Secondly, she insists on the potential for heroism surrounding these characters, at least “in the works of less orthodox writers” (111.) And thirdly, she considers two characteristics of the old maid figure that disrupt Victorian ideals: mobility and isolation (124; 144), as opposed to domesticity. Of the second trait, Auerbach sees isolation as “heroic” because it affirms the spinster’s individuality; conversely, “absorption into family would deny her splendid identity” (144). Each of these points inform my own study of the spinster figure.

Though Auerbach focuses specifically on the Victorian cultural imagination, her work has strong implications for earlier novels classified within the Romantic tradition. Both *The Inheritance* and *The Monk* contain laughable images of spinsters who are portrayed as either unwanted, in the case of Miss Pratt, or grotesque, in the case of Leonella. However, as suggested by the previous discussion of parody, a careful study of their individual roles within the novels reveals another function—a second, less obvious but more uplifting, tale of the spinster. To use a variant of Auerbach’s term, Miss Pratt and Leonella have strong potential towards “heroism.” In addition, the fact of Susan Ferrier’s exclusion from the ranks of “the less orthodox” indicates that the old-maid-as-hero image may be much more widespread than originally supposed: the powerful and pervasive figure of the spinster finds her way into the writings of Romanticism, not simply isolated Victorian works. The following analysis of Ferrier’s second work, *The Inheritance*, explores the positive side of seemingly negative characterizations of the
spinster, to also consider functions within plot and resulting implications for feminist criticism and narratology.

*The Inheritance*, like many other works of its time, centers around the travails of a central heroine, Gertrude St. Clair, as she awaits her inheritance and negotiates the shark-infested waters of the marriage market.\(^9^2\) However, providing arguably more interesting commentary on women’s roles are the minor characters that surround her—i.e. the three spinster figures. Miss Pratt is by far the most prominent spinster in *The Inheritance*, though it is notable that Ferrier incorporated no less than three old maids into her work.\(^9^3\) Lady Betty, Miss Pratt, and Miss Becky Duguid.\(^9^4\) Of these three, *The Inheritance* grants Miss Pratt the most notice by far, but her fellow spinsters are remarkable for their differing roles and means of offsetting her. That a marriage novel should contain so many old maid figures seems remarkable.\(^9^5\) This circumstance points to the sheer number of spinsters during Romanticism and Victorianism, as well as the financial concerns that brought them so often to the forefront of discussion. Generally, spinsters were viewed as a source of societal disruption. Marriage and childbirth were two sacred duties of every woman, and unmarried women furthered the family name and fortune in

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\(^{92}\) Gertrude’s uncle, Lord Rossville, wishes her to marry Mr. Delmour. Meanwhile, Miss Pratt pairs Gertrude with Edward Lyndsay, and Colonel Delmour pursues her hand in order to procure her coming fortune.

\(^{93}\) Augustine Birrell points out that Susan Ferrier knew a number of “maiden aunts,” perhaps one reason why her novel includes so many (32). In addition, Ferrier’s personal contact with these women offers a rationale and potential support for the argument that the author possessed some empathy for them as individuals, which may have influenced her portrayal of Miss Pratt as an ultimately sympathetic character.

\(^{94}\) I humorously refer to them as “the unholy trinity,” due to the negative perspectives that surrounded spinsters of the time.

\(^{95}\) This project’s introduction clarifies my usage of “marriage novel” to describe those that contain marriage as a central focus or theme, and very often end with the happy nuptials of a protagonist.
no way. In fact, spinsters’ primary function is often represented as draining family resources, though without this societal circumstance, some of the best novels of the nineteenth century may never have been written. Both Lady Betty and Miss Becky seem quite inconsequential since they influence the novel’s actual plotline very little, but their characters gain in importance when Miss Pratt becomes a central focus. In fact, though both figures fulfill a specific role within family circles, their functions contrast one another quite markedly; they are mirrored opposites of each other. Whereas Lady Betty—presented as aunt to Gertrude and sister to Lord Rossville—appears towards the novel’s beginning in Chapter III, Miss Becky Duguid—of no relation to the heroine—occupies a random chapter in the middle of the novel, the thirtieth of one-hundred-and-five chapters. Fittingly, Miss Pratt is the second-introduced and centre-most positioned of the three spinsters; the other two old maids form a highly unique cohort, albeit sometimes by virtue of their stressed uninterestingness. Readers learn of Lady Betty that she is “remarkable for the quantity of worsted work she executed” (21), but that her “character does not possess materials to furnish so long a commentary” (21). The only other references prior to this point describe her as a “harmless, dull, inquisitive old woman” with a lap-dog (11), a “long, inquisitive-looking nose,” “looks only expressive

96 Cindy McCreery describes the eighteenth-century perspective on women in the following way: “At a time when fears of population decline and the prospect of continued war led to the establishment of charities to preserve foundlings and to ensure the save delivery of poor married women, the public importance of motherhood, and motherhood within marriage in particular, was heightened” (113). Naturally, this viewpoint colored nineteenth century perspectives as well.  
97 Jane Austen’s novels are perhaps the most widely known nineteenth-century works that deal with the marriage theme. From Pride and Prejudice’s Elizabeth Bennett to Persuasion’s Anne Elliot, the protagonists of Jane Austen face the horrors of potential spinsterhood and overcome obstacles to their happy marriages.  
98 Writing of late eighteenth-century caricatures, Cindy McCreery remarks, “Thinness combined with a fondness for pets, especially cats, contribute to old maids’ witchlike demeanor” (127).
of stupid curiosity” (17-18), and a penchant for novel-reading (22). In keeping with her inquisitiveness and curiosity, she poses a number of questions which, as the narrator pointedly notes, no one bothers to answer (22), and Ferrier leaves her character static and undeveloped; her role is that of a fixture and nothing else.

In marked contrast to Lady Betty, Miss Becky Duguid’s appearances, limited to three total, lack the staid, complacent fixedness of her counterpart’s. Ferrier’s descriptions lead readers to accept Lady Betty without question, as they would a piece of furniture that never changes but clearly belongs in its particular nook or cranny. However, the role of Miss Becky provides more room for speculation. A cousin to Mrs. Fairbairn and, as stated, no relation to the heroine, Miss Becky first surfaces at the end of the twenty-ninth chapter. This intrusion into the storyline the narrator excuses based on her role as a messenger for Mrs. Fairbairn, who is detained from a Black family function due to her child’s crossness. Ferrier ends the chapter with this description: “In short, Miss Becky had the tout ensemble of a poor elderly maiden aunt; and such, indeed, was her history and character, as it is, alas! Of many others; but a slight sketch may serve to describe the genus, and serve as a tolerably faithful picture of Auntimony” (260).

Without further ado, the author then plunges readers into a chapter on the plight of Miss Becky, who “as a single woman, had vainly expected to escape the cares and anxieties of the married state” (261). Enumerated among these cares and anxieties are “the ill-humor

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99 Here Ferrier, like the later George Eliot, pokes fun at “silly novels.” She reports that Miss Betty “also read all the novels and romances which it is presumed are published for the exclusive benefit of superannuated old women and silly young ones—such as ‘The Enchanted Head,’ ‘The Invisible Hand,’ ‘The Miraculous Nuptials,’ etc, etc. ec.” (22).

100 Ferrier incorporates one such question into the text itself to illustrate this characteristic of Lady Betty. Lord Rossville pauses a long-winded panegyric about Mr. Delmour, at which point Lady Betty interjects with the words: “What time of night is it?” (24). No one answers the question, and Lord Rossville continues his discourse.
of husbands,” along with “the troubles and vexations of children” (261). Miss Becky’s chief desire is for freedom and mobility, and the narrator attributes the following perspective to her in the first person: “I can go where I like, do what I like, and live as I like” (261). But readers quickly learn the erroneous nature of this supposition, for Miss Becky does not long escape the state of “auntimony.”

If Miss Becky becomes a fixture within the novel, hers is a very mobile sort of fixedness, and not the sort that she desires. Her brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, and acquaintances of all sorts conscript her to their services. Indeed, she has no choice in the matter, but faces a constant unvarying drain on her limited resources: her money, time, and energy are sacrificed on the altar of societal expectation. Since she has no immediate family herself, “as a single woman, she could have nothing to do but oblige her friends”—or so the story typically runs. To reinforce descriptions of Miss Becky’s servitude, Ferrier fills the majority of her chapter with a single letter from a faceless “G.G,” who makes no less than fourteen different demands upon the spinster, each replete with subsidiary requests. G.G. tasks Miss Becky to return tea, have velvet dyed, hire a servant, order stays, drop by a gunsmith’s, watch the children, visit the family, procure fishing supplies, return a turban, send silk patterns, convey razors to the cutler’s, inquire into pricing for side saddles, take a child to the dentist, and follow up on shoe repairs. All of these activities and others Ferrier’s narrator ironically terms “the toils of celibacy” (268), a phrasing that not only underscores G.G.’s failure of maternal duty, but also argues against the unfair treatment of maiden aunts like Miss Becky whose families take advantage of them. The example of this seemingly minor character, who fills even less space within the novel than Miss Pratt, underscores yet again the unconventional
nature of Ferrier’s novel, also overturning the idea that the work simply recreates the same ridicule-rife stereotype of the spinster figure.

It seems fitting that, out of the three moments when readers glimpse Miss Becky, not once do they hear her voice in direct dialogue: Ferrier’s artistic omission silently comments on the deprivation of freedom, as evidenced through lack of social participation, effected by society. Despite the distinction of having an entire chapter devoted to her, Miss Becky remains voiceless and relegated to the margins—literally. As noted, the majority of Chapter XXX features the writing of “G.G.,” the married woman who oppresses Miss Becky into unwanted auntimony. This letter occupies center stage in the chapter, framed by very brief descriptive narration at the beginning, and then again at the end. The chapter itself appears to be a digression, yet the amount of attention afforded to spinsters in the novel overall suggests quite a different story. Ferrier frames her primary spinster figure, Miss Pratt, by two polar opposites—a fixture spinster whose presence drains family resources, and a mobile spinster whose family drains her resources. Neither character makes a notable contribution to the plot overall: Miss Becky surfaces in time for a random digression, and Lady Betty simply forms part of the scenery. But their extreme traits and odd, polarized functions counterbalance the presence of Miss Pratt, who borrows aspects of both characterizations to form the novel’s third and most compelling portrait of a spinster.

Part of the humor surrounding Miss Pratt arises from the indirect nature of her relationship to the families that she imposes upon. As Colonel Delmour explains the connection, “Miss Pratt, then, by means of great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers (who, par parenthese, may commonly be classed under the head of great bores), is,
somehow other, cousin to all families of distinction, in general, throughout Scotland, but to this one, from its local advantages, in particular. I cannot pretend to show forth the various modifications of which cousinship is susceptible, first, second, and third degrees, as far as numbers and degrees can go” (56). Delmour’s explanation of Miss Pratt’s connection to his family, and to other families, serves the initial purpose of comic relief as it interrupts the Earl’s long-winded harangue; it additionally contributes to Delmour’s own characterization by highlighting his pretensions as a great wit while showcasing the flippancy and rudeness that permits him to interrupt his own father. However, even as it fulfills several immediate functions, it also emphasizes Miss Pratt’s unusual mobility along with her social connectedness and, to a certain extent, her ingenuity. Rather than being used by the social system after the manner of Miss Becky Duguid, Miss Pratt molds the system to her own advantage. Delmour indirectly alludes to this fact as well when he goes on to explain her connection to the mysterious Anthony Whyte, who surfaces only as a name throughout the novel. He points out that Miss Pratt would not “be recognized in the world without Anthony Whyte” (56). Ironically, although it is Anthony Whyte who possesses riches, fine accommodations, even “horses and hounds” (56), he is perpetually absent and Miss Pratt parrots his name in order to add to her own social status. Miss Pratt extols the manifold virtues of her nephew, Anthony Whyte, throughout the novel, yet she does so in order to appropriate his authority and make it her own. In contrast to the disempowered old maids whom Ferrier has thus far presented, Miss Pratt bends the existing patriarchal framework to her will in surprising ways.

In terms of personal characteristics, Miss Pratt’s most marked trait is her garrulousness. Unlike the silent Miss Becky, Miss Pratt lives up to her namesake, prating
constantly, and her voice at times forms the only audible sound. In fact, the narrator uses the word “gabble” no less than four times to describe her speech within the novel’s first sixteen chapters.\(^1\) The overtones of ridicule—the very ridicule that often deters in-depth analysis—come through clearly in such descriptions. But in this case they point to characteristics that exert a powerful influence on plot.\(^2\) Creative descriptions of Miss Pratt’s vociferousness surface throughout the novel. For example, in a moment of free indirect discourse, the narrative voice reflects Lord Rossville’s perspective, when he takes umbrage at the “audacious jaws”—i.e. Miss Pratt’s—that invite hearse drivers to stay the night at Rossville (478).\(^3\) Perhaps the second-most-emphasized aspect of her physical person, Miss Pratt’s eyes merit a lengthy description at her first appearance. The narrator delineates Miss Pratt as follows:

Miss Pratt then appeared to her to be a person from whom nothing could be hid. Her eyes were not by any means fine eyes—they were not reflecting eyes; they were not soft eyes; they were not sparkling eyes; they were not penetrating eyes; neither were they restless eyes, nor rolling eyes, nor squinting eyes, nor prominent eyes—but they were active, brisk, busy, vigilant, immovable eyes, that looked as if they could not be surprised by anything—not even by sleep. They never looked angry, or joyous, or perturbed, or melancholy, or heavy; but morning, noon, and night they shone the same, and conveyed the same impression to the beholder, viz. that they were eyes that had a look—not like the look of Sterne’s monk,

\(^{101}\) These references occur on the following pages: 80, 112, 127, and 134.
\(^{102}\) Miss Pratt possesses social power and influence as well, which I will discuss later.
\(^{103}\) This incident will be discussed in more detail on page 109.
beyond this world—but a look into all things on the face of this world.

(63-64)

In contrast to the time-honored tradition of describing eyes by what they are, Ferrier here describes them by what they are not—a move, incidentally, reminiscent of Shakespeare’s parodic Sonnet 130, and the eyes become a metaphor for the figure herself: they open the proverbial window to her soul and reveal her keenness of observation, a trait reminiscent of Lady Maclaughlan’s role as truth-teller in the novel *Marriage*. The character Miss Pratt is “active, brisk, busy, vigilant,” and also “immovable.” Like Miss Becky, she keeps quite busy and enjoys a great deal of mobility, though she resembles Lady Betty in her reliance on others for sustenance. Indeed, the mobility issue and the subject of sustenance go hand-in-hand. From the outset of the novel the narrator makes Miss Pratt’s parasitical tendencies quite clear: she seems to be constantly on the move, which connects with a masterful knack of getting relatives to pay her bills. In fact, the narrator characterizes her as one “experienced in the art of offering visits, securing a seat in a friend’s carriage, and such like manoeuvres” (652). Colonel Delmour introduces the name of Miss Pratt for the first time when he acknowledges that his presence at Rossville springs partially from his desire to avoid Miss Pratt, who is accompanying Mr. Lyndsay. Delmour offers a seat in his curricle to Lyndsay, who in turn chivalrously offers it to Miss Pratt—which arrangement Delmour assiduously avoids due to his hatred of the latter. Delmour relays Lyndsay’s situation as

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104 The first line of Sonnet 130 relies upon a parodic reversal of typical sonnet conventions: “My mistress’ eyes are nothing like the sun.”

105 The narrator uses the word “immovable” in the sense of “obdurate”; it does not allude to mobility.

106 Just as the denigration of parody deters from its true importance, so also does the representation of Miss Pratt as parasitical too often deter from her actual role within the novel. Here we see a close relationship between satire and parody, as well as parody’s ability to perform dual functions simultaneously.
follows: “he remains like a *preux chevalier* to escort her [Miss Pratt] in a hackney-chaise, and also, I believe, to attend a Bible meeting, or a charity sermon, or something of that sort. It is more, I suspect, as a paymaster than a protector that his services are required, as he discovered it would cost her, I can’t tell how many shillings and sixpences; and though I would willingly have paid her expenses, yet, really, to endure her company for a nine-mile *tete-a-tete* was more than my philosophy dreamt of’ (55). This statement reveals a great deal about Delmour as well as Lyndsay, of course, a point to which I will later return.

Miss Pratt spends the remainder of the novel moving among friends and relatives, all the while managing to expend very few of her own resources; in fact, her financial success is quite remarkable and forms yet another contrast to the stereotype of the maiden aunt who must occupy her days with frugality, on the brink of poverty. While Miss Pratt’s parasitical economic success clearly add to the satirical and laughable side of her characterization, it provokes further thought when one considers the issues of mobility and isolation that Auerbach raises. Both of them cohere with satiric representations of the old maid during the nineteenth century, yet Miss Pratt enacts them with a unique, individualized style all her own; Ferrier has clearly modified simply satiric versions of the old maid to parody and create. At first glance, her character Miss Pratt falls short of the “isolation trait,” since she appears to be constantly with people, yet a second perusal unearths quite a different truth: she does indeed present readers with a form of isolation because she refuses the assimilation to which Auerbach refers. As Ferrier’s narrator states quite directly, her “business” involves “interfering in that of every other person” (384). Paradoxically, she both belongs to every group and to no group. Lord Rossville,
for one, exhibits terror at the thought of her coming and heaves a sigh of relief each time she leaves! In actuality, his reaction proves metonymic of a much larger, but related phenomenon. Ferrier facetiously writes, ‘‘sweet are the uses of adversity,’ when they come even in the questionable shape of a Miss Pratt” (82), then expands upon this idea by explaining, ‘‘everybody wearied of her, or said they wearied of her, and everybody abused her, while yet she was more sought after and asked about than she would have been had she possessed the wisdom of a More, or the benevolence of a Fry. She was, in fact, the very heart of the shire, and gave life and energy to all the pulses of the parish” (82). This candid description ends on a highly positive note. But even more importantly, it utterly denies the marginal status of the old maid, instead shifting her to the center of the social strata. It insists that, despite Miss Pratt’s imperfections, she performs a very important social function. Far from being a boring, sad, lonely, isolated old maid figure, she is actively involved in her community and makes important contributions that people instinctively value, even as their actions denigrate her. This is parody at its finest, for Ferrier has taken a stereotyped and denigrated figure in nineteenth-century society and turned such societal notions topsy-turvy. The figure without a heart suddenly becomes the heart of an entire shire.

In addition, each of the three abovementioned characteristics—talkativeness, vigilance, and mobility—first become embedded in the plot itself, and then exert a shaping influence on it: in the end the narrative relies heavily on Miss Pratt’s voice, her

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107 For examples of this, see Chapter XXIV and Chapter XXXV. In the first instance, Miss Pratt assures Lord Rossville of her visit. The narrator describes his reaction as follows: “Lord Rossville’s countenance fell at this assurance. He had been anxiously waiting the termination of Miss Pratt’s visit” (214). In the latter instance, the narrator broadens the scope of relief to include others: “Miss Pratt’s departure was as usual a relief to the whole party” (310).
sight, and her activeness for furtherance and ultimate resolution. For example, Miss Pratt’s eyes see much, but they lack discernment. This enables key misunderstandings to occur, which in turn act as catalysts for the plot. Miss Pratt does not long remain silent about what her eyes see. Thanks to her vigilance and corresponding lack of mental penetration, Miss Pratt infers a love interest, rather than disinterested friendship, between Edward Lyndsay and the heroine, Gertrude.\(^{108}\) Her mobility removes her from the immediate context long enough to leave the mistake uncorrected, and also permits her to spread rumors that later contribute to plot resolution. The pearls given to Gertrude by Lord Rossville are thus attributed to Lyndsay; based on her false assumption of the gift’s nature and source, Miss Pratt spreads the news of an attachment between Gertrude and Lyndsay (310), and this action precipitates a number of serious consequences.

Of the rumor Ferrier writes, “The report of his niece’s engagement with Mr. Lyndsay had, by the ingenuity of Miss Pratt, quickly circulated throughout the county, and had resounded and reverberated from all the corners of it, before the last echo reached the dull ear of Lord Rossville; but when it did, it produced all the effect of a thunderbolt upon his senses” (337). The “thunderbolt” experienced by Lord Rossville leads to a forcing of Gertrude’s hand—literally. Her uncle insists that she choose between marriage to Mr. Delmour, the family heir, or being disinherited. At this point, Gertrude has pledged her affections to the younger brother, Colonel Delmour, and is

\(^{108}\) The following excerpt offers an example of Miss Pratt’s misunderstanding of the relationship between Gertrude and Lyndsay: “The mutual embarrassment of the cousins was not lessened when they next met, and they seemed, by a sort of tacit agreement, to avoid each other, which Miss Pratt set down as a proof positive that there was a perfect understanding between them; but she was highly provoked that, with all her watching and spying, she never could detect stolen glances, or soft whispers, or \textit{tete-a-tete} walks, or private meetings, or any of those various symptoms which so often enable single ladies to anticipate and settle a marriage before it has been even thought of by the parties themselves” (309).
unaware of the rumor regarding herself and Edward Lyndsay. Ultimately, Miss Pratt’s action leads to the uncovering of the relationship with the younger Delmour. This forms one central conflict of the novel, as the desires of the heroine are thwarted by her uncle’s sense of duty and family honor. Had Miss Pratt not started her rumor, Colonel Delmour’s machinations might well have succeeded, since he intended to ensnare Gertrude in a secret engagement so that he could collect on her inheritance once the obstacle of Lord Rossville was removed. Instead, Colonel Delmour recedes from the narrative, temporarily at least, until he can plan another sally on Gertrude’s inheritance. Unlike Lady Maclaughlan in Marriage, the role of Miss Pratt in this instance is not to speak truth directly, but rather to inadvertently speak an untruth, which later evolves into a truth of ultimate benefit to the novel’s key players. On one level this immediate function of Miss Pratt mirrors one of her overall meta-functions within the novel. Through her character, Ferrier reproduces a representative of the old maid figure whose exaggerated characteristics speak a surface untruth about the societal worthlessness of the spinster. As Miss Pratt’s characterization unfolds, however, readers observe a corresponding transformation that points to a quite different and, from Ferrier’s perspective more accurate, valuation of the unmarried woman.

The inadvertent consequences of Miss Pratt’s actions—i.e. the temporary removal of Colonel Delmour—points to another important and redemptive purpose within the narrative. The previous section raises the notion of spinster-as-catalyst for the plot, but it also suggests an alternative role in conjunction with the heroine. Miss Pratt’s actions, inadvertent though they may be, often serve to protect Gertrude from some undesirable consequence, or conversely, to accelerate some desirable event. In the case of Colonel
Delmour, Miss Pratt’s rumor and Lord Rossville’s reaction to it initially prevent him from gaining Gertrude’s inheritance, if not her heart, through clandestine means. Miss Pratt also sows the seeds of future developments in the minds of both Edward Lyndsay and the heroine: it is the spinster who first insinuates doubt into Gertrude’s mind regarding the character of Colonel Delmour, and it is she who first encourages Lyndsay to think of Gertrude as a love interest. The happy conclusion of The Inheritance depends upon the marriage of these two key figures, for the narrator has represented Lyndsay as a man of impeccable principles and a fitting guide for the heroine’s future life. This particular revelation, inconsequential though it may seem at first, begins to unfold through the officiousness of Miss Pratt. She instigates the visit to Lord Rossville’s dressing room when she asks, “What have you all been thinking of, not to have found out that Miss St. Clair is the very picture of the Diana in the Yellow Turret?” (68). She then overcomes Lord Rossville’s reluctance to admit company to his private dressing room when she insinuates that his quarters may be less fit to be seen than her favorite Anthony Whyte’s. This obstacle overcome, the visitors have the opportunity to admire the portrait and note its resemblance to Gertrude—a fateful comparison.

109 Of Colonel Delmour, Miss Pratt says to Gertrude, “many’s the sore heart his wife will have, and many a sore heart he has given already with his flirtations, for he’s never happy but when he’s making love to somebody or other, married or single, it’s all the same to him” (287). She then proceeds to tell Gertrude about Colonel Delmour’s gambling debts and the 7,000 pounds he owes to Edward Lyndsay. Gertrude grants Miss Pratt’s words little credence at the time, but they help to reveal the Colonel’s true character. The narrator takes care to establish this fact towards the novel’s beginning, when Lord Rossville and visitors contemplate the portrait of Lizzie Lundie. Colonel Delmour disdains the thought of marrying a woman of low birth, whatever her moral accomplishments. Lyndsay responds, “‘There is a taste in moral as well as in corporeal beauty . . . and I can love and admire both for their own intrinsic merits without the aid of ornament. You, Delmour, must have them in court dress, with stars and coronets; but with beauty such as that,’ and his eye unconsciously rested on Gertrude, ‘had the mind, principles, and manners corresponded to it, I could have loved even Lizzie Lundie—perhaps too well’” (78).
Not only does Miss Pratt recommend the portrait to her auditors, but she also encourages and ultimately enables them to view it. Her goal reached, she establishes the connection between the portrait and Lizzie Lundie, the huntsman’s daughter. The narrator capitalizes upon the comparison later in the work, when the mysterious American, Lewiston, arrives and readers begin to question Gertrude’s parentage anew. Some questioning occurs as early as the portrait scene, not only due to the remarkable resemblance that Miss Pratt describes, but also thanks to the final flourish that she sets in motion: the fainting of Mrs. St. Clair for emphasis.\textsuperscript{111} At first, Miss Pratt’s actions have no apparent connection whatsoever to her role as protector; if anything, she puts the heroine at risk of losing her inheritance, should the secret of Gertrude’s adoption become known. However, further analysis reveals quite a different truth. Miss Pratt bears direct responsibility for the happy resolution of the marriage plot on several different fronts: 1) she sows the seeds that later enable Gertrude to recognize Colonel Delmour’s true character, 2) she singlehandedly brings Edward Lyndsay to fall in love with Gertrude, 3) she sets in motion the chain of events that makes Lyndsay Lord Rossville, and 4) she even saves the heroine’s reputation in the end.

Ferrier often uses Miss Pratt as a means of juxtaposing other figures, in order to develop characterization and also reveal moral character. Both functions occur in a number of places throughout the novel. On its most simple level, juxtaposition-as-character-development serves as comic relief to prompt laughter from readers. Lord Rossville is the most obvious example of this. As established earlier, he lives in mortal

\textsuperscript{111} Miss Pratt’s loquacity continues when she questions aloud, “I wonder what became of Lizzie’s family, for I think always I heard she had a daughter as great a beauty as herself—I’ve a notion it was a daughter of hers—Mrs. St. Clair, are you well enough?—Bless my heart, she’s going to faint!” (79).
terror of Miss Pratt, who undermines his dignity and usurps his position of power. When Colonel Delmour offers his initial, mocking description of Miss Pratt, Lord Rossville insists on clarifying her relationship to the family, which reveals his discomfort with her. He manages a half-articulated sentence before Colonel Delmour breaks in; this interruption on the score of Miss Pratt Delmour performs with his usual unconscionable suavity. Already, the simple subject of Miss Pratt has revealed important characteristics about two key players in the tale. Miss Pratt is clearly a source of conflict and discomfort for Lord Rossville, and Ferrier accentuates the contrast between the two when she describes the former as a “pert active sparrow” and the latter as a “peacock spreading its plumage, and straining its neck in all directions” (74). These images reiterate key traits of both characters—the mobility and vigilance associated with Miss Pratt, and the pride and show of decorum associated with Lord Rossville. Various moments of contrast between Miss Pratt and other characters thus serve as a means of developing respective characterizations, even as they accomplish the much more iconoclastic end of gender role reversal. As the head of his family, Rossville inherits the expectation of family protection with his title, as well as the funds that would permit him to safeguard loved

112 Lord Rosville’s interrupted sentence is as follows: “Miss Pratt’s great-grandfather—” (55). The exact nature of Miss Pratt’s relationship to the family remains hazy throughout the novel.

113 The theme of pride proves an enduring one in novels of the nineteenth century. Not only does the introduction of The Inheritance mirror that of Pride and Prejudice, but it also introduces the subject of pride, which is continued on that same page through a Biblical allusion to the Tower of Babel, a symbol of human pride. The novel makes a further connection to pride through its reference to the Rossville family’s outrage at the marriage of the Honourable Thomas St. Clair with “the humble Miss Sarah Black, a beautiful girl of obscure origin and no fortune” (2). Chapter Two then opens with a reference to the pride of Mrs. St. Clair (8), which the narrator then juxtaposes with the open and natural character of the heroine, Gertrude St. Clair (9-10).

114 Another example of clear contrast occurs in the midst of Chapter XIV, when Miss St. Clair considers her attraction to Colonel Delmour. The narrator interrupts this moment with the following comment: “But it was impossible for any ruminations to be carried on long in the presence of Miss Pratt, whose own ruminations never lasted longer than till she had made herself mistress of the dresses of the company or the dishes on the table” (116). Here the contrast between Gertrude’s thoughtfulness and Miss Pratt’s lack of thought serves to enhance the perfections of the central heroine.
ones in any way necessary, including travel for business or other purposes. But it is Miss Pratt to whom Ferrier ascribes a reputation for mobility, and it is the old maid Miss Pratt who exercises vigilance that ultimately works furthers family well being.

While the connotation of pride connected to the peacock image does hint at an authorial judgment, connecting with a key theme introduced at the very outset of the novel, Ferrier goes beyond simple contrast between Miss Pratt and other figures to comment on moral character. She thus imitates more typical, mocking representations of the old maid, but also modifies it in parodic fashion so that it serves other functions beyond that of simple ridicule or comic relief. Edward Lyndsay and Colonel Delmour, two characters whom Ferrier often juxtaposes with one another, offer key examples of this tactic: their interactions with Miss Pratt offer insight into Ferrier’s valuation of them. Once again, the first mention of Miss Pratt proves important for this very reason.

Colonel Delmour happily abandons Miss Pratt to her fate rather than enduring the tedium of her conversation, but Edward Lyndsay chooses to both stay with her and pay for her expenses. Ferrier here suggests that spinsters may indeed create a drain on resources, but she also reflects positively on those who provide for them. Indeed, the positive commendation becomes clearer as she continues to reveal character with the aid of Miss Pratt. When Miss Pratt and Mr. Lyndsay arrive, the company greets them “with shouts of laughter,” but Edward Lyndsay looks up, smiles, and seems “nowise disconcerted”; instead, he stands “patiently waiting for his companion to emerge” from their rather embarrassing conveyance (59).115 Later descriptions of Lyndsay reveal that his lack of embarrassment and his patience are not a failure of acuity or sensibility, but rather the

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115 They arrive in “a hackney-chaise of the meanest description” (59).
outflow of kindness towards another human being. Unlike Lord Rossville or Colonel Delmour, he offers a simple explanation of his connection to Miss Pratt, and for quite different motives: he endures her foibles patiently out of loyalty to his mother (63). His consistent actions towards Miss Pratt reveal the true nobility of his character, and thus his fitness to become Gertrude’s spouse. When Miss Millbank seeks to sympathize with Lyndsay on his lengthy journey with Miss Pratt, he does not use the opportunity to poke fun or vindicate himself, but seeks to terminate the conversation (62), and then offers Miss Pratt his arm at dinner (118). Ferrier later juxtaposes this kind action of Lyndsay’s with a contrary action by Delmour, who damages Miss Pratt’s dress and then “without deigning to take the least notice of the injury he had inflicted,” passes her by to offer another woman his arm (284). While one could argue that Miss Pratt’s role her is purely incidental, or important only to highlight the two male characters’ roles as foils to one another, a different vantage reveals that the treatment she here receives proves metonymic of spinsters in general. The fact remains that Delmour’s actions are represented as despicable; they bring to the fore the unfair marginalization that women like Miss Pratt must endure. As such, this scene serves as a brilliant, but covert, social commentary on the unfair treatment of women.

This is not to undermine the importance or complexity of the contrast that Miss Pratt permits to happen between Lyndsay and Delmour. Indeed, Ferrier’s commendations of Edward Lyndsay’s character via Miss Pratt prove much more subtle than her animadversions on the character of Colonel Delmour. Once again, Colonel

\[116\] In response to Miss Millbank’s inquiries Lyndsay says of Miss Pratt, “She was my mother’s friend and relation” (63).
Delmour’s tale of his versus Lyndsay’s actions towards Miss Pratt speaks volumes; by his own mouth Delmour stands condemned. Though the narrator so often makes Miss Pratt the center of a joke, thus distancing author from character, Miss Pratt’s perspective on Delmour proves to be correct. She both mistrusts and dislikes him, and one of her major functions is to reveal to the heroine and to the authorial audience his true character. Indeed, Delmour’s reactions to her, similar to Lyndsay’s, convey a great deal about himself. Besides refusing to champion Miss Pratt in the earlier instance where Lyndsay provides for her, he also shows “disgust” at her lack of musical talent (129), seizes her hands in annoyance (185), and purposely injures her “good Plowman’s gauze” (284).

One of Delmour’s chief characteristics in the presence of Miss Pratt is violence, which paints him as a desperate character and bodes ill for his future wife, a thought which Miss Pratt communicates on several occasions. In the second listed instance, when Delmour physically prevents Miss Pratt from removing a flower from Gertrude’s hair, Miss Pratt says, “I know you’ve left your marks upon me in a pretty manner. I didn’t know Miss St. Clair’s head had been your property, or, I assure you, I wouldn’t have offered to touch it; but I know if she’s wise, she’ll take care of how she trusts you with her hand, after seeing how you’ve used mine” (186).

Delmour may succeed in deceiving Gertrude, but Miss Pratt suffers no illusions on the matter. She sees the dangers of Delmour’s violent temper and voices them to Gertrude and others. A second instance of this proclaiming/revealing occurs after Delmour damages her dress, when she says, “she had need to be both a bold woman and

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117 Here again, a second level of parody becomes evident. One could take this as commentary on the plight of the unprotected spinster, rather than a satirical portrayal that ridicules Miss Pratt.
an rich one, who would choose such a rough wooer” (284). Just as the narrator grants credence to Miss Pratt’s notion of Gertrude’s resemblance to Lizzie Lundie (75), so also does a similar alignment occur on the subject of Delmour. Repeated acts of violence towards Miss Pratt bring out his true character,\(^{118}\) and place the spinster aunt once again in the role of protector as she warns the heroine and/or others of his actions and probable designs. Through the medium of Miss Pratt, Ferrier reveals the respective moral characters of Lyndsay and Delmour, and then juxtaposes them. Yet another clear instance of this occurs when Miss Pratt warns Gertrude of Delmour’s gambling debts and relays that Lyndsay generously became the latter’s creditor to save him from ruin. The story told by Miss Pratt additionally suggests Delmour to be a poor guide for the young—in context, to Edward Lyndsay who had just come of age, but also to the young, impressionable Gertrude by extension. An earlier contrast between Delmour and Lyndsay suggests that the latter would be just the man to act as mentor to Gertrude, as indicated by their differences over the issue of birth and the Lizzie Lundie portrait.

Among the most important of her roles within the novel, Miss Pratt serves as a matchmaker for the protagonist, singlehandedly bringing Edward Lyndsay to fall in love with the heroine. As previously indicated, her interferences at least undermine the certainty that Colonel Delmour will achieve Gertrude’s hand unchallenged. Perhaps due in part to her aversion to Delmour, Miss Pratt thinks that she discerns an intrigue between Lyndsay and Gertrude. At that point in the novel no such idea has entered Lyndsay’s head, but an inadvertent comment of Miss Pratt’s sets him thinking about it. Miss Pratt

\(^{118}\) Miss Pratt herself chooses the word “violent” after Colonel Delmour grabs her hands (185). The narrator’s use of “seized” to describe this incident, and later description of Delmour’s “colouring a little at the transport of indignation he had given way to” (185), validates this perspective and reveals the colonel’s tendency towards physical violence.
says, “So, I wish you joy, the cat’s out of the bag; but take care what you’re about, for a
certain person,’ pointing to Colonel Delmour, ‘will be ready to bite your nose off. ‘Pon
my word, you quiet people always play your cards best after all’” (295). These words,
unfounded though they are, plant a seed that takes firm root in Lyndsay’s mind. They
have such an impact that he later returns to request an explanation. The narrator explains,

Mr. Lyndsay, indeed, was little in the habit of attending to her words,
being possessed of that enviable power of mental transmigration, which
placed him, when even within her grasp, quite beyond the influence of her
power. He had, however, been struck with the mystical fragments of
speech she had bestowed on him the preceding evening; he was aware
how little dependence was to be placed upon them, but like the spider, her
webs, even though wove out of her own intellectual resources, must still
have something to cling to, and he resolved to lose no time in demolishing
those cobwebs of her imagination. (303-304)

Even as Ferrier seeks to differentiate between a minor and a major character, between a
Miss Pratt and an Edward Lyndsay, readers see the power of Miss Pratt’s words and
actions. Ridicule is very often present as Ferrier builds Lyndsay up at the expense of her
other character. For example, the narrator describes Lyndsay as having an “enviable
power of mental transmigration,” which reflects negatively on Miss Pratt. Nonetheless,
her insinuations about Lyndsay and Gertrude have taken hold and precipitate an inquiry
that solidifies the potential of relationship even more: “Disbelieving, as he certainly did,
the greater part of Miss Pratt’s communications, still it was not in nature that Mr.
Lyndsay should have felt altogether indifferent to them. Although not a person to yield
his affections lightly, he certainly had been charmed with Miss. St. Clair’s beauty and grace, with the mingled vivacity and softness of her manners, and with the open naïf cast of her character” (309). The narrator’s statement about Lyndsay’s inability to remain indifferent serves to elucidate his character further. Ferrier implies that, as a person of discernment, Lyndsay does not fall prey to transient, shallow emotions, yet he possesses enough taste to recognize and admire the heroine’s strong points. Nonetheless, much of the credit for Lyndsay’s interest in the heroine rests with Miss Pratt, in part due to her role in returning his attention to Gertrude, and the concern she elicits in him, that the heroine not fall prey to Colonel Delmour (309). Once again, Miss Pratt succeeds in placing these characters in juxtaposition with one another, but on quite a different plane: from this point forward, the two men become rivals for Gertrude’s affections. The very noteworthiness of this narrative outcome signals a disjunction between the minor role that Miss Pratt apparently occupies and her influence on plot and characterization. Ferrier clearly adopts many laughable characteristics of the spinster figure, but then modifies them to her own parodic ends.

In addition to Miss Pratt’s roles as plot catalyst, juxtaposer of characters, and helper to Cupid, Ferrier adds another, related function: bringer of death. This role proves singularly appropriate, considering the spinster’s placement external to marriage, outside of the sexual economy, and therefore apart from motherhood. The dramatic arrival of Miss Pratt via hearse occurs towards the middle of the novel and could be said to form its true center, or a primary focal point.119 It symbolically pinpoints one of the greatest anxieties associated with spinsterhood, since old maids cannot contribute to the

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119 Ian Jack calls this scene the “most entertaining moment” in the novel (238).
furtherance of the family line. Perhaps the most humorous moment in the entire story, this action of Miss Pratt’s attributes to her an almost supernatural power over life, which is somewhat reminiscent of Lady Maclaughlan in the novel *Marriage*. To say that Miss Pratt offends propriety (when she pulls up at Rossville in a hearse and provides overnight shelter for its attendants and the corpse of one Mr. M‘Vitae, a distiller) would be a massive understatement. Lord Rossville is justly incensed at Miss Pratt’s “violation of all propriety,” and her “disrespect to the living, . . . decorum to the dead” (477). In fact, the narrator informs readers, “The shock of a man-trap is probably faint compared to that which he experienced at finding himself in the grasp of the fair, and all powers of resistance failed under the energy of her hearty shake” (477). Miss Pratt shows a remarkable talent to overcome obstacles once again; the hearse, its attendants, and its democratic, deceased occupant do indeed stay the night on the strength of Miss Pratt’s cousinship to Rossville, along with the fear of a lawsuit and resulting unrest should the equipage be turned away (481). Similarly to her usage of Anthony White’s name, Miss Pratt uses the laws of her patriarchal society to advantage; the very laws that grant Rossville authority here usurp his power and cede it to Miss Pratt. The incident of the hearse attributes a freedom to Ferrier’s character and reveals Rossville’s oppositional pride to be a trap that restricts his control and obstructs his desires.

Once again, Miss Pratt serves as a clear contrast to the unbending decorum and pride of Lord Rossville. The novel’s reiterated thematic emphasis on pride in contrast to the spinster figure proves highly significant, in light of literary precedent. For example, Greek literature highlights *hubris* as the sin particularly abhorrent to the gods, as
emphasized by the very recorded definition of term.\textsuperscript{120} Biblical literature, another ancient source, also tends to place pride in opposition to a powerful deity and associate it with an ultimate downfall.\textsuperscript{121} While it is unsurprising, based on literary precedent, that the pompous Lord Rossville experiences a fall—in this case, death—it is highly significant that the novel utilizes pre-existing association of death with the spinster figure, but then causes death to befall a male character. Miss Pratt’s action ultimately purges the family of a dead weight, working in unforeseen ways to further the plot and the family line, as well as the welfares of Lyndsay and Gertrude. The narrator implies that Miss Pratt’s outrageous actions cause Lord Rossville such unrest that it hastens his death.\textsuperscript{122} Terrified by the judgment of his neighbors, Rossville spends a restless night: “When the first faint gray streak of light appeared, he rang his bell to inquire whether the funeral procession had departed . . . ; and when his servant entered in the morning he found his master a lifeless corpse” (485). The only insight provided into the mode of Rossville’s death is an inquiry, followed by a statement: “Whence it came, who can tell? Whether from cold, mental disquiet, or irreversible decree? ‘When hour of death is come, let none ask whence nor why!’” (485). Naturally, this closing exclamation sets in motion the opposite effect, encouraging readers to consider the immediate cause of the death rather than ignore it. The preceding reference to “mental disquiet,” demarcated by the words “cold” and “irreversible decree,” underscore the agitation caused by Miss Pratt’s actions and

\textsuperscript{120} The \textit{OED} defines “hubris” as “presumption, orig. towards the gods; excessive self-confidence.”

\textsuperscript{121} Proverbs 16:18 states: “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

\textsuperscript{122} Herbert Foltinek also affirms, “The abrupt demise of the Earl is indirectly due to an annoyance for which the indefatigable Pratt must accept responsibility” (136). But he then concludes: “Such a personage can hardly inspire affection, and the narrator is by no means keen to enlist our sympathy for her” (136). Since Ferrier presents Lord Rossville as a proud tyrant, his death hardly evokes sympathy from readers. In the end, Miss Pratt is a far more sympathetic character than Lord Rossville, with whom she is often juxtaposed.
suggest that she brought more than a corpse to the estate that fateful day: death himself paid Rossville a call. As is often the case, marked consequences attend the actions of Miss Pratt. The decease that she hastened begins a series of odd, unaccountable deaths, and the title passes from the elder Rossville, to Mr. Delmour, to Colonel Delmour, and from thence to . . . Edward Lyndsay. By hook or by crook, Ferrier will ensure that her heroine receives both wealth and the pomp of title. Albeit covertly, she uses her maiden aunt to further this desirable occurrence—yet another task for this oft-underestimated and parodic figure.123

Though Miss Pratt initially raises questions about Gertrude’s inheritance, and starts the rumor about the heroine and Edward Lyndsay, she also rights any wrong that they suffer through her agency. Gertrude does not obtain the title via either Mr. Delmour or the Colonel, but she receives it nonetheless, through the suitor with whom Miss Pratt had long paired her. Miss Pratt’s rumors cause embarrassment for Gertrude and others, yet they ultimately serve the lovers, for the spinster reappears at the novel’s end “to give the lie direct to the current report of Gertrude’s having been rejected by her lover on the discovery of her birth” (893). Miss Pratt insists that Gertrude repeatedly rejected Colonel Delmour and “had been long engaged to Edward Lyndsay” (893). In the end, the old maid’s chief qualities—her talkativeness, her mobility, and her vigilance—stand Gertrude in good stead. They evoke laughter and sometimes cause discomfort to those around her, but their effects are ultimately positive. They permit her to enter and exit the narrative at key moments, make observations that ultimately work to the benefit of the

123 As indicated previously, Miss Pratt is aunt to the perpetually absent Anthony Whyte.
protagonist, and act as a witness in time of need. From plot catalyst to righter of wrongs, each additional role that the spinster performs further validates her worth.

As a laughable spinster figure, Miss Pratt automatically falls into the category of minor character, but her many functions within the plot and her reiterated traits belie this instinct. In fact, other elements of Ferrier’s construction—such as placement and narrative explanations—attribute to Miss Pratt a high degree of importance. For example, the author sometimes delegates to Miss Pratt the task of beginning or ending a chapter. Chapter XXI provides just such an instance. The war between Miss Pratt and Colonel Delmour continues: upon Miss Pratt’s accusation that he has destroyed her ruff, Delmour gives the party a reading on the history of ruffs, to which affront Miss Pratt responds, “Such nonsense! . . . I really never heard the like of it. I wonder how you have patience to listen to it, Lady Betty. I really think Miss St. Clair might show more sense than to laugh at such ridiculous stuff. There’s the gong, that’s better worth attending to” (188). Miss Pratt’s words and ensuing exit end the scene and with it, the chapter as well. In contrast, Chapter LXXVI offers an example of Miss Pratt’s beginning a chapter, which opens with the words: “The dialogue was now at its lowest ebb, when Miss Pratt came pattering into the room full speed” (650). In this situation, the narrator affords Miss Pratt less notice, granting her no initial verbal role. But discussion of this character keeps Miss Pratt at the center of the narrative, for this is the chapter where Colonel Delmour tries to

\[124\] B.G. MacCarthy actually calls Miss Pratt “the best of all” when referring to characters and entertainment value (460), while Marshall Walker similarly concludes that she is the “liveliest part of the novel” (158). \[125\] In addition, Foltinek rightly says of Miss Pratt that “the amount of space allowed to her entries seems to show that the author took some inward delight in that personage’s unperturbed individualism and vigorous bearing” (143).
convince Gertrude to be rid of her. Both chapter XXI and LXXVI use character placement to contribute humor and further plot progression.

Other instances attribute importance to Miss Pratt, courtesy of explanations that Ferrier deigns to give through her narrator. In Chapter IX, the narrator describes why Lord Rossville finds Miss Pratt so insufferable. This clarification comes upon the heels of the key moment where readers learn why Miss Pratt is in such demand, despite the pretense that “everybody wearied of her” (82). It functions in part to dilute the strength of Lord Rossville’s dislike: readers thus understand that his reactions do not constitute authorial rejection of Miss Pratt’s character. Of those other characters who either dislike Miss Pratt or feel suspicion towards her—most prominently Colonel Delmour and Uncle Adam Ramsay—the narrator takes care to discount their opinions in various ways. By the novel’s end, the profligacy and villainy of Colonel Delmour has been established strongly enough to discount his opinion; if anything, his lack of regard for Miss Pratt could be seen as authorial endorsement of her. As for Uncle Adam, he himself finds her to be a remarkable woman, one who understands stocks no less (527), but she rouses his suspicion at her forwardness: in particular, her invitations for him to take sustenance in his own niece’s home, and her offer to take wine with him at dinner (533). Miss Pratt and Uncle Adam do, however, form an alliance against the infamous Colonel Delmour (579), and readers understand that Uncle Adam’s hesitancy stems primarily from his crotchety nature and his traditionalism. Overall, no contrary opinion within the novel functions as a definitive condemnation of Miss Pratt’s character, despite the narrator’s acknowledgment of her quirks.
On the contrary, other types of narrative endorsement solidify the pivotal role of Miss Pratt in unfolding events. As mentioned, the narrator sometimes agrees with her on important issues, such as Gertrude’s resemblance to Lizzie Lundie, or the despicable nature of Colonel Delmour. One key statement, contained within the explanation of the conflict between Rossville and Miss Pratt, provides a means of understanding the latter’s character: “The provoking part of Miss Pratt was that there was no possibility of finding fault with her” (83). In context, the narrator suggests that Lord Rossville’s attempts to correct or re-shape Miss Pratt’s conduct are wasted. She refuses to take him seriously, instead attributing “all the rebuffs and reproofs she received to the score of bile” (83). The surface meaning and rationale behind the narrator’s explanation are clear, but they also raise a second possibility. In the end, the narrator too does not “find fault” with Miss Pratt. Her bumbling, her mistakes, her breaches of decorum finally work out for the good of the protagonist and the truehearted Edward Lyndsay. Not only is potential damage neutralized, but Miss Pratt contributes strongly to the novel’s happy resolution—which fact the narrator acknowledges by the final moment of *deus ex machina*, when Miss Pratt singlehandedly saves the heroine’s reputation, an action that connects circularly with the novel’s opening statement about pride and human nature. The very existence of Ferrier’s initial reflection, as well as its placement at the outset of her work, points to the duty of discerning readers to judge characters rightly. The sequence of events within *The Inheritance* redeems the character of Miss Pratt, and the novel calls for a re-evaluation of both her importance and the importance of individuals apart from stereotype-based measurements of value.
In addition to this final mark of favor, the narrator validates Miss Pratt still further by saying, “One of the first to pay her respects to the new heiress of Bloom Park was Miss Pratt. That lady’s absence, or, at least, her silence, for so long a period, remains to be accounted for to such as take an interest in her fate” (892). It is fitting that the first to “pay respects” plays such a large part in bringing together the heroine and her paramour. However, it also seems telling that the narrator deigns to provide explanation regarding Miss Pratt, thus presuming readers’ interest in her absence, her silence, and her overall fate. Having set events in motion, Miss Pratt could afford to drop out of the narrative for a time, but her fate towards the end is bound to the fate of the heroine. As shown, Miss Pratt manifests a number of stereotyped characteristics commonly attributed to old maids, but she plays a crucial role within the narrative structure of *The Inheritance* and she performs many important functions. In addition, the laughter she evokes makes her an ultimately sympathetic character. The figure of the old maid in Ferrier’s second novel is thus highly ambivalent. Initially, she seems the butt of ridicule, but the facts validate her in the end, attributing inescapable power and importance to this parodic representation of a spinster.

**Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk***

Like *The Inheritance* (1824), Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796) also features a memorable spinster figure. However, whereas Miss Pratt falls clearly into the category of the “unwanted,” Leonella is more accurately classified as “grotesque,” whose characterization is further complicated by its connection with the duenna comic
First and foremost, Leonella manages to support herself, which closes down her upkeep as an avenue of attack. This in turn leads Lewis to blatantly direct his barbs against her person. Leonella is described as old, loud, profane, ugly, flirtatious, and obstinate, and she even smells of garlic. Each of these characteristics the author establishes from the novel’s outset: to all appearances, its opening scene tells readers all they need to know of Leonella. Chapter I presents a colorful, crowded scene at the church of the Capuchins in Madrid, where Leonella and her niece Antonia, along with many others, have come to hear the abbot Ambrosio speak. Of the assembly the narrator says, “The women came to show themselves, the men to see the women: some were attracted by curiosity to hear an orator so celebrated; some came, because they had no better means of employing their time till the play began; some, from being assured that it would be impossible to find places in the church; and one half of Madrid was brought thither by expecting to meet the other half” (11). Through one simple series of statements, Lewis here implies motives that range from vanity and lust, to curiosity and idleness. The people come to see and be seen, not out of devotion to religion, piety, or a supreme being.

The narrator goes on to say that the “only persons truly anxious to hear the preacher, were a few antiquated devotees, and half a dozen rival orators, determined to find fault with and ridicule the discourse” (11). The word “ridicule” proves fitting here, because ridicule is everywhere: even as Lewis’s characters prepare to ridicule, their author himself ridicules them, along with practically everyone and everything else. This

126 The OED’s second definition of “grotesque” is “a clown, buffoon, or merry-andrew.” Its second-listed adjective indicates that a grotesque object or person is “characterized by distortion.” In addition, the verb “grotesque” means “to caricature,” which establishes another link between the word and satirical caricature.
is “Monk” Lewis at his best—or his worst. Exaggeration is his favored tool,\(^{127}\) and the genre of the Gothic novel lends itself perfectly to that end. Because of its extremes and its ribald content, Lewis’s *Monk* is remembered as “the most controversial novel of the eighteenth century” (Cooper 24). Indeed, in the 2006 article “Gothic Threats: The Role of Danger in the Critical Evaluation of *The Monk* and *The Mysteries of Udolpho,*” Andrew L. Cooper identifies four key areas in which reviewers condemned *The Monk* as a threat: its influence on the young, its representation of gender, its treatment of superstition, and its revolutionary tendencies. The second matter touched upon, that of gender, becomes particularly important in light of the issues raised thus far in this chapter. Most critics see *The Monk* as remarkably transgressive in its portrayal of gender relations,\(^{128}\) but the tendency is to focus on Matilda, alias Rosario, who first cross-dresses as a rather effeminate male, and then manifests more aggressive or “manly” traits once she reveals her true sex to Ambrosio. Considering Lewis’s track record, Leonella seems quite unremarkable, for she manifests many of the same ridiculed traits commonly attributed to old maids of the eighteenth century. In this respect at least, has Lewis conformed to the status quo, thus accepting the common societal evaluation of the old maid as grotesque? Though Lewis’s Gothic novel differs drastically from *The Inheritance*, which follows many conventions of the novel of manners or *Bildungsroman*, it too contains a powerful minor female character that ultimately parodies disempowering notions of the old maid.

\(^{127}\) Kent and Ewen note that traditional definitions of parody name distortion, exaggeration, and substitution as its major techniques (12).

\(^{128}\) Cooper explains that its “transgression of gender norms goes beyond the portrayal of a wanton woman who delights in murder and promiscuity, which alone would be enough for a critic like the English reviewer of Tancred to declare that the novel encouraged unnatural violations of gender norms for femininity” (25).
As suggested, Lewis’s introduction to Leonella brings to the surface most, if not all, of the most-ridiculed traits of the spinster; if his representation does indeed parody established stereotypes, as I argue, then the novel illustrates an even closer relationship between satire and parody than *The Inheritance* does. The fact that Lewis embeds Leonella in a Gothic novel, set in a foreign country that embraces Catholicism, makes it much easier for him to adopt a satirical portrayal. The setting and circumstances distance his British, Church of England audience even further from the subject material. Thus, Leonella is not simply annoying, but downright repulsive. The first two traits to be referenced are her age and her recalcitrance, along with her masculine arms: “The old woman was obstinate, and on she went. By dint of perseverance and two brawny arms she made a passage through the crowd, and managed to bustle herself into the very body of the church, at no great distance from the pulpit” (12). Age, of course, is one oft-critiqued aspect of old maids, who are sometimes referred to as a “superannuated virgins,” or denigrated by some similar phrase.129 When speaking of late eighteenth-century British caricature, Cindy McCreery rightly notices that single women came under attack not only for their gender, but also for their age, and “an exploration of their treatment reveals considerable antipathy toward aging and the elderly” (112-113). But Lewis’s “old woman” is hardly fragile, as her “two brawny arms” attest. In his very first reference to her, Matthew Lewis engages in gender bending by attributing to Leonella the masculine trait of strength. Also, even as he terms her “obstinate,” he pairs this word with “perseverance,” which carries quite a different, and not altogether negative, 129 In the early modern period, words “virgin” and “maid” tended to appear more often in a literary context, while “spinster” and “singlewoman” appeared in legal, testamentary, and civil records (Froide 160).
connotation. Leonella shows this ability to persevere immediately when she first gives a “broad hint” about their (hers and Antonia’s) seating arrangement, hoping to receive aid from bystanders. She precedes this hint with the statement: “I believe we must return,” which utterance reinforces her temerity. Leonella had fought her way into the heart of the overcrowded sanctuary. Rather than succumbing to her circumstances and at least resting for a while, she then expresses willingness to exit along the arduous path she had just taken. Though Lewis’s descriptions clearly ridicule Leonella, she still comes across as formidable and not simply grotesque. Had the author truly wished to show disdain towards this character, he could have made her an insipid, or entirely irritating character, instead of also showcasing her formidable strength. Instead, Lewis’s Leonella comes across as noteworthy from the outset—ridiculed, yes, but nonetheless remarkable.

When she opens her mouth to speak, the first words to issue humorously underscore her lack of piety: she exclaims “Holy Virgin!” not once, but twice—a distinctly masculine move which, to minds of an English audience, better befits a sailor than a lady of breeding and heroine’s companion.130 Like Miss Pratt, Leonella’s vociferousness aligns her with stereotypical notions of the old maid, who tortures everyone with her incessant babbling. The narrator reinforces this characteristic after Lorenzo, for the sake of his new paramour, agrees to speak with the marquis de las Cisternas on Antonia’s behalf. “Leonella’s satisfaction was much more loud and audible.

130 Published in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the American publication *Appleton’s Journal* describes the use of religious profanity in various European nations: “As a matter of course, in thoroughly Roman Catholic countries the Virgin’s name figures extensively” (134). Within the same paragraph, the article cites the surprise of Englishmen who discovered that children in Calais spoke a very pure form of French, also noting that these same English visitors “might have justly added ‘and used irreverent language too.’” The journal’s mode of phrasing, though colored by an American perspective, suggests that the English would be shocked by what would be considered profanity in England. Lewis’s characterization of Leonella taps into this English perspective of religious profanity.
Indeed, as her niece was generally silent in her company, she thought it incumbent upon her to talk enough for both: this she managed without difficulty, for she very seldom found herself deficient in words” (18). Lewis here implies that Leonella’s words make her a tedious companion who grates on the nerves of unfortunate listeners, but his narrator and his readers find themselves much obliged to her for this very same trait on two different counts.

First, similarly to the technique utilized by Ferrier in *The Inheritance*, the juxtaposition between this spinster figure and Antonia furthers character development: most roses would smell sweeter after Leonella’s garlicky perfume, but the contrast nonetheless establishes Antonia’s beauty, modesty, and sensibility quite effectively. The marked differences between the two women serve to heighten her lover’s appreciation for her. Such effects of Leonella’s presence point to a parodic technique similar to that operating in *The Inheritance*; even as Lewis taps into spinster stereotypes, modification is at work as Leonella becomes more than the stereotype, shaping the novel’s plot from within. For example, after Leonella’s broad hint regarding seating, Antonia expresses her willingness to return home “in a tone of unexampled sweetness” (12), which attracts the attention of Don Lorenzo and Don Christoval. In addition, Leonella’s inept attempts to flirt with the latter stand in stark contrast to Antonia’s shyness about unveiling in public (14-15), and her modest sense of propriety. The narrator describes Antonia not only as a youthful beauty (15), but also characterizes her demeanor in the following manner:

“She looked round her with a bashful glance; and whenever her eyes accidentally met

131 In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Mary Poovey discusses eighteenth-century viewpoints on female nature and propriety. She writes, “Modestly announces purity in a virgin” and “promises fidelity in a wife” (22). Poovey also notes the attractiveness associated with modesty, the effect of which Lorenzo clearly experiences in this scene.
Lorenzo’s, she dropped them hastily upon her rosary; her cheek was immediately suffused with blushes, and she began to tell her beads” (15). This shy, maidenly behavior humorously offsets the bold glances of Leonella, who has marked out Don Christoval as her prey. In the midst of their discussion with the two newly-met strangers, she begins to favor him with her attentions. As the narrator describes the situation, “Here she intended to throw a tender and significant look upon Don Christoval; but, as she unluckily happened to squint most abominably, the glance fell directly upon his companion” (17).

In addition to her flirtatious behavior, “grey eyes that squint,” “paint and patches,” and a “few red hairs” complete the ensemble (35-36). Leonella is clearly hideous, but her physical appearance serves to highlight the positive qualities of her charge—from her “sweet tones” (12), to her “delicacy,” “elegance,” and “fair hair” (13)—which all pique Lorenzo’s interest and pull him into the storyline.

Secondly, in addition to their contribution to character development, Leonella’s effusions convey very important information that Lewis builds upon later. Perhaps the most important such instance occurs when Leonella relays Antonia’s history to Lorenzo and Christoval. Along with the cavaliers, readers learn of the secret marriage of Antonia’s mother Elvira with a young nobleman. This offers insight not only into the heroine’s circumstances, rendering her highly interesting to her lover, but it also contains a second bit of important information—the kidnapping and reported death of Elvira’s young son, Antonia’s brother. At the very end of the novel, when Ambrosio sells his soul and faces his death, the abducting fiend reveals that Ambrosio has added matricide and incest to the list of his crimes: Elvira was his mother, and Antonia was his sister. The

132 These descriptions appear within the gypsy’s song towards the end of Chapter I.
very information that readers received from the mouth of Leonella serves to foreshadow dramatic ending to the work. In terms of narrative function then, she contributes to the overall unity of the narrative.

Leonella’s talkativeness and contrast with central heroine Antonia both parallel the interplay between Miss Pratt’s characteristics and roles in *The Inheritance*. As discussed, Miss Pratt sets in motion important events through communications to fellow characters, which in turn facilitate the unfolding of the plot. She also juxtaposes other figures in order to reveal aspects of their moral characters. Other primary traits of this sister spinster include vigilance and mobility, two attributes that Leonella shares. Similarly paired aspects of Leonella’s vigilance are worth discussing—her lack of mental acuteness and her instinctive judgments. These characteristics often go hand in hand, as when Leonella mistakes Don Christoval’s gallantry for romantic interest. Feigning maidenly delicacy (of which readers understand she has none), she makes an unfounded request that Christoval delay his proposal of marriage (23), then later instructs that he “moderate the excessive ardour of [his] passion” (24). Leonella notices Christoval’s attentions, but misunderstands the motives behind them: she misses that the man simply seeks to further his friend’s interests while acting the part of a gallant young gentleman. Even as he plays with the unrealistic conventions of courtship and romance, there is no doubt that Lewis pokes fun at spinsters who refuse to acknowledge their age and attempt to entrap younger men into matrimony.

But there is another side to Leonella’s vigilance that proves highly accurate—her judgment of the novel’s villainous monk, Ambrosio. In Chapter I, the narrator and Leonella join forces to further Lewis’s revelation of the monk’s truly evil heart. A
rhetorical question ends Ambrosio’s stunning oration in the church of the Capuchins:
“The abbot, smiling at their eagerness, pronounced his benediction and quitted the
church, while humility dwelt upon every feature. Dwelt she also in his heart?” Lewis
contrasts this query with the sweet sorrow that Antonia feels at Ambrosio’s departure, as
she considers the abbot’s isolation and the likelihood that she will never see him again.
Lorenzo and Antonia then agree that the abbot has a strong chance of maintaining his
virtue despite the temptations of success, and Antonia asks her aunt to request that her
mother make Ambrosio their confessor. Leonella states: “I do not like this Ambrosio in
the least; he has a look of severity about him . . . . Were he my confessor, I should never
have the courage to avow one half of my peccadilloes . . . ! I never saw such a stern-
looking mortal, and hope that I shall never see such another. His description of the devil,
God bless us! almost terrified me out of my wits, and when he spoke about sinners he
seems as if he was ready to eat them” (23). Don Christoval then responds, “Too great
severity is said to be Ambrosio’s only fault. Exempted himself from human failings, he
is not sufficiently indulgent to those of others” (23). Antonia experiences none of the
dislike that her aunt feels towards Ambrosio, yet oftentimes the ridiculed maiden aunt has
the truest instinct towards the villain of the piece. As Miss Pratt becomes the sworn foe
of Colonel Delmour, so does Leonella wish to keep Ambrosio as far from her household
as possible. Her reasons may not claim a concrete, well-rationalized backing, but events
prove her to be correct about Ambrosio’s character: the abbot becomes Antonia’s greatest
foe—the man who first attempts to seduce her, and whose desires end in rape and

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133 “Their eagerness” refers to the swiftness with which the people divided the rosary that Ambrosio dropped.

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murder. Ambrosio’s severity blinds him to the hypocrisy lurking in his heart and ultimately contributes to a number of very serious consequences, among them the death of Antonia.

Leonella’s instinctive vigilance points to an important role that she shares with Miss Pratt. In her own way, she also serves as a protector to the central protagonist. Her dislike of Ambrosio bars him from their home perhaps a little longer than he would have been if Antonia had gained her desire immediately—an outcome that Miss Pratt also effects for her heroine when she (indirectly) uncovers Colonel Delmour’s plot to Lord Rossville. Later in The Monk, though Leonella finally yields to Antonia’s desire to visit Ambrosio on behalf of her sick sister, she does so with trepidation. The narrator informs readers, “Her fears had conquered even her natural loquacity” (208). Just as she helps to bar one villain for a time, she too contributes to the potential love match between the protagonist and Lorenzo.\(^{134}\) Out of caution, Antonia’s mother forbids Leonella to send the promised note to Lorenzo, apprising him of their location,\(^{135}\) but Leonella disregards the injunction. At this point the narrator assumes a mock-heroic tone: “Through this resolution Leonella was determined to break: she conceived it to be inspired by envy, and that her sister dreaded her being elevated above her” (175). Both the narrator’s statement and the words of Leonella’s note provide readers a means of chuckling at her vanity and her misperception of Don Christoval’s attachment to her. In her note she reiterates the notion that the actions of Elvira stem from jealousy, but hints that they also bespeak protectiveness of her own maidenly virtue (rather than Antonia’s). The note begins with

\(^{134}\) In keeping with Lewis’s choice of the Gothic genre and his lack of conventionality, the expected love match never actually materializes.

\(^{135}\) Leonella tells Lorenzo in the Church of the Capuchins that she will relay his offer of help to her sister and then send to him (24).
the words: “Doubtless, Segnor Don Lorenzo, you have frequently accused me of ingratitude and forgetfulness: but on the word of a virgin it was out of my power to perform my promise yesterday” (175). What exactly strikes readers as so humorous about this scene? Part of the humor arises from misperception—once again, the idea of vigilance sans mental penetration. Leonella sees her sister’s apprehension and her protectiveness, but she wrongly assumes that these reactions pertain to her. Whether or not she accurately grasps the situation, however, she performs a number of important functions within the plot, which readers would not normally attribute to a flat, stereotypical character whose primary end is satirical rather than parodic.

This incident relies heavily upon stereotypes associated with those in Leonella’s position. As in The Inheritance, the trait of vigilance contributes to the construction of Lewis’s old maid figure, additionally tying in with the aforementioned duenna characterization, which often places an aged female figure as an obstacle to the attainment of a love interest. However, Lewis has modified his character so that other, more parodic associations are at work here as well. Vanity and voracious sexual appetite are two characteristics sometimes attributed to old maids; not surprisingly then, Lewis pursues vanity as a major theme in The Monk, yet he does not associate it exclusively with one sex or the other—a somewhat unusual choice. In “Lustful Widows and Old Maids in Late Eighteenth-Century Caricatures,” Cindy McCreery rightly points out that “old women were satirized more than young women for their barrenness, vanity, and interest in men,” just as “unmarried women were censured more harshly than married women” (114). The vanity of Leonella differs greatly from the vanity of Ambrosio, the
arch villain. No one walks away from Lewis’s novel with a modicum of respect for Ambrosio, but it could be argued that Leonella becomes an ultimately lovable character.

Within the context of Leonella’s note, the reference to jealousy aligns with the narrator’s to highlight her mistaken idea of her own attractiveness.136 Leonella’s status as an old maid contributes humor to these other characteristics, and Lewis heightens the humor still further through statements like the abovementioned reference to virginity. The irony behind the words is unmistakable: Leonella claims credibility based on her status as a virgin, while the epitome of virginity—one such as Antonia—would blush to even reference the subject of virginity. Through Leonella’s own words, then, Lewis casts doubt upon this character’s discretion, if not her continence. He once again incorporates an underlying parody of the Gothic romance, which Gary Kelly describes as “sentimental tales transplanted to other climes and times” (43). Lewis undoubtedly meets the criterion of exotic location, but there is nothing sentimental about Leonella’s blunt references to chastity. Furthermore, in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, modesty was seen as a sign of purity and an indication of future fidelity in marriage (Poovey, The Proper Lady 21). Leonella’s foibles are thus exceedingly anti-romantic, yet they cause harm to no one. They evoke laughter from readers and ultimately further the cause of her protégé. The novel continues to affirm Lorenzo as a potential spouse for the heroine, and the storyline ultimately validates Leonella’s actions when it reveals Ambrosio’s villainy and Lorenzo’s honorable intentions. Overall, Ambrosio’s mother Elvira may possess much more acuteness than her sister: her displeasure at Lorenzo’s false representation of the

136 This trait surfaces often in satirical descriptions of grotesque, aging women who often “paint” as well. Madame Duval in Frances Burney’s Evelina offers another example of just such a woman, which shows that women other than the old maid found themselves the butt of caricature.
reasons for his friend’s failure to visit Leonella communicates her awareness of his
deception (177). But it is the actions of Leonella that bring Antonia closer to obtaining
Lorenzo as a protector, while Elvira wrongly trusts Ambrosio at first. In the end, it could
be argued that Leonella serves as a stronger protector figure than Antonia’s own mother.

Similarly to her counterpart Miss Pratt in The Inheritance, the contributions that
Leonella makes to the heroine and others far outweigh the harm that she does. Besides
furthering the potential love match between Antonia and Lorenzo, she acts as a protector
in other instances, and Lewis uses these moments to bring a depth to his character that
challenges her initially satirical portrayal. Leonella’s characteristics clearly connect with
those commonly attributed to eighteenth and nineteenth-century spinsters; but her
positive qualities and her influence on the plot singlehandedly overturn the work’s satire
to suggest a parodic rendering of common stereotypes. By revealing Leonella to have a
heart of gold, Lewis’s novel actually parries and parodies the reader’s negative
expectations stemming from the initial portrayal of Leonella. The first clear evidence of
Leonella’s positive qualities surfaces in Elvira’s story to Lorenzo. When she tells the tale
of her relations’ cruelty, Elvira admits that she and her daughter reached “the very brink
of want” upon her father-in-law’s death (183). The ensuing acknowledgment, though
briefly stated, is staggering: “In this situation I was found by my sister, who, amongst all
her foibles, possesses a warm, generous, and affectionate heart. She aided me with the
little fortune which my father left her, persuaded me to visit Madrid, and had supported
my child and myself since our quitting Murcia” (183). Elvira’s balanced, straightforward
manner of speaking almost obscures the import of her statement. Despite her desperate
circumstances, the text gives no indication that Elvira sought help from her sister—quite
the opposite. The word “found” instead suggests that Leonella sought for her sister and then took upon herself the support of two people, no small strain on her resources. Had vanity been Leonella’s primary characteristic, she would never had sacrificed her “little fortune” for the good of her destitute sister and niece. Singlehandedly, she saves them both from poverty, perhaps even from starvation.

Another aspect of Leonella’s protection extends beyond mere sustenance to the person of Antonia herself, as established earlier. Leonella keeps Ambrosio at bay for a time, though she yields to her niece’s requests in the end. This fatal decision, however, does not override her protector function, for the narrative still emphasizes the important role that she fills as protector to Antonia. When Ambrosio decides to visit his future prey, the narrator notes, “It was here that he ran the greatest risque of discovery. Had Leonella been at home, she would have recognized him directly. Her communicative disposition would never have permitted her to rest, till all Madrid was informed that Ambrosio had ventured out the of abbey, and visited her sister. Fortune here stood the monk’s friend” (210-211). This moment within the text illustrates the true importance of the very same characteristics so often ridiculed in the spinster figure. Even without a direct and deliberate attempt to protect, Leonella’s loquacity and her vigilance would once again have proved Antonia’s friend, had the spinster been present. In order for Lewis to fulfill the dastardly trajectory of the novel, in order for him to enable Antonia’s murder, he must first remove her most powerful protector: the unmarried aunt. Ironically, the woman who bears direct responsibility for Antonia—i.e. her mother—again makes the wrong decision. It is Elvira who insists that Leonella undertake the journey to secure a bequest left to the sisters by their cousin: “But Elvira insisted upon
her taking the journey, conscious that in her daughter’s forlorn situation, no increase of fortune, however trifling, ought to be neglected” (211).

Considering the monetary loss that Leonella has suffered on behalf of sister and niece, she has a strong rationale for leaving Antonia unprotected. The novel, however, clearly indicates the strength of Leonella’s affection and her unwillingness “to quit her sister in so dangerous a state,” lest the latter succumb to illness (211). Lewis’s narrator here echoes Elvira’s earlier words to acknowledge that her sister’s heart “was truly warm and affectionate” (211). And more importantly, the disappearance of Leonella from the text assures the doom of Antonia. Shortly thereafter Elvira tells all her cares regarding Antonia to her daughter’s chief enemy, Ambrosio, better known as the wolf in sheep’s clothing. The mother admits that Antonia has but two protectors: of these, she considers Leonella to be highly unstable due to her thoughtlessness and vanity (213). The irony of the mother’s role becomes doubly clear at this moment. She fears the influence that Leonella might exert on Antonia, but she places her trust in the very man who would most gladly endanger her daughter. Granted, she does realize Ambrosio’s intentions later in the novel, but she fails to stop the abbot and becomes his prey instead. In contrast, Lewis made it quite clear that, had Leonella been present, her very foibles would have best served Antonia’s interests and kept her from harm.

Leonella’s absence is thus highly significant; without his spinster figure, Lewis would have no tale to tell. Absence also connects with the issue of mobility in surprising ways. By and large, Leonella seeks to use her mobility—so often seen as a negative trait—for the good of others. This spinster aunt might be characterized as highly mobile, since readers know that Leonella has traveled to her sister’s rescue in the past and later
departs just in time for Ambrosio to consummate his evil scheme. If Miss Pratt engages in *deus ex machina* towards the end of *The Inheritance*, Leonella’s actions here could be termed as “reverse *deus ex machina.*” Indeed, her sudden exit seems just as contrived as Miss Pratt’s abrupt entrance in the nick of time to save the heroine’s reputation. This juxtaposition between exit and entrance by spinsters obtains still more significance in light of the novel’s ending: Antonia does not in fact become Lorenzo’s bride, but instead becomes the prey of the novel’s villain. Is the absence of a more traditional happy ending—i.e. the love match between protagonist and devoted paramour—connected to Leonella’s absence? The details suggest that this is indeed the case. Inadvertent though her interference may be, one of Leonella’s chief functions as maiden aunt is to serve as a protector to the heroine; only when she leaves does Ambrosio find a means of ingratiating himself with his prey and her mother. Ironically, marriage surfaces as the major motivation behind Leonella’s extended absence. The narrator informs readers that an “honest youth of Cordova, journeyman to an apothecary, found that her fortune would be sufficient to set him up in a genteel shop of his own. In consequence of this reflection he avowed himself her admirer. Leonella was not inflexible; the ardour of his sighs melted her heart, and she soon consented to make him the happiest of mankind” (212).

The situation that Lewis constructs contains several parodic reversals of the typical romance plot. First and foremost, it is Leonella rather the young heroine who suddenly obtains the prize of marriage, and in the context of this argument, marriage proves of the utmost importance. The author possesses strong awareness of novelistic conventions and recognizes the traditional trajectory of *Bildungsromane* and novels of manners, which genres validate the virtue of their heroine through a happy marriage that
concludes the novel. Instead, Lewis grants this prize to the “superannuated virgin” of the piece. In this way he not only parodies established novelistic convention, but undermines his character’s ability to fulfill her protector role. The consequences of Leonella’s absence, and her marriage by extension, force a reevaluation of commonly accepted notions of the time. Far from being superfluous, Leonella not only plays a crucial role in the lives of her family members—their lives are literally at stake—but her actions also serve as a driving force behind the plot. The issue of absence thus gains tremendous importance and grants Leonella an unusual amount of power. Because of one character’s choice, a mother and daughter both die. Once again, had Leonella managed to publish Ambrosio’s first visit, she would have proverbially “blown his cover,” but her absence enables him to perpetrate two murders. Due to Antonia’s death, her lover Lorenzo marries another, the woman Virginia. The remarkable recovery of this lovesick hero adds a final flourish to Lewis’s parody: to echo the words of his narrator, “Nobody dies of mere grief” (266).

A second parodic reversal attached to Leonella’s surprise marriage stems from her part in the matchmaking. Lewis presents the spinster as flirtatiously grotesque and out to catch a husband, but in the end a husband catches her. Yet again, Leonella steps into the role of provider, and throughout the space of the novel she never once drains anyone’s resources—in fact, quite the contrary. Lewis revels in the circumstances surrounding the marriage of this character. His narrator adopts a mock-heroic tone to parody the language adopted by so many marriage novels: for example, Leonella “consents” to make her lover “the happiest of mankind.” Lewis makes it clear that the journeyman has mercenary motives, and his words are rife with ironic undertones. Leonella does indeed
make her husband the happiest of mankind, thanks to her independent income. In addition, the journeyman’s behavior tops Leonella’s, making her flirtatious tendencies much less grotesque. As for Lewis’s treatment of marriage in this instance, the case of Leonella forces a re-examining of her character. The facts suggest that she is not another satirical portrayal of the spinster, but rather a parody of such negative characterizations. If spinsters became the target of harsh portrayal due to a failure to marry, and if negative portrayals were meant to serve as a deterrent, then Leonella fails to serve the purposes of satire, instead herself becoming a sort of commentary on inflated societal perspectives of marriage, as evidenced through the romance novel. Her role within The Monk is both powerful and overwhelmingly positive, and Lewis rewards her with marriage, even at the heroine’s expense. As additional validation, both Don Raymond and Lorenzo present her with gifts, in gratitude for her generosity to Elvira and Antonia.

Initially, The Inheritance and The Monk form a sharp contrast to one another. Ferrier’s reputation for didacticism contributed to her novel’s fall from favor, while the graphic nature of Lewis’s novel made it a best-seller; Ferrier adopts the conventions of the novel of manners, while Lewis gravitates towards the luridness of the Gothic. Even the respective lengths of the three-volume novels enhance this juxtaposition: The Inheritance concludes around 900 pages and The Monk around 400. Nonetheless, at the heart of both novels lies one major similarity, their appropriation and modification of stereotypes surrounding the old maid. The characterizations of Miss Pratt and Leonella evidence some of the most-ridiculed traits associated with spinsters—such as talkativeness, vigilance, and mobility. Yet the argument can be made that these figures actually parody society’s negative perspectives on the role of the old maid. A close
examination of Miss Pratt and Leonella’s functions within, and influence on, their narratives reveals their potential towards heroism. In fact, the satirical overtones surrounding these figures break down over the space of their novels. A handful of minor characters die in each novel, but the spinster is never among them; instead, she receives some sort of validation by the novel’s conclusion. Ferrier’s narrator grants Miss Pratt the honor of contributing to the heroine’s love match and then offering her congratulations at the end. Though others ridicule her or are said to ridicule her, she never feels the full brunt of their scorn. Towards the conclusion of *The Monk*, Leonella receives the dual rewards of marriage and gifts. Even more tellingly, both women serve as powerful protector figures of the central heroine: Miss Pratt’s presence enables Gertrude’s love match, and Leonella’s absence precipitates Antonia’s eventual death. When one changes focus to consider each of these characters as a potential center to their stories, the central messages of each novel also seem to shift. In the end, two novels within the Romantic tradition affirm the worth of initially satirized spinster figures, and one of the two, Lewis’s work, does so while both mocking and undermining the conventions of the romance novel. This works against common societal perspectives of uselessness to suggest that spinsters too have important contributions to make. To return to earlier-referenced characteristics of parody, among its major traits are “ambiguity” and “ability to criticize and renew its target” (Rose *Parody* 86). Ferrier’s and Lewis’s representations of the spinster are tinged with ambiguity, because of their dual functions. Both convey clear overtones of humor—more marked overtones in the case of Leonella—but both also affirm the worth of their characters repeatedly. Even as the novels rely heavily on
satirical caricature, so do they also bring new, positive perspectives and possibilities to the discussion of the spinster’s role in society, as well as their individual worth.
The third chapter of my dissertation, “Satire and the Role of the Monster,” considers the interconnectedness of grotesque monstrosity and two satirized, secondary, female characters—Madame Duval in Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778) and Harriet Freke in Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801). Whereas Madame Duval comes across as hyper-feminine, Harriett Freke falls between genders, complicating essentialist-based notions of identity in the tradition of *Gender Trouble*. She cross dresses, feels at ease in male attire, and even has “bold, masculine arms” (39). However, readers are not duped by the intense, satirical negativity of *Belinda*’s descriptions of this character: despite her “freakishness,” Harriett Freke plays an important role in the novel. She acts as the best-friend-turned-enemy to Lady Delacour, engaging the latter in a secretive and injurious duel, which is key to plot furtherance and development. In contrast to Harriett Freke, Madame Duval’s abnormality stems from her broken English, overly youthful attire, painting, and lack of feminine decorum. Critics such as Julia Epstein have discussed “the chaos, ferocity, and violence of Burney’s prose,” pointing to a seeming “obsession with violence and hostility” in scenes that feature anger and assault (5), to suggest that it draws attention to the cruel treatment of women.\footnote{Epstein states quite forcefully in her “Introduction”: “It is my contention that the chaos, ferocity, and violence of Burney’s prose allow us to unravel the constrained cultural situation not just of her own but of women’s writing in general during a period crucial for the entrance of women into the mainstream literary marketplace, the turn of the nineteenth century” (5).} Although Madame Duval’s characterization

\[135\]
may thus serve several protective social functions, documenting violence towards women and purportedly “inappropriate” behavior by women,\footnote{George Meredith sees the satirist as “a moral agent, often a social scavenger, working on a storage of bile” (44). This agrees with Epstein’s theories of Burney; of her own writing process Epstein reveals, “I found myself submerged in these reservoirs of Burneyan anger and frustrated desire that led me to write this book” (5).} it also performs a masking function to partially obscure the true role of a supposedly “minor” character within the narrative. Madame Duval acts as a powerful force that moves Evelina towards collision with her father and realization of her destiny. Duval’s insistence on a lawsuit prompts Rev. Villars to agree that “milder measures be adopted . . . since it must be so” (173). This in turn enables another secondary character, Mrs. Selwyn, to obtain the audience with Sir Belmont that leads him to acknowledge Evelina as his heir. The actions of both Madame Duval and Lady Delacour set off a powerful series of events that force a critical revaluation of these characters’ importance—along with their grotesque characterization and the role of satire within both works.

The second volume of Frances Burney’s epistolary novel *Evelina* (1778) provides a fitting introduction to this discussion, for it contains one of the work’s most humorous and piteous scenes—featuring a coach, a ditch, a band of supposed “highway robbers,” and one very forlorn Frenchwoman. Inspired by his hatred of all things foreign,\footnote{Evelina mentions that the Captain “has a fixed and most prejudiced hatred of whatever is not English” (95). He manifests this behavior in a number of ways, which include insulting Madame Duval by calling her “Madame French” (96), “Mrs. Frog” (97), “old French hag” (99), and “old French-woman” (178).} Captain Mirvan stages an attack on Madame Duval, during which the latter ends up trussed, bedraggled, and lying in a ditch. The novel’s heroine Evelina describes the aftermath to her surrogate father, Rev. Villars:
The ditch, happily, was almost quite dry, or she must have suffered still more seriously; yet, so forlorn, so miserable a figure, I never before saw. Her headdress had fallen off; her linen was torn; her negligee had not a pin left in it; her petticoats she was obliged to hold on; and her shoes were perpetually slipping off. She was covered with dirt, weeds, and filth, and her face was really horrible, for the pomatum and powder from her head, and the dust from the road, were quite pasted on her skin by her tears, which, with her rouge, made so frightful a mixture, that she hardly looked human. (190-191)

“She hardly looked human,” concludes Evelina at her paragraph’s end, and then follows this admission with another: “The servants were ready to die with laughter the moment they saw her” (191). The above excerpt directly links Madame Duval’s inhuman, grotesque, or monstrous appearance with laughter, a pairing that occurs often throughout Evelina, and that deserves further analysis. As Mikhail Bakhtin correctly notes, the satirical overtones of the grotesque may mask the presence of ambivalence, leading readers to overlook alternatives other than the simple negation that satire often effects (304); in short, the exaggeration associated with the grotesque effectively renders other implications invisible. Though Bakhtin’s study identifies the importance of the grotesque, isolating “exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness” as “fundamental attributes of the grotesque style” (303), he fails to explore what Mary Russo terms “the social relations of gender,” leading her to conclude that “his notion of the Female

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140 Note also the connection to my previous chapter, which discusses ambivalence as a potential side-effect of parody as well.

141 In context, Bakhtin alludes to Geschichte der Grotesken Satyre, by G. Schneegans, whose approach “ignores the deep ambivalence of the grotesque and sees it merely as negation, an exaggeration pursuing narrowly satirical aims” (304).
Grotesque remains in all directions repressed and undeveloped” (63). This very lack of development points to the need for further studies of novels, like *Evelina*, that feature prominent female grotesques whose integration into the storyline serve to comment upon women’s roles, sometimes critiquing and sometimes affirming them.

*The Oxford English Dictionary*’s explanations of “grotesque” bring several important elements together, which the above scene from *Evelina* illustrates in unique ways. The first definition of the noun alludes to a “kind of decorative painting or sculpture, consisting of representations of portions of human and animal forms, fantastically combined and interwoven with foliage and flowers.” Other listed definitions reference that which is exaggerated, bizarre, distorted, extravagant, or unnatural. Similarly, the first definition of the noun “monstrosity” refers to an “animal or plant, or (occas.) an organ or part, that is abnormally developed or grossly deformed. Also: abnormal development.” In the mock robbery scene from *Evelina*, Burney spares no pains to render Madame Duval grotesque. Her description of Duval, as seen through the eyes of another woman, transforms this character into something inhuman—as contrasted with the paragon Evelina, also present at this moment—almost as though Duval were a painting or sculpture instead of a living woman. Like the grotesque, Duval becomes a fantastically absurd, hybridized figure that combines elements of the human, the animal, and the vegetable kingdoms. Besides being plastered with “dirt, weeds, and filth” from surrounding vegetation, her clothes—which symbolically differentiate humankind from beasts—are ripped, missing, and torn, and her distorted makeup enhances the overall
sense of deformity. In this description, Burney has dehumanized Duval to render her grotesque and even monstrous, apparently to elicit laughter from readers: this utilization of humor directed towards Madame Duval occurs throughout the novel. The particular type of humor being used calls for further consideration, along with its role within the larger narrative of Evelina. However, I first wish to briefly discuss the role of Evelina as narrator, in the description of Madame Duval’s humiliation by Captain Mirvan.

In this scene, Evelina could be considered a symbolic projection of the author, Frances Burney. Her narrative is disturbing not only for its violence, but also for its very existence. Because Evelina does not suffer as Madame Duval does, she has leisure to notice the details, which she then memorializes in letter form. Had Burney wished, she could have used narrator Evelina to minimize the embarrassment of Madame Duval (Evelina’s own grandmother), but Burney instead captures the moment’s absurdity in graphic detail, which elicits laughter: in a sense, one woman thus contributes to another’s disgrace, both within and without the novel. The force behind her narrator, Burney possesses primary culpability for this act, which in its most extreme sense could be seen as a woman slandering or libeling her own sex, albeit in fictionalized form. Nonetheless, careful analysis reveals a strange ambivalence behind Evelina’s description. Laughter, accompanied by straightforward ridicule, seems the natural reaction for characters in the novel and for Burney’s readers: the author has rendered Madame Duval distinctly ludicrous in the midst of her smudged paint, vegetation, and general disarray. The fact that she looks less than human diminishes her further, an impression that the laughter of

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142 Henri Bergson says of deformity, “A deformity that may become comic is a deformity that a normally built person could successfully imitate” (75). Madame Duval’s makeup contributes to her transformation into a comic figure, precisely because it is a distortion of normality that readers can recognize and appreciate.
other characters accentuates. Yet simultaneously, carefully chosen words like “forlorn” and “miserable” prompt pity from Burney’s ideal readership, another audience familiar with the writings of Adam Smith, also a major contributor to the language and “cult of sensibility.”143 Such descriptors mesh with narrator Evelina’s purported thankfulness for the relative dryness of the ditch, along with her own refusal to laugh. This restraint Burney directly juxtaposes with the violent laughter of other characters; she thus implements class commentary to convey disapproval of insensitive laughter, and also differentiates between her noble heroine and the servants’ vulgarity, or lack of compassion.144 Incidents like this show that Burney bases her ideal readership on the growing middle class, which readership in turn would find it easier to condemn the laughter of servants due to their own class identification.

What stands behind the competing forces at work at this moment? Laughter versus sympathy, brutality versus compassion: why does textual analysis uncover dual messages at sites of laughter, and what is the ultimate significance of this phenomenon? The second chapter of this dissertation, “Parody and the Role of the Matriarch,” discusses ambivalence as one of four key traits of parody-as-device. This is not, however, to

143 Speaking of pity, Adam Smith claims: “the greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society is not altogether without it” (9). He describes pity, or compassion, as “the emotion which we fell for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner,” then insists: “that we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instance to prove it” (9).

144 Patrick Hogan’s exploration of narrative universals points out that emotions, specifically reactions to literature, provide insight into cultural values (2). In the case of Evelina, her placement as heroine in a Bildungsroman privileges her emotional responses and, to a certain extent, proposes them as a pattern for readers. Hogan might refer to this phenomenon as an “ethics of compassion” (139). The ethics of compassion to which Hogan refers was quite familiar to Burney’s audience, which was steeped in philosophical discourses of sympathy. Smith’s extensive explorations of sympathy offer a prime example of such discourse: “But whatever may be the cause of sympathy, or however it may be excited, nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary” (13).
suggest that its presence in a text definitively pinpoints the presence of parody, for other sites of laughter often house ambivalence as well, and various types of humor may exist together—either quite peacefully, or at war with one another. In his discussion of humor in nineteenth-century American literature, Greg Camfield also addresses the matter of ambivalence. Even as he nods in the direction of what he terms “aggression theories of humor,” which “have dominated humor studies from classical antiquity to the present” (6), he acknowledges humor’s ability to “address ambiguity” and “step outside binary opposition” (6). In the case of Madame Duval, satire’s strong presence is undeniable, and one must consider its association with related ambivalence, or ambiguities. Another primary descriptor that falls under the aegis of wide-ranging “humor,” my own usage of “satire” calls for further definition and explanation. The OED offers an excellent starting point for this challenge, as the majority of its entries pair satire with ridicule—which in turn opens an avenue of distinguishing between satire and parody. As noted in the previous chapter, ridicule may result from parody, but the two do not always co-exist. In contrast, satire carries with it unmistakable overtones of ridicule and its target very often becomes the butt of a joke. Such is the case with the overt ridiculing of Madame Duval; seductive satire at such scenes bends readers to its will and unerringly evokes laughter at the character’s expense, often performing a corrective function. Nonetheless,

Camfield also draws a distinction between satire and “amiable humor” (185); he considers the latter to be healthier than satire (62). He states: “But as a compensation, humor is much healthier than satire because it makes possible a flexible psychic alternative to repression and aggression” (62). In contrast to satire, humor has the ability to hold “both our desire and our revulsion in suspense,” which in turn permits “some degree of reconciliation in the reader of conflicting elements of the reader’s self” (46).

As noted, George Meredith encapsulates this concept poignantly in his “Essay on Comedy”: “If you detect the ridicule, and your kindliness is chilled by it, you are slipping into the grasp of Satire” (42).
figuratively speaking, to “lose the lady in the laughter” is to ignore Madame Duval’s larger role within the text of Evelina.

Susan Gubar’s discussion of female monsters and Augustan satire offers several helpful insights into the treatment of female grotesques like Madame Duval in literature; thus, her study directly affects my own exploration of Madame Duval’s characterization. Gubar notes, for instance, that female grotesques were most prevalent in literature of the eighteenth century (1), which time frame directly corresponds with the 1778 publication of Burney’s novel. This discussion’s implications reach beyond the novel to enter the realm of visual prints and caricatures. For example, Cindy McCreery’s work attests to the eighteenth century’s ubiquitous interest in female behavior and psychology. It identifies the latter half of the century as the “golden age of English satirical prints” and points out scholars’ increasing interest in visual artifacts of satire (6). The Satirical Gaze responds to a lack of research on satirical representations of women, organizing itself around basic themes such as: women and prostitution, women and acting, women and masculinity, women and domestic contexts, and women above age thirty-five. Overall, the author offers a unique method of contextualizing Evelina—in terms of the visual

147 Taking a different but related tack, Ronald Paulson’s seminal work on satire and the novel also focuses on the eighteenth century. Clearly not lacking in either scope or ambition, Paulson’s work thus sets out both to address satire as its own distinct genre—one which precedes the novel—and to examine the results of satire’s intersection with and integration into the novel. Frank Palmeri’s more recent work also addresses the waning prominence of satire during the eighteenth century; while he too references the rise of alternative genres that displace satire, he does not see novels as the dominant replacement form (12). Critics such as John Clark characterize it as overly ambitious, stating that Paulson attempts to analyze the satiric elements of too many novels, from Fielding’s to Austen’s, which leads readers through a variety of emotional states, first piquing interest but leading inexorably toward a frustration that ends in utter exhaustion (504). Paulson’s main premise, continues Clark, was correct; he recognized the necessity of establishing the novel in some sort of precedent, since Ian Watt’s groundbreaking Rise of the Novel failed to address “novelistic harbingers,” so to speak, instead leaving readers to wonder at the novel’s invisible origins. However, his reliance upon complicated jargon and multiple allusions leads to confusion: as Clark puts it, “The reader is simply crushed to death by the reckless accumulation of novels and vocabulary” (505).
rather than the verbal. Though she does not focus on Burney’s novel, her work traces the development of satirical caricatures of women across the eighteenth century. It pursues an in-depth study of satirical categorization, but it also explores the larger implications of shifts in perspective that occur.\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Evelina} clearly contains textual traces, in fictionalized form, of the very issues that McCreery addresses on a larger scale, which facilitates useful parallels between the two works. The research of Gubar, Paulson, Palmeri, McCreery and others indicates that pervasive satire in late eighteenth-century novels such as \textit{Evelina} is not remarkable. In fact, the pairing of humor with an aging, female, minor character occurs quite often.\textsuperscript{149} But several facets of Madame Duval’s characterization, once recognized, catch and hold attention as highly unusual: First, Burney continually pairs violence with Madame Duval, who encounters extraordinarily brutal treatment. Secondly, this violence often meshes with satirical laughter in some way. And thirdly, despite the cruelty and satire Burney directs towards this character, she still grants Madame Duval an astonishing amount of power within the context of her narrative. An exploration of each of these avenues is crucial to understanding Burney’s use of secondary characterization in her novel.

Violence-as-theme surfaces early on in \textit{Evelina}, and with this initial reference Madame Duval makes her flurried entrance into the text. The first epistle of Volume I, from Lady Howard to the Rev. Mr. Villars, conveys that the sender has received a “disagreeable intelligence” from Madame Duval (57). Lady Howard writes: “Her letter

\textsuperscript{148} \textit{The Satirical Gaze} contributes McCreery’s essay “Lustful Widows,” since it offers visual proof of the same phenomenon the author notes in the realm of verbal texts.

\textsuperscript{149} See Chapter Two for a discussion of parody and the figure of the old maid. Negative perspectives of unmarried, aging women could very well influence perspectives on aging, single women, even those who had formerly been married.
is violent, sometimes abusive, and that of you!—you, to whom she is under obligations
which are greater even than her faults, but to whose advice she wickedly imputes all the
sufferings of her much-injured daughter, the late Lady Belmont. The chief purport of her
writing I will acquaint you with; the letter itself is not worthy of your notice‖ (57).
Within the context of this study, several details of Lady Howard’s letter prove
noteworthy. For example, its very placement at the novel’s outset grants it significance.
Readers initially accept the words of Lady Howard at face value, since no direct textual
evidence contradicts her veracity. As Proverbs astutely notes of human psychology, “The
first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him‖ (18.5).
While readers assimilate Lady Howard’s viewpoint, Burney begins to transition them into
the role of chief questioner. The writer’s evident emotion rouses suspicion in the minds
of an Enlightenment-influenced audience:150 is Lady Howard an objective witness?

Other, more overt details pair with subtly-sown seeds of doubt to undermine her
testimony still further. Lady Howard states that Madame Duval’s letter is unworthy of
Rev. Villars’ notice, yet this same document prompts her to write, and features
prominently in her own communication. Such conflicting details strengthen readers’
uncertainty as they assimilate the opinionated tone of Lady Howard’s writing, and as they
read further excoriations of Madame Duval: “it is evident, from her writing, that she is
still as vulgar and illiterate as when her first husband, Mr. Evelyn, had the weakness to
marry her” (57). Lady Howard’s words evidence a lack of charity at the very least, and
could be described as quite cruel. She casts aspersions upon Madame Duval as “vulgar”

150 The Enlightenment influence manifests itself at various points throughout Burney’s writing, as when the
author separates her work from “the fantastic regions of Romance . . . . where Reason is an outcast” (56).
and “illiterate,” then attributes “weakness” to Rev. Villars’s own protégé. The content of Lady Howard’s letter manifests an indiscriminate, verbal violence towards the very woman to whom she ascribes this same trait—which inadvertently hints at her own hypocrisy. As the story continues, other discrepancies of detail become evident. Lady Howard also writes of Madame Duval, in an attempt to rationalize the latter’s recent interest in Evelina: “This woman is, undoubtedly, at length, conscious of her most unnatural conduct” (57). However, the remainder of the novel does not authenticate this view of Madame Duval. In fact, Burney characterizes Duval as one steeped in emotion, who possesses little sense of cause and effect, much less any thought of her own conduct as unnatural. Lady Howard’s faulty interpretation of Madame Duval undermines her reliability as an epistolary narrator and partially redeems the target of her vitriol, indicating that this figure may be more complex than surface characterizations would suggest.

In the case of Lady Howard’s letter, violence emanates not from Madame Duval, but rather is directed towards her. Duval does, however, act aggressively in several instances—the most notable of which perhaps occurs during the scene described previously. Immediately after the heroine rescues her from Captain Mirvan’s clutches, Duval slaps her liberator. Evelina exclaims, “But what was my astonishment, when, the moment she was up, she hit me a violent slap on the face!” (190). This passage uses the word “violence” a second time to characterize Madame Duval’s demeanor prior to being untied: “Almost bursting with passion, she pointed to her feet, and with frightful

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151 Evelina writes of Madame Duval: “But, with all her violence of temper, I see that she is easily frightened” (184); her description emphasizes the power of Duval’s emotions over her conduct.
violence, she actually beat the ground with her hands” (190). A number of other descriptions attribute violent behavior to this same character. In the first volume, Letter XVI portrays Duval’s passionate anger: “The rage of poor Madame Duval was unspeakable; she dashed the candle out of his [Captain Mirvan’s] hand, stamped upon the floor, and, at last, spat in his face” (111). Within Letter XXI, Duval delivers “a violent blow on the face” to a servant, which sets him “in a violent passion,” after which Evelina records Duval’s “rage” and “fury” (134). In addition, Burney pairs variants of the word “violence” with Madame Duval on multiple occasions throughout the novel. Within its first volume alone, references by Evelina include the following: 1) “they [the Captain and Madame Duval] had a violent quarrel” (123), 2) “nothing more passed . . . , except a very violent quarrel between Captain Mirvan and Madame Duval” (163), 3) “Madame Duval was . . . violent against the Captain” (165), 4) “they [the Captain and Madame Duval] have battled the point together with great violence” (167), 5) “Her [Madame Duval’s] character, and the violence of her disposition, intimidate me” (172).

The sheer number of repetitions draws attention to the violence surrounding Madame Duval. Notably, as often as Duval manifests aggression towards another, she herself experiences it in some form. Of all characters she undergoes the most extreme physical trauma. For example, in addition to the ditch, Captain Mirvan seizes her wrists during their first meeting (97); shortly thereafter she is pushed into the mud (110); and her motions are mimicked, taking the form of “ridiculous distortions” (122). The abuse endured by Madame Duval, and the violence that she enacts in the midst of her rage, is unmistakable. Epstein goes so far as to note the author’s “obsession with violence and hostility,” which she sees “in scenes of assault and moments of disguised anger
throughout Burney’s writings‖ (5). Yet although the brutality in *Evelina* is marked, Burney ameliorates most of its expression through its association with Madame Duval’s satirical characterization. Humor thus masks the full purport of the injustice that this figure experiences—most of which occurs at male behest. In contrast to that of her persecutors, Madame Duval’s violence usually manifests itself through her own body, through screaming and crying (112), “scarlet” face (131), sparkling eyes (131), scolding (148), and even choking (250). Although she does knock a candle from the Captain’s hand and spit in his face—all extreme expressions of emotion—these are reactions to the abuse of others (111), rather than initiations of violence. The two instances in which Madame Duval inflicts bodily injuries upon another—when she hits the servant (134), then later slaps Evelina out of fear (190)—pale in comparison to the violence enacted against her. Their very presence highlight the cycle of abuse in which she finds herself, for her aggression manifests itself primarily as a reaction to others’ cruelty. This circumstance technically elevates her above her oppressors, though Burney never places her in a position of moral superiority; instead, readers are encouraged join with others in the laughter directed against her grotesque appearance and monstrous behavior. To a certain extent, the laughter elicited against Madame Duval also ties in with stereotyped associations with her nationality. A full spectrum of nineteenth-century literary sources attest the existence of such prejudices—from the rejection of French novels as an assertion of cultural superiority (Flint 141), to the insertion of “French jokes” within English novels.152

152 *Cranford* offers one such example in the ironic, tongue-in-cheek parallel it draws between “the Red Indians” and the French: when robberies occur in Cranford, the homodiegetic narrator says, “But we comforted ourselves with the assurance which we gave to each other, that the robberies could never have
This final realization raises the second of the three points cited at the outset of my analysis of *Evelina*—namely, that Burney frequently references laughter in her novel, and that she often pairs laughter with violence. However, it seems significant that her first allusions to laughter describe the reactions of heroine Evelina, whose desire to laugh at Lovel’s foppish airs is followed by an actual outburst of laughter (75; 78). Evelina then laughs a second time at a stranger’s (Sir Clement Willoughby’s) raillery (86), and finally a third time at the same man’s flippant statements (91). In these cases, Evelina’s laughter shows her inexperience and prepares readers to recognize the heroine’s development across the space of the novel, as evidenced through restraint, in the tradition of the *Bildungsroman*. While Evelina’s expressions of emotion do reveal her lack of polish, they also attest to her innocence, and thus do not taint her character. Within the novel’s second volume, readers witness growth when Evelina feels inclination to laugh at Duval’s description of the supposed robbery, but then forbears. She writes, “Though this narrative almost compelled me to laugh, yet I was really irritated with the Captain, for carrying his love of tormenting,—sport, he calls it,—to such barbarous and unjustifiable extremes” (193). Other references to laughter in the novel show the above-mentioned connection to violence even more clearly. For instance, Evelina cites the laughter of the youthful Branghtons at Madame Duval’s description of her abduction, which she terms “the violence of their mirth” (210). This prompts several extreme responses: rage from Madame Duval, astonishment from M. Du Bois, and anger from Mr. Branghton. The interconnectedness of brutality and laughter is undeniable, and this particular scene

been committed by any Cranford person; it must have been a stranger . . . , who brought this disgrace upon the town, and occasioned as many precautions as if we were living among the Red Indians or the French” (90). Through this humorous representation of Cranfordian opinion, Gaskell taps into stereotyped notions of barbarity that nonetheless contain a hint of then-current, derogatory views towards both groups. 148
reveals a vicious cycle. Violence against Madame Duval causes laughter, which in turn leads to further violence of sorts.

Numerous other references to violence and laughter follow. A much later moment features threats by Mrs. Selwyn, which elicits laughter from the group of three young gentlemen to whom she spoke (308-9). As late in the novel as Volume III, Evelina describes the racing of old women by Mr. Coverly, Mr. Lovel, and Lord Merton. The women’s infirmity rouses pity in the novel’s heroine, but once again prompts laughter from the profligate young gentlemen (345). Trauma occurs in this scene as well, when the old women fall and bruise themselves upon the gravel (346). However, more than towards any other figure, the violence directed at Madame Duval often co-exists with laughter from other characters. The Captain’s laughter at Madame Duval points to his low breeding, for Evelina reports Mrs. Mirvan’s shame at his rudeness (111). When this same character causes Madame Duval pain and surprise with a bottle of smelling salts, her anger causes the Captain “diversion,” and Evelina notes that “he laughs and talks so terribly loud in public, that he frequently makes us ashamed of belonging to him” (123). Though Burney does not always treat laughter negatively, its appearance throughout her novel tends to signal a lack of refinement at the very least—if not an outright condemnation of the character. Laughter is a very common guest at scenes of Madame Duval’s disgrace, which forces readers to re-consider the purpose of Burney’s satire. Her satirical characterization of Madame Duval prompts laughter, yet Burney often and repeatedly condemns this behavior when it emanates from other characters in her novel. It is as though the author makes hypocrites of her readers! The audience follows Burney’s guidance in condemning, or at least disagreeing with, treatment towards
Madame Duval, yet their own instincts later betray them into laughter. What could be the purpose of this contradictory, satire-evoked laughter? The very contradictoriness of it proves reminiscent of Robert C. Elliott’s study of satire, in which he makes the following statement: “It is astonishing to find that the same people for whom ridicule’s destructive power holds such terrors institutionalize it for therapeutic purposes; they turn its primary function inside out, as it were, and ridicule, properly conducted, becomes a thing to be enjoyed for the health of society” (78). Applied to Evelina, Madame Duval becomes the “banished devil,” or scapegoat about which Elliott writes. Open mockery serves as a powerful deterrent against the sort of behaviors which Duval both manifests and embodies. It also gives modern-day readers insight into the values of Burney’s time period. Duval’s rage may afford her a measure of protection against the shame that springs from the scorn leveled against her, but the novel’s distanced, ideal readership can fully appreciate the embarrassment of the situation and thus experiences a powerful lesson about proper conduct.

To shed further light on this issue, especially its contradictory impulses, one might first consider Evelina’s introductory poem and its note “To The Authors of the Monthly and Critical Reviews.” Both introductory materials are saturated with humility, not uncommon posturing for a woman writing during the late eighteenth century; depreciation and apologies served as common openers to novels (Case 4). Burney writes, “The language of adulation, and the incense of flattery, though the natural inheritance, and constant resource, from time immemorial, of the Dedicator, to me offer nothing but

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153 Elliott conveys a similar idea in his insistence: “In any society in which high value is placed upon the opinions of others, ridicule will clearly be a potent deterrent to deviant behavior; the more a person dreads shame, the more he will avoid situations which might bring upon him the bad name conveyed by public mockery” (69).
the wistful regret that I dare not invoke their aid. Sinister views would be imputed to all I could say; since, thus situated, to extol your judgment, would seem the effect of art, and to celebrate your impartiality, be attributed to suspecting it” (53). The writer’s words evidence a strong concern that she not be interpreted incorrectly, or as an artful women with ulterior designs.154 This preoccupation connects with other aspects of the text that raise questions—for example, “Why did Burney choose an epistolary novel as her chief medium?” One might argue that epistolary novels in the tradition of Richardson’s Pamela were hardly uncommon to the period. Nonetheless, Burney’s own “Preface” provides a more accurate rationale for her approach. She first states: “The following letters are presented to the public—for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called—with a very singular mixture of timidity and confidence, resulting from the peculiar situation of the editor” (55), then pairs it with a note on novel-reading:

Perhaps were it possible to effect the total extirpation of novels, our young ladies in general, and boarding-school damsels in particular, might profit from their annihilation: but since the distemper they have spread seems incurable, since their contagion bids defiance to the medicine of advice or reprehension, and since they are found to baffle all the mental art of physic, save what is prescribed by the slow regimen of Time, and bitter diet of Experience, surely all attempts to contribute to the number of those which may be read, if not with advantage, at least without injury, ought rather to be encouraged than contemned. (55)

154 Alison Case explores the complicated and inter-related nature of women’s narration and power. She suggests that women narrators endanger themselves through their potential association with “female plotters of a more unsavory sort” (15). Burney’s choice of the epistolary novel and presentation of herself as an editor helps to circumvent such concerns.
Due to her own situation as a woman writer, and also due to the unfortunate reputation of novels in general, Burney must anticipate and remove possible objections from her audience. She thus seasons her opening words with deprecating humor, calls herself an “editor,” and presents a series of letters instead of a novel, for letter-writing was considered quite a genteel occupation for a woman. In fact, in his discussion of conduct book literature, William St. Clair cites letter-writing as an activity in which women enjoyed a reputation for superiority over men (506). Burney’s apologia on novel-reading anticipates and reacts to the arguments of even the most hardened critics. It insists that, even should detractors maintain her novel to be without positive benefit, they cannot deny its inoffensiveness. Her words contain a defense of those novels (like hers) that can be read “without injury,” communicating a sense of her precarious stance, of the obstacles she faced, and also of the moral direction her writing would take.

This seeming tangent thus culminates in full circle, returning to the issue of satire and of dual messages in Burney’s novel. Numerous sources support the notion of satire as didactic in nature. Anna Udden, for one, identifies didacticism as an expectation for novels of the latter eighteenth century (55); she also characterizes satire as “extramural”—that is, tending towards aims that are social or moral in nature (39). If satire tends to be didactic in nature, then sites of overt satire often present pointed messages about morality or other issues. Burney’s own “Preface” and humble means of introduction suggest that she had something to fear, and thus something to avoid. As a woman, Burney-as-overt-advocate of women would automatically prove suspect. The

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155 Palmeri builds the case that the barring of women from public, political arenas prolonged the usage of satire in women’s writing into the latter half of the eighteenth century: “The prominence of satiric
author therefore borrows the trope of the monstrous woman, as contrasted with humble heroine Evelina, to convey typical, conduct-book inspired messages about feminine behavior. However, she also uses readers’ satirical laughter against themselves. Society tends to use laughter at specific behaviors as a sort of safety valve, or means of ensuring the status quo.\footnote{Burney evokes a very natural, very acceptable reaction from her contemporary readers when they laugh at Madame Duval’s inappropriate behaviors and the mishaps that befall her. Yet even as readers laugh, they must also face that the laughter embedded within the novel itself, the laughter from other characters, is neither good-natured, nor completely advocated by the implied author. This places readers in an uncomfortable, semi-contradictory position. Eventually, this in turn forces a re-evaluation of the secondary character who most often becomes the butt of laughter—namely, Madame Duval—which realization raises the third-listed point at the outset of this discussion: despite the cruelty and laughter directed at Madame Duval throughout \textit{Evelina}, Burney grants this character a great deal of power within the context of the narrative. As noted in the introduction, Madame Duval acts as a powerful force moving Evelina towards collision with her father and elevation to her proper status.}

In fact, one might safely venture to suggest that—despite her grotesque and ludicrous characterization—Madame Duval’s importance within the narrative cannot be overstated. It seems fitting that she features prominently in the novel’s first two letters. Her impropriety in contacting Lady Howard provides the novelist an excuse to enumerate narratives by British women from Delarivier Manley to Frances Burney indicates that satire retained its usefulness to a greater extent for them than for their male counterparts” (41).\footnote{Regina Barreca lists seven specific manner in which theoreticians define comedy: the fourth if these she cites as a “social safety valve” (8).}
past history, so that readers have an overview of Evelina’s heritage: first, her relationships to Rev. Villars, her grandfather’s tutor, and to Madame Duval, her grandmother (the former tavern wench); and secondly, her mother’s tragic connection with Sir John Belmont, the man who privately married her and then denied their legal union. Armed with this knowledge, readers engage the story with an understanding of the heroine’s origins, and a corresponding predisposition to despise Madame Duval. Lady Howard’s testimony, as illustrated, does deconstruct itself in unique ways. However, Rev. Villars adds to her negative characterization of Duval by writing this response: “Madame Duval is by no means a proper companion or guardian for a young woman: she is at once uneducated and unprincipled; ungentle in her temper, and unamiable in her manners” (59). Later within the same letter Villars calls Madame Duval “low-bred and illiberal” (60). From the story’s inception, Burney stacks the cards against her character in a masterful manner, though not, as suggested, without insinuating room for some doubt in her readers. In addition to the testimony of two witnesses, the author brings class, spirituality, and nationality into the equation. Villars informs readers of Duval’s former profession as a “waiting-girl at a tavern” (59). This dubious qualification could hardly stand against the word of a noblewoman, Lady Howard, and a pious member of the clergy, Rev. Villars. Both of these characters are, of course, English like Burney’s own readership, which is set in opposition to Duval’s own origins as a Frenchwoman. One must also take note that, despite the reverend’s poor opinion of Madame Duval’s guardianship potential, he himself ultimately fails to protect two

157 Lady Howard notes: “nor does she at all apologise for addressing herself to me, though I was only once in her company” (57).
generations of Evelina’s forbearers. Also, it is not he, but rather Madame Duval, who proves instrumental in effecting the re-uniting of Evelina with her father.

Madame Duval’s interference in Evelina’s affairs via Lady Howard sets events in motion that eventually bring Evelina to London, and the trip to London of course acts as an important step towards successful reconciliation with Sir Belmont. Rev. Villars will not, it seems, initially trust “the mind and morals” of Evelina to her grandmother, but his correspondence with Lady Howard leads to Evelina’s visiting Howard Grove, which in turn lands her in London. Destiny cannot be escaped. An authorially constructed “chance” meeting with Madame Duval ultimately precipitates some of the novel’s funniest scenes, as Evelina’s most satirized character makes her debut. The initial meeting between the Captain and Madame Duval, as the latter attempts to find a coach on a rainy evening (95), sets these two characters on a collision course, around which interactions revolves two of the novel’s three volumes. Much of Evelina’s ensuing letters chronicle the exchange of insults between her grandmother and the husband of her host, and she writes to Rev. Villars: “Indeed, but for Madame Duval, I should like London extremely” (118). This casual statement, in conjunction with other important textual details, contributes to uncovering the true importance of Duval within the plot.

Suddenly, a point of connection between Evelina’s primary protector figure, Rev. Villars, and Madame Duval begins to materialize. Villars taps into an ongoing discourse about rise of industrialism which, with it many related problems, led to a ubiquitous juxtaposition of city (as evil) and country (as good) across late eighteenth- and
nineteenth-century British literature.\textsuperscript{158} Previously in the novel, Villars introduces a facet of this perspective in his letter to Lady Howard, when he asks about Evelina:

--but, can your Ladyship be serious in proposing to introduce her to the gaieties of London life? Permit me to ask, for what end, or what purpose? A youthful mind is seldom totally free from ambition; to curb that, is the first step to contentment, since to diminish expectation, is to increase enjoyment . . . . the town-acquaintance of Mrs. Mirvan are all in the circle of high life; this artless young creature, with too much beauty to escape notice, has too much sensibility to be indifferent to it; but she has too little wealth to be sought with propriety by men of the fashionable world. (64)

The presence of Madame Duval serves to shield Evelina from completely surrendering herself to enjoyment of the city. And this protection, minor though it may seem initially, unites with other protective acts throughout the story. For example, the second of the novel’s three coach incidents involving Madame Duval furthers Evelina’s acquaintance with Lord Orville, her future spouse. Orville calls after the breakdown of the coach to enquire after the health of Evelina and Madame Duval, which provides the former with further opportunity to observe and approve of Lord Orville’s conversation, manners, and other admirable qualities.

Evelina writes to Rev. Villars, “I could wish that you, my dearest Sir, knew Lord Orville, because I am sure you would love him; and I have felt that wish for no other person I have seen since I came to London” (118). She then continues by imagining that

\textsuperscript{158} Marilyn Butler refers to drastic alterations that occurred in the latter eighteenth century, including population shifts and growth, which manifests itself in the city/country binary that many novels incorporate (25).
Lord Orville will, in latter years, resemble her beloved foster father in his “benevolence, dignity, and goodness” (118). While there is no direct connection between Madame Duval and Lord Orville in this scene, the coach incident, in which she features prominently, does offer Orville opportunity to pay his respects and thus further his and Evelina’s mutual admiration. Indeed, unlike Evelina, Madame Duval has quite regrettable luck with coaches. Burney takes great delight in exercising her satire against Duval whenever a carriage is involved. Each of the novel’s first two volumes incorporates at least one major scene of carriage disaster, in which this character meets disgrace in part due to her own “carriage,” or lack thereof; one might go so far as to say that the first two volumes center around these powerful incidents. Although Volume I does not begin with such a carriage scene, the introduction of Duval’s name gives the story impetus from the outset, and Burney re-introduces Madame Duval, in person this time, when her heroine reaches London (the first of the coach scenes). The second scene occurs right on the heels of the first and provides continuing comic relief from the novel’s overt didacticism. And finally, the third major coach scene (explored on page one of this discussion) takes place at the beginning of Volume II, as Burney once again has recourse to this favored secondary character to add excitement to the storyline.

Perhaps most importantly, however, Madame Duval hastens the meeting of Evelina and her father, and thus the happy resolution of the novel. Shortly before the opening of the second volume, a letter from Evelina reveals an important detail regarding Madame Duval—namely, that her grandmother intends 1) to prove Evelina’s birthright,

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159 Definitions 12-16 of “carriage” in the OED allude to a secondary, more abstract associations with the word that direct attention away from a physical object instead to ideas such as moral conduct, behavior, and treatment of others.
and 2) “to claim, by law” Evelina’s inheritance (166). In the words of Burney’s heroine: “She declared that she would have nothing to do with any round-about ways, but go openly and instantly to law, in order to prove my birth, real name, and title to the estate of my ancestors” (167). While Evelina herself sees the actions of Madame Duval as outrageous and inappropriate, they precipitate major events within the narrative and spur unusual and unexpected alliances. Lady Howard, the same woman whose words speak so dammingly against Madame Duval from the outset of the novel, “openly avows her approbation of Madame Duval’s intentions” (167). At this moment, the very qualities that act as a liability for Duval, turning the laughter of readers against her, become her greatest strength. Her brashness, her volubility, even her lack of propriety, all fuel her passionate nature to act on behalf of Evelina, and other powerful women lend their strength to unite the heroine with her father and claim her inheritance. Duval’s insistence prompts Lady Howard to write a letter to Evelina’s foster father, explaining the course of action the women intend to take. Howard begins with this assertion: “I know you have too unaffected a love of justice, to be partially tenacious of your own judgment” (168). The words reflect both generosity and determination, while their undercurrents indirectly cite Madame Duval as an agent of justice. This theme of justice, so unexpectedly merged with the figure of Duval, prompts further reflection upon the role of this character throughout Evelina, suggesting that the character herself has merit and worth, even apart from her role in the forward motion of the plot.

What does this fresh development suggest about the consistent pairing of Duval with satire and violence? After such apparent negativity, what are the implications of allying her with justice, traditionally represented as blind? Duval very rarely evidences a
comprehensive grasp of the eddying events that sweep her into the whirlpool: for example, though Evelina shows full awareness of the masked Captain Mirvan’s role in the third coach fiasco, Duval alone remains impervious for an extended period of time—yet her rage, however exaggerated, seems the instinctive reaction of a minor figure who senses that true justice has been denied her. Lady Howard’s alliance with her on the matter of Evelina’s birthright stands in stark contrast to continued opposition from Captain Mirvan, who refuses even to consider the details of the matter (167). At this point in the work, more than any other, concord arises among the novel’s female characters who unite to see justice done. Lady Howard acknowledges her own instinctive reaction against Duval’s proposal, but states to Rev. Villars: “upon more mature consideration, I own my objections have almost wholly vanished” (168). She hints that Villars’ mind “is superior to being governed by prejudices, or to opposing any important cause on account of a few disagreeable attendant circumstances” (168). These “disagreeable attendant circumstances,” reminiscent of Lady Howard’s “disagreeable intelligence” in Letter I, refer of course to Madame Duval, and the word “prejudices” strikes at the heart of the prejudicial treatment she encounters throughout the novel. Moments such as these overturn the vast majority of surface issues that paint Duval condescendingly, to reveal a startling amount of depth to her characterization.

Though Mrs. Mirvan, unlike Lady Howard, does not step forward in outright opposition to the Captain, she too joins in support of Evelina. According to Lady Howard, Mrs. Mirvan insists that Evelina “would have had the most splendid offers, had there not seemed some mystery in regard to her birth, which, she was well informed, was assiduously, though vainly, endeavoured to be discovered” (169). Mrs. Mirvan’s
intelligences thus contribute to Lady Howard’s appeal on Evelina’s behalf. They also prompt a lengthy justification of his conduct in the response from Rev. Villars, along with this important admission: “Let milder measures be adopted; and—since it must be so,—let application be made to Sir John Belmont; but as to a law-suit, I hope, upon this subject, never more to hear it mentioned” (173). The words “since it must be so” attribute to Madame Duval, the instigator of this important event, almost the power of fate itself. And yet, the strange ambivalences surrounding this character continue.

Despite Lady Howard’s plea against prejudice, Rev. Villars’ view of Madame Duval proves inexorable. He may “pay the highest deference” to the opinions of Duval’s newest lieutenant, Lady Howard, and he may be “unwilling to oppose” his opinion to hers (170), but Rev. Villars continues to intersperse his letter with aspersions on Madame Duval. He refers to her “hardness of heart” and the “violence of her disposition” (170; 172), as well as her ignorance, obstinacy, and weakness (172). Simultaneously, he admits that he considered “a thousand plans” pertaining to Evelina’s birthright during the childhood of his charge, but that he remained “in a perpetual conflict” until he decided to adopt her as his own heir (171). Rev. Villars’s own statements, therefore, highlight the difficulties surrounding acknowledgement of Evelina’s birth: this monumental task calls for the passion of Madame Duval.  

160 Rev. Villars’s opinionated remarks about Madame Duval’s passionate nature underscore his solidly British characterization, as well as his correspondingly engrained (nationalistic) prejudices regarding the French. Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments shows the importance that the British traditionally ascribe to restraint. In fact, the sheer number of references to “self-command” in the work form their own supporting argument. Raphael and Macfie’s “Introduction” to the work cites “the influence of Stoic principles on Smith’s own views” (6), and Smith himself devotes an entire segment of his work to the virtue of restraint: “The most perfect knowledge, if it is not supported by the most perfect self-command, will not always enable him [the prudent man] to do his duty” (237). As the consummate Englishman, Villars expresses concern about his duty and doubts the ability of an (overly) passionate Frenchwoman to do hers. For her
Villars’s words also raise questions as to the wisdom of his guardianship. After admitting his unwillingness to oppose Lady Howard, he refers to himself in the following terms: “nor, indeed, can I, but by arguments which, I believe, will rather rank me as a hermit, ignorant of the world, and fit only for my cell, than as a proper guardian, in an age such as this, for an accomplished young woman” (170). He then seeks to vindicate his actions, which further highlights the fact that they are in question. Indeed, Burney embeds individual details within the novel that class Evelina’s guardian with another, older and more chivalric order: she characterizes Rev. Villars as venerable and respectable, but not incapable of skewed judgments. He represents a conservative order that initially denies Evelina’s introduction to the world, which perspective concurrently opposes the very purposes of the Bildungsroman. At every turn he seems to stand in opposition, but is forced to yield, as when he must relinquish Evelina to her grandmother’s care for a month (205). Similarly to Lady Howard’s early misperceptions of Madame Duval in her first letters, Villars’ opinions are not inerrant. Readers see his false assumption, for instance, at the outset of Letter II to Lady Howard, that Madame Duval “is at length awakened to remorse” (58). Burney’s consistent characterization of Madame Duval suggests that remorse is a reaction more typical of Villars than of Duval; from a psychological perspective, then, he attributes his own probable reaction in similar circumstances to Evelina’s grandmother, though he never chooses to grant her the charitable benefit of doubt in other cases. Overall, the text presents Villars as a conservative, oppositional force—which nonetheless cannot stem the passionate opinions part, Burney may reflect or even accept these values on a surface level, but the absorption of Duval into narrative events does not completely endorse Villars’s perspective.

161 Letter V of Volume I, from Mr. Villars to Lady Howard, exemplifies the sort of effusions that class the writer’s sensibilities with those of a past era (65).
and efforts of the dauntless Madame Duval. As Villars himself asks, “what arguments, what persuasions can I make use of, with any prospect of success, to such a woman as Madame Duval? Her character, and the violence of her disposition, intimidate me from making the attempt: she is too ignorant for instruction, too obstinate for entreaty, and too weak for reason” (172). Villars continues with this condemnation which simultaneously reflects his own contumacy, or refusal to find any redeeming quality in the target of his tirade: “as soon would I discuss the effect of sound with the deaf, or the nature of colours with the blind, as aim at illuminating with conviction a mind so warped by prejudice, so much the slave of unruly and illiberal passions . . . . I yield, therefore, to the necessity which compels my reluctant acquiescence” (172). Although Villars accuses Duval of “prejudice”—again this word arises in his correspondence with Lady Howard—he himself refuses to picture her in any other light than that which he held from the beginning. His own prejudices come to the forefront, and readers must acknowledge that Duval’s purported weaknesses become strengths on Evelina’s behalf.

Largely due to Madame Duval, Lady Howard does indeed write to Sir John Belmont in support of his injured daughter. As events unfold Duval continues to provide much comic relief within the novel as she rages against the Captain, who is joined by Sir Clement in his behaviors towards her. However, Burney eventually gives Duval the upper hand, as when she beards Clement to his face during his unexpected and inappropriate visit to the Branghtons. Duval’s words contribute so greatly to Clement’s awkwardness that his immaculate self-possession falters, and he even begins to stutter (252). In this scene, the advantage gained by Madame Duval is reinforced by the laughter leveled this time, not at her, but rather at the impudent Sir Clement. Duval cries,
“this is too much! Pray, Sir, what business have you to come here, a ordering people that comes to see me? I suppose, next, nobody must laugh but yourself!” (253). This moment proves significant because Duval claims the right of laughter, previously directed against herself, and turns it against Evelina’s enemy. Prior to this point in the storyline, Duval once again obtains her own wishes in opposition to Villars, after Sir John Belmont responds to Lady Howard’s letter only to refuse all claims of Evelina. Madame Duval, as a major force behind Evelina’s eventual reconciliation with her father, gives the following response, as reported by Evelina: “afflicting as this letter is to me, I find that it will not be allowed to conclude the affair, though it does all my expectations: for Madame Duval has determined not to let it rest here. She heard the letter in great wrath, and protested she would not be so easily answered; she regretted her facility, in having been prevailed upon to yield the direction of this affair to those who knew not to manage it, and vowed she would herself undertake and conduct it in future” (201). Madame Duval determines that she herself will take Evelina to Paris to face her father and demand justice. Once again, the word “justice” surfaces in conjunction with the wrath of Madame Duval. Of all those who surround Evelina, none other seems so bent upon justice. Her determination drives her to visit Rev. Villars who submits to Duval’s “ungovernable” passion (205). As it turns out, Evelina does not face her father with her grandmother at her side, but Duval still exercises an important agency that brings events to a culmination.

As Evelina herself admits, her grandmother is “very unlike other people” (123). This “unlikeness” Burney satirizes with a vengeance, and it gives rise to much of the novel’s humor. However, as illustrated, ambivalence continually marks sites of satire
surrounding Madame Duval. How does the text itself treat the subject of satire in its
direct references? The word arises on approximately six occasions throughout the novel.
The first of these arises within Letter XVI of Volume I, in reference to Sir Clement; he
directs his satire against Madame Duval in the presence of the Captain, in order to
insinuate himself into his host’s good graces for better access to Evelina. Five
subsequent references occur much later in the novel, all pertaining to Mrs. Selwyn: her
propensity towards satire disgusts Rev. Villars; she “keeps alive a perpetual expectation
of satire, that spreads a general uneasiness among all who are in her presence” (376); and
her laughter is more easily borne than her satire (413). These declarations spring from
Evelina, Sir Clement, and Lord Orville respectively. Each character speaks negatively of
Mrs. Selwyn, due to her usage of satire. In addition, Evelina calls Mrs. Selwyn “our
satirical friend” (319), and notes what delight Mrs. Selwyn takes “in giving way to her
satirical humour” (319). The self-reflexive nature of such references to satire must, of
course, be taken into account considering Burney’s own evident delight in “giving way”
to satirical humor in her novel. It is significant that no condemnation of Mrs. Selwyn is
possible without condemning the author herself, which in turn must necessarily redeem
satire. What may be the connection between Burney’s satirization of Duval, and later
joining of Mrs. Selwyn with satire? This question points back to yet another
phenomenon within Evelina, the disappearance of Madame Duval. Towards the end of
Volume II, Madame Duval drops out of the text, and this exeunt marks the approximate
point of entry for Mrs. Selwyn.

In Letter XXIV, Evelina describes her awkward encounter with M. Du Bois,
Madame Duval’s admirer, when Duval discovers Du Bois prostrating himself at
Evelina’s feet. She refuses to take Evelina to Paris, or further interest herself in Evelina’s concerns, unless the heroine agrees to marry “young Branghton” (291). Upon Evelina’s refusal, Duval disappears from the narrative for over 100 pages; in the midst of Volume III, Evelina reports receiving a letter from her. Prior to that point Duval’s name arises on three occasions. Two of the three emanate from Sir Clement, who designates her the “termagant Madame Duval” (362), because she refused him intelligence regarding Evelina’s location, then calls her a “virago” and refers to her “vulgarity” (376). Evelina later mentions her grandmother briefly, voicing her intention to write to her (411). The two references by Sir Clement could be considered significant, because he does not have Evelina’s best interests at heart. Thus, an interference from anyone, even Madame Duval, is positive and serves protective aims. Once again Duval furthers the safety of Evelina, albeit inadvertently, and it does seem significant that the entrance of Mrs. Selwyn occurs only three letters after Madame Duval’s exit. The trail of satirical laughter suggests that this figure may act as a sort of surrogate for the oddly absent Madame Duval, who can no longer serve as Burney’s prime purveyor of humor; instead, Burney uses Mrs. Selwyn to direct satire towards other characters surrounding her. Evelina’s view of this satire is not overly positive, as seen through various comments, including one that characterizes Selwyn as reserving her conversation for the gentlemen (324), in which she is so absorbed that she sometimes overlooks her guest, Evelina (329).

Once again, however, textual details rescue a minor character from banality. Evelina may record Mrs. Selwyn’s faults, but she also casts her as “kind,” “attentive,” and “clever” (307). Readers later learn that Mrs. Selwyn knew Evelina’s mother (350); this privileged information, along with her relationship to the deceased, distinguishes her
from other characters and highlights her importance. In addition, the source of certain negative perspectives of her undermines their veracity. That Sir Clement disagrees with the “unbounded license of her tongue” and calls her a “virago” merely highlights her oppositional role and the manner in which her presence shields Evelina (376). His words conflict with other assessments, such as Evelina’s statement that Mrs. Selwyn “has too much sense to be idly communicative” (350), and that she “is quick as lightning in taking a hint” (378). When Miss Belmont appears in London, Mrs. Selwyn’s course of action is immediate. Evelina relays, “She says that I ought instantly to go to town, find out my father, and have the affair cleared up. She assures me I have too strong a resemblance to my dear, though unknown mother, to allow of the least hesitation in my being owned, when once I am seen” (350). The machinations of Mrs. Selwyn continue as she herself serves as Evelina’s emissary to John Belmont, requesting an audience with him (397). When he refuses to acknowledge her case, she insists that they pursue “this unhappy affair with spirit” (401). She also decides not to precede their visit to Sir John with a message in case he chooses to avoid their meeting (402). Through her direct interference, Mrs. Selwyn completes the chain of events set into motion by Madame Duval, and furthered by Lady Howard. She also proves instrumental in uncovering the means by which Evelina and the fraudulent Miss Belmont were switched shortly after birth (405).

The placement of Mrs. Selwyn as Madame Duval’s successor naturally raises the question of why it was necessary to effect the removal of her counterpart in the first place. A number of possible rationales behind the choice present themselves for inspection: for example, does the replacement of Duval point to class prejudice? Might
either Burney’s own prejudices or the prejudices of her readers have led the writer to place a more acceptable character in the role of Evelina’s benefactor? While this is quite possible, it is equally possible that Burney created Madame Duval as a sort of “straw man,” or rather straw woman, whose alternative Frenchness, grotesqueness, and social class all paved the way for readers to more readily accept another version of herself (Mrs. Selwyn) whose physical sex no longer serves as a detractor to her prominent role in resolution contribution. In comparison to the alternative, Evelina’s new supporter possesses a high level of social acceptability and the satire directed against Madame Duval works to render her actual gender invisible. The concept of invisibility, while controversial in its own right, might also be re-phrased as an near-obliteration of gender difference, which could subtly bring readers one step closer to the notion of gender equality.

_Evelina_ features a number of strong-willed women—Madame Duval, Lady Howard, and Mrs. Selwyn being the most notable. The connections among these three women prove remarkable, and though Madame Duval is portrayed as the most weak-minded of the three, she first sets events into motion to precipitate the happy reconciliation of the heroine with her estranged father. She infuses the novel with comic relief, which effectively camouflages her own role within the plot; scenes in which she features prominently help to unify _Evelina’s_ three volumes, even as they increase the tempo of the torrent that rushes the story to its climax. Burney’s situation as a female novelist publishing during the late eighteenth century accounts in part for her handling of satire and secondary characterization in her work. This matter of context leads to overtones of ambiguity that readers may sense through dual, semi-discordant aspects of
Duval’s characterization. Kristina Straub identifies a very similar phenomenon when she writes of a pervasive tension woven into the very fabric of *Evelina*: though Burney’s text acknowledges a distinct female society, it refuses to completely separate itself from the eighteenth century’s patriarchal framework.\(^{162}\) Burney clothes her critique in satire, but it retains a certain subtlety due to the indirectness of the narrative form itself, and her masterful manner of cloaking her message in the form of a secondary character, Madame Duval.

**The Role of the Monster: Harriet Freke in *Belinda***

Similarly to Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778), Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* (1801) charts the travails and triumphs of a young woman across the space of a novel, which concludes in marital bliss for the chosen hero and heroine.\(^{163}\) As straightforward and uncomplicated as this initial pattern seems, it contains rich, unplumbed depths that call for further exploration. Audrey Bilger astutely designates “the marriage market” as the “most frequent site of satiric exposure in feminist comedy” (120),\(^{164}\) citing the common contrasting of “exceptional heroines” with “foolish suitors” to support her point.

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\(^{162}\) *Divided Fictions* builds upon prior feminist evaluations of *Evelina*—for example, Newton’s *Women, Power, and Subversion*—to pursue the issue of “doubleness” or “dividedness” (1). Straub considers critics’ insistence upon textual unity to be a major drawback and seeks to acknowledge the subversive tendencies of contradiction. She measures conflict as a gauge of Burney’s social climate, claiming that “Burney’s fiction is a mixed and contradictory *bricolage* of ideological assumptions” (5). As a departure from Gilbert and Gubar, Straub speaks not of “female discourse” and “subversion” (6), but focuses on the idea of split texts that acknowledge women’s complex social situation. She pursues two primary avenues of inquiry within the disjunctions springing from cultural presuppositions. The first pertains to the “synchronically conceived structure of the female maturing process,” while the second deals with “the daily occupations that give female time its diachronic identity” (7).

\(^{163}\) The text affirms the status of Clarence Hervey as hero not only through his eventual marriage to Belinda, but also through the narrator’s whimsical method of calling Hervey “our hero” (89). Similarly, the narrator also refers to Belinda as “our heroine” (211).

\(^{164}\) Of course, both novels contain marriage as a prominent theme; *Belinda* raises the subject on its first page, in connection with Mrs. Stanhope’s matchmaking schemes.
Unsurprisingly, both of the above novels contain their measure of such disjunctive pairings: while the foppish Lovel briefly pays court to Evelina, the vacuous Sir Philip Baddely aspires to the hand of Belinda.\textsuperscript{165} Such “sites of satiric exposure,” however, reach well beyond the heroine-fool juxtaposition to encompass additional figures, such as Edgeworth’s secondary character Harriet Freke. In contrast to Madame Duval, who serves as the butt of many a joke in Evelina, Harriet assumes the impish role of a trickster figure in Belinda; rather than becoming the victim of the jest, she momentarily becomes the teller of the tale through her own narration.\textsuperscript{166} Even as Edgeworth satirizes her behavior, however, the character herself directs ridicule—often satiric in nature—towards others within the novel. One notable example of this occurs when Mrs. Freke plays upon Juba’s superstition, as revenge over his appropriation of a coach house for Mr. Vincent’s use. The narrator details the aftermath as follows: “Mrs. Freke, when she found herself detected, gloried in the jest, and told the story as a good joke wherever she went—triumphing in the notion, that it was she who had driven both master and man from Harrowgate” (223).\textsuperscript{167}

Trickster figures—or those who “practise trickery” and serve as rogues, cheats, or knaves (\textit{OED})—play a number of roles in literary texts, and their stories have been told

\textsuperscript{165} Burney’s narrator refers to Lovel’s “foppish” dress and “ridiculous speeches” (74; 75), and Edgeworth’s narrator describes Baddely as “a gentleman who always supplied ‘each vacuity of sense’ with an oath” (24).

\textsuperscript{166} After tricking Juba into believing himself haunted by an obeah-woman, Mrs. Freke’s subsequent discovery leads her to “glory” in the jest and continually repeat the story wherever she goes (223).

\textsuperscript{167} Juba repeatedly sees a “flaming apparition,” which he takes to be an obeah-woman who has followed him to exact revenge. Belinda realizes that the specter is, in actuality, a figure drawn in phosphorous (222). This apparently trivial incident becomes important to my analysis (discussed later), in that Mrs. Freke’s action leads to Mr. Vincent’s departure from Harrowgate and eventual meeting of Belinda.
for centuries, across societal and religious boundaries (Hynes and Doty 1). Hynes and Doty define tricksters as “figures who are usually comical, yet serve to highlight important social values” (2). Bilger herself sees the presence of “female trickster characters” in the novels of Burney, Edgeworth, and Austen as serving specifically feminist goals: such “strategies allow the authors to offer up conduct-book advice to the reader’s laughter and thereby kill off the specter of the ideal woman” (89). Bilger’s definition of the female trickster hinges upon a character’s ability to “mock” and “challenge” what she terms “male power” (97). The author identifies a range of trickster types from satirists like Mrs. Selwyn, to pranksters like Harriet Freke, to hedonists in the tradition of Lydia Bennet (98). While I would agree with Bilger regarding the trickster role of Mrs. Freke, as well as its association with “reveling in unconventionality” (103), I wish to explore the following in greater detail: 1) the significance of Mrs. Freke’s connection to satirized grotesqueness and monstrosity, and 2) the ways in which this character contributes to the narrative construction of Belinda. Her very presence infuses a carnivalesque atmosphere into the work, resulting in specific reversals that open new possibilities for critical inquiry.

“Who am I! only a Freke!” cries Harriet Freke before she shakes Lady Delacour’s hand, springs into a carriage, and joins in the general laugh (46). Harriet’s behavior clearly mimics masculinity, yet it is her words that seem most striking. They are phrased

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168 Hynes and Doty cite Hermes, the Apostle Peter, and Herschel as tricksters in the Western tradition, and also allude to Native American, Asian, and African trickster figures (2).

169 It is widely acknowledged that nineteenth-century British novels, particularly novels of manners, borrowed heavily from conduct book literature (Kelly 44), which genre grew in popularity at the turn of the eighteenth century and continued well into the next (St. Clair 504).

170 Russo states that “the tradition of the frak as monster . . . has a long history in European culture” (75); she further notes the inherent difficulties of tracing a concrete history of the grotesque (93).
not as a question, but rather as a declaration that finds expression through exclamation. This moment of self-identification forms perhaps the greatest contrast to the characterization of Madame Duval. Throughout Evelina Duval’s frustration is palpable: her anger stems in part from her inability to control outward circumstances, and in part from the oppression she experiences due to her lack of adherence to social norms, despite a natural human desire for acceptance. Burney’s ridiculing of her underscores both Duval’s powerlessness and the violence directed against her. Mrs. Freke, however, is not only well aware of her “breaches”—in decorum and gender expectations—but revels in them as she acts the part of the fool and turns societal expectations upside down, several important attributes of carnival.\textsuperscript{171} Lady Delacour characterizes her in the following manner: “Harriet had no conscience, so she was always at ease; and never more so than in male attire, which she had been told became her particularly. She supported the character of a young rake with such spirit and truth, that I am sure no common conjurer could have discovered any thing feminine about her” (47). In direct deviation from the hyper-feminine Madame Duval, Harriet Freke cross-dresses (47),\textsuperscript{172} engages in unbridled speech (47),\textsuperscript{173} speaks in a “Stentorean voice” (59), and actually enjoys being stared at (43). This last characteristic reiterates the aforementioned distinction between her and Madame Duval. Much of Duval’s grotesqueness Burney attributes to poor choices. This

\textsuperscript{171} Bakhtin identifies “the suspension of all hierarchical rank” as one key trait of carnival (10), a characteristic to which I will return later. He also cites clowns and fools as “characteristic of the medieval culture of humor” as seen in Rabelais (8).

\textsuperscript{172} One synonym often substituted for “trickster” is “fool.” Vicki Janik notes that “the dress and behavior of both male and female fools often suggest sexual ambiguity if not androgyny” (xiv). Furthermore, in her chapter on “Feminism and the Carnivalesque” Kathleen Rowe refers to cross-dressing as a sort of gender inversion.

\textsuperscript{173} Lady Delacour speaks of Freke’s spewing out “a set of nonsensical questions” during their adventure with Colonel Lawless. These questions include the (in context) impertinent and inappropriate inquiry, “How soon with lady Delacour marry again after her lord’s death?” (47).
connects with the author’s strong didactic tendencies, often expressed through satire.\textsuperscript{174}

The novel pointedly states that Duval has a clear claim to natural beauty (59), which in turn links her monstrosity to her actions. Specific behaviors render her grotesque, despite her physical attractiveness. In contrast, Harriet Freke possesses no beauty whatsoever. Upon her first meeting with Lady Delacour, she strikes the latter as “downright ugly,” and she receives repeated attention due to her “wild oddity of countenance” (43). To this “natural” freakishness of appearance Harriet adds purposefully unusual—even “unnatural”—behaviors,\textsuperscript{175} which render her even more grotesque. Whereas Madame Duval very neatly falls under the \textit{OED}’s first definition of grotesque, Harriet Freke embodies the characteristics attributed to grotesques, as referenced earlier: exaggeration, bizarreness, distortion, extravagance, or unnaturalness. In short, she exaggerates traits, or distortions, that others consider bizarre in order to purposefully stand out as “unnatural” in the midst of her extravagant behaviors. Thus, like Burney, Edgeworth explores the theme of monstrosity through a satirized minor character that exhibits “abnormal development,” in this case through both physical and behavioral deformity.\textsuperscript{176}

Before pursuing the ways in which Mrs. Freke influences the narrative of \textit{Belinda}, it proves fruitful to consider the relationship between her naming and her satirical characterization. In the context of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, women had little choice on the matter of naming. Marriage led to a definitive alteration

\textsuperscript{174} Bilger states: “When Burney directly addresses feminist issues in her novels, she tends to take a moralizing stance” (94).

\textsuperscript{175} By this statement, I refer to Harriet Freke’s bending of gender categories. The following analysis pursues the idea further. However, an additional example of this aspect of Harriet’s characterization surfaces in the case of Juba’s first interaction with the woman. When he encounters Mrs. Freke, he is surprised “to hear such a voice from a woman”—Harriet has just uttered a loud threat—and later calls her a “\textit{man-woman}” (219).

\textsuperscript{176} See the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary} definition of “monstrosity,” cited on page 138 of this analysis.
of surname: unlike current customs, a woman of that time could neither keep her maiden name, nor hyphenate it, nor adopt it as a middle initial on her cheques. Edgeworth’s first reference to Harriet Freke through Lady Delacour excludes the former’s first name but includes her honorific, and the novel often alludes to her simply as “Mrs. Freke.” This choice reveals, for the first time, the author’s tendency towards ridiculing her fictitious character. In omitting Mrs. Freke’s given name, Edgeworth depersonalizes her, both presenting her as a sort of stock character and emphasizing the word “freke” — which readers must associate with the idea of abnormality. The presence of the word “Mrs.” also juxtaposes Harriet’s “manly” behaviors and underscores the absence of Mrs. Freke’s husband throughout the majority of the novel. In conjunction with the first of these two points, Edgeworth spares no pains to present her character’s actions as grotesque, freakish, even monstrous. Her decision to literally call Harriet a “Freke” mocks the woman in a very definitive manner, and encourages consideration of the relationships among freakishness, the grotesque, and monstrosity in literature. Building on the work of Bakhtin, Mary Russo notes, “The freak and the grotesque overlap as bodily categories” (79). She suggests that “the ‘physiological freak,’ like the grotesque, is produced through discursive formations including, but not restricted to, empiricism” (79). While Russo rightly connects the freak with spectacle, she locates the idea temporally, as “a cultural representation in the late nineteenth century” (79). That Edgeworth’s novel, originally published in 1801, features a nominal and gender-crossing

177 The OED traces this usage of “Mrs” back to the fifteenth century and notes that it identified a gentlewoman. The actual definition is as follows: “A title of courtesy prefixed to the surname of a married woman having no higher or professional title, often with her first name, or that of her husband, interposed.”
178 Russo clarifies this idea further through a reference to Susan Stewart, who shows the connection between the “freak of nature” and “freak of culture” (79).
“Freke” so prominently indicates that the idea may subsist more often in cultural imagination and discourse than one might initially suppose.

Edgeworth’s own satirical portrayal of a “freakish female” says a great deal about the values of her time period, as well as its views of proper behavior for women. Furthermore, its definition of freakishness through characterization raises the age-old debate of “nature versus nurture” (99). Bilger suggests that Mrs. Freke’s behavior disagrees with the concept of biological determinism, to instead side with personal agency: she cites Lady Delacour’s opinion of Mrs. Freke’s lack of modesty and decency to show that “gender-specific traits are not viewed as biologically determined, but rather as put on and cast off by individual choice” (99). This stance, of course, emphasizes the strength of will that Harriet exercises throughout Belinda. Bilger points out, for instance, the manner in which she furthers the heroine’s development, so that “reason rather than gender,” or rather than cultural expectations of gender, becomes the primary factor in her life’s choices (100).179 My central contention throughout this dissertation has been that various types of humor, often expressed through characterization, tend to mask a secondary figure’s true importance within the plot; satire, like irony and parody, also possesses this ability to camouflage. To this point I will return later, but I first wish to consider the second of the above-raised ideas regarding Harriet’s naming. As indicated, the common pairing of “Freke” with “Mrs.” contributes to Harriet’s grotesque characterization in very specific ways. It acts as a sort of oxymoron, merging expectations of normality with abnormality, even as it reveals the writer’s strong

179 Bilger’s support is based upon the narrator’s statement: “Mrs. Freke’s conversation though at the time it confounded Belinda, roused her, upon reflection, to examine by her reason the habits and principles which guided her conduct” (qtd. in Bilger 100).
awareness of contemporary cultural mores pertaining to a woman’s role. For example, the oft-present, traditional honorific of “Mrs.” underscores several important, but unusual absences: the absence of Mrs. Freke’s husband for the majority of the novel and the vast disparity between Harriet’s supposed wifely role and her actual behavior. Initially at least, this flies in the face of societal convention and disrupts traditional notions of hierarchy within the home.

Inversion, role reversal, and disruption of hierarchy are all characteristics of carnival that emerge in conjunction with the characterization of Mrs. Freke. Lady Delacour’s manner of describing this figure communicates the latter’s enjoyment of unusual freedom from domestic duties; in fact, her behavior better befits a widow than a wife. Having once been married, widows no longer were expected to adhere to a father’s or a husband’s guidance, and the most fortunate of them added to this situation a financial freedom which their absent male relatives could not balk. Considering this instinctive association between Harriet’s conduct and widowhood, Mrs. Freke’s choice of costume at Lady Singleton’s masquerade proves singularly appropriate. She tells Clarence Hervey that her friend Lady Delacour will dress as the Widow Brady in men’s clothes, but then assumes this disguise herself (21-22). The deception and trickery that occurs in this situation fits Mrs. Freke’s role as a trickster figure, but it also brings to light other important truths. As characteristics of the masquerade, Terry Castle cites both “estrangement of the familiar” and “familiarization of the strange” (162); she also

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180 Gabriella Castellanos also explores inversion of roles and reversal in her discussion of carnival in the novels of Jane Austen (89).
181 An excellent fictional commentary on such freedoms arises in Susan Ferrier’s *The Inheritance*, when Miss Delmour says to heroine Gertrude, “Do you know, I never see the Duchess of St Ives that I do not wish I had been born a widow” (700).
identifies transvestite apparel as one of the two most popular eighteenth-century masquerade disguises (22). In the case of the Singleton masquerade, Mrs. Freke’s usually unacceptable and freakish behavior is “familiarized.” The cross-dressing which makes her a spectacle in other situations normalizes her in this one; it also surfaces to indirectly comment on her normal behavioral patterns, or her enjoyed freedoms that evoke but also transcend the state of widowhood. In actuality, the masquerade scene could be considered as metonymic of the entire novel, and the part can be analyzed as a miniature reflection of the whole. What role does Harriet Freke play in this scene? What does the masquerade reveal about the connection between her satirical characterization and her influencing of unfolding events?

The moment of masquerade in Belinda is truly significant, in terms of understanding aspects of Edgeworth’s narrative construction, as well as the positioning of secondary character Harriet Freke within the larger storyline. In the context of my own analysis, several key indicators draw attention to this moment, which the author encloses in her second chapter, entitled “Masks.” As seen through the lens of Bakhtinian theory, this name hints at its intricacy and multifacetedness, since the mask may be the most complex theme within folk culture (39). Chapter II incorporates the name of Mrs. Freke for the first time even as it also precedes, and precipitates, the important account of Lady Delacour’s tragic history. Castle’s research brings important insights to crucial moments such as this one. The writer notes, for instance, that masquerade scenes can serve as a

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182 Castle also cites 1717 as the year of the first English masquerade (10), and indicates that masquerades were popular until the 1790s (3).
183 By “transcend” I mean to imply that Mrs. Freke’s behavior tends to be exaggerated. Chapter XIX illustrates Edgeworth’s penchant towards humorous hyperbole in its inclusion of Mrs. Freke in the role of huntsman (250). Clearly, hunting with gentlemen was not a common activity for women at the turn of the century, but Edgeworth continues to rouse readerly laughter through Harriet’s unusual proclivities.
catalyst for the plot (127). Lady Delacour’s utter despair following her gaiety at the ball encourages her to reveal the secret of her illness to Belinda, along with the details of her interactions with Harriet Freke. The two full chapters devoted to Lady Delacour’s narrative within a narrative indicate a high authorial perception of importance. They also forge a link between the idea of masquerade as a visual deceit sanctioned by society and deeper, more complex ideas of deceit encouraged by society: both self-deceit and deceit of others. In addition, the knowledge Delacour provides becomes crucial to plot furtherance, as Belinda enters her hostess’s confidence and continues to navigate the dangers of high society.\textsuperscript{184} As noted, Chapter II also witnesses the first allusion to Harriet Freke, and her name in fact surfaces on three separate occasions in the space of its fifteen short pages. That this occurs within the chapter on masquerade—which fans the plot’s forward momentum—is no accident, for it concurrently unmasks the true importance of Mrs. Freke in \textit{Belinda}. The first of the above-mentioned references arises when Lady Delacour tells Belinda, “not a human being will find us out at the masquerade; for no one but Mrs Freke knows that we are two muses” (21). She proceeds to tell Belinda of the trickery that leads to Harriet’s adopting the garb of a widow. Readers’ first introduction to Mrs. Freke thus reveals that she has access to secrets, specifically the secrets of Lady Delacour; Freke literally possesses the power to unmask her friend, a power that her later betrayal mirrors.

Halfway through the chapter, Lady Delacour again mentions Mrs. Freke, this time to confess: “I have not one real friend in the world, except Harriet Freke” (29).

\textsuperscript{184} Later in the tale, Mrs. Freke seeks to bring Belinda to Harrowgate, in order to lure Mr. Vincent back into Mrs. Luttridge’s clutches. Belinda declines the onslaught, later saying to Mr. Percival: “I think her friendship more to be dreaded than her enmity” (232). This is just one example of the influence that Lady Delacour’s tale has on the course of the storyline.
Delacour’s admission contains several undercurrents of meaning that provoke exploration, such as the author’s choice to inflect the word “real.” Spoken in the context of the masquerade, which blurs the boundaries between truth and falsity, fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, it is unsurprising that Edgeworth later turns this statement topsy-turvy by permitting Harriet’s own mask to slip and reveal the treachery behind it. The heroine, of course, stands in stark contrast to Mrs. Freke; to quote Lady Delacour, “you are truth itself, Belinda” (175). The chapter’s title thus proves itself on multiple fronts as the author describes not only the various costumes featured at the masquerade, but also invokes the prerogative of such carnivalesque moments to turn the world upside down.  

At the scene’s conclusion, Lady Delacour utters the following startling statement:

No living creature suspects that lady Delacour is dying by inches, except Marriott, and that woman, whom but a few hours ago I thought my real friend, to whom I trusted every secret of my life, every thought of my heart. Fool! idiot! Dupe that I was to trust to the friendship of a woman, whom I knew to be without principle—but I thought she had honour; I thought she would never betray me. O Harriet! Harriet! You to desert me! Any thing else I could have borne—but you who I thought would have supported me in the tortures of mind and body which I am to go through—you to desert me! Now I am alone in the world—left to the mercy of an insolent waiting-woman. (32)

This excerpt identifies the masquerade as the site of numerous reversals, which include: an apparently healthy woman who is dying, a friend who turns traitor, and an

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acknowledged wit who plays the fool. After the revels Lady Delacour shows Belinda the wound she received when her dueling pistol discharged. She allegedly takes this action because Harriet Freke has “gone over at last to odious Mrs. Luttridge” (66), Lady Delacour’s sworn enemy. Freke’s treachery contributes to the author’s moral and didactic aims, as it leads Delacour to question her own modish, extravagant manner of living. In the midst of her story she acknowledges, “One grows strangely selfish by living in the world” (61), and also says to Belinda: “Excuse me for showing you the simple truth; well dressed falsehood is a personage much more presentable” (62).

Like Burney, Edgeworth evidences strong moralistic tendencies throughout her novel, manifested by the lessons she weaves into Lady Delacour’s narrative. My own analysis supports Bilger’s claim that the latter novelist takes a much more overt approach than Burney, thus using “satirical commentary as a direct and witty way to criticize society’s more absurd demands upon women” (89). However, the ends that Edgeworth’s humor serves are often much more complex than one might initially assume, and the author’s grasp of satire enables her to incorporate less overt, more subtle forms of commentary as well. At this particular textual moment the author extends Mrs. Freke’s grotesqueness to encompass moral deformity, as Harriet adds betrayal and deceit to her list of abnormalities. However, Lady Delacour’s comment about the attractiveness of “well-dressed falsehood” uses concrete personification to identify the betrayal as a moral

186 Selina Stanhope writes to her niece Belinda that Lady Delacour’s “high pretensions to wit and beauty are indisputable” (9), and the narrator reports, “every thing, that her ladyship said, was repeated as witty” (10).
187 The “Advertisement” which prefaces Belinda calls it a “Moral Tale”: “The following work is offered to the public as a Moral Tale—the author not wishing to acknowledge a Novel.” Edgeworth’s didactic tendency manifests itself even in the story’s margins, as when the narrator informs readers that a porter’s lodge, built by Mr. Percival and visited by Belinda, houses “industrious tenants” now in want, but whose poverty came “not by imprudence, but by misfortune” (244). The emphasis that the author places on this seemingly irrelevant detail reveals the moralizing manner she often adopts.
deformity, rather than a social abnormality. The action contributes to Mrs. Freke’s
grotesque characterization, thus serving a more subtle didacticism—through
characterization as deterrent—even as Delacour’s words provide overt, direct satiric
commentary. But as Harriet becomes the story’s Judas figure, an example for all to
eschew, the key role that she fulfills within the context of the masked chapter mirrors her
importance throughout the novel. If one does take Chapter II as a reflection of Belinda’s
narrative structure, Harriet Freke quickly takes center stage. Paradoxically, the very
attention she calls to herself by socially and morally aberrant behaviors detracts attention
from her all-encompassing and powerful role within the plot. Harriet Freke fittingly
appears at three points within “Masks,” as noted: at the beginning, at the middle, and at
the end. Her various parts include the role of secret keeper, widow, and betrayer, as well
as friend-turned-enemy. She is the variable that remains unaccounted for, even as
Edgeworth seemingly pigeonholes her as the enemy—her sudden reversal of roles points
to her unpredictability; it also unveils her direct responsibility for a narrative twist that
sparks the furtherance of the novel’s plot.

Intensifying the paradox that is Harriet Freke, her character surfaces in Chapter II
only as a name, but names carry important messages with them, as evidenced by the
previous discussion of Edgeworth’s carefully considered naming of the character. Lady
Delacour’s friend of ten years (42), Harriet features rather prominently in the two
chapters that contain the former’s history. Edgeworth exercises the full strength of her
satire against Mrs. Freke in the midst of this narrative, characterizing her as grotesque
and monstrous in the ways described earlier. The portrait seems overwhelmingly
negative, but contains brief glimpses of admiration also, as when Lady Delacour
acknowledges her prior perspective of Mrs. Freke: “I had a prodigious deference for the masculine superiority, as I thought it, of Harriet’s understanding. She was a philosopher, and a fine lady—I was only a fine lady” (54). To some extent, even this begrudging admission may contain overtones of authorial disapproval, if the implied author taps into contemporary viewpoints that poke fun at female philosophers and blue stockings.\footnote{Elizabeth Hamilton’s \textit{Memoirs of Modern Philosophers} is particularly known for its blatant satirizing of female philosophers through the character of Bridgetina or “Biddy.” Harriet Martineau’s \textit{Autobiography} remarks on early nineteenth-century viewpoints of bluestockingism: “When I was young, it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously; and especially with pen in hand. Young ladies . . . were expected to sit down in the parlour to sew,—during which reading aloud was permitted,—or to practice their music; but so as to be fit to receive callers, without any signs of bluestockingism which could be reported abroad” (100). Within this same context, Martineau tells of “Jane Austen herself, the Queen of novelists,” who “was compelled by the feelings of her family to cover up her manuscripts with a large piece of muslin work . . . whenever any genteel people came in” (100).}

The title and thematic material in Chapter XVII reinforce this notion through the medium of dialogue, as when Harriet Freke showcases her pretensions to intellect along with her actual intellect. Besides her miscarried reference to the Satan of \textit{Paradise Lost} rather than its author, which inaccuracy Belinda corrects (227), Mrs. Freke displays her utter lack of taste in lambasting renowned writers like Adam Smith (228). She then provokes a debate that centers on “the Rights of Women,” only to prove her inability to engage in nuanced argument. For example, she links “delicacy” with “hypocrisy,” rather than recognizing the difference between delicacy and false delicacy, or deceit (229-230).

Despite Lady Delacour’s mistaken notion of Mrs. Freke’s intellect, Edgeworth must ensure that readers maintain some respect for her character’s judgment, even before her betrayal at the hands of her false friend. This is necessary to ease audience acceptance of her current judgments’ accuracy, and the lessons that Edgeworth means to convey with them. Overall, however, the narrative contained in Chapters III and IV shows the intertwined nature of the two characters’ motivations and actions. Without Harriet Freke,
Lady Delacour has no story to tell; around Edgeworth’s freakish character revolves much of the novel’s conflicts and tensions, and thus much of its interest.

For the space of eight chapters, after the conclusion of Delacour’s story, Harriet Freke is absent from the overall narrative, though her name then briefly resurfaces in two sequential chapters: Chapters XIII and XIV. Chapter XVI charts a resurgence of activity as Mrs. Freke’s name appears at approximately four different locations, which in turn precedes her actual physical re-entry into the narrative in Chapter XVI, “Rights of Woman,” in which Harriet Freke casts herself as a knight errant in order to “rescue” Belinda and then use her to ensnare Vincent. The proliferation of direct references by the heterodiegetic narrator, rather than secondary allusions via other characters, calls attention to this chapter. Nonetheless, the significance of previous moments of naming should not be minimized. Each of the two previous points possess differences worth noting, and their similarities prove just as striking. For example, they all address the theme of friendship, carry distinctly didactic overtones, and utilize juxtaposition in unique ways. Chapter XIII, which introduces Volume II of Belinda, contains an indirect reference to Mrs. Freke in the voice of Clarence Hervey, who responds to Belinda with these words: “Yes, her connexion with that Mrs Freke hurt her more in the eyes of the world, than she was aware of. It is tacitly understood by the public, that every lady goes bail for the character of her female friends. If lady Delacour had been so fortunate as to meet with such a friend as miss Portman in her early life, what a different woman she would have been! She once said some such thing to me, herself, and she never appeared

189 Though her name does not appear directly, Chapter XV also contains a veiled reference to Mrs. Freke, through a letter from Mrs. Stanhope: “Pray, my dear, do not forget to tell lady Delacour, that I have a charming anecdote for her, about another friend of ours who has lately gone over to the enemy” (201).
to me so amiable as at that moment” (166). This quotation occurs on the third page of Chapter XIII. As illustrated in my analysis of *Evelina*, secondary characters like Madame Duval (and thus Mrs. Freke) may surface towards the beginning of a chapter and/or volume, in order to accelerate the pacing of a novel, also resulting in plot furtherance. Whether purposely or inadvertently, this placement could be seen to comment on the value of such characters, since introductions and conclusions serve as points of emphases; her placement symbolically parallels her actual narrative importance and contributes to a memorableness that will outlast any temporary absence from the narrative. Due to her flamboyant personality, Mrs. Freke is difficult to forget, and the novel makes doubly sure of this unforgettableness through her structural positioning.

Considering this foreshadowing of importance, it is hardly surprising that, despite her eight-chapter silence, Mrs. Freke once again enters the novel towards the beginning of Volume II, albeit through an indirect reference. In this case, Mrs. Freke’s magnetic characterization first draws audience attention, then repels it in the direction of the heroine. The resulting juxtaposition of two characters with textually established reputations—the model heroine versus the freak—stabilizes specific surface messages that the implied author apparently advocates: for example, the common conduct book message on the fragility of a woman’s reputation, and the importance of proper companions. Edgeworth’s prior, satirical characterizations of Harriet Freke ensure that her audience will instinctively accept the didactic message captured in this moment. The

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190 In her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft excoriates one outcome of this undue emphasis on reputation, namely that women pursue the reputation of chasteness above chastity itself (ch. 8).
191 John Gregory’s advice to his daughters includes commentary on “Friendship, Love, Marriage”: “A happy choice of friends will be of the utmost consequence to you, as they may assist you by their advice and good offices” (33).
source of the message grants it further validity, since the marriage plot model often 1) necessitates the incorporation of hero as reward, and 2) identifies Clarence Hervey as the most likely romantic hero. However, this brief allusion to a satirized minor character contains much more food for thought. Beneath the surface messages that readers instinctively assimilate lurk other, more complex ideas to contemplate. Hervey phrases his conclusions in Johnsonian manner: “It is tacitly understood by the public, that every lady goes bail for the character of her female friends” (166). This sweeping, but pragmatic statement of fact he follows with his certainty that Lady Delacour would have been “a different woman,” had Belinda been her confidante rather than Harriet Freke. In context, readers understand that this “difference” is meant positively, yet the entire moment opens an avenue for questioning of societal norms. Upon what is this “tacit understanding” based? Is it just? What constitutes “the public,” and who is qualified to judge? Hervey’s explicit description of societal mores is followed by a subtle compliment to Belinda’s character and influence, yet readers continue to wonder what “difference” implies.

Considering the important, entertaining role that Harriet Freke plays throughout the novel, one might conclude that an earlier, perpetual association between Lady Delacour and Belinda (as substitution for Mrs. Freke) may have crafted a more virtuous character, but rendered Lady Delacour’s characterization much more boring, a

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192 Specific statements in Belinda place its categorization as a Bildungsroman, or novel of development, beyond doubt. The narrator states on the novel’s first page that Belinda’s “character, however, was yet to be developed by circumstances. Other such statements include: a passing reference to Belinda’s “newly acquired moral sense” (15); a key moment when the heroine reasons “for the first time in her life . . . upon what she saw and felt” (69); an instance when she erects “in her own understanding the exact boundaries between right and wrong” (232); and a culmination when Lady Delacour admits, “you are much fitter to conduct yourself, than I am to conduct you” (332).
circumstance highlighted by her own attraction to Harriet Freke. In one brief scene, therefore, the name of Harriet Freke serves a number of diverse purposes. The juxtaposition of this secondary character with the heroine contributes to plot development by advancing the hero’s regard for Belinda, also hinting at a secret that adds tension to the storyline. Hervey himself indicates that the original contrast between Belinda and Mrs. Freke, drawn by Lady Delacour, engages his emotions in the heroine’s favor. He admits that Lady Delacour spoke of her regret over befriending a Harriet Freke rather than a Belinda, and he then acknowledges, “she never appeared to me so amiable as at that moment” (166). The narrator records that Hervey “pronounced these words in a manner more than usually animated” (166), which bespeaks the awakening of passion. This in turn precedes his embarrassment and the ensuing restraint that suggests “some secret cause” preventing a direct declaration of his feelings (167). Edgeworth uses this moment, enabled by a brief allusion to Mrs. Freke, to foreshadow a major plot conflict—the existence of Virginia St. Pierre. In similar fashion, momentary allusions to Mrs. Freke in Chapters XIV and XV serve important functions, facilitated by audience memory of her satiric characterization. Lady Delacour again contrasts Belinda with her former friend when she asks, “but what was Harriet Freke in comparison with Belinda Portman? Harriet Freke, even while she diverted me most, I half despised. But Belinda! Oh, Belinda! how entirely have I loved! trusted! admired! adored! respected! revered you!” (183). Through this incident, Edgeworth comments on aspects of friendship, such as the power of betrayal to falsely color perspective: readers are well aware that Belinda is in fact guiltless of the charge. The moment also taps into late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century discourses of the imagination and passion when the narrator
records Lady Delacour’s exhaustion from emotions stimulated “by the force of her powerful emotion” (183). As the model heroine, Belinda of course possesses “superior strength of understanding,” while Lady Delacour is “governed by pride, by sentiment, by whim, by enthusiasm, by passion—by any thing but reason” (271). If this is Delacour’s true nature, her internal passion forges another link to Harriet Freke who serves as an example of one who acts on whim, almost as though she were the logical outcome or externalization of her counterpart, Lady Delacour. Through Delacour and Freke, Edgeworth presents readers with two extreme manifestations of the renunciation of reason in favor of passion.

Once again then, a brief allusion serves multiple functions which could be classed as didactic, societal, and narrative. Initial, surface didacticism deals with the matter of appropriate friendships and the cultivation of virtues like restraint, even as the reference to emotion and imagination comments on contemporary values, highlighting discourses that were then taking place. On a narrative level, the influence of Harriet Freke also manifests itself as she reaches across space to once again alter plot. Lady Delacour’s betrayal at her hands results in another juxtaposition that casts Belinda in an unfavorable

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193 The influence of Enlightenment thinking surfaces at various points throughout Belinda. In one such instance, the common binary of reason verses passion makes a very evident appearance. Mr. Vincent experiences marked guilt over his gambling and vacillates on whether or not he should inform Belinda: “Vincent wavered in his resolution to confess the truth to Belinda. Though he had determined upon this in the first moments of joyful enthusiasm, yet the delay of four and twenty hours had made a material change in his feelings: his dread of losing Belinda by his sincerity increased, the more time he had for reflection. Indeed his most virtuous resolves were always rather the effect of sudden impulse, than of steady principle. But when the tide of passion had swept away the landmarks, he had no method of ascertaining the boundaries of right and wrong” (439).

194 Adam Smith writes of the loss of reason as “the most dreadful” of “all the calamities to which the condition of mortality exposes mankind” (12). In context, this quotation refers to actual insanity, yet Smith’s reflections nonetheless evidence the eighteenth century’s high regard for the capacity to reason. The discourse surrounding the relationship among reason, imagination, and passion seeps into works across the eighteenth century. Mary Wollstonecraft’s Maria, for example, reflects on the use and misuse of imagination, and incorporates various situations that show the conflict between reason and emotion in the protagonist.
light and ultimately leads to her ejection from Lady Delacour’s residence. The change of location itself prompts further narrative windings, such as the introduction of a new potential hero, Mr. Vincent. Harriet Freke bears responsibility for this twist on two separate fronts. Not only does she influence the switch in location that permitted Belinda’s introduction to Henry Percival’s ward, but she also exerts influence on Vincent so that he adopts a collision course with the heroine. Sandwiched between two lengthy paragraphs appears the following statement: “It is somewhat singular, that lady Delacour’s faithful friend, Harriet Freke, should be the cause of Mr. Vincent’s first fixing his favorable attention on Miss Portman” (219). This launches the tale of Juba, which interjects further humor into the text. Later in the narrative, Mrs. Freke purposefully seeks to ruin Belinda’s prospects with the same Mr. Vincent, but only succeeds in solidifying his regard for the heroine (335).

Whether or not Harriet Freke intends Belinda good or ill, her efforts ultimately work in the heroine’s favor, enhancing her well being. Even more importantly than her contributions to Belinda via Mr. Vincent, Harriet Freke’s trickster machinations further the romantic interests of the novel’s true hero, Clarence Hervey, which of course contributes concurrently to narrative resolution. Based on my previous analyses of both irony and parody, secondary characters very often serve this key function in covert ways: Harriet Freke does not prove the exception to this trend, but rather confirms it. In Chapter XIX, Mrs. Freke’s cruelty to a respectable clergyman, Mr. Moreton, provides opportunity for Clarence Hervey to rescue him from ruin. This instance reintroduces Hervey into the mind of the heroine, when she hears of his generosity from Mr. Vincent, which anecdote Mr. Percival follows with further affirmation of the hero’s character: “No
man more likely to do a generous action than Clarence Hervey” (254). According to Edgeworth’s narrator, Belinda gladly repeats the words of Mr. Percival, but without either blushing or enthusiasm, since her willpower and efforts “had prevented her prepossession from growing into a passion that might have made her miserable” (254). Though the text seems to suggest that the heroine has overcome her love for Clarence Hervey, it also sows seeds of doubt as to whether the emotion has been completely eradicated. Even more importantly, it implies that Vincent’s comment about Hervey may actually further Belinda’s passion for him. The past perfect tense of the verb within above sentence indicates a prior past action, or one past action that precedes another. This in turn implies that, even if the narrator’s assessment may be accepted without question, it does locate her rite of overcoming solidly in the past, thus suggesting that it may be reversed by current events—such as Belinda’s appreciation of Hervey’s generosity, roused by Mr. Vincent, whom Harriet Freke placed in the heroine’s path.

Mr. Vincent’s romantic attentions do not usurp the affections of Belinda from Clarence Hervey. This shows that Harriet Freke’s introductory role does not in fact impede the heroine’s eventual marriage with Hervey. Instead, every action of Mrs. Freke seemingly furthers Belinda’s interests. Her introducing Vincent to Belinda (albeit unintentionally) leads to the reintroduction of Hervey’s name and the increasing of Belinda’s admiration for him. After Vincent’s brief anecdote about Mr. Moreton, he and Mr. Percival discuss the subject of first loves, which naturally recalls Belinda’s first love, Clarence Hervey, to her mind. The proximity of Vincent to Belinda serves to further her regard for her true hero. Hervey’s later rescue of Vincent from suicide serves, by contrast, to in turn further solidify audience expectations that Hervey must remain the
romantic hero of the story. Incidentally, this same interaction with Vincent brings several key events to the fore: Hervey admits aloud to the former that he has “loved longer, if not better” than Vincent has, and Vincent admits to Hervey that Belinda loves his rival. The act of speaking here is significant, as an affirmation of his true affections, even as he recalls his engagement and seeks to persuade himself that Vincent’s words regarding Belinda are foundationless (434). This mental battle could also be seen as furtherance of his affection for Belinda, since the very acts of self-deception and fighting against one truth reveal a deeper one—that Clarence Hervey truly does love Belinda, and that his denial of passion did involve struggle (472). Repeatedly then, Vincent proves instrumental in indirectly furthering the mutual regard of the hero and heroine for one another. Even towards the novel’s end Vincent once again serves in this capacity when he writes Belinda a farewell letter that contains yet another witness of Hervey’s character. Edgeworth’s narrator tells the audience that Vincent’s letter “was written with true feeling, but in a manly style,” and the writer’s “generosity, in speaking of Clarence Hervey” does not escape Belinda (449). This moment of understatement underscores the actual importance of Vincent’s final action to further Hervey in Belinda’s esteem. Without Mrs. Freke’s instrumental placing of him in Belinda’s life, readers might have missed their expected happy ending.

Overall, Mrs. Freke affects the storyline of Belinda in powerful ways, and her very name serves as a catalyst to the plot. Edgeworth satirizes this minor figure repeatedly through grotesque characterization, yet this “ill usage” adds humor to the text while conveying important messages to the audience. The words that Lady Anne applies to Lady Delacour might very well be extended to Harriet Freke: “prodigies and monsters
are sometimes thought synonymous terms” (102). Although she is characterized as a monster, Freke influences the narrative in the manner of a prodigy. Attributes of the carnivalesque manifest themselves very clearly through her, and her presence tends not only to challenge or disrupt hierarchical notions of gender, but also to defer norms and traditions, a trait to which Bakhtin also refers (10). In addition, he contrasts the laughter of carnival with satirical laughter, stating that the satirist “places himself above the object of his laughter” (12), thereby forcing public laughter to become private and negative in nature. But in the case of both Madame Duval and Mrs. Freke, the authorial laughter of the satirist becomes that of the audience and serves several very important purposes. Like carnival, it might be thought to function as a sort of safety valve, even as its ambivalence opens avenues for inquiry regarding gender roles and other supposed constants that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth society often took for granted. Within the narrative itself, laughter both masks and exposes ideas. Bakhtin suggests the following as the ends of the carnival-grotesque: to “consecrate inventive freedom,” permit new combinations, and free from the primary perspective; this in turn facilitates a fresh way of viewing (34). Within *Evelina* and *Belinda* this certainly proves to be the case.
Chapter Four, “Wit and the Roles of Mentor and Protégé,” concludes my dissertation with an analysis of mentor-mentee figures in Jane Austen’s *Emma* (1816) and Thomas Love Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* (1818). The relationship between Emma and Harriet is perhaps the most famous example of humorous mentor-protégé interaction in British novels of the nineteenth century; it will thus provide a fitting introduction to this chapter. In contrast, Peacock’s less-examined novel describes the small, misanthropic community of Nightmare Abbey, where its male protagonist falls under the influence of several unlikely female mentors. In light of the proliferation of approaches to Austen, as well as my own reliance upon feminist criticism in the context of nineteenth-century discussions of gender and perceptions of wit, it seems appropriate to acknowledge: “That Jane Austen, unforgotten, canonized, and stunningly authoritative, has been a problem for feminists is not surprising: in the struggle for power between politically radical and conservative critics, she has for years been claimed by both parties” (Brownstein 57). Some aspects of her laughter make Austen difficult to categorize, while initiating a discussion of gender relations—specifically, an analysis of the interactions between male

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195 Gabriella Castellanos also notes the alliance of conservative and radical tendencies in Austen; she suggests that the author’s “distaste for sentiment” proves reminiscent of Wollstonecraft’s brand of feminism (10).
and female characters, as well as representations of masculinity and femininity. In the context of *Emma*, an analysis of gender dynamics within the novel’s network of mentor-mentee relationships provides startling insights into Austen’s own definition of wit, which differs greatly from other nineteenth-century sources.

Based on the theories of George Meredith, Austenian laughter typically falls into the categories of “humor” and “comedy,” both gentler than satire, which attacks “the quivering sensibilities” (43). Simultaneously complicating classification, however, Austen’s treatment of humor at times highlights a subtle aggressiveness reminiscent of Sigmund Freud’s theories in *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905). Freud acknowledges the role that wit may play in instances of hostile aggression: “Wit permits us to make our enemy ridiculous through that which we could not utter loudly or consciously on account of existing hindrances; in other words, *wit affords us the means of surmounting restrictions and of opening up otherwise inaccessible pleasure sources.* Moreover, the listener will be induced by the gain in pleasure to take our part, even if he is not altogether convinced,—just as we on other occasions, when fascinated by a harmless witticism, were wont to overestimate the substance of the sentence wittily expressed” (151). Freud’s explanation of how wit operates once again raises the matter of humor’s relationship with ridicule. Based on previous discussions, wit aligns itself more closely with parody since it possesses the potential to mock a particular object but, 

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196 Wendy S. Jones argues that Austen “discredits cultural myths of the gendered personality by exposing the factitious nature of the gendering of perception” (316). She then implies that the juxtaposition of purportedly “masculine” and “feminine” perceptions in *Emma* thereby reveals their limitations and ultimately transcends them (316). Additionally, Claudia Johnson has discussed the idea of “gender transgression” in *Emma*, suggesting that the novel is more concerned with such transgressions enacted by men (196). Other pertinent points by Johnson include the following: that Mr. Woodhouse embodies “sentimental manhood” (198), that the novel pictures gallantry as effeminate (199), and that Emma’s strength has masculine overtones (202).

197 Meredith speaks of forms of humor more generally here; he does not directly reference Austen.
unlike satire, does not always utilize the weapon of ridicule. This trait explains one key
difference between *Emma*’s exploration of wit, which relies heavily upon subtle, ironic
humor, and the harsher forms of wit-reliant humor manifested by *Nightmare Abbey*,
which shows aggressively satirical tendencies that manifest themselves through
ridicule.  

An analysis of the mentor-protégé relationships in Austen and Peacock additionally offers useful insights into the similarities and differences between variations of wit—specifically irony-reliant and satire-steeped wit—and other forms of humor, as well as the relationship among humor, characterization, and plot within two disparate novels of the nineteenth century that both address the subject of mentorship.

Austen’s discussion of humor and her deployment of minor characters in *Emma*
depends very heavily upon an understanding of the protagonist herself; for this reason,
my opening discussion of the novel focuses on its heroine, as a useful lens by which to understand the interaction between wit and representations of masculinity and femininity. Thus, Chapter Four initially deviates from the established pattern of placing primary focus on a secondary female figure, or character traditionally considered to be “minor,”
due to her seeming marginality to the plot. However, this choice in fact reiterates my continuing insistence upon the artificiality of “minor” as a classification. What keeps Emma herself from being classified as a minor figure? Austen’s heroine clearly occupies center stage throughout the novel, yet her unusual characterization—specifically, the foregrounding of specific flaws—disrupts traditional notions of the central heroine.

While nineteenth-century British novels are not without other examples of flawed

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198 My third chapter states that *OED* definitions of satire overwhelmingly “pair satire with ridicule—which in turn opens an avenue of distinguishing between satire and parody” (6). It also points out that “ridicule may result from parody, but the two do not always co-exist. In contrast, satire carries with it unmistakable overtones of ridicule and its target very often becomes the butt of a joke” (6).
heroines, Catherine Moreland in *Northanger Abbey* being a notable example, Emma differs from a protagonist like Catherine in that her characterization serves aims other than overt parody; Austen’s sophisticated treatment of her heroine grapples with important messages, in this case the relationship between wit and gender. Due to its sophistication, *Emma* could be viewed as a transitional work between earlier, more traditional *Bildungsromane* and later Victorian novels such as Anthony Trollope’s *Miss Mackenzie*. Like Austen, Trollope exhibits a highly developed sense of irony, and this humor finds vent in its placement of a spinster figure—a character that would have been relegated to the margins in most other novels—at the center of the narrative, in the place usually reserved for the primary protagonist. Marriage is still a dominant theme in both *Miss Mackenzie* and *Emma*, but these novels place a stronger emphasis on the development of the protagonist herself than on the unfolding love plot, which differs from the traditional romance novel. Of all novels encountered thus far in this dissertation, from Ferrier’s *Marriage* to Edgeworth’s *Belinda*, no other work approximates Austen’s in its unconventional treatment of its heroine. For example, few novels of manners begin with deploying irony-laced wit *against* the heroine herself. The opening lines of *Emma* serve as readers’ first introduction to the discussion of wit that takes place throughout the narrative. Austen’s turning of wit against Emma immediately reveals her heroine to be flawed, which in turn decreases the distance between her and other, more “minor” or less important, less centrally located, characters in the story. It also begins to work towards the new hierarchy of character valuation that Austen wishes to establish, through creating a non-gendered definition of wit as a measurement of
worth, and developing a network of mentor-mentee relationships through which this quality is explored.

The first chapter of *Emma* begins with the following witty description of its primary protagonist: “Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” (3). In a single stroke, Austen informs her audience of the heroine’s 1) full name, 2) physical appearance, 3) mental acuity, 4) financial status, 5) material accommodation, 6) general temperament, 7) specific age, and 8) overall situation. The author thereby achieves multiple objectives, which corresponds with her reputation for brevity and tightly-ordered plot structure.  

In his chapter on techniques of wit, Freud repeatedly identifies economy of expression as essential to wit (49-52), an assertion reminiscent of Shakespeare’s “brevity is the soul of wit” (*Hamlet* 2.2); even as Austen focuses on wit in conjunction with Emma, she herself employs it through her subtle use of irony, explored further below. Austen’s introductory sentence shows her masterful grasp of audience expectation, for she answers the very questions that a seasoned storyteller might await from readers well versed in the conventions of the Gothic romance, the *Bildungsroman*, and the novel of manners. Careful analysis reveals the true complexity of this prologue; its syntax reifies and foreshadows the upcoming struggle between

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199 Regarding Austen’s brevity in this novel, E.N. Hayes does voice a dissenting opinion, stating that “economy of incident and detail” is “quite lacking in *Emma.*” He refers to its tediousness, prolixity, and unnecessary repetition, which springs from the novel’s emphasis on the development of its protagonist’s character (11). Later in his article, he also references the author’s tendency to be “verbose” (14).

200 In this case, the words are ironic as they are placed in the mouth of Polonius, a character known for being prolix. Freud shows familiarity with several works of Shakespeare in his discussion of wit; for example, he quotes Prince Hamlet’s words to Horatio in the context of this same discussion: “Thrift, Horatio, thrift” (50). He additionally alludes to the play *Love’s Labor’s Lost* in his fifth chapter (222).
convention-expectation on the one hand, and the “divine right” of the author on the other—her power to linguistically challenge the status quo through narrative. In alliance with later details, a phrase such as “the best blessings of existence” becomes a cliché. Austen unveils it as a substance-less, hollow aphorism when she unites it with a second clause presented almost as an afterthought: “and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” fails to validate, in fact undermines, the previous description. A reference to Emma’s youth—underscored by the modifier “nearly” and allied with a dearth of testing, trial, and turmoil—suggests that her character remains untried, and consequently unformed. In the absence of experience-as-comparison, Emma cannot be expected to truly recognize or live the “superlative” privileges (i.e. best blessings) she is said to possess. The choice of “seemed” in the first clause further accentuates this disjunction between appearance, or expectation, and the author’s underlying message about the actual situation. Even as Austen crafts readers’ understanding of protagonist Emma, she foreshadows the introduction of several of the novel’s major themes: cleverness and the necessity of mentorship for witty people, regardless of their gender.

Indeed, no discussion of *Emma* is complete without an exploration of the novel’s heroine, whose actions and consciousness permeate the storyline. Through her narrator the author reiterates Emma’s cleverness, as a corollary of her wit, even as Austen shows the limitations of this same wit, and manifests her own wittiness through the ironic contrast that she creates. Repeated associations between Emma and wit give her a major, often masculine, role in the unfolding of the novel’s unique perspective of witty women. Furthermore, her relationship with other characters traditionally believed to hold more
minor roles—specifically Harriet (her mentee) and Knightley (her mentor)—force a reassessment of their importance and status, while revealing further insights into *Emma*’s overall treatment of wit. Besides introducing her protagonist, Austen’s beginning statement provides a first glimpse of the novel’s humor, for it unmasks the intricacy of her irony, which device utilizes contrast to overturn the face value of a statement to force re-consideration of meaning. Contrary to readers’ intuitive assumptions, therefore, Emma cannot be said to know “the best blessings of existence” on the terms with which the narrator opens; this absence or lack of knowledge (usually gained through experience-acquired discernment) opens an avenue for solution in the form of mentorship, while Austen engages with the controversial subject of wit. She additionally prods her audience to exercise their own wits to decipher her meaning, thus making them complicit in the process. As Freud points out, wit acts as a sort of judgment that enables one to recognize a humorous juxtaposition (5), which suggests a close alliance among wit, humor, and contrast. He also notes that wit does not necessarily

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201 Rosmarin argues that, while the prevalence of Austen’s irony has been recognized, her use of irony in *Emma* is “obscure,” “frequently overlooked,” and “often recognized only in retrospect” (320). This viewpoint aligns with my own close reading of the novel’s opening lines and emphasis on the author’s subtlety.

202 As indicated in Chapter One, my definition of irony relies more heavily upon Wayne Booth’s theories than those of Sigmund Freud. Although aspects of Freud’s ideas contribute to my analyses, I disagree with Freud’s designation of irony a “a sub-species of the comic” (276), since this capitulation understates the crucial role of irony. Freud additionally insists that the essence of irony “consists in imparting the very opposite of what one intended to express” (276), an assessment that contradicts Booth’s more nuanced approach to irony.

203 The following paragraph explores this controversy further, giving an overview of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century perspectives on wit.

204 To support his point, Freud quotes K. Fischer on the relationship between wit and the comic: “Our entire psychic world, the intellectual realm of our thoughts and conceptions, does not reveal itself to us on superficial consideration. It cannot be visualized directly either figuratively or intuitively, moreover it contains inhibitions, weak points, disfigurements, and an abundance of ludicrous and comical contrasts. In order to bring it out and to make it accessible to aesthetic examination, a force is necessary which is capable not only of depicting objects directly, but also of reflecting upon these conceptions and elucidating them—namely, a force capable of clarifying thought. This force is nothing but judgment. The judgment which produces the comic contrast is wit” (5).
merge with the comic; in fact, the tendency to focus on the comic may mean that wit is overlooked (3), but the merging of the two to form comic wit requires the presence of a third person due to the “desire to impart,” which Freud identifies as inseparable to wit but not to the comic (220-222). In his words, “one can enjoy the comic alone when one happens on it,” but wit “must be imparted” and it requires and object (220; 221). It is in this role, the role of the third person apart from the object, that Austen very often places her reader. Such a placement imparts a significance to readers, as it fixes a high value on their own ability to discern the messages about wit that the novel seeks to impart.

Even as the author recognizes and meets the requirements of her audience, she also demands a critical sifting, or re-evaluation of viewpoint. One of the novel’s major such negotiations centers around the intertwined subjects of gender, wit, and shifting roles of mentor and protégé: Emma acts as a mentor to Harriet, serving the masculine role of protector and matchmaker to Harriet, but also as a protégé to Mr. Knightley. Austen often describes her protagonist as “clever,” a synonym that she sometimes substitutes for wit, although her definition of true wit is much more complex. The *Oxford English Dictionary* does establish a connotative difference between these two terms. Whereas cleverness (from the early eighteenth century to the mid- to late-nineteenth century) refers primarily to “skill,” “talent,” or mental quickness, wit during this period may refer not only to a cleverness, but also to “wisdom,” “discretion,” “good judgment,” and “prudence,” considered the equivalents of sense. Of the two synonyms wit has the strongest potential alliance with humor. However, as noted, Austen often uses “wit” and

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205 He later states that “in most cases wit and the comic can be cleanly separated” (334), concluding that wit “can be separated from the comic, and that it unites with it on the one hand only in certain special cases, on the other in the tendency to gain pleasure from intellectual sources” (335).
“cleverness” as surface synonyms, although *Emma*’s overarching message about wit also addresses the matter of good judgment, as this chapter argues. Of the two terms the latter appears the most frequently, but the author sometimes strengthens the connection between the two by pairing “wit” with the adjective “ready,” to emphasize quickness, as in the case of Mr. Elton’s reference to “ready wit” in his verse (66). To not only comment on the concept of wit, but also to establish her own definition of it apart from prevalent, heavily-gendered eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conceptions, Austen integrates a network of relationships among male and female characters into her novel, which I will explore throughout this chapter.

Wit was the source of much discussion throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: it roused mixed admiration in some cases, but multiple sources attest that wit, especially wit in woman, is viewed with suspicion, as well as inferior to other types of more feminine (amiable) humor. For example, Audrey Bilger alludes to the writings of Scottish clergyman James Fordyce, a prominent eighteenth-century orator and sermon-writer, which cite wittiness as a detractor to women who desire husbands (22).\(^{206}\) She references wit and humor as “manifestations of a head/heart dichotomy,” which viewpoint was firmly entrenched by the advent of Victoria (20).\(^{207}\) Many scholars identify a nineteenth-century association between wit and the head, humor and the heart—which explains why women with wit, as flawed, ineffectual guardians of heart and

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206 One such quotation from Fordyce is as follows: “But when that weapon [wit] is pointed at a husband, is it to be wondered if from his own house he takes shelter in the tavern? . . . . How I have pitied such a man” (98). He later writes, “Who is not shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman, that wants to dazzle by the supposed superiority of her powers?” (99). The preferred traits for a woman, according to Fordyce, are humility and wisdom (99).

207 Bilger further notes, “Jovial laughter became a prized manifestation of sentiment in the English gentleman” (21).
hearth, were especially subject to mistrust. Eileen Gillooly similarly suggests that prominent Victorian novelist George Eliot represents “barbaric humor and wit” as “masculine strategies,” whereas straightforward humor is associated with the maternal (165). A much earlier source, Adam Smith’s mid eighteenth-century *Theory of Moral Sentiments* draws a distinction between amiable and awful/respectable virtues, which idea was apparently influenced by Hume (23). In Chapter V, “Of the amiable and respectable virtues,” Smith pairs the descriptor “amiable” with “soft” and “gentle” (23), two words often associated favorably with the feminine. In his *Lectures on the English Comic Writers* (1819), published only three years after *Emma*, William Hazlitt indicates that extreme forms of wit/humor appeal to a string of negative qualities, from indolence and vanity to weakness and insensibility (30), further stating that “an affectation of wit by degrees hardens the heart” (38).208 This hardening of the heart, of course, Austen explores through the “Box Hill incident,” when Emma turns her wit against Miss Bates, a woman who was once her social superior. In terms of then-contemporary perceptions of wit and woman, such an incident is to be expected from a woman who possesses the unfeminine trait of wit. However, the novel taps only momentarily into the stereotype, in order to make a much larger statement about wit and mentor-mentee relationships. Thanks to Emma’s relationship with Knightley, she comes to repent her actions towards Miss Bates. Her change of heart is significant, as she retains her wit but changes her behavior, which in turn suggests that wit in woman is not in itself a negative quality. Austen’s protagonist has an undeniable claim to wit in the sense of cleverness, which

208 In addition, he states that wit “is the salt of conversation, not the food” (38); in other words, it should be used in moderation.
characteristic she makes no efforts to hide—quite the reverse. In fact, Gary Kelly cites the “special status” that witty characters enjoy in Austen’s novels (127), but only after he acknowledges attacks on wit in works such as The Mysteries of Udolpho and Camilla (54). He suggests that wittiness in Austen “advertises a good head but raises suspicions about the heart and the moral judgment, the willingness to participate fully in social life” (127). 209

Kelly’s perspective provides a fitting transition into my own discussion of wit as viewed through the lens of mentor-mentee relationships in Emma. The novel does cast suspicion upon Emma’s judgment in multiple instances, and sometimes connects flawed judgment with the idea of flawed morality, or lacking virtues such as generosity. However, it also continually emphasizes both Emma’s wit in terms of cleverness and her good, albeit misguided, intentions; this approach aligns with the perspective cited by Stallybrass and White, namely that wit and sense were often placed in opposition to one another as early as the seventeenth century (111). To support this assertion the authors reference a 1946 article by Robert M. Krapp, whom they cite as locating a polemic juxtaposition between middle class sense and aristocratic wit (110). Although the aristocracy is largely absent in Emma, 210 its heroine occupies the top of the social ladder in her neighborhood. 211 The upper class Emma projects a fair share of sense in most areas of life, although her judgment breaks down in the realm of social relationships, especially romantic ones and those that involve class differences. She continually

209 This statement forms a stark contrast with Freud’s more general view of wit, which he categorizes as “the most social of all those psychic functions whose aim is to gain pleasure” (286).

210 E.N. Hayes notes an overall absence of aristocracy, of lower middle class, and of the poor, but points to Austen’s repeated hints of “a class conflict which is never allowed to develop in the pages of this pleasant romance” (6).

211 Nancy Armstrong refers to Austen’s “middle-class aristocracy” (160).
misreads those around her, (a circumstance that parallels her erratic reading habits), first in her matchmaking schemes for Harriet and Mr. Elton, then in her belief of Frank Churchill’s affection for her, and finally regarding her own relationship with Mr. Knightley.\textsuperscript{212} This misreading is significant, as it underscores her limitations as a mentor to Harriet and points to the need for her own guidance.

Relationships between Emma and other characters are undeniably important in Austen’s novel. There are four primary strands of interaction that must be explored to understand Emma’s wit: besides the protagonist’s mentorship of Harriet, her relationships with Miss Taylor (later Mrs. Weston) and her father, briefly, and Mr. Knightley should be taken into account. Considering their respective ages, situations, and gender (in the latter two cases), each of these characters other than Harriet might be expected, traditionally at least, to fulfill the role of a mentor to Emma. The novel casts Miss Taylor not only as sister and friend, but also as mother figure and governess;\textsuperscript{213} the role of the father, as seen through the lens of John Gregory,\textsuperscript{214} is self-explanatory; and Mr. Knightley plays the part of a brother-mentor until Emma realizes her true feelings for him.\textsuperscript{215} Because of Emma’s remarkable intelligence, however, only one of these characters is truly qualified to act as her mentor. Within the complex interplay of relationships in the novel, the text uses wit

\textsuperscript{212} This “misreading” parallels the lack of Emma’s systematic reading referenced earlier. Through narrative events themselves, and through included information about reading habits, Austen gives her own readers an indication of the strength of certain characters’ judgment and/or character.

\textsuperscript{213} Austen informs readers that the place of Emma’s mother was filled by “an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a mother in affection” (3). Miss Taylor is cast as “less as a governess than a friend . . . . Between them it was more the intimacy of sisters . . . ,” and “they had been living together as friend and friend very mutually attached” (3).

\textsuperscript{214} John Gregory’s \textit{Legacy to His Daughters}, advice on subjects ranging from religion to marriage, was among the most oft-reprinted nineteenth-century works of conduct literature (St. Clair 504).

\textsuperscript{215} Duffy’s article focuses strongly on this “startled awakening of Emma’s consciousness,” or her progression to the point of realization that the “attachment between herself and Knightley is not at all the brother-sister friendship she had pretended it to be but one based on strong ties of physical affection” (41).
as a means of valuation that transcends other bases for hierarchy, including gender, reaffirming the placement of mentor above protégé. Intelligence is one major aspect of wit, but the two traits do not always coexist. The novel associates wit not only with intelligence or mental ability, but also with the facility of expressing one’s self in a clever and appropriate manner. Throughout *Emma* the concept of cleverness itself does carry misgiving with it, because it is not always used appropriately; Austen’s treatment of this characteristic reflects awareness of her audience’s preconceptions, which she acknowledges in various ways, while still presenting an entirely different viewpoint of wit’s positive potential under guidance. Unlike other works, *Emma* neither discounts wit as an entirely negative trait, nor conveys a gendered conception of it. Instead, the novel presents an optimistic perspective of wit, while acknowledging audience notions of potentially detrimental side-effects, and presenting a solution to these through specific, sanctioned types of mentorship.

In contrast to such an ideal, Emma’s misguided mentorship of Harriet has been much-discussed. It has long been understood that education, particularly the education of the heroine herself, is one of the novel’s major themes, which makes Emma’s insistence on adopting the teacherly role “a recurrent irony” (Hughes 70). Jones pushes the idea further to acknowledge the dark, gendered overtones of this relationship by comparing Emma’s marital machinations with “the socially common form of patriarchal violence inherent in the forced marriage, which assaults both a daughter’s feelings and ultimately, her body” (326). She follows her assertion with this conclusion: “Emma’s behavior thus accords with the male stance that she assumes toward Harriet . . . . It is significant that Emma, in wishing Harriet to make a good match, structurally inhabits the father’s place
in the traditional courtship plot” (326-327). Although Jones’s reading carries more ominous implications than my own, it points towards a significant amount of gender crossing in the novel, perhaps most obvious in its protagonist and the role she assumes as mentor to Harriet. Not only does Emma serve as Harriet’s matchmaker and protector-figure, but specific associations with wit also place her in the masculine role. Nineteenth-century novels rarely place two witty characters in a matrimonial relationship and, as noted, wit is generally viewed as a masculine trait. Once again, Maria Edgeworth’s *Belinda* proves a case in point. The novel contains two markedly witty characters, Lady Delacour and Clarence Hervey, yet neither marries a person with equal renown for cleverness. Despite his drunkenness, Lady Delacour’s husband eventually manifests some redeeming qualities that compensate for his rather “feminine” lack of mental acuity, and Lady Delacour herself experiences redemption due to the protagonist’s intervention on her behalf, which reconciles her with both her daughter and her motherhood. Hervey’s paramour Belinda, while no mental dullard, does not manifest the suspicious tendency towards wit that taints the character of her mentor, Lady Delacour.\(^{216}\) Wit is entertaining, but it often bars a character from the part of protagonist, since the heart of a true heroine should be maternal and above suspicion of masculine taint.\(^{217}\)

Nonetheless, unlike most heroines of nineteenth-century novels, Emma apparently receives “the best of both worlds.” She retains the status of heroine-protagonist, while

\(^{216}\) Lady Delacour’s intellectual ability, along with her social status and beauty, install her in the role of a mentor to the heroine. However, the novel showcases the limitations of her wit and places Belinda in the role of paragon-like protagonist. This forms a clear contrast to *Emma*, where the protagonist has a marked claim to wit.

\(^{217}\) Belinda’s desire to reconcile Lady Delacour with daughter Helena shows the heroine’s “natural” maternal qualities, as contrasted with Lady Delacour’s “unnatural” willingness to relinquish the care of her daughter.
also playing a dominant, masculine part, which her relationship with Harriet highlights in unique ways. Harriet acts as a continual foil to her mentor, Emma. Whereas wit remains Emma’s most marked characteristic, Austen meticulously informs readers on numerous occasions that wit is the very quality that Harriet lacks; via specific happenstances and commentary she thus provides a clear pattern for wit in the form of Emma, and a pattern for its converse through Harriet. The first of these instances arises when Emma first meets Harriet, and the narrator communicates that the heroine “was not struck by anything remarkably clever in Miss Smith’s conversation” (20). In alignment with Emma’s assessment, Jones identifies “artless” as the most common adjective associated with Harriet’s characterization (321), and her charming appearance is another prominent quality. Dual aspects of the word “artless,” both in usage from the early seventeenth century through the time of Emma’s publication, provide further insight into Harriet’s characterization. The first of these connotes lack of culture or skill, while the second communicates more positive ideas, referring to naturalness, simplicity, and also sincerity (OED). From one perspective, Harriet’s combined lack of culture and wit solidify her inferiority to the true heroine, which in turn casts wit in a positive light. Naturalness and simplicity render her agreeable and marriageable, although the former qualities appear as quieter, less dazzling traits when cast in the shade by Emma’s sparkling wit. However, the last of the above-listed traits complicates this assessment somewhat, as sincerity is highly regarded in relationship with ideal womanhood, which in turn implies a relationship between wit and duplicity. In no way does Austen associate her protagonist with low cunning, but she does incorporate commentary on the Achilles heel of the witty woman through two secondary characters: Harriet and Miss Bates. The harm that Emma
causes Harriet serves as a central focus of the novel, although Austen ultimately alleviates it, even negates it, through Harriet’s later marriage to the staid Mr. Martin, which I will explore later in this chapter.

As an elderly single woman of little social status, Miss Bates could be said to mirror Harriet, revealing her fate should Emma’s matchmaking schemes prove ineffective. Like the lovable spinster figure Miss Pratt, Miss Bates manifests marked social deficiencies, but Austen suggests that the neighborhood ultimately benefits from her presence: “she was a happy woman, and a woman whom no one named without good-will. It was her own universal good-will and contented temper which worked such wonders. She loved everybody, was interested in everybody’s happiness, quick-sighted to everybody’s merits” (18). The narrator’s descriptions of Miss Bates are overwhelmingly positive, even as her character functions as a foil to Emma in her lack of intelligence. When first introducing Miss Bates the narrator explains that “she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement for herself, or to frighten those who might hate her into outward respect. She had never boasted either beauty or cleverness” (18). In its entirety the statement about lacking “intellectual superiority” places Miss Bates in a juxtapositional relationship with the protagonist, much like Harriet, although she differs from Emma’s protégé in her lack of beauty. This shows the fate of a woman similar to Harriet, but for whom marriage is not an option despite her formerly strong social standing. Emma erroneously insists upon Harriet’s high birth and treats her accordingly,
despite her unknown parentage; in contrast, the protagonist knows of Miss Bates’s background as a gentlewoman but still treats her with contempt.218

Both of these circumstances showcase the dark side of Emma’s characterization. Characters’ treatment of Miss Bates offer readers insight into their moral compass. Unsurprisingly, in an instance of verbal irony Frank Churchill refers to her “powerful, argumentative mind,” which recognition places his mental powers on par with Emma’s, but reveals his lack of generosity (238). The Box Hill incident, briefly referenced earlier, acts as the most stunning reminder of the dangers of wit, where the overriding message seems to be that cleverness does not promise virtues such as kindness and discernment: when the latter are lacking, selfishness may influence a person to act cruelly. Whereas Knightley has been known to offer Miss Bates his carriage (203-4), Emma mimics her (206), then goes on to shame her in front of others. At the Box Hill picnic when Miss Bates declares in her deprecating, humble way: “I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as ever I open my mouth, shan’t I?” (340), Emma replies with the clever repartee, “Ah! ma’am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me, but you will be limited as to number—only three at once” (340). Miss Bates initially misses Emma’s meaning, but soon recognizes its embedded barb. In response to Mr. Knightley’s later inquiry into how she could be so “unfeeling” and “insolent” (344), Emma attempts to minimize her part in shaming Miss Bates. Knightley then assures her that Miss Bates not only understood her, but also evidenced both “candour” and “generosity” towards Emma in return. He concludes with the acknowledgment: “This is not pleasant to you, Emma—and it is very

218 Knightley refers to a time when Miss Bates’s “notice was an honor” and states that she “has sunk from the comforts she was born to” (344).
far from pleasant to me; but I must, I will—I will tell you truths while I can; satisfied with proving myself your friend by very faithful counsel and trusting that you will some time or other do me greater justice than you can do now” (345). Later events do indeed vindicate Knightley’s perspective of Emma and her conduct towards Miss Bates, and even more importantly, this statement of Knightley’s reveals his important placement as counselor to Emma, as one who possesses true wit, who equals Emma’s cleverness but possesses the discernment to act with kindness and integrity, as when he offers his carriage to Miss Bates and Jane Fairfax. In this instance, Austen provides interpretation of the action itself through Emma, who admits despite her prejudice against the women that their benefactor not only “humane,” but also “benevolent,” “considerate,” and “unostentatiously kind” (204).

As one of Miss Bates’s supposed deficiencies and Harriet’s strengths, the matter of external appearance deserves some exploration. Specifically of Harriet’s beauty the novel states: “She was a very pretty girl, and her beauty happened to be of a sort which Emma particularly admired” (20). Emma’s appreciation of Harriet’s appearance also proves reminiscent of the admiration or regard a male character might have for a good-looking, but weak-minded woman; such pairings are not unusual in Austen’s novels.219 After this first highlighting of absence, the narrator reiterates Harriet’s deficient wit not once, but twice. Emma is characterized as “quick and decided in her ways,” in contrast to Harriet who “certainly was not clever” (22). The next page communicates that in the

219 For example, the narrator in Pride and Prejudice describes the relationship between Elizabeth Bennet’s parents as follows: “Her father, captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour, which youth and beauty generally give, had married a woman whose weak understanding and illiberal mind, had very early in their marriage put an end to all real affection for her. Respect, esteem, and confidence, had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown” (159).
latter case “strength of understanding must not be expected,” although Emma’s protégé proves capable of appreciating both elegance and cleverness. In concurrence with this character’s lack of wit, the narrator delivers the following statement: “Harriet had no penetration” (23). If Austen had not for so long enjoyed her pristine reputation as a sexless novelist, and a precursor to later writers with Victorian sympathies, one might be tempted to suspect her of insinuating a bawdy pun into her novel. In any case the combined implications of this sequence of events is evident: as a foil to Emma, Harriet’s lack of penetration—that is, of understanding and cleverness—highlights these purportedly “masculine” qualities in her mentor. Three chapters later the author still proves intent upon reinforcing Harriet’s witlessness in order to emphasize the converse quality in Emma. In this specific instance, Austen adds the testimony of Mr. Knightley to previous characterizations of Harriet. Knightley tells Emma that Harriet “is not a sensible girl, nor a girl of any information,” then states: “At her age she can have no experience; and, with her little wit, is not very likely ever to have any that can avail her. She is pretty, and she is good-tempered, and that is all” (56).

Even as mentee continues to juxtapose mentor through such comments, Harriet’s role also reveals that the presence of cleverness does not promise co-existent

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220 As noted, Austen tends to conflate “wit” and “cleverness.” Based on OED definitions of the two terms, “wit” has a stronger connection to “strength of understanding,” but the placement of this denial of cleverness with denial of strong understanding illustrates the narrator’s synonymous usage of the two words.

221 In passing, Hayes references this characteristic of Austen’s novels, relating it to a contemporary, middle-class English discomfort with sexuality: “English men and women of the middle class during the early nineteenth century were reticent in matters of sex, and abided by conventions which today we consider foolish” (6). He feels that, for this and other reasons, Austen fails to transcend her own time period and “show her characters totally and in relation to mankind” (6).

222 The OED confirms that the dual meanings of the word “penetration” have existed since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Sir Francis Bacon used it to denote “keenness of perception” as early as 1605 in his The Advancement of Learning, while the sexual connotation existed at least from 1613.
discernment; later narrative events bear out Mr. Knightley’s insistence that, despite Emma’s foundationless scruples, Mr. Martin is an excellent match for Harriet. Of lesser weight than the assessments of either Emma or Mr. Knightley—perhaps because he himself possesses less wit than either or them—Mr. Elton’s response to the heroine once again reinforces her superior claim to cleverness. The lines that he composes for Harriet, which are in actuality about Emma, praise the subject’s mental quickness (66). Despite her purported wit, Emma misses the mark entirely and takes the commendation as a testament of Elton’s love for Harriet: “Humph—Harriet’s ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love, indeed, to describe her so” and later (67), “What a strange thing love is! he can see ready wit in Harriet, but will not dine alone for her” (103). Even as the novel continually affirms the cleverness of its protagonist, especially in contrast to Harriett, specific aspects of Emma’s misreadings and misguided mentorship lead readers both to question the extent of her wit and to recognize that the heroine has room for growth.223

The novel is thus rife with dramatic irony; the narrator’s subtle insinuation of doubt communicates truth to readers of which Emma, with all her talents, is quite unaware. Free indirect discourse is one major technique that Austen uses repeatedly to show the limitations of Emma’s wit.224 In her discussion of irony in *Emma*, Edena Rosmarin discusses the heavy dependence of this device upon “an admixture variously

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223 Hayes offers a non-comprehensive catalogue of Emma’s “errors in judgment” to include the following: “that Mr. Elton is an admirable person; that she will never marry; that Mr. Elton loves Harriet; that Frank loves Harriet; that Harriet loves Frank; that Frank loves her; that she dislikes Mr. Knightley; that she loves Frank; that Jane Fairfax has been indiscreet with Mr. Dixon” (16).
224 Mary Poovey identifies free indirect discourse as a device that Austen often uses (184). Regarding *Emma* specifically, Wendy Jones suggests that the author uses free indirect discourse to evoke sympathy; she insists that Austen was the first to “fully exploit” this narrative device, and hints that the author might be considered its inventor (338).
conflating and juxtaposing the disinterested voice of the narrator and the interested voice of an individual character, usually Emma” (321). Rosmarin notes the range of narrative reliability in these instances, from “total to nil, and signs of this wavering reliability range from conspicuous to absent” (321). One example of this occurs early on in the novel, when the narrator informs readers, from the perspective of Mrs. Weston, that “dear Emma was of no feeble character; she was more equal to her situation than most girls would have been, and had sense, and energy, and spirits that might be hoped would bear her well and happily through little difficulties and privations” (15). By this point, Austen has incorporated enough background on Mrs. Weston for readers to recognize that her statement is suspect, due to an optimistic generosity in her character that may inhibit impartial judgment. This trait of the amiable woman was greatly prized by Austen’s contemporaries, but the author uses it to subordinate Mrs. Weston to Emma and, in specific instances, to also encourage questioning of her conclusions. The first page of the novel says of Miss Taylor, the future Mrs. Weston, that “the mildness of her temper had hardly allowed her to impose any restraint” upon Emma. At this point the narrator—without any hint of free indirect discourse—states: “The real evils, indeed, of Emma’s situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself” (3). In view of this contextualization and the earlier-referenced, common juxtaposition of wit with sense, Austen insinuates that the former quality in Emma might outweigh or undermine the latter. Further details confirm that

225 Jones describes the technique more simply, as occurring when “a third person narrator writes in the voice of a character” (338). She sees free indirect discourse as a major means of identification and a means of experiencing, “in some sense, being someone else” (338).
226 The verb phrase “might be hoped” reinforces my earlier point about the author’s opening irony and the lack of “difficulties and privations” that Emma has thus far experienced.
227 As noted, see Stallybrass and White, as well as Robert M. Krapp.
Emma does indeed possess strength of character, energy, and spirits, but repeatedly reinforce the questioning of her judgment; just as Austen spares few pains to establish Emma’s cleverness, so also does she pour remarkable energy into eroding readers’ notions of Emma’s sense, often in connection with secondary characters such as Harriet.

Harriet contributes significantly to the unfolding of Emma’s characterization, as well as readers’ understanding of Austenian wit, which leads to a re-consideration of artificial designations of status, specifically “primary” and “secondary,” within a novel. At least three instances of such erosions occur within a fifteen-page span in Chapters Eight and Nine. During a conversation with Mr. Knightley, Emma admits again that Harriet “is not a clever girl,” which she follows with her insistence that “she [Harriet] has better sense than you are aware of” (58). If the narrator does indeed undermine or question the extent of the heroine’s sense, then such an assessment of Harriet is suspect. Austen fans this suspicion into flame through humorous details, including Harriet’s fickleness of falling in love with multiple men across the space of a year. Additionally, she follows the above assertions by Emma with a blunt statement from Knightley, which shows his doubts about her application of sense: “Upon my word, Emma, to hear you abusing the reason you have, is almost enough to make me think so too. Better be without sense than misapply it as you do” (58). Already, the author uses dialogue to show Knightley as one of Emma’s few companions who can both match her cleverness and surpass her judgment. While Emma’s governess-mother-friend-sister Miss Taylor, later Mrs. Weston, may possess her fair share of sense, her wit is no match for Emma, and thus makes her an unfit mentor for the novel’s protagonist, although her abilities do equip her for companionship. It proves significant that, in listing Miss Taylor’s
characteristics—just as she did for her protagonist—Austen relays “intelligence” first, then follows this trait with the fact that Emma’s friend is “well-informed, useful, gentle, knowing all the ways of the family, interested in its concerns, and peculiarly interested in herself [Emma], in every pleasure, every scheme of hers; one to whom she could speak every thought as it arose, and who had such an affection for her as could never find fault” (4).

Although they do document Miss Taylor’s understandable bias in favor of her friend, these words additionally exemplify free indirect discourse, where the words of narrator merge with the thoughts of heroine. Speaking for both Austen and her protagonist, the narrator shows that both value intelligence, which is however differentiated from wit. The use of personal pronouns within context, first the reflexive pronoun “herself” and then “hers,,” “she,” and “her,” provide concurrent distance and closeness; this particular integration of third person marks a merging of the objective narrative voice with a tinge of emotion that could only be conveyed by Emma’s inside knowledge of her governess and surrogate mother’s generosity. Moments such as this within the novel provide further insight into Austen’s treatment of cleverness: the author differentiates and constructs a hierarchy of characters, apart from gender and based primarily on their wit. One might argue that gender also plays a significant role, since the female Miss Taylor possesses the necessary intelligence to serve as Emma’s friend, but lacks the proper apportionment of wit to act as her guide—a role which Austen ultimately relegates to the male character Knightley. Nonetheless, the author judges a character’s fittingness as a mentor based on the alliance between wit and sense, rather than wit and gender. Textual references to Emma’s mother make this stance clear, when the narrator
indicates that Emma’s flaws spring from a lack of guidance that could have been provided by her mother, the only person in her family system who possessed the necessary wit to match hers. As Knightley tells Mrs. Weston, “Emma is spoiled by being the cleverest in her family. At ten years old she had the misfortune of being able to answer questions which puzzled her sister at seventeen. She was always quick and assured; Isabella slow and diffident. And ever since she was twelve, Emma has been mistress of the house and of you all. In her mother she lost the only person able to cope with her. She inherits her mother’s talents, and must have been under subjection to her” (33). Though Knightley does not explicitly state that Mrs. Woodhouse possessed a wit to equal Emma’s, the implication is clear based on the contrast drawn between Emma and Isabella, as well as the notion that Emma has “inherited her mother’s talents.” Only a person of equal wit but greater sense has the necessary qualifications to mentor Emma. The strength of the protagonist’s wit, without proper mentorship and untempered by sense, leads to a series of miscalculations that precipitate some of the novel’s most humorous conundrums.

As indicated, the majority of these misunderstandings have to do with Emma’s matchmaking schemes for Harriet, which both enforce the limitations of her wit and indirectly point to mentorship by Knightley as the panacea. The character of Knightley is in actuality the major means by which Austen questions Emma’s judgment, and ultimately reveals her misreading of various situations. Of all figures in the novel (apart from Emma’s deceased mother), he alone possesses the necessary merging of wit and sense to act as a guide for a person of Emma’s talents. Additionally, his changed assessment of Harriet towards the novel’s end, when he acknowledges that Harriet “has
some first-rate qualities” such as lack of pretension and singlemindedness, shows that he too possesses the potential for growth. Conventional marriage novels insist that a potential love match meet such requirements as social status, proper income, even acceptable age. Knightley fits all these qualifications, along with the additional quality of superior wit, thus making him a fitting mentor to Emma, a circumstance of the utmost importance in Austen’s novel. Her father, as Austen makes quite clear, falls well short of the protagonist’s abilities: Emma loves Mr. Woodhouse dearly, one validation of her warm heart, but he cannot “meet her in conversation, rational or playful” (5). He has never equaled his daughter’s powers of intellect, and has apparently returned to his second childhood: “The evil of the actual disparity in their ages (and Mr. Woodhouse had not married early) was much increased by his constitution and habits; for having been a valetudinarian all his life, without activity of mind or body, he was a much older man in ways than in years; and though everywhere beloved for the friendliness of his heart and his amiable temper, his talents could not have recommended him at any time” (5). References to Mr. Woodhouse’s friendly heart and “amiable temper” once again raise the matter of gender, as amiability is a prominent characteristic of the novel’s more “feminine” characters—Harriet, Isabella, and Jane—and also a sought-after trait of the dutiful wife.²²⁸ In fact, one brief exchange pertaining to Emma and Jane Fairfax illustrates how Austen taps into the contemporary contrasting of feminine amiability with masculine wit. Emma misreads Jane in the following manner when she assumes an

²²⁸ As with Austen’s other novels, marriage is a prominent theme and presented, on the surface at least, as the natural order of life. The author references Isabella’s and Miss Taylor’s marriages early in the narrative, but she also affirms other potentialities through Miss Bates, who enjoys “a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married” (18). Despite her status as an old maid, she is described as “a happy woman” (18). Emma too seems quite happy in her singleness and, according to Mrs. Weston, “always declares she will never marry” (36).
inappropriate liaison between the latter and Colonel Campbell: “The amiable, upright, perfect Jane Fairfax was apparently cherishing very reprehensible feelings” (222). As the first-listed of these traits, Emma’s choice of amiability conveys an awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, of societal expectations regarding the role and characteristics of the ideal woman, as well as a potential lack in herself. This in turn points to the commonly contrasted quality of wit, which Emma possesses in abundance.

Far from a humorist himself, the highly domestic Mr. Woodhouse displays feminine traits in addition to amiability that are linked to his childlike demeanor and the parental role that his daughter assumes towards him. As viewed through the lens of Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mr. Woodhouse’s “valetudinarian” existence is reminiscent of the ideal convalescence and perpetual childhood so often seen as a feminine virtue.

Emma has experienced a reversal placing her in the dominant role in relation to Mr. Woodhouse; a prime example of this occurs shortly after the narrator offers the aforementioned explanation of the father’s disposition. Mr. Woodhouse expresses a gentle petulance about a number of matters, from Miss Taylor’s new accommodations, to the carriage, to the situation with servants. When her father’s thoughts take a more positive turn, Emma spares “no exertions to maintain this happier flow of ideas” and distracts him through a game of backgammon (6-7). Emma, rather than her father,

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229 This marks another instance of free indirect discourse, since the thought is not enclosed in quotation marks, but it clearly reflects Emma’s consciousness.
230 Castellanos notes that there are very few successful parental roles in Austen (19).
231 “Chapter 5: Animadversions on Some of the Writers Who Have Rendered Women Objects of Pity, Bordering on Contempt,” begins with a reference to Sophia, and Rousseau’s erroneous conclusion that “woman ought to be weak and passive, because she has less bodily strength than man.” “Chapter 2: The Prevailing Opinion of a Sexual Character Discussed” states: “Men, indeed, appear to me to act in a very unphilosophical manner when they try to secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood.”
possesses the power at Hartfield, and she seems unwilling to relinquish either this role, or her parental duties towards Mr. Woodhouse. An analysis of the novel’s commentary on humor, specifically wit, highlights interesting reversals in hierarchy such as the above, also making definite contributions to readers’ understanding of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century perspectives on gender and power, as well as Austen’s unique approach to these subjects. Within the context of previous descriptions, specifically Miss Taylor’s gentle lack of guidance and Emma’s lack of equals in intellect (a direct corollary to her wit), the novel reveals that this quality in Mr. Knightley makes him the best-qualified mentor for Emma. How exactly does Emma reinforce his claims to mentorship?

Unlike the majority of people around her—after all, Emma has “no equals” in Highbury (5)—Mr. Knightley proves “one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse” (8), and she herself describes him as loving to find fault with her (8). Knightley alone possesses the co-existent wit, will, and discernment that make him not only a match, but also a fitting guide for Emma.

Austen introduces the question of which character is cleverer in Emma’s first chapter, in the midst of a conversation regarding Miss Taylor’s recent marriage, when Emma claims credit for making the match. Knightley refers to this happenstance as “a lucky guess,” to which the protagonist responds: “And have you never known the pleasure and triumph of a lucky guess? I pity you. I thought you cleverer, for, depend upon it, there is always some talent in it” (10). At this moment in the conversation, Emma introduces her scheme to find a match for Mr. Elton, and Knightley instructs her, 232

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232 Incidentally, the word “talent” also proves noteworthy here, as Austen indicates that Emma has talent in multiple areas, such as music, but she lacks application and consistency, qualities that a mentor would help to develop. See also Footnote #10, on the connection between wit and talent.
“Invite him to dinner, Emma, and help him to the best of the fish and the chicken, but leave him to choose his own wife” (11). Knightley’s willingness to oppose Emma, as well as his consistently sound judgment, are reinforced at multiple points throughout the novel. His opinions of various characters—from the Martins, to Harriet, to Frank Churchill and Emma herself—is unerring, but all too often conflict with Emma’s. In the case of the Martins, Knightley thinks highly of them, but Emma’s split-second judgment determines that they must be “very unfit to be the intimates of a girl who wanted only a little more knowledge and elegance to be quite perfect” (20). This is the moment when Emma decides to mentor Harriet, to “introduce her into good society” and “form her opinions and manners” (21). The heroine’s choice springs from two bases: her instantaneous liking of Harriet, and her belief that she can be “useful to Harriet” (23). However, the narrator undermines readers’ trust in Emma’s perspective through revelations of the protagonist’s class snobbery, and through Knightley’s insistence on the potential harm that could result from an intimacy between Emma and her young protégé.

Class-as-theme surfaces in numerous instances throughout the novel, and very often in conjunction with the heroine. This becomes obvious when the narrator—tinged by Emma’s consciousness in an additional instance of free indirect discourse—refers to the Martins as “another set of beings” and speaks of Emma’s amusement in hearing tales of them (23). Austen integrates direct quotation to reinforce readers’ awareness of this trait in the heroine, as when Emma admits she may have encountered Mr. Martin “fifty times, but without having any idea of his name.” Figuratively speaking, Emma adds insult to injury by noting, “A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people
with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. A degree or two lower, and a creditable appearance might interest me; I might hope to be useful to their families in some way or other. But a farmer can need none of my help, and is, therefore, in one sense, as much above my notice, as in every other he is below it” (26). Statements like this one uncover self-deceptions in Emma of which she herself is unaware, but that Knightley has the ability to identify truly. Before Austen conveys Emma’s belief that she can be useful to Harriet, the narrator acknowledges specific benefits that Emma receives from Harriet’s company. Textual details communicate that Emma feels flattered by Harriet’s “early attachment to herself,” as well as repeated affirmations of her mentor’s opinions and cleverness (23). In fact, Harriet is “exactly the young friend she [Emma] wanted—exactly the something which her home required” (23). A phrase such as “the something which her home required” objectifies Harriet, practically reducing her to the status of a item of furniture or décor. Harriet’s presence not only flatters Emma, but also provides useful supplementary benefits, since Emma can “summon” her protégé at any time to serve as a walking companion (22). Even as Emma convinces herself of all the good that she can do for Harriet, she herself receives benefits from Harriet’s presence, a fact which undermines her claims to altruism. Whether or not Emma actually does accomplish anything positive for her young mentee is often brought into question, especially by the character of Emma’s would-be mentor, Knightley.

The novel’s fifth chapter begins with a snippet of dialog that communicates Mr. Knightley’s misgivings regarding Emma’s mentorship of Harriet. In the ensuing exchange, Knightley tells Mrs. Weston his opinion of the “great intimacy” between the two women, which he terms “a bad thing.” Mrs. Weston first expresses surprise at this
viewpoint, then insists that Emma “must do Harriet good,” the very matter in question. Since readers already know that Emma’s governess-friend has been far too lenient with Emma and views her through rose-colored glasses, this statement by Mrs. Weston does not prove particularly convincing. After a brief exchange, referenced earlier, about Emma’s erratic reading habits, Knightley affirms the very truth which the narrator had earlier insinuated—namely, that the presence of Harriet simply flatters Emma’s ego, while Emma’s misguided mentorship will make Harriet unfit for her future life: “She is a flatterer in all her ways; and so much the worse, because undersigned . . . . As for Harriet, I will venture to say that she cannot gain by the acquaintance . . . . She will grow just refined enough to be uncomfortable with those among whom birth and circumstances have placed her home. I am very much mistaken if Emma’s doctrines give any strength of mind, or tend at all to make a girl adapt herself rationally to the varieties of her situation in life” (34). An alignment between the perspectives of the implied author and one of the novel’s key characters (via the narrator) may be taken as an affirmation of authorial endorsement. The sheer number of times that Knightley references a variant of the word “reason” situates him as a major proponent of reason—even as “the voice of reason”—in the novel. In contrast to the other characters, including Mrs. Weston and Mr. Woodhouse, Knightley alone manifests a clear-sightedness when evaluating Emma; he proves capable of appreciating her virtues in addition to her faults, as when he admits that Emma, though pretty, is not vain. Mrs. Woodhouse calls her young friend “beautiful,” and Knightley responds by first acknowledging his partiality as an “old friend” before stating: “I have not a fault to find with her person . . . . I think her all you describe. I love to look at her; and I will add this praise, that I do not think her personally vain.
Considering how very handsome she is, she appears to be very little occupied with it; her vanity lies in another way. Mrs. Weston, I am not to be talked out of my dislike of her intimacy with Harriet Smith, or my dread of its doing them both harm” (35).

Knightley’s words reveal multiple facets of his character, additionally foreshadowing the unfolding of future events. The fact that Knightley appreciates Emma’s physical appearance sets the stage for the late bloom of the love plot between him and his protégé. But despite his long-seated partiality for her as a family friend, he still proves capable of identifying her vanity and seeing potentially detrimental side-effects of her relationship with Harriet. The discernment and frankness that he manifests with Mrs. Weston surface in other situations as well. For example, as Emma continues her attempts to ensnare Mr. Elton and Harriet in marriage, Knightley’s self-admitted “sincere interest in Emma” leads him to continue his straightforward assessments of her actions (36). From his insistence on Emma’s having drawn Harriet too tall (43), to his direct noting of her desire for compliment (53), to his concerns about her interactions with Harriet, Knightley continues to mentor Emma. Based on his knowledge of her character and influence, he directly accuses her of writing the letter of refusal to Mr. Martin, then insists that Emma “has been no friend to Harriet” (57). Her reaction to Knightley’s rebuke reveals her instinctive acceptance of his mentorship, although pride leads her to a verbal rejection, for she possesses a “habitual respect for his judgment in general” which leads to marked discomfort when their viewpoints oppose one another (60). Later, of course, the novel affirms Emma’s internalized acknowledgement of Knightley’s leadership in such cases when the narrator directly states that Emma is “too eager and busy in her own previous conceptions and views to hear him [Mr. Elton]
impartially, or see him with clear vision” (102). This theme of blindness, or lack of clear vision, the story continues when Emma notes Mr. Elton’s “strange insensibility towards Harriet,” as well as his persistent attentions towards herself (115), which culminate in a declaration and offer of marriage not for Emma’s protégé, but rather for Emma (119). Finally, the protagonist not only admits her misjudgment (123), but acknowledges her underhanded attempts to persuade Harriet into liking Mr. Elton (124)—yet another mis-mentorship similar to her convincing Harriet to reject Mr. Martin, all the while pretending not to influence the decision (47).

Emma’s willingness to admit error marks progress in her character development, but her sustained disagreements with Mr. Knightley, her mentor figure, mark her evolution as far from finished. Although she admits her errors in matchmaking for Harriet and Mr. Elton, she still is unwilling to acknowledge Mr. Martin an appropriate spouse for her protégé (126), and she continues to consider other potential matches for Harriet (127), two circumstances that mark her development as incomplete. In fact, Emma repeatedly disagrees with her mentor on the subject of Frank Churchill and even calls Knightley “the worst judge in the world” when they differ over Churchill’s absence (134): Knightley astutely notes that Churchill could have contrived a means of coming to see his father and stepmother had he wished, while Emma maintains that mitigating circumstances might have prevented the journey. Churchill’s letters disgust Knightley, and he thinks very little of the “good manners” of a man who shows “no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people” (137). Emma, of course, takes a completely opposite stance on the subject, just as she does where Mr. Martin is concerned.

Throughout each of these instances Emma’s purposeful obstinacy, or blindness, contrasts
Mr. Knightley’s uncannily accurate judgment, thus proving him to be most capable of acting as her guide. Although Emma maintains her insistence of Frank Churchill’s sincerity and Mr. Knightley’s incorrect perspective of him (179), the narrative validates the latter’s viewpoint, showing Knightley to be the only one not duped by the man’s charm. Though Churchill “was judged, throughout the parishes of Donwell and Highbury with great candour; liberal allowances were made for the little excesses of such a handsome man—one who smiled so often and bowed so well,” there “was one spirit among them not to be softened, form its power of censure, by bows or smiles—Mr. Knightley” (188). Even at this point, when Knightley persists in thinking Churchill a “trifling, silly fellow” (188), Emma retains her conviction of his not being “a trifling, silly fellow” (193). She also misjudges Jane Fairfax, although Mr. Knightley accurately identifies the woman’s only fault as a lacking, open temperament (263), which readers later learn springs from her clandestine engagement to Frank Churchill.

Throughout the remainder of *Emma*, references to Mr. Knightley’s good judgment and clear sight become more and more marked. His habits reflect strong moral character, as shown when Emma humorously notes that Mr. Knightley is either “reading to himself or settling accounts” when at home (287). Knightley is the sort of astute, dedicated man who, in the words of the American Benjamin Franklin, “drives his business” rather than permitting it to drive him. His actions towards Harriet receive further authorial validation, for when Mr. Elton refuses to dance with her Knightley graciously takes that task upon himself (300). In addition, he identifies Emma’s enemies in the same context.

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233 See the connection to page 6 and the subject of reading, and the corresponding reference to pages 32-33 of *Emma*.

234 Franklin’s 1758 “Way to Wealth,” an excerpt from *Poor Richard’s Almanac*, offers the following advice: “Drive thy business, let not that drive thee.”
that she admits her mistaken notion of Mr. Elton, acknowledging his “littleness” (302). Knightley repeatedly sees what his protégé cannot, from Churchill’s potential double dealings (314), to Emma’s unfeeling conduct towards Miss Bates.\footnote{In this oft-referenced scene, Emma humiliates Miss Bates during the Box Hill party, using her wit to point out the latter’s dullness of speech. In describing Miss Bates’s reaction to the barb, the narrator states: “Miss Bates, deceived by the mock ceremony of her manner, did not immediately catch her meaning; but, when it burst on her, it could not anger, though a slight blush showed that it could pain her” (340). Mr. Knightley later rebukes Emma for her cruelty (344).} Knightley’s misgivings about the relationship between Emma and Harriet and the conduct of Frank Churchill are vindicated eventually, and Emma acknowledges that her relationship with Mr. Knightley has ripened into something more. Just as the heroine realizes that “Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!,” she also experiences an epiphany signaled by a series of exclamation points: “Her own conduct, as well as her own heart, was before her in the same few minutes. She saw it all with a clearness which had never blessed her before. How improperly had she been acting by Harriet! How inconsiderate, how indelicate, how irrational, how unfeeling had been her conduct! What blindness, what madness had led her on! It struck her with dreadful force, and she was ready to give it every bad name in the world” (375). This narrative moment marks a point of culmination in \textit{Emma}: the mentorship of Knightley, the man of wit and feeling, proves instrumental to this development. My analysis of \textit{Emma} shows that the novel centers around such relationships to fulfill the goals of the \textit{Bildungsroman}, or illustrate the development of the heroine; this construction additionally permits the work to pursue the subject of wit in a creative manner. The progression of Austen’s work is therefore best understood in terms of its psychological and sociological emphases, rather than geographical movement or dramatic alterations in plot.
The Roles of Mentor and Protégé: Nightmare Abbey

Like Emma, Nightmare Abbey does not emphasize plot progression in the traditional sense; instead, its satirical characterization offers a means of understanding the development of specific themes and ideas across the space of the novel. Thomas Love Peacock’s opening epigraph to Nightmare Abbey (1818) proves fitting, for it acknowledges the presence of glaring difference: the author’s work stands out from that of his contemporaries as a “goose among swans,” sounding its barbaric “cackle” unconcernedly over the rooftops of the world.236 In 1918, a full hundred years after the publication of Peacock’s novel, John W. Draper accounts for this divergence by noting the historical placement of Peacock between first and second generation Romantics.237 Born in 1785, Peacock preceded Shelley by seven years, but arrived twelve years after Coleridge (456). Draper notes the resultant confusion that an audience experiences when trying to pinpoint the novelist’s viewpoint on various political and social matters: “Often the reader is puzzled to know where—if anywhere—Peacock’s preferences lie; he often sets the puppets dallying, and then stands aside to watch for broken heads, with the genially malicious unconcern of the innocent bystander. At times . . . he makes known his point of view . . . but, even so, one commonly finishes a volume with the wish that Peacock would, like Bernard Shaw, prefix a preface to make certain just what he wants

236 The Penguin edition offers W. F. Smith’s translation of Peacock’s French epigraph: “I have elected to chirrup, and cackle as a Goose among Swans, as the proverb hath it, rather than be esteemed dumb among so many gentle poets and eloquent orators” (261). My own sentence construction additionally alludes to the following famous line from stanza 52 of Walt Whitman’s “Song of Myself”: “I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world” (110).

237 Research on Peacock’s corpus is severely limited, perhaps because of his anachronistic difference; scholarly interest tend to focus on the circle of Romantics that fall into these two acknowledged “generations.”
the whole thing to mean‖ (457-458). His assessment concludes with the rather dated, but optimistic belief that an accurate interpretation of authorial intention can be attained (458).238 This much-debated matter falls by the wayside for narrative theorists who track the trail of implied author through the text,239 yet Draper rightly identifies the general tenor of Peacock’s satiric novels, as well as the interpretational difficulties that they pose for even the most practiced reader. In the case of Nightmare Abbey, as with Emma, the merging of two threads—wit with the roles of mentor and protégé—provides one possibility for unlocking the mysteries of the novel’s construction. Rather than addressing the subject of wit in an overt manner, Peacock renders this abstract concept concrete through the narrative itself, and an analysis of characterization and mentor-mentee relationships in Nightmare Abbey thus offers unique insights into another key nineteenth-century perspective on humor, but from the viewpoint of a male author whose novel places the male protagonist Scythrop at its center. Nonetheless, the story does contain two dominant female figures, Marionetta and Celinda, who contribute to readers’ understanding of both the protagonist and the novel’s treatment of wit. This in turn forces a re-consideration of their relationships with Scythrop and their secondary status, as well as their part in shaping the novel’s messages.

Unlike Emma, Nightmare Abbey is conspicuous for its very lack of direct, verbal references to wit, although the marked absence of this trait in many of its characters serves as satirical societal commentary in its own right; if the abbey community serves as a metonym of society with its range of characters, then Peacock holds a very low view of

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238 Draper confidently concludes: “With some pains, however, a fairly accurate interpretation can be attained” (458).
239 Here I refer to “the intentional fallacy,” the slippery slope encountered when making assumptions about authorial intention.
society. Nonetheless, the indisputable presence of the technique of wit makes it of interest to critics and readers alike. If wit indeed involves a judgment that permits recognition of humorous contrast (Freud 5), then Peacock proves himself very witty indeed. As a male writer he faced an indisputably different set of challenges than those confronted by women writers of the early nineteenth century—unlike Austen, he need provide no rationale for the presence of witty characters; he need not emphasize the overt presence of wit in order to undermine potential critique. Instead, his alliance of satire with irony creates a unique, Peacockesque brand of wit that sets him apart from his contemporaries, while still providing commentary on wit itself. Perhaps for this reason more than any other, my dissertation ends with an analysis of Peacock as a master of multiple “humors” which coalesce under one heading: the technique of wit.240 Parody—which my second chapter associates with two actions, 1) imitation and 2) modification—is clearly present throughout Nightmare Abbey, usually with the undisguised aim of ridicule. The novel parodies popular genres such as the romance novel and the Gothic thriller, among other items. Its setting in an abbey, “a venerable family-mansion, in a highly picturesque state of semi-dilapidation” (39), can hardly be classified as anything other than parody in the tradition of Northanger Abbey (1817), also tapping into and parodying major themes such as melancholy, which trait Scythrop embodies. However, of the techniques of humor discussed thus far, irony and satire prove most essential to Peacock’s treatment of wit. In the preface to his critically acclaimed work on the subject,

240 Ironically, Peacock’s humorous characterization of his more melancholy figures, such as Glowry and Scythrop, taps into earlier notions of the bodily humors. For instance, the first OED definition of the word “atrabilarius,” used to describe Mr. Glowry, refers secondarily to “black bile” (in Peacock’s usage of it). As a fluid necessary to proper functioning of the liver, bile was counted among the four humors essential to early physiology.
Wayne Booth states that, though largely overlooked prior to the eighteenth century, irony was of crucial importance by the end of Romanticism (ix). Incidentally, he also suggests that modern scholars have been derelict in studying irony’s concurrent function as a dividing and unifying force of authors and readers (ix). In the case of Nightmare Abbey, where wit very often embodies itself in the intersection of irony and satire, the resultant over-the-top humor serves as a powerful force towards unification. I would suggest that this occurs for several reasons, the most powerful of these pertaining to perception and place of satire in early nineteenth-century thought. Peacock’s strong reliance on satire leads to his classification as a satiric novelist, and the presence of this form pervades practically every page of Nightmare Abbey. To some extent this brands the author as an anachronism, thereby downplaying the potential threat of implied critique: his irony proves him a product of his time, but his satire marks him as a throwback to past periods, even as the central placement of strong female characters contributes a progressive edge to the work.

Much research supports this viewpoint, as scholars trace the development of the emergent, satire-streaked novel across the eighteenth century to its widespread acceptance sometime during the nineteenth. Though irony may either unite or divide, Peacock’s extreme version of satire merges with the former technique to form a wit that diffuses opposition. This is not to designate it as devoid of aggression. Instead, Peacock

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241 Booth states this in grandiose terms: “By the end of the Romantic period, it had become a grand Hegelian concept, with its own essence and necessities; or a synonym for romanticism; or even an essential attribute of God” (ix). He further notes, “And in our century it has become a distinguishing mark of all literature, or at least all good literature, in some of what was said by New Critics like Cleanth Brooks” (ix).

242 See page 142 in Chapter Three, “Satire and the Role of the Monster,” which cites Ronald Paulson and Frank Palmeri regarding “the overt presence of satire in late eighteenth-century novels such as Burney’s, as well as the increasing preference for the more subtle irony of later works” (my words).
engages his reader in the role of Freud’s third person to facilitate the formation of a unique brand of wit that scoffs and rages—but ultimately promotes peace among opposing parties. The “fools” of Nightmare Abbey thus contradict the proper order of things, in the Biblical brand of common sense at least. Peacock’s satirical characterization becomes evident on page one, when he introduces the first of his wit-riddled fools, a Christopher Glowry, Esquire, of “an atrabilious temperament, and much troubled with those phantoms of indigestion which are commonly called blue devils” (39). In short, Christopher Glowry suffers from depression, a trait which he shares with his son and heir Scythrop, also the novel’s protagonist. At an early stage Peacock thus introduces the themes of love, marriage, and gender relations which are severely satirized throughout the work. This phenomenon proves unsurprising when viewed through the lens of Freud, who states: “Among the institutions which cynical wit is wont to attack there is none more important and more completely protected by moral precepts, and yet more inviting of attack, than the institution of marriage” (164). He sees this as stemming from suppression of sexuality (164), which in turn marks such witticism as a form of aggression. Regardless of the veracity of Freud’s stance, one fact stands secure—Peacock’s mockery of love and marriage is undisguised. Readers learn of Glowry that he “had been deceived in an early friendship: he had been crossed in love; and had offered his hand from pique, to a lady, who accepted it from interest, and who, in so doing, violently tore asunder the bonds of a tried and youthful attachment” (39). The text incorporates several humorous reversals in this first scenario. The phrasing of the above

243 Proverbs 29:9 refers to the fool, who “rages and scoffs, and there is no peace.”
244 These themes also qualify the work as a “marriage novel” which, figuratively speaking, places it within the jurisdiction of this dissertation.
description—namely, “violently tore asunder the bonds of a tried and youthful attachment”—mimics the romance novel, but its overtones are rendered mock-heroic through their juxtaposition with a marriage “from pique.” Rather than describing “star-crossed lovers” in the tradition of *Romeo and Juliet*, the cynical narrator instead begins with images of crossed love and inconstancy. He then inflates the satirical scenario further through reversal of gender expectations. In contrast to the sensibility-charged, heroic heroine trapped into a loveless marriage, the novel presents a curmudgeonly old gentleman once married to a calculating, vain, shrewish woman who took advantage of his broken heart for her own personal gain, or “‘interest.’”

As indicated in my discussion of *Emma*, tradition often assigns emotion to the realm of the heart and thus “the feminine,” but Peacock’s male characters, particularly Scythrop and his father, have the strongest connection with emotional vicissitude, one possible example of gender crossing. Peacock additionally associates Glowry men with the tortured Romantic hero, to the apparent end of poking fun rather than prompting readerly identification. It is understood that Scythrop took Peacock’s friend Shelley as his model for Scythrop. Indeed, the protagonist might be described as a “beautiful and

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245 The novel begins with descriptions of the past; Mr. Glowry’s wife dies when Scythrop is a small child (40).

246 Adam Smith defines pity and compassion as “fellow-feeling with the sorrows of others” (1.1). In this case Peacock does not use an emotional appeal to prompt identification, but rather seeks to provoke laughter with the aim of ridiculing Romantic excesses.

247 Aurelien A. Digeon states that Peacock and Shelley spent time in one another’s company (42). He identifies parallels between the latter and Scythrop to include: aspects of biography, the failed treatise, revolutionary ideas, and an appreciation for lurid tales (43). Digeon also cites Peacock’s memoirs to show that Shelley assumed himself to be the pattern for Scythrop, although Peacock gives no direct confirmation (43). He concludes, “*Nightmare Abbey* is the greatest document for the history of the relationship between Peacock and Shelley. It marks the end of their active friendship” (45).
ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain” (203-204), as he actually accomplishes remarkably little; from his failed treatise (he sells a total of seven copies) (48), to his resolution to commit suicide (he agrees to wait a week and then defers again) (119-121), Scythrop’s projects culminate in failure. Of great use in this discussion, however, the opening details of Nightmare Abbey illustrate its tendency to entangle various forms of humor, particularly satire and irony, in a manner that makes them difficult to extricate and treat separately. Harshness and mockery very often accompany satiric humor, while a strong touch of irony continually disturbs surface meanings to render messages highly unstable. Despite its recognizably overt satiric humor, this peculiar mixture of elements engages readers’ faculties, forcing them to exercise judgment in recognizing Peacock’s comic contrasts: they must apply wit in order to engage with the text and appreciate its unique, perpetually laughing voice. Of the hyperbolized and over-the-top characters in Nightmare Abbey, Scythrop initially holds center stage, filling the role of protagonist, at least until the advent of his love interests. Even this aspect of the status quo manifests Peacock’s love of laughter. Instead of a heroine navigating the dangers of the marriage market, the author gives readers a Fieldingesque hero of the Joseph Andrews stamp, with two potential “suitors” of completely opposite temperaments: the capricious Miss Marionetta Celestina O’Carroll

248 In context, Arnold describes Wordsworth as standing out “first and preeminent in actual performance” from among their contemporaries, including Coleridge and Shelley (203); his description of Shelley follows this assertion.

249 The footnote in the Penguin edition of the novel identifies the treatise with Shelley’s Proposals (262), and Draper terms Scythrop’s drinking of port at the novel’s end “a jocose reflection upon Scythrop’s (Shelley’s) sincerity” (“Part II,” 25).

250 See page 141 in Chapter Three, which quotes George Meredith in order to establish the common connection between satire and ridicule.

251 The naive hero of this eighteenth-century novel by Henry Fielding is a parodic remake of the Biblical Joseph who flees when Pharaoh’s wife attempts to seduce him. Fielding’s Joseph experiences repeated pursuit by women.
and the grave philosopher Miss Celinda Toobad. Scythrop himself comes to the realization that his dual love interests involve “two damsels of minds and habits as remote as the antipodes” (94). At various moments, Peacock takes great delight in conjuring the fickle woman archetype, while turning gender topsy-turvy, as when he states of Scythrop: “The scale of predilection always inclined to the fair one who happened to be present; but the absent was never effectually outweighed, though the degrees of exaltation and depression varied according to accidental variations in the outward and visible signs of the inward and spiritual graces of his respective charmers” (94).

Segments of prose such as “inward and spiritual graces” also sound uncannily similar to excerpts from the essay “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists,” published later in 1856, where George Eliot discusses the hackneyed phrasing of the mind-and-millinery school. Even the diction of Nightmare Abbey shows that Peacock spares no pains in his exaggerations. He ridicules everyone and everything indiscriminately, which tends to level the playing field, figuratively speaking. Because the author mocks in a wholesale, almost arbitrary fashion, the sting of his words is muted, but this does not undermine the deliberateness of the novel’s construction. The placement of his protagonist between two supremely different female characters who exercise such power over him is all but coincidental. Scythrop’s “charmers” hold him in thrall in the tradition of La Belle Dame Sans Merci; in different ways, at diverse moments in the story, these beautiful women act without mercy, and Scythrop manifests perpetual dependency on their continued

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252 Paragraph eighteen of her essay specifically references “manly breasts,” “redolent minds,” and “hollow hearts.” Peacock has, of course, previously incorporated a hollow-hearts-allusion when he introduced Scythrop’s mother.  
253 See Keats’s narrative poem, published in May of 1820.
presence in his life. Unlike the character of Knightley, they do not assume the role of
guardian, and their influence over the hero suggests mentorship of a very unhealthy sort.
In one instance, after she reads Scythrop’s pamphlet and seeks him out, the novel does
refer to Celinda (Stella) as Scythrop’s “fair protégé,” but this showcases a moment of
authorial irony, where Peacock’s diction mimics conventions of the romance novel. In
actuality, Stella plays a remarkably strong part that defies her placement in a weaker,
more traditional or secondary role. The same context integrates overtones of
Wollstonecraftian ideas into Stella’s speech patterns and describe her as having a “highly
cultivated and energetic mind” (93). Naturally, Peacock continues to poke fun
throughout such descriptions, but the text still associates strength with Celinda’s
character. Whereas Marionetta represents the lure of instant satisfaction and “living in
the moment,” Celinda represents delayed gratification and the life of the mind. The latter
meets a mental ideal, while the former appeals primarily to the senses. In fact, the
women might be described as a sort of allegorical psychomachia transformed into living
and breathing, albeit fictionalized, flesh and blood.\footnote{The \textit{OED} defines “psychomachia” as follows: “Conflict within the soul, or between the soul and the
body; an instance of this; a literary or artistic representation of such a conflict.”}

These three characters—Scythrop, Marionetta, and Celinda—form a love triangle at the novel’s heart. As the protagonist,
Scythrop naturally takes center stage and thus bears the brunt of Peacock’s witticism,
which in turn pulls his paramours into the eye of the . . . scorn. In loving a fool, they
exhibit their own foolishness, thus making them easy targets of satire.

However, in keeping with the author’s ridicule towards exaggerated notions of
romance, Scythrop falls in love with a Miss Emily Girouette prior to his acquaintance
with the other women: “He fell in love; which is nothing new. He was favorably received; which is nothing strange” (41). By implication, these terse statements highlight the unnecessary verbosity that typically encompasses such common-place events in romance novels. They also contrast Peacock’s inflated phraseology in other instances, which carry stronger overtones of mockery while undermining hyperbolic representations of romantic love, understood to spring from transitory infatuation. A few sentences later comes a description of dissolution, when the supposed inviolable bond between lovers is broken: “The lovers were torn asunder, weeping and vowing everlasting constancy; and, in three weeks after this tragic event, the lady was led a smiling bride to the altar, by the Honorable Mr Lackwit; which is neither strange nor new” (41). This sentence is reminiscent of Austen’s ironic technique in *Northanger Abbey* (1803), when the narrator comments on the short period that solidifies fast friendship between Catherine Moreland and Isabella Thorpe, who later betrays the heroine. At the outset of Chapter VI, Austen’s narrator communicates: “The following conversation, which took place between the two friends in the Pump-room one morning, after an acquaintance of eight or nine days, is given as a specimen of their very warm attachment, and of the delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste which marked the reasonableness of that attachment” (38). Naturally, the ensuing conversation between characters contradicts every aspect of the narrator’s assertion, revealing it to be straightforward verbal irony. Like Austen’s, Peacock’s statement also contains doses of irony, although satire manifests itself more strongly when his narrator engages the audience in two distinct steps: first, direct facts must be noted, and secondly, readers must process the sardonic narrative voice with its directive conclusion by the implied author. Both Peacock and
Austen lead readers to specified realizations, but Austen’s technique relies primarily upon stable irony, while Peacock’s more heavy-handed approach brings satire to the forefront.

In terms of overall narrative progression, Scythrop’s opening disappointment clears center stage for the entry of new love interests, but also permits Peacock to continue his satiric laughter at lack of realism in romances, false ideas of everlasting constancy, and the insincerity of shallow people— as well as other targets, from “the oracular species” of novel to the state of education. His mockery of the “oracular” genre could be said to precede and foreshadow Eliot’s tirade in “Silly Novels”; after Scythrop’s first disappointment in love, his father “comforts him” by reading a self-composed Commentary on Ecclesiastes (41). This Commentary expounds what is already self-evident in the Biblical book, reflecting negatively on women all the while, which in turn leads to a discussion of education. The ensuing disparagement of women’s education, i.e. “not so well finished” as Scythrop’s, evokes earlier remarks by the narrator about the small store of learning that the university had removed from the protagonist: “he was sent home like a well-threshed ear of corn, with nothing in his head” (40).

This rather singular sentence serves as a harbinger of impending doom. In terms of knowledge and wisdom, Scythrop may have little in his head, but this lack will be remedied by the two women who soon share the center of the novel with its anti-heroic

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255 Eliot defines “the oracular species” of novel as that “intended to expound the writer's religious, philosophical, or moral theories.”

256 Draper also identifies Peacock’s mockery of education, which he links with the prominent marriage theme: “Holding so pessimistic a view of the education of men and women, Peacock could scarcely hope much for their union in marriage” (458). He comments on the clear connections to Wollstonecraft in the author’s work, suggesting that Peacock also sees the flaws of marriage as an institution, but that he identifies the underlying problem not as a double standard for men and women, but rather as flawed human nature. Draper concludes, “Peacock sees men and women as mis-educated and mis-allied, sees marriage cankered by false ideals and greed of money, made a thing of mockery, and to that mockery, adds his own Juvenalian laughter” (460).
protagonist. Scythrop may “dread the fire of female eyes” in the wake of his disappointment (46), but a steady diet of romance novels and German tragedies prepare him to play the tragic hero in future romances, a placement distinctly reminiscent of Catherine Moreland in Northanger Abbey. Similarly to Emma, Nightmare Abbey contains limited geographical movement and its parodic storyline offers little that might be termed “new.” However, Peacock’s characterization and embedded wit technique provide more than enough material to engage the mind.

The first of Scythrop’s unlikely mentors, and a character central to the constricted storyline, the orphaned Marionetta arrives at Nightmare Abbey with her Aunt and Uncle Hilary. Marionetta represents the convergence of numerous stereotypes that novels had made mainstream by the outset of the nineteenth century, and her very name proclaims her to be a puppet of Peacock.257 As the product of a doomed elopement between a Mr. Glowry’s runaway sister and an Irish officer,258 the love child Marionetta naturally displays “in her own character all the diversities of the April sky” (50), thereby embodying the dramatic words of Shakespeare’s Hamlet: “Frailty, thy name is woman!” (1.2). Her chief desire is power, which renders her a destructive force when combined with the additional characteristics of “coquetry” and “caprice.” The narrator describes her as “pursuing an object with earnestness while it seemed unattainable, and rejecting it when in her power as not worth the trouble of possession” (50), yet another mocking gender reversal in its evocation of Shelley’s notorious fickleness in matters of love. Marionetta’s combined traits enable her to wield a strong influence over Scythrop’s

257 In its literal sense, a marionette is “a puppet with jointed limbs, usually operated by strings.” Figuratively speaking, the word connotes one who is easily manipulated (OED).
258 Peacock again displays cynicism of marriage when he notes that the love between Marionetta’s parents disappeared soon after their money did (50).
emotions, and her charms erase all memory of Emily Girouette. Here Peacock mocks “the power of philosophy and the exercise of reason” that enable his protagonist to forget his previous “eternal” attachment (50). This revelation of Scythrop’s inconsistency directs laughter primarily at the protagonist, but also at Marionetta, the waxen-doll-turned-conniving-puppet-master of the narrative. Like Austen, Peacock adopts free indirect discourse to achieve multiple objectives in such instances. He first uses his narrator to offer a straightforward statement of the protagonist’s belief in his own superior powers of reason, which readers understand to be dramatically flawed; this technique again manifests a merging of humors, as verbal irony serves satiric ends. Scythrop and Marionetta bear the brunt of authorial laughter while readers fulfill Freud’s third person role to render Peacock’s wit technique viable. Even as the audience forms the final link in this chain of humor, other aspects of the communication reveal a still greater complexity to the utilized technique, which overturns the initial, straightforward verbal irony to reveal its instability.

In context of the story world itself, Peacock thus provides fairly directive indirect commentary on his characters, simultaneously laughing at time-perpetuated stereotypes, yet his references to “power of philosophy” and “exercise of reason” make deeper, additional philosophical statements in their own right. What does the culmination of such laughter-evoking techniques of humor actually achieve? What do they reveal about Peacock’s perspective on wit? The allusion to “philosophy” and “reason” in the context of wit formation fulfills an important function within the text. As noted in my discussion of *Emma*, Mr. Knightley’s references to reason situate him as “the voice of reason,” or a major proponent of reason in the story; his characterization helps readers to recognize the
presence of the implied author in the text, and thus identify specific embedded messages. In this instance Peacock does not designate an actual character as advocate or pattern for reason; neither does he hold up the heterodiegetic narrator as his model. Instead, he undermines the serious voice of narrator with irony to gesture more pointedly at himself, or rather the implied author, as the standard of reason against which the actions of characters are measured. Scythrop’s implied lack of reason proves significant in conjunction with previous discussion, since there is a connotative connection between wit and reason, wisdom, and sense. As its second definition, the OED describes wit as “the faculty of thinking and reasoning in general; mental capacity, understanding, intellect, reason.” Subsequent definitions connect it with common sense and wisdom, as well as cleverness. In Emma, the association between Knightley and wit points to important embedded textual messages. However, within Nightmare Abbey and in this instance, the disjunction between the protagonist and reason points readers away from Scythrop’s perspective as the final goal and helps them to recognize authorial irony in the midst of satirical characterization, a hallmark of Peacock’s wit technique.

An analysis of the two female characters Marionetta and Celinda, along with their connection to wit, offers key insights into the novel’s treatment of this subject. The first of Scythrop’s guiding influences, the character Marionetta derives enjoyment from the emotional torture of her lover. Peacock’s narrator states that “she could not debar herself from the pleasure of tormenting her lover, whom she kept in a perpetual fervor” (57). She alternates among expressions of “affection,” “indifference,” “coldness,” and “tenderness.” Each affectation evokes specific responses from her lover, to include anger, love, jealousy, even agony (57). The apparently unbounded influence that this
figure exercises over the protagonist serves to reinforce earlier satiric commentary, previously discussed, on romance novels, false notions of romantic love, and the truly ludicrous role of the romantic hero. Peacock revels in poking fun throughout various scenes, such as the one that occurs towards the end of Chapter V, incorporating a series of comic moments. The chapter begins with Marionetta’s adoption of reserve to toy with Scythrop’s emotions, at which point the brooding hero retreats to his Gothic tower to imagine a secret tribunal that tries a penitent Marionetta. When the subject of his imagination materializes in his chamber, Scythrop proffers obeisance to his deity in the language of the romance novel, accompanied by kneeling at her feet, kissing her hand, and delivering sundry vows in ardent terms (52-53). The consummate manipulator naturally torments him further, then soothes him, which culminates in her flight and his pursuit. The theatricality of Scythrop’s headlong rush through his ancestral mansion reveals the state of his affections to the disconsolate Mr. Glowry, which event precedes another of Scythrop’s love affairs, and the arrival of his second would-be mentor, the daughter of Mr. Toobad the “Manichaean Millenarian” (45).

Clearly, Peacock lacks no sense of the dramatic. No mockery of Gothic romance could be complete without a character in disguise, and Celinda Toobad—aka Stella—meets this time-honored requirement through her appearance at Nightmare Abbey under mysterious circumstances, in the tradition of Coleridge’s “Christabel.” In fact, the text incorporates direct allusions to the infamous femme fatale Geraldine, both through its description of the stranger and various verbal parallels.259 Celinda dresses in garb of

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259 Peacock evidences strong awareness of his contemporaries throughout the novel and alludes to “Christabel” on page two of his first chapter, when he describes Mr. Glowry, “like Sir Leoline in Christabel,” awaking to discover the death of his wife (40). Chapter VIII includes additional references to
flowing black, while Geraldine’s robe is white, but the two women both possess snowy-white complexions and lovely eyes notable for their “brilliancy” or brightness.\footnote{Biographia Literaria and “Kubla Khan.” In the latter case, Peacock manifests his typical mode of ridicule when Mr. Flosky says, “last night I fell asleep as usual over my book and had a vision of pure reason. I composed five hundred lines in my sleep” (83).}

Coleridge writes of Geraldine, “She was most beautiful to see / Like a lady of a far countree” (225), and Peacock counters of Celinda, “Her dress was extremely elegant, but had an appearance of foreign fashion, as if both the lady and her mantua maker were ‘of a far countree’” (91). Continuing his playful mockery, the writer of Nightmare Abbey further expounds upon the situation in which the young lady and gentleman find themselves: “For, if it be terrible to one young lady to find another under a tree at midnight, it must, \textit{a fortiori}, be much more terrible to a young gentleman to find a young lady in his study at that hour. If the logical consecutiveness of this conclusion be not manifest to my readers, I am sorry for their dulness, and must refer them, for more ample elucidation, to a treatise which Mr Flosky [aka Coleridge] intends to write, on the Categories of Relation, which comprehend Substance and Accident, Cause and Effect, Action and Re-action” (91).\footnote{Nightmare Abbey describes Celinda’s eyes as “large” and “black,” “of almost oppressive brilliancy” (91). Geraldine’s eyes are also notable, likely of a dark color, as contrasted with Christabel’s blue eyes; Coleridge depicts the former’s eyes as “fair,” “large,” and brightly glittering (454).}

Though satire may be considered one of the less graceful and refined faces of humor, Peacock showcases its potential for embedded complexities, even as he carries out his satiric aims. The beginning of his tongue-in-cheek statement revels once again in gender reversal as he endows his emasculated “hero” with a timidity hardly in keeping with more intrepid romantic protagonists. Of course, the conclusion which the narrator states as apparent regarding the “terrible” nature of the situation is not
self-evident at all. It instead conjures a rather ironic reversal of Keats’s *The Eve of St. Agnes*, in which Scythrop rather than Madeline awakes to find himself in the frightening situation which Jack Stillinger has discussed; in actuality, it is unlikely that Scythrop has grounds to fear for his virtue. The ensuing references to “consecutive conclusion,” “dulness,” and “elucidation” also sound suspiciously similar to various theories of Keats and Coleridge—especially the former’s idea of negative capability and the latter’s esoteric philosophical convolutions.

In context, the phrasing “consecutive conclusion” mildly echoes Keats’s letter to Benjamin Bailey, when he writes: “I have never yet been able to perceive how any thing can be known for truth by *consequitive reasoning*—and yet it must be—Can it be that even the greatest Philosopher ever arrived at his goal without putting aside numerous objections—” (992). The word “consequentive” springs from the merging of “consecutive” and “consequent”; Peacock chooses the former term to slightly increase the subtlety of the allusion, and thus enhance its Wittiness on his own terms, since it requires greater discrimination from the reader. In so doing he simultaneously moves

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262 Although Stillinger’s interpretation of Keats’ poem earned him an indisputable place in literary criticism, he himself admits that it “was well known for a while as the dirty-minded reading of *The Eve of St. Agnes*” (*Reading* 38). Stillinger achieved infamous notoriety by claiming, “In Madeline’s dream the imaginative enactment of pleasure comes first; it is an earthly repetition of spiritual pleasure that follows, and perhaps in a grosser, rather than finer tone” (“Hoodwinking” 53). Prior to his groundbreaking interpretation of the poem, Earl Wasserman’s “The Eve of St. Agnes” reigned supreme. Even Stillinger names it a “brilliant and provocative reading” (*Reading* 37). The approach focuses attention on the metaphysical, rather than physical, aspects of the poem; Wasserman sees Porphyro’s experiences as a symbolic or spiritual movement towards the divine otherness of Madeline. He claims that within Madeline’s chamber the “mortal Porphyro has risen to such a degree of passionate ardor that it may now blend with the *chaste immutability* that Madeline has become by virtue of the grace of St. Agnes’ Eve” [my emphasis] (22). Directly attacking Wasserman’s exalted notions—and with it 130 years of idealism (*Reading* 36)—Stillinger reverses his predecessor’s paradigm.

263 Footnote #6 to the *Longman* version of this letter also arrives at this conclusion (992).
away from one wit construction identified by Freud, under the heading *Formation of Mixed Words*, which Freud calls “condensation with substitutive formation” (20).

Through his own slight modification the author thus adds an additional layer of wit to Keats’s witticism. As Freud points out, “the more insignificant the substitutive modification, the better is the wit” (26). Perhaps Peacock’s technique might be described as reverse substitutive modification; it too involves a sort of substitute and modification, but removes the original element of condensation. The following, additional reference to Mr. Flosky’s yet-unwritten treatise with its incomprehensible title delivers a not-so-veiled jab at Coleridge’s famous habits of procrastination, as well as his perceived obligation to explain even his more conversational expositions, expressed in Byron’s dedication to *Don Juan*: “And Coleridge, too, has lately taken wing, / But like a hawk encumbered with his hood, / Explaining Metaphysics to the nation— / I wish he would explain his Explanation” (13-16). Even as he satirizes his contemporaries, particularly those who show intelligence but lack his version of true wit, Peacock enacts a grand version of Freudian wit formation, explained above. He splices together not words, but rather allusions, in close proximity to one another, and this form of condensation requires continual analysis, as well as an exercise of judgment that depends upon familiarity with a range of works by other Romantic writers. Such brief analyses of *Nightmare Abbey* undermine the notion, whether overtly stated or implied, that satire marks a less developed novelistic form, or throwback to eighteenth-century precursors of novels like Austen’s. In the case of *Nightmare Abbey*, close reading reveals the meticulous merging

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264 Coleridge might be said to have greatly contributed to the popularity of “the Romantic fragment”; in the words of the *Norton* introduction, “he lacked application and staying power” (425).
of multiple forms of humor—satire and irony in addition to parody—to infuse the novel with strong doses of wit.

As indicated, Peacock repeatedly uses satirical characterization of key figures in his novel to illustrate his unique perspective of wit. Analysis of such passages prove beyond doubt that the text does not convey a negative viewpoint of the subject: quite the contrary. Without a strong appreciation of wit’s creative potential and possibilities, such a work as *Nightmare Abbey* could never have been constructed. Undoubtedly, the author exercises his own wit at his characters’ expense, since the focus figures are not represented as particularly clever themselves—a far cry from the heroine Emma. They rather provide fodder for the outworking of the writer’s own wit. In this manner, Peacock makes his audience complicit in the attack, while incorporating an element of flattery; it is a truth self-evident that his wit is devoid of sting in the absence of discriminating readers who can recognize the tactics initiated. To display the full array of his weaponry, Peacock creates a character triangle within his Gothic spoof of the manic Byronic hero, embodied in Scythrop. The protagonist’s two mentors, represented as exercising extreme influence over his emotions, act as fragmented versions of the female Byronic paragon: “She walks in beauty, like the night / Of cloudless climes and starry skies; / And all that’s best of dark and bright / Meet in her aspect and her eyes” (1-4). Neither Marionetta nor Celinda alone capture the yin and yang of this ideal, but instead represent separate dark and bright personality traits that, if united, would form the consummation of abstract philosophy and concrete reality that Scythrop instinctively seeks. He realizes that Marionetta lacks intelligence of the philosophical variety that he admires (50-51), yet still finds himself attracted to her bright vivacity—the very trait that
Celinda the philosopher lacks. Scythrop’s father calls Celinda a “lovely, serious creature, in a fine state of high dissatisfaction with the world, and every thing in it” (54). Readers, of course, instinctively grasp the irony of this statement coming from the depressive Mr. Glowry, and feel inclined to reject the commendation.

Ultimately, it is Scythrop’s attraction to powerful, influence-exerting opposites that constitutes the mock tragedy of his reality; the two women prove the bane of his existence, since he is unable to choose between them. Spanning only fifteen chapters, the tale of Nightmare Abbey ends shortly after it began with the hero drowning his sorrows in Madeira—without Peacock seeming to have made any concrete statement at all. This brings the discussion full circle, back to my opening acknowledgement of the difficulty of pinpointing authorial perspective. Nonetheless, just as Freud insists that “our philosophic inquiries have not afforded to wit the important role it plays in our mental life” (3), so also might readers of Nightmare Abbey claim that critics have not acknowledged the important role that wit plays within the space of the novel. It is thus worthy of pursuit. Freud also asserts that “wit is never really purposeless even if the thought contained therein . . . merely serves a theoretical, intellectual interest” (203). Despite its association with reason, Freud sees wit as an actual guard against reason, because it acts as a manifestation of the unconscious and thus fights against “restrictive power” or “critical judgment” (203). Such a claim may initially seem to contradict preceding arguments made in this chapter; however, Freud makes the assertion when writing of wit’s ability to surmount inhibitions through a pleasure that diverts reason (204), momentarily at least. Austen’s discussion of wit also proves pertinent in this respect, since it also possesses potential to undermine opposition. In its own unique way,
*Emma* taps into controversies surrounding the concept of wit, especially wit in woman. The author utilizes a network of mentor-mentee relationships to acknowledge the drawbacks of this humor, but re-defines it on her own terms. Although she and Peacock faced entirely different challenges when writing, both find wit worthy of pursuit, and do so through the medium of fictional relationships in nineteenth-century novels.
CONCLUSION

Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids—the race whom all despise; they have fed themselves, from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and endurance . . . self-control is so continually their thought, so perpetually their object, that at last it absorbs the softer and more agreeable qualities of their nature; and they die mere models of austerity, fashioned out of a little parchment and much bone.

—Charlotte Bronte

My study focuses primarily on novels within the Romantic Period, yet its results have implications for works across the sweep of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many such narratives contain seeming carbon copies of the matriarch, the old maid, the monster, and the mentor or mentee figure, but each character has her own story to tell; additionally, she often carries messages of cultural and societal change. For example, whereas Romantic works like The Inheritance and The Monk relegate the spinster to the fringes of the story, the Victorian novels Villette (1853) and Miss Mackenzie (1865) bring her out of the shadows to place her in a central role. Overall, the rise of the spinster protagonist reflects the burgeoning freedom that writers, particularly women writers, experienced in granting the formerly “despised” a voice that is centrally located in the text; it also bespeaks a change in thinking regarding the societal role and importance of the spinster herself. My analysis of secondary characters identifies the start of changes in thinking that blossom in later works, as ideas subtly written into the margins expand to take over the text. The Professor (1857)—in actuality the first-written of Charlotte Bronte’s novels—grants its primary voice to a male character, who considers the plight of spinsters in the above excerpt from Chapter XXIII. But the later Villette...
abandons such conventions to place an old maid in the spotlight. In contrast to Bronte’s works, the male-authored Miss Mackenzie may be seen as less an exercise of newfound freedom, and more a documentation of once-scandalous ideas that had become mainstream. Anthony Trollope’s spinster protagonist Miss MacKenzie is laughable in her innocence when courted by multiple men, yet the humor is sympathetic in nature and renders her character lovable. A consideration of both male- and female-authored novels enables critics to better understand the differing gender-based constraints faced by authors during the period, as well as the means in which they sought to overcome them.

Across the space of four chapters, my analyses of eight different novels culminate to answer those questions that form the foundation of this project—namely, 1) What is the relationship among humor, secondary characterization, and plot structure in late eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century marriage novels? and 2) How do such novels use the intersection between specific archetypes and forms of humor to comment on women’s roles during this time period? As I have shown, the word “humor” shelters many laughter-evoking techniques under its broad aegis. Foremost among these, irony, parody, satire, and wit in turn prove valiant defenders not only of those once romantically termed “the fair sex,” but also of their male counterparts. Defense is among humor’s first purposes in British novels of Romanticism and Victorianism. Writers use humor to mask messages by deflecting attention away from themselves, away from the reversal-rife implications of their works, and towards stock characters that have become commonplace to the time period. These humorous minor characters—more appropriately termed “secondary,” due to their subordination to a central heroine and the non-minor parts that they truly play—must now be recognized not only for their contributions to narrative
structure, but also for themselves. To call them “stock characters” is to underestimate, even misunderstand, not only their true complexity, but also the strong individuality of the women and men who created them: from the life force of the authors springs the life force of the characters—the matriarchs, the old maids, the monsters, and the mentor-mentee figures. It has been said that “the best offense is a good defense,” and works from Ferrier’s *Marriage* to Peacock’s *Nightmare Abbey* certainly prove this to be the case. Paradoxically, novelists first develop and then defend their notions of gender through incessant attack, by permitting secondary characters to bear the brunt of laughter ranging from the gentle to the biting; in this way they discuss the status of women and suggest creative alternatives to the norm. Simply because their works often begin and end traditionally, with a courtship plot and a marriage, is not to say that the works themselves accept or ultimately affirm the *status quo*. Marriage meets one audience expectation, while simultaneously fueling the need for such serious elements of plot to be balanced by humor: this in turn creates the space for the secondary female character, the laughable woman who provides comic relief and very often covertly helps the protagonist towards the desired goal—even as she points towards a very different state of existence for herself. Through exploration of the individual story placed in the margins, a novel thus questions cultural assumptions and ideologies that are taken as truth.

In terms of feminist themes, the pairing of one facet of humor with a secondary female archetype forms a dynamic partnership. My dissertation shows that other forms of emotion, not simply anger, serve as markers of important messages in texts. Focusing on instances where laughter converges with specific female archetypes enables readers to identify forward societal movement in specific areas; it marks moments where the novel
documents changes already in motion, even as it furthers them through its own
discussion. Ultimately, I argue that the combinations explored in each chapter enable
writers to call for four aspects of social transformation in the following areas: political
structure, gender roles, attitudes/actions, and intellectual assumptions. Throughout my
study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels, it proves repeatedly true that, in the
words of Eileen Gillooly: “Feminine humor . . . tends to hide behind the stereotypes it
meticulously reproduces, foregrounding them so as to expose them as risible and, in so
doing, to weaken their cultural authority” (17). In a very real sense, my dissertation is
about laughing at women. Laughter is the strain that unites all four chapters in this study,
and it is paradoxical in nature. It defends and attacks, hides and reveals. Ambiguity is its
common companion. But most importantly, the humor that evokes this laughter has the
power to explode the very stereotypes it seems to reinforce, and to validate empowering
messages about the possibility for change. Remove laughter’s mask, for behind it lies
truth.
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