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Neither angel nor ass: A study of the novels of Jane Austen, eighteenth century conduct literature, and eighteenth century feminism

Leahy, Veronica Webb, Ph.D.
The Ohio State University, 1990
NEITHER ANGEL NOR ASS:
A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN,
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CONDUCT LITERATURE, AND
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FEMINISM

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

Veronica Webb Leahy, B.A., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1990

Dissertation Committee:

David Riede
James Battersby
Lisa Kiser

Approved by

David Riede
Advisor
Department of English
To Kelly

who gave me the books that gave me the idea
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express sincere appreciation to Dr. David Riede for his guidance, insight, and speed reading throughout this project. I would also like to thank the other members of my advisory committee, Dr. James Battersby, for his wise suggestions and witty comments, and Dr. Lisa Kiser, for kindly agreeing to be my third reader in the final stages of the project. In addition, to my family and the friends whom I have neglected and to the friends—particularly Susan Calovini and Pam Achter—on whom I have obtruded myself and my worries during the writing of this dissertation, I offer my apologies and gratitude.
VITA

July 22, 1949 ................ Born - Dakar, Senegal

1981 ......................... B.A., Worcester State College
              Worcester, Massachusetts

1983 ......................... M.A., Ohio State University
              Columbus, Ohio

1981-1988 .................... Teaching Associate
              Department of English
              Ohio State University
              Columbus, Ohio

1988-1990 .................... Lecturer
              Department of English
              Ohio State University
              Columbus, Ohio

1989-Present .................. Assistant Professor
              Department of English
              Pontifical College Josephinum
              Columbus, Ohio

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Area: English

Studies in: Nineteenth-Century English Literature
Eighteenth-Century English Literature
The Novel
Nineteenth-Century European Art
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INTRODUCTION

Virtually every recent text on Jane Austen has been introduced in the same way: with a discussion of the controversy over whether Austen was a conservative moralist, who accepted "the structure and values of her society" (Smith 1); or a subversive radical, in conflict with herself and/or with society. In my dissertation, I propose to demonstrate that, while Austen was indeed a moralist who accepted many of the values of her society, she recognized and revealed in her novels the problems that beset women trying to survive in a society that in general did not acknowledge or accommodate their intellectual and moral potential, and she demonstrated the erroneous nature of common stereotypes about women.

The view of Austen as a complacent conservative has the longest history, and, although such critics as Reginald Farrer in 1917 touched on Austen's disaffection with her society, D.W. Harding in 1940 and Marvin Mudrick in 1952 were the first to challenge articulately "a long-popular image of Austen as a complacent, entertaining novelist of manners, conventional and orthodox in her opinions, niggling and aloof in her judgements" (Smith 2). Harding argued that the novel gave Austen a way "of being
intensely critical of people to whom she also has strong emotional attachments" (Harding 46). "Mudrick states that Austen's irony provides a means of avoiding 'a full commitment' to the 'deeply conformist and self-complacent society' in which willingly or not, she was trapped" (Smith 1).

Despite these readings of Austen, many critics still held their ground for Austen as a conservative, and Alistair Duckworth (1971) and Marilyn Butler (1975) are the two critics most frequently cited as having "squashed the subversive view of Jane Austen" with firmness" (Monaghan 5). Duckworth argues that "Jane Austen affirms society, ideally considered as a structure of values that are ultimately founded in religious principle, at the same time as she distinguishes it from its frequently corrupted form" (Duckworth 28); and he states that "it is incumbent upon the Austen heroine to support and maintain an inherited structure of values and behavior" (Duckworth 7). Butler contends that

Through their plots, characterization, and structure, and in their didactic leaning, [Austen's early novels] in particular resemble more programmatically conservative women's novels. Thus, despite Austen's own superior artistry and overt reluctance (part feminine, part aesthetic)
to state opinions, she participates in a conservative reaction against more permissive, individualistic, and personally expressive novel types of earlier years. (Butler xiv-xv)

In short, according to David Monaghan, "For Duckworth, whose Jane Austen is a Burkeian conservative, and Butler, who places her firmly in the anti-Jacobin camp, Jane Austen is totally committed to her society and its values" (5).

In light of the compelling contextual nature of Duckworth's and Butler's criticism, Monaghan, who edited a collection of essays on Austen entitled *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, is surprised that so many critics still view Austen "as being at odds with her society" (5). That many critics do hold this view is illustrated by the recent proliferation of critical works on Austen examining her position on "the woman question." Mona Wilson in 1938 was the first to suggest a connection between Austen and Mary Wollstonecraft, but it was not until 1973 that Lloyd W. Brown presented "the first important discussion of [Austen] as possibly a 'feminist' writer" (Smith 3), whom he linked with Mary Wollstonecraft, and in the past seventeen years many other critics--Mary Poovey, Margaret Kirkham, and Alison Sulloway, among them--have advanced the idea that Austen viewed the situation of women in her society with anything but complacency and that, in the words of Kirkham,
"Austen's stance as a moralist, in the eighteenth-century sense of the word" is "indicative of her sympathy with the rational feminism of the Enlightenment" (xii).

Surprisingly, an explanation of this perspective on Austen is offered by Marilyn Butler herself, who in 1987 wrote a new introduction to *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. In this introduction she acknowledges that

Written ten or even five years later than it was, the book could not have been the same. The collective effort of women scholars has transformed our understanding of the literary history of the last two centuries, and has raised even more fundamental questions, though not resolved them, about the generic qualities of women's writing. (xxi)

She says, "feminist critics seem to have persuaded all but the most unregenerate men not to congratulate themselves too heartily on what looks like female submissiveness" in "Austen's ethic of duty and self-sacrifice" (xxi). She does, however, take issue with Kirkham, who had directly challenged her in *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, and she criticizes Kirkham's definition of Austen's intellectual context "by a programmatic exclusion, as the feminist controversy of 1788 to 1810" (xxii). And she states that "I do not myself believe in a single feminism that embraced
Wollstonecraft along with Austen," but she adds that "I do believe in the existence of different ideologies in which perceptions of the nature and role of women played an important part." Among such ideologies, she includes "a Tory women's tradition, which must also be thought of as proto-feminist, for it was conscious that women were treated as an inferior class in a man's world," and it is to this tradition that she says Austen "can surely more plausibly be assigned" (xxiii). Butler still argues that "To read an Austen novel as only a woman's novel is. . . . to read it selectively." However, she now concedes that "not to read it as among other things a woman's novel is also, as feminist criticism has taught all of us, to leave a proper historical dimension out" (xxxii).

Butler is very concerned that the historical dimension of literary works not be overlooked, and she censures the practice of "decontextualizing" (xii) literature: that is, the "propensity [of critics] to read a writer of a past age as she could not have been read in her own time" (ix). She therefore applauds the efforts of Kirkham, who "is as committed as [herself] to establishing Austen's proper intellectual context" (xxii), and Poovey who, she claims, "has brought a new precision and sophistication to the relationship between individual works and their circumambient culture" (xxiv).
I am indebted to both Poovey and Kirkham for introducing me to the circumambient culture of the period in which Jane Austen wrote and stimulating my interest in how that culture is reflected in Austen's novels. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Poovey's objective was to examine the formation of the nineteenth-century ideal of the Proper Lady and the ways in which three women writers—Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen—responded to the constraints imposed by that ideal. Poovey derived her portrait of the Proper Lady from a variety of sources: "conduct books, popular magazines, novels, and women's memoirs and diaries" (xi). She offers a regrettably brief historical survey of conduct literature, the general goal of which according to Poovey "was to provide such emulatable models as [each] writer desired—models for acceptable behavior, legitimate values, and even permissable thoughts" (xii-xiii). Although these works would, therefore, seem to have been idiosyncratic, Poovey also argues that "as examples of the public discourse of middle-class society, [they] themselves reproduce the system of values—the ideology—of this society" (xiii). In other words, like the self-help books of today, they both shaped and reflected middle-class values and ideals.
In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft launched a frontal attack on certain conduct book writers: Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory, Chesterfield, Mrs. Thrale, Madame de Stael, and Madame de Genlis. It was Wollstonecraft's conviction that these conduct books had much in common and "that the whole purport of those books" was "to degrade one half of the human species, and render women pleasing at the expense of every solid virtue" (22). This condemnation leads one to ask several questions: What were the views of women presented by the aforementioned writers? How much unity was there among their viewpoints, which would indicate a dominant middle-class view of women in the period? Was Wollstonecraft's assessment of these writers just? How did Austen respond to the ideas about women that these writers sought to promulgate?

Kirkham's project was to present the first book-length study of the relationship between Austen's views and those of Wollstonecraft and her predecessors and to demonstrate how Austen might have been inhibited from direct expression of feminist ideas by the scandal that resulted from the publication of Godwin's memoirs of Wollstonecraft in 1798 and the ensuing "feminist controvery." Her smorgasbord approach to the subject is, however, problematic. Her often short discrete chapters, her perfunctory explanation of what she calls "Enlightenment" or "rational" feminism
and "the common line of feminist concern and interest, stretching back to Mary Astell at the very end of the seventeenth century" (xi), and her almost dismissive treatment of Austen's triad of earlier novels—particularly *Pride and Prejudice*, which contains a direct reference to and an indirect attack on Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, one of the works criticized by Wollstonecraft—leave a lot of questions unanswered. Was there a common line of feminist concern running from Mary Astell to Catharine Macaulay to Mary Wollstonecraft? What precisely were these women agitating for or against? Was there a feminism that would embrace both Wollstonecraft and Austen?

In her recently published book *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*, Alison Sulloway sets out to prove that Austen was a moderate feminist in the tradition of Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, and she analyzes Austen in the context of conduct literature and early feminist polemic. Her approach is not, however, very systematic: she does not clearly lay out either the ideas of the writers of conduct literature or the feminists. And she focuses a lot of her attention on Thomas Gisborne, the author of *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*, who was marginally more enlightened than his predecessors and of whom Austen expressed some approval, and Mary Hays, who was a radical follower of Wollstonecraft. Furthermore, although
she states that Austen was not a "radical" feminist, she argues that "when [Austen] satirizes male privileges and female disenfranchisements, her purposes were as insurrectionary as those of Mary Wollstonecraft and Wollstonecraft's feminist colleagues in the 1790s and later" (xvi). Thus, while Sulloway's book offers some insights into the contextual background of Austen's work, it does not adequately answer all the questions left unanswered by Poovey and Kirkham.

My dissertation seeks to answer these questions, and to this end, I present in Chapter I an outline of ideas about women drawn from the works of Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory, Chesterfield, Mrs. Thrale, Madame de Stael, and Madame de Genlis. As a result of studying these works, I am impressed by the accuracy of Wollstonecraft's assessment of them and the justice of her charges against the authors. Although there are differences among them, the similarities are pronounced—particularly in the works by the male writers. In a nutshell, they presented women as physically, intellectually, and morally inferior beings, who were destined by providence to be subordinate to men, and whose primary duty (and need) was, therefore, to make themselves pleasing to men, although they were relentlessly taken to task for their preoccupation with attracting male
admiration, and they were told that one of their functions (or rewards) was to improve the manners and morals of men. It seems almost unnecessary to point out that this material was full of what Poovey calls "tensions, paradoxes, and contradictions" (xiii), and it is little wonder that intelligent women like Wollstonecraft and Austen would be affronted by such self-contradictory dogma. Since my purpose is to illustrate commonalities and present a picture of what I perceive to be the two stereotypes of woman that emerge from this literature, I focus on the similarities among the writers rather than ways in which they differ from one another. I also include some of Wollstonecraft's objections to each work.

In Chapter II, I examine the ideas of Wollstonecraft, Astell, and Macaulay. One of my objectives in this chapter is to demonstrate that Wollstonecraft's feminism is less radical and innovative than many readers realize and that the vituperative criticism against her stemmed more from Godwin's having revealed the details of her irregular personal life in his posthumous biography of her than from her rhetoric about the nature and education of women. Wollstonecraft's demands on behalf of women were very moderate. Although she criticized the social order that deprived women of legal and political rights and
occupational opportunities, her primary concern was that women were denied an education that would enable them to develop as rational and moral beings, who would accordingly be better daughters, wives, and mothers. Like Wollstonecraft, her two predecessors, Astell and Macaulay, contended against male delineations of female nature, believed in female rationality, agitated for better education for women, and blamed defective female behavior on faulty female education rather than faulty female nature. An examination of Austen's novels reveals that she shared their concerns. I also hope to illustrate in my discussion of Astell that this witty and acerbic ironist, conservative, and advocate of women was a forerunner of Austen.

In Chapter III, I examine Pride and Prejudice in the context of both eighteenth-century conduct literature and feminism. I have been surprised to find that critics have not made more of the fact that Austen not only mentions Fordyce's Sermons to Young Women in this novel but also associates the work with one of her most notable fools: Mr. Collins. I see intriguing correspondences between Fordyce's distinctive rhetoric and ethos and the character and speech of Mr. Collins. I also find Austen's characterization of the Bennet family to controvert the notion of domestic harmony that writers like Fordyce assure their readers will
ensue if women have a proper **female** education. I further argue that Austen's representation of Elizabeth Bennet in this novel aggrandizes characteristics and behavior that are anathema in conduct literature—and applauded in the work of Wollstonecraft—and also points up erroneous assumptions about the lack of female rationality. Finally, I argue that Austen's depiction of other female characters in the novel constitutes a tacit criticism of conduct-book ideas about female "nature" and of the limited education and opportunities available to women in Austen's society.

In Chapter IV, I explore these latter issues further by examining some of the female characters in the other five Austen novels. Of particular interest is Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, whom numerous critics have seen as a conduct-book heroine entirely unlike Elizabeth Bennet, a change reflective of Austen's maturity and her increasing suspicion of the dangers of unchecked individualism. My aim is to show the many ways in which Fanny diverges from the conduct-book ideal and to demonstrate that the difference between Fanny and Elizabeth does not reflect a reversal in Austen's thinking about women. I take issue with those critics who argue that there is a significant disparity between Austen's early and later novels—the former youthful productions and the latter the product of her middle age. I argue for Austen's continuing preoccupation with female
education and situation and the manner in which they shape female personality and behavior. To this end, I return to the conduct-literature stereotypes and the feminist responses to them, to show that in her representation of such traits in women as physical and mental weakness, sensibility, cunning, vanity, malice, and lasciviousness, Austen is in agreement with Wollstonecraft and her predecessors who believed that these characteristics were fostered in women by their education, their economic dependency, and their lack of alternatives to marriage.

There is no way to ascertain whether Austen ever read the works of Astell, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft, but the ideas advanced by these writers seem to have been in the air for more than a century, and it is also reasonable to assume that a penetrating social observer like Austen might have arrived at the same conclusions as her predecessors had. Another point worthy of note is that Astell, like Austen, was a committed Tory and a devout Anglican, who nonetheless recognized and exposed the inequities in the social order as they pertained to women--thus demonstrating that conservativism and feminism are not incompatible. Ruth Perry, in her biography on Astell, writes,

Whoever reads Astell carefully will not find a feminist heroine of the past with whom it is easy to identify. The stamp of her ultraconservative
attitudes are [sic] impressed on everything she wrote. She struggled in earnest with her very real sense that society had not made adequate provisions for her or for other bright women, and she tried to reconcile that recognition with her equally powerfully held but conflicting belief that it was selfish and antisocial and dangerous to challenge the fundamental arrangement of the society in which one was born, a society which protected and cherished one since birth, and without which one would not have survived. (13)

Butler says of the proto-feminist "Tory women's tradition" that

It met [the recognition that women were treated as an inferior class in a man's world] first by urging self-cultivation on women, a moral and spiritual strength; second, by giving them a religiously-sanctioned role of service, both to the family and (through teaching and charitable work) to the community. (xxiii)

And she differentiates between a Tory feminist tradition and that of "the campaigning and often secular educationalist" (xxiii), presumably like Wollstonecraft. Certainly, the Jacobin Wollstonecraft did challenge the fundamental arrangements of society, but her concerns were not entirely
secular, and she shared many of Astell's views about women. Macaulay was a radical historian, who "campaigned tirelessly for universal manhood suffrage, [but] never claimed the vote for women" (Rogers 182), and she was also a religious moralist. The conservative Astell combined elements of both traditions described by Butler, in that she not only fit the definition of a Tory feminist but was also a campaigner and an educationalist. Thus, labels like Tory, moderate, radical, Enlightenment, and even rational feminism do not adequately describe any of these individuals, and I am reluctant to apply a feminist label to Austen.

What is clear, however, is that there did indeed seem to be a common line of feminist concern running from Astell to Wollstonecraft, and if one reads Austen's novels in the context of the issues raised by Astell, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft, it becomes evident that Austen shared many of their views. Furthermore, if one reads Austen with a knowledge of the ideas about women presented by the writers of conduct literature, it becomes equally clear that she did not subscribe to most of their views— that she, in fact, reacted against their dicta, and in her treatment of domestic relationships and her depictions of women, she demonstrated the erroneous and insidious nature of many of the assumptions and recommendations disseminated in the conduct literature.
I make no apologies for what I recognize to be a selective reading of Austen. My hope is that this particular reading of Austen's works will illuminate some of her concerns by providing an admittedly partial context for them, and enhance appreciation of her acuity in perceiving the problems inherent in the dominant social attitude toward women and her skill in delineating them.
CHAPTER I: THE CONDUCT BOOK WRITERS

In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft speaks of the "barren blooming" of women, one cause of which she attributes to a false system of education, gathered from the books written on this subject by men who, considering females rather as women than human creatures, have been more anxious to make them alluring mistresses than affectionate wives and rational mothers. (7)

Most of the books to which she alludes were the conduct manuals that proliferated from the late seventeenth century onward 1 (Armstrong 62): works prescribing proper female education, manners, and behavior, and proscribing any conduct viewed as improper or inappropriate for (primarily middle-class) women. In her vindication, Wollstonecraft attacks these texts and devotes an entire chapter, entitled "Animadversions on Some Writers," to examining and refuting the works of particular authors, "from Rousseau to Gregory, [who] have contributed to render women more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and consequently, more useless members of society" (22).
An examination of eighteenth-century conduct literature is instructive because, as Mary Poovey points out, conduct books and periodicals tell us more than what young girls growing up in this society might have been likely to read or hear about what they were or ought to be. For, as examples of the public discourse of middle-class society, these works themselves reproduce the system of values—the ideology—of this society. (xiii)

It was this predominant system of values—relating to women's proclivities and capacities—that eighteenth-century feminists like Wollstonecraft were reacting against.

In _A Vindication of the Rights of Woman_, Wollstonecraft takes issue with seven writers of conduct literature: Rousseau, Dr. Fordyce, Dr. Gregory, Mrs. Piozzi, the Baroness de Stael, Madame Genlis, and Lord Chesterfield. Rousseau, Fordyce, and Gregory, however, are the three authors who come in for the largest share of her opprobrium.

Wollstonecraft was most vocal in her criticism of Rousseau and the ideas that he presented in his educational treatise _Emile_ because Rousseau, and most of the male writers who have followed his steps, have warmly inculcated that the whole tendency of female education ought to be directed to one point—to render them pleasing.
Published in France in 1762 and translated into English the following year, *Emile* actually outlines Rousseau's ideal education of a male from his birth to his marriage. The work is divided into five books, and it was the fifth book that caused Wollstonecraft to take umbrage. In Book V, Rousseau explains his ideas about the nature and education of women, and he illustrates these ideas in the person of Sophie, the woman that his narrator has selected as Emile's ideal mate, a character that Wollstonecraft terms "grossly unnatural" (24). Wollstonecraft describes Rousseau's argument:

Rousseau declares that a woman should never, for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquetish [sic] slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man, whenever he choose to relax himself. He carries the arguments, which he pretends to draw from the indication of nature, still further, and insinuates that truth and fortitude, the corner stones of all human virtue, should be cultivated with certain restrictions, because with respect to the female character, obedience is the grand lesson which ought to be
impressed with unrelenting rigour. (25)
And she characterizes his discussion of women as "the reveries of fancy and refined licentiousness" (90).

Wollstonecraft was also contemptuous of Dr. James Fordyce, a Presbyterian divine and poet, whose *Sermons to Young Women*, published in 1765, became a popular handbook on the subject of female education and deportment. The two-volume work comprises twelve "sermons" on such subjects as modesty of apparel, female reserve, female virtue with intellectual accomplishments, female piety, and female meekness. In his Preface, Fordyce explains his rationale for publishing them: first, his "unfeigned regard for the Female sex"; second, a "fervent zeal for the best interests of society, on which he believes their dispositions and deportment will ever have a mighty influence"; and finally, from a secret desire long felt of trying whether the style of preaching, which to him appears upon the whole, adapted to an auditory above the vulgar rank, might succeed on a subject of this nature; nothing in the kind, that he knows of, having been endeavoured before in any language. (iii-iv)

Wollstonecraft particularly objected to Fordyce's "affected style" and "the lover-like phrases of pumped up passion, which are everywhere interspersed" (94) in a work, the
objective of which Wollstonecraft believed to be to level all women "by meekness and docility, into one character of yielding softness and gentle compliance" (95). And in response to Fordyce's reiterated contention that certain qualities in women should be cultivated because they are appealing to men, Wollstonecraft asks,

Why are women to be thus bred up with a desire for conquest? . . . Do religion and virtue offer no stronger motives, no brighter reward? Must they always be debased by being made to consider the sex of their companions? Must they be taught always to be pleasing? (94-95)

Wollstonecraft was less critical of Gregory's tone and intentions than she was of those of Rousseau and Fordyce. She says, "I respect his heart; but entirely disapprove of his celebrated Legacy to his Daughters" (28). She condemns Gregory's "cautious family prudence" and confined views of partial unenlightened affection, which exclude pleasure and improvement, by vainly wishing to ward off sorrow and error—and by thus guarding the heart and mind, destroy also all their energy. (100)

Gregory's book, A Father's Legacy to His Daughters was published in 1774, and it was widely read in the eighteenth
century. The work is divided into four sections: Religion; Conduct and Behavior; Amusements; and Friendship, Love, Marriage. In the introduction, Gregory, a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University, explains his reasons for writing this work. He was a widower in poor health, and he had young daughters about whose well-being he was concerned should anything happen to him. He states that he considers women to be "companions and equals" to men, "designed to soften our hearts and polish our manners," rather than "domestic drudges or the slaves of our pleasures" (6), but he adds that "there arises a certain propriety of conduct peculiar to your sex" (7). Consequently, he decided to leave his reflections on female manners as a legacy to his daughters, believing that they would then have "at least for once in [their] lives, the genuine sentiments of a man who has no interest in flattering or deceiving [them]" (6). He nonetheless advocated some deception on the part of females in their dealings with men, and Wollstonecraft despised what she viewed as the "system of dissimulation, throughout the volume" (99).

Wollstonecraft also directed some of her ire at female writers who "argue in the same track as men, and adopt the sentiments that brutalize them, with all the pertinacity of ignorance" (102.) She accused Hester Lynch Piozzi of
repeating "by rote, what she did not understand" (102) in her "Letter to a Gentleman Newly Married," which was contained in a collection entitled _A Series of Letters on Courtship and Marriage_. Mrs. Piozzi, formerly Mrs. Thrale, was a close friend of Samuel Johnson, and the apparent occasion for her letter was the recent marriage of another male friend, to whom she offered advice about how to achieve marital felicity. In the letter, she tells her reader "that a woman will pardon an affront to her understanding much sooner than one to her person" (131). To this Wollstonecraft responds:

> Whilst women avow, and act up to such opinions, their understandings, at least deserve the contempt and obloquy that men, who never insult their persons, have pointedly levelled at the female mind. And it is the sentiments of these polite men, who do not wish to be encumbered with mind, that vain women thoughtlessly adopt. (103)

Wollstonecraft was also angered by the Baroness de Stael's "eulogium" on Rousseau, asserting that de Stael's sentiments were "the sentiments of too many of my sex" (103). Germaine de Stael (née Necker), daughter of Louis XVI's finance minister, brilliant personality, writer, and theorist of romanticism, wrote her "Letters on the Writings
and Character of J.J. Rousseau" in 1788, when she was only twenty-one. The work comprises six letters: the first on Rousseau's style and his first discourses on science, inequality, and the danger of spectacles; the second on Heloise; the third on Emile; the fourth on Rousseau's political works; the fifth on Rousseau's taste for music and botany; and the final one on Rousseau's character. De Stael is passionate in her praise of Rousseau because in her view, "what does it matter to women that his mind quarrels about power with them, when his heart submits to them?" (An Extraordinary Woman 43). Wollstonecraft parodies de Stael: "[Rousseau] denies woman reason, shuts her out from knowledge, and turns her aside from truth; yet his pardon is granted, because 'he admits the passion of love'" (103-104).

A third female writer castigated by Wollstonecraft, for "her absurd manner of making parental authority supplant reason" and for inculcating "not only blind submission to parents; but to the opinion of the world" (104), is Stephanie-Felicité Ducrest de Saint-Albin, Comtesse de Genlis. Her work Addèle et Théodore was first published in France in 1782 and was translated and published in England in 1783, its author a remarkable French woman and a prolific writer, who had been appointed gouverneur to the sons of the Duke of Chartres because of her ingenious theories on
education. The three-volume work is epistolary, and it charts the educational progress of two children, Adelaide and Theodore, from early childhood to marriage. The children are educated by their benevolent but authoritarian parents, whose objectives are to expand the young people's minds, inculcate virtues in them by means of example, and increase their fortitude. Like Emile's preceptor, the parents do this by first secluding the children from society and then by orchestrating all their experiences, often unbenownst to Adelaide and Theodore, who grow up virtuous, docile, and, in Adelaide's case, almost totally passive. Commenting on this work, Wollstonecraft asks, "Is it possible to have much respect for a system of education that thus insults reason and nature?" (105).

Wollstonecraft was also critical of Chesterfield's education of his son, and the last section of her chapter "Animadversions on Some Writers" is reserved for the letters of Lord Chesterfield to his son. Wollstonecraft does not, however, discuss the content of the letters, although she stigmatizes Chesterfield's "system" as "unmanly" and "immoral" (106); instead she takes issue with "the avowed tendency of them--the art of acquiring an early knowledge of the world" (106) from precept rather than experience and the exercise of one's own faculties. Chesterfield's letters to his son, written between 1736 and 1768 when his son died,
were never intended for publication. They were personal letters although decidedly didactic in intent, and in them Chesterfield delineates his plan of education for his son; his precepts; and his ideas about men (and women), manners, and how to get ahead in the world. He explains his intentions in a letter written to his son in 1746: "Let my experience supply your want of it and clear your way in the progress of your youth of those thorns and briers which scratched and disfigured me in the course of mine" (Letters 20). Wollstonecraft's objection to such a plan is that

An early acquaintance with human infirmities; or, what is termed knowledge of the world, is the surest way, in my opinion, to contract the heart and damp the natural youthful ardour which produces not only great talents, but great virtues. (106)

Despite the differences in their backgrounds; their personal idiosyncrasies; and individual variations in their style, form, and stated objectives, there is remarkable uniformity in the ideas that Rousseau, Fordyce, Gregory, and the other conduct book writers of the period express. The objective of their texts seems to be to define women in largely negative terms and offer them an alternative in the form of a feminine ideal, which was a prescription for
womanhood rather than a description of it. As a consequence, they created two stereotypes—one of what women were supposed intrinsically to be and another of what women ought to be—both of which served to contain women, repress their natural tendencies, and limit their desires.

According to the first of these stereotypes, women are innately inferior to men—not only physically but also intellectually. Rousseau states that "The quest for abstract and speculative truths, principles, and axioms in the sciences, for everything that tends to generalize ideas, is not within the competence of women" (386). Female studies should be practical; they should apply the principles men have found. "[W]orks of genius. . . are out of the reach of women" (386). In his view, "woman observes, and man reasons" (387).

Similarly, Fordyce informs his female readers "that nature appears to have formed the faculties of your sex for the most part with less vigour than those of ours; observing the same distinction here, as in the more delicate frame of your bodies" (II, 7). He concedes that there are exceptions to this rule, but adds, "you, yourselves, I think, will allow that war, commerce, politics, exercises of strength and dexterity, abstract philosophy, the abstruser sciences, and the like, are most properly the province of men" (II, 8). He explains why this is so:
I would by no means insinuate that you are not capable of the judicious and the solid, in such proportion as is suited to your destination in life. This, I apprehend, does not require reasoning and accuracy, so much as observation and discernment. (II, 8)

Chesterfield tells his son that he "would not recommend to [him] to go into woman's company in search of solid knowledge or judgment" (Chesterfield 129), and in a later letter he elaborates:

Women, then, are only children of a larger growth; they have an entertaining tattle, and sometimes wit; but for solid, reasoning good sense, I never in my life knew one that had it, or who reasoned and acted consequentially for four and twenty hours together. (Chesterfield 163)

The writers assert that women, on the other hand, have more sensibility, which makes them more imaginative, emotional, and volatile than men, characteristics which predispose them to religion and make them susceptible to certain kinds of literature. It is religious precept and practice, however, to which females are thought to be predisposed. Rousseau alludes to the "extravagant character" of the female sex, which causes females to miss the truth in matters of religion. "Always extreme, they are
all libertines or fanatics; there are none who know how to join wisdom with piety" (377). They should, therefore, be told what to believe, and their religion should be that of their mothers or their husbands.

The view that females should not choose their own religion prevails among the conduct book writers, as does the idea that female responses to religion will be emotional rather than intellectual. Fordyce argues that women are by nature peculiarly fitted for piety:

Nor are these ideas beyond the ordinary reach of female understanding. They depend not on a nice chain of reasoning, nor on the abstruse researches of science. . . . [M]asculine intellects are by no means necessary. Connected with facts the most astonishing to the imagination, and sentiments the most touching to the heart, they seem to lie particularly level to the better characters of your sex. In short, to feel their tendency, and experience their operation, a modest, susceptible [sic], and affectionate mind is chiefly required. (II, 75-76)

Gregory concurs with Fordyce, stating that, since religion is "rather a matter of sentiment than reasoning" (13),
The natural softness and sensibility of your dispositions particularly fit you for the practice
of those duties where the heart is chiefly concerned. And this, along with the natural warmth of your imagination, renders you peculiarly susceptible of the feelings of devotion. (10)

Rousseau also argues against teaching girls to read too soon because "There are very few girls who do not abuse this fatal science more than make good use of it" (368). Gregory agrees with Rousseau about the dangers of reading, and he tells his daughters that they should only indulge in sentimental reading and conversation if they plan to remain unmarried. Otherwise, he exhorts them to "shun as you would do the most fatal poison, all the species of reading and conversation which warms the imagination, which engages and softens the heart, and raises the taste above the level of common life" (117). Such reading produces a refinement of taste which causes a woman who marries for any reason other than love to be embittered all her married days.

Fordyce also avers that novels are unfit for his female readers because "They paint scenes of pleasure and passion, altogether improper for you to behold, even with the mind's eye. Their descriptions are often loose and luscious in a high degree," (I, 102) and they "engender notions of love unspeakably perverting and inflammatory" (I, 106). He does, however, recommend certain works of the imagination, among them essays like those of The Spectator, because
I should not on the occasion do justice to your sex, if I did not say, that such books as those last mentioned are, in a particular degree proportioned to the scope of your capacities. Of this I am certain, that amongst sensible women I have discovered an uncommon penetration, in what relates to characters, an uncommon dexterity in hitting them off through their several specific distinctions, and even nice discriminations, together with a race of fancy, and a fund of what may be strictly termed Sentiment, or a pathetic manner of thinking, which I have not so frequently met with in men. It would seem that nature, by her liberality to the female mind in these respects, has seen fit to compensate what has been judged a defect in point of depth and force; and a real defect, I believe, it is, if estimated absolutely. If estimated with a due regard to the design and formation of the sex, it ought to be considered as no defect at all. (II, 14)

The idea that nature has compensated women with cleverness/guile/wit/cunning for their deficiencies in strength and intellectual depth is also common among the
conduct book writers. Rousseau claims that girls are "flatterers and dissimulators" (369) and that "Guile is a natural talent with the fair sex" (370) and should be cultivated like other natural inclinations but not abused. Cleverness enables women to exploit "man's position and [put his] peculiar advantages to their use" (371-372), and it is how women govern while obeying. Thus wit should be cultivated like beauty, which can be lost and which grows less compelling with familiarity.

Fordyce agrees that "Many of you, it is evident, have the art of turning your infirmities to your own advantage so far as concerns your influence with our sex" (I, 113), but unlike Rousseau he views artful and cunning behavior as conduct that men often justly complain of, and he believes that dissimulation in women carries with it "obliquity" and "impotence" (II, 220). And Gregory is equally critical of women who entice men that they esteem but have no intention of marrying. He exclaims,

God Forbid, I should ever think so of all your sex! I know many of them have principles, have generosity and dignity of soul that elevate them above the worthless vanity I have been speaking of. (97)
That woman are naturally vain, love adornment, and seek admiration is a commonplace of conduct literature. In 1749, Chesterfield wrote to his son,

Women are much more like each other than men; they have, in truth, but two passions, vanity and love: these are their universal characteristics. . . . In general, all they say, and all they do, tends to the gratification of their vanity, or their love. He who flatters them most pleases them best; and they are most in love with him they think is the most in love with them. No adulation is too strong for them; no assiduity too great; no simulation of passion too gross. (Chesterfield 275)

Rousseau insists that "Little girls love adornment almost from birth. Not satisfied with being pretty, they want people to think that they are pretty" (365). He even claims that a little girl's preoccupation with dressing her doll signifies the female's innate love of adornment and that "She awaits the moment when she will be her own doll" (367). Fordyce asserts that

The unbounded and undistinguishing love of admiration, has been thought the most common, the rankest, and the most noxious weed, that grows in the heart of a female. It is nourished
by nothing more than the love of finery. (I, 54)

Because he believes that the love of dress is natural to females, Gregory, on the other hand, states that "therefore it is proper and reasonable" (55). He is less tolerant of "vanity, and the love of admiration," which, "is so prevailing a passion among you, that you may be considered to make a very great sacrifice whenever you give up a lover, till every art of coquetry fails to keep him, or till he forces you to an explanation" (96).

Another commonplace is that, left to their own devices, women will saunter/rove/gad about and that they like going to public places—a fact to which all the warnings against such activity attest. Fordyce asks whether myriad social engagements (which he terms "a dissipated life") do not manifestly breed an impatience of home, and such a propensity to show, as rather than not be gratified, shall baulk the most important duties, and court the most improper company? Does it not tend directly to expence [sic] and profusion? Does it not cherish unavoidably the passion for idleness and sauntering, so inconsistent with every thing solid, useful and improving? (I, 95)

He believes that "roving about continually" is a poor
preparation for the "domestic employments" of matrimony and that men are becoming reluctant to marry primarily because they dread a dissipated and expensive companion in marriage. He also recommends the acquisition of certain accomplishments because they

would prevent or cure most of those little prejudices, and little passions, which often hurt the sex in the opinion of their best friends. Not to insist on what has been mentioned more than once, their astonishing prepossession in favor of public places, greatly owing to their want of something rational and agreeable to employ them at home. (II, 47)

Gregory too advises his daughters:

By continually gadding abroad in search of amusement, you lose the respect of all your acquaintances, whom you oppress with those visits, which, by a more discreet management, might have been courted. (52)

Rousseau believes that immuring young girls in convents or boarding schools leads to their later dissipation. Consequently, he suggests reversing the common practice of society by not cloistering young girls and by exposing them to such entertainments as "balls, feasts, games, even the
"theater"—because, if properly prepared by their mothers "against the illusions of vanity," "the better they see these boisterous pleasures, the sooner they will be disgusted by them" (387-388), and as women they will be happier to lead retired lives. Fordyce also says that it is appropriate to give young women a taste of public life, in order that they may better appreciate "the calm and rational pleasures" (I, 62) of home.

The writers also argue that women tend to be more loquacious and malicious—particularly about other women—and there is some questions about whether they are capable of sincere friendship with other women. Rousseau states that "Women have more flexible tongues; they talk sooner, more easily, and more attractively than men. They are also accused of talking more" (376). He believes that women say more and speak more easily than men because men say what they know, but women say what pleases. He adds, however, that with one another women are constrained and coldly polite, although he concedes that sometimes young girls are capable of genuine and franker friendships. But in the presence of men, girls tend to kiss and caress one another more often, "for they take pride in sharpening men's lust by the image of those favors they know how to make men desire" (376). His ideal woman Sophie "thinks that what makes women slanderous and satirical is to speak of their
own sex. So long as they limit themselves to speaking of [men], they are only equitable" (398). Consequently, she speaks of others with circumspection and only speaks of women when she has something good to say about them.

Fordyce says "That there are women capable of friendship with women, I cannot for my part, question in the least." However, he adds that "it is questioned by many men; while others believe that it happens exceedingly seldom." And he himself suspects that it is rare among single women and that males are more capable "of a generous and steady friendship for each other" (I, 114) than females are. He even says that although he is delighted to see two sisters who are close friends without envy and jealousy of one another, he suspects that this too is an uncommon phenomenon (II, 139). He also speaks of "that ignoble disposition to scandal, deemed by many one of the characteristic blemishes of your sex" (II,49).

Gregory too warns against detraction, of which women are often accused more than men. Gregory finds this accusation unjust but attributes detraction to a collision of interests and a quickness of temper, which occur more frequently among men than women. For this reason, women should "be particularly tender of the reputation" (33) of their own sex. On the subject of friendship, Gregory says
that females are by temper and disposition more inclined to enter warmly into friendships than men. This tendency causes them to be sometime rash in their choice of friends—a choice they may later regret. Thus, female friendships tend to be "fluctuating" (73), and they are also compromised by competition.

There seems to be little question about women's sexual proclivities: Rousseau insists that women have unlimited desires (359); Fordyce suggests that women are under strong temptations to "indecorum, intemperance, and incontinence" (I, 86); and Gregory says that it is easy "to warm a girl's imagination" yet difficult to "deeply and permanently affect her heart" (54).

However, it is declared that modesty, shame, and/or a concern for reputation are natural to women. Rousseau asserts that modesty and shame imposed by nature serve as a brake on female desires (359). Fordyce says that "A concern for character is, from their constitution, education, and circumstances particularly strong in women" (I, 8).

Rousseau claims that "Everything that characterizes the fair sex ought to be respected as established by nature" (363), and Fordyce tells his female readers that "The Almighty has thrown you on the protection of our sex" (I, 7). Nature and the Almighty (depending on the religious
convictions of the author) are often referred to by the writers of conduct literature as the wellsprings of the female character. Although some consideration is given to the effects of education and social organization on female behavior, the recurrent tendency is to ascribe both the female's subordinate role in society and the female personality to external omnipotent forces. One of the many paradoxes of the conduct literature, however, is that it seeks to suppress some—but not all—of these "natural" traits in women, a fact that becomes evident from the second stereotype that emerges from the literature: women as they ought (or are desired) to be.

Rousseau recommends a "woman's education": "see to it that [women] like the cares of their sex, that they are modest, that they know how to watch over their households and busy themselves in their homes" (373). Fordyce tells his readers what men are seeking in a companion for life:

> They will try then if they can find women well-bred and sober-minded at the same time, of a cheerful [sic] temper with sedate manners; women of whom they may hope that they will love home, be attached to their husbands, attentive to their families, reasonable in their wishes, moderate in their expences [sic], and not devoted to eternal show. (I, 76)
Gregory states that "one of the chief beauties in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration" (26). Clearly these images of a reserved, retiring, domestic woman—of "female worth unambitious of appearing" (Fordyce I, 74)—are incompatible with the notion that women are naturally inclined to vanity, show, and pleasure seeking.

The feminine ideal then is a composite of characteristics: some that she is believed to possess naturally, others that she acquires by suppressing certain supposedly innate tendencies and exercising self-control. Her physical weakness is endorsed because women are pleasing when they are delicate and soft. Gregory advises his daughters never to boast of their good health because we so naturally associate the idea of female softness and delicacy with a correspondent delicacy of constitution, that when a woman speaks of her great strength, her extraordinary appetite, her ability to bear excessive fatigue, we recoil at the description in a way that she is little aware of. (50-51)

Fordyce states that "men of sensibility desire in every woman soft features, and a flowing voice, a form not robust, and a demeanour delicate and gentle" (II, 183).
Rousseau declares that in the relations of the two sexes "One ought to be active and strong, the other passive and weak," from which principle "it follows that woman is made specially to please man" (358). However, he adds that "an invariable law of nature. . . gives woman more facility to excite the desires than man to satisfy them" (360). Thus man is also constrained to please woman "so that she will consent to let him be the stronger" (360), but he never knows if her capitulation is the result of will or weakness. In this way, women make their weakness their glory and "possess their empire not because men wanted it that way, but because nature wants it that way" (360).

Although they embrace the idea that women are intellectually inferior to men, the conduct book writers encourage women to cultivate their faculties, in addition to acquiring certain accomplishments like needlework, domestic economy, drawing, singing, dancing, and playing a musical instrument--in order that they can be pleasing companions to men. However, the writers are not advocating an educational program comparable to that of males. Rousseau says that "[Females] ought to learn many things but only those that are suitable for them to know" (364). He believes that men should be the study of women and taste their aim. Women must study the heart of men to make men do what women cannot do for themselves because they are weak and their horizons
circumscribed. Fordyce also tells his female readers, "Your business chiefly is to read men, in order to make you agreeable and useful" (II, 8). Nonetheless, he recommends a program of reading for women, because he would like to see "the female world more accomplished than it is" (I, 138) but not, however, abounding with "Learned Ladies of any kind," lest females "should lose in softness what they gained in force, and lest the pursuits of such elevation should interfere a little with the plain duties and humble virtues of life" (I, 139). And he also concedes that men fear female pedantry.

Gregory goes further, warning his daughters that they should be cautious in displaying good sense and that learning should be kept "a profound secret, especially from men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding" (31-32). Even before a man of genius and candor, who would be above such meanness, females should "not be anxious to show the full extent of [their] knowledge" (32), for, says Gregory,

If he has any opportunities of seeing you, he will soon discover it himself; and if you have any advantages of person or manner, and keep your own secret. he will probably give you credit for a
great deal more than you possess.—The great art of pleasing in conversation consists of making the company pleased with themselves. You will more readily hear them talk yourselves into their good graces. (32-33)

Obviously, the feminine ideal is modest, self-effacing, and intent on pleasing. Fordyce says that such a female will manifest a noble forgetfulness of [herself], with a becoming respect for others; a diffidence of [her] sentiments, with a deference to theirs in doubtful points, or in such as they are entitled to know better, a readiness to learn of everyone, with a disposition to give everyone an opportunity of appearing with advantage, and thus to make all happy in their turn. (II, 200)

Gregory states that modesty dictates that females remain relatively silent in company, speaking more by the expression on their countenances than with words (28), and he also says that gentleness of spirit and manners is engaging in a woman (38). The natural gaiety of Rousseau's Sophie has been gradually repressed by her mother so that she is modest and reserved "even before the time to be so" (396). In society she is obliging and attentive and possesses a politeness which "comes from a true desire to please—and it does please" (398).
Such conduct, however, is diametrically opposed to the idea that women are by nature loquacious and exhibitionistic, and the conduct writers repeatedly warn their female readers that men are repelled by such tendencies. Fordyce asserts that

The beauty that obtrudes itself, how considerable soever, will either disgust, or at most excite but inferior desires. Men are so made. They refuse their admiration where it is courted; where it seems rather shunned, they love to bestow it. The retiring graces have always been the most attractive. (I, 66)

Gregory suggests that fine women will be more appreciated the less that they display their charms and are in the public eye—and the less that they converse "with us with the same unreserved freedom as we do with one another; in short by resembling us as nearly as they possibly can" (42). Women who pursue a contrary line of conduct "soon reduce the angel to a very ordinary girl" (43).

Self-assertion in women is usually designated as masculine behavior, and it is unanimously condemned. Rousseau states that "Woman is worth more as woman and less as man." He claims that if mothers want to raise their daughters like men, men will gladly consent to it because
"The more women want to resemble them, the less women will govern them, and then men will truly be masters" (363-364). Fordyce insists that women should act like women and not like men because "A masculine woman must naturally be an unamiable creature. . . . [A] young woman of any rank, that throws off all the lovely softness of her nature, and emulates the daring intrepid temper of a man--how terrible!" (I, 71-72)

Thus women are exhorted to be sweet, gentle, docile, and uncomplaining--regardless of the injustices and the provocations that each of the writers concedes they will encounter. Rousseau recommends "habitual constraint" in the education of females because from it comes gentleness and docility, which women need to obey the often flawed men they will marry. He argues that gentleness will win most men over, whereas

The bitterness and the stubbornness of women never do anything but increase the ills and the bad behavior of their husbands. Men feel that it is not with these weapons that women ought to conquer them. Heaven did not make women ingratiating and persuasive in order that they become shrewish. It did not make them weak in order that they be imperious. It did not give them so gentle a voice in order they they utter insults. It did
not give them such delicate features to be disfigured by anger. (370)

Fordyce states that "soft compliance, and meek submission, in a woman" (II, 203) are qualities that "men are taught by nature, by education, and by custom to consider as your duty, and their right" (II, 204). He even suggests that worthless married men may be so because their wives are turbulent and uncomplying rather than attentive and complacent -- qualities that are vital to maintaining the husband's attachment once familiarity has dulled his delight in his wife. Fordyce thinks it folly in some women to complain of their husbands' neglect, when in fact their own conduct is to blame:

But had you behaved to them with a more respectful observance, and a more equal tenderness; studying their humours, overlooking their mistakes, submitting to their opinions in matters indifferent, passing by little instances of unevenness, caprice, or passion, giving soft answers to hasty words, complaining as seldom as possible, and making it your daily care to relieve their anxieties, and prevent their wishes, to enliven the hour of dulness, and call up the idea of felicity. . . I doubt not but that you would have
maintained and even increased their esteem.

(II, 206)

He does concede that there may be some men who will not be improved by their wives' goodness, but he says that, nonetheless, women could do more to please, and they should not drop the engaging manners of the courtship because passion seldom lasts long after marriage.

In addition to being patient and long-suffering, the feminine ideal will never strive for singularity in her dress. Rousseau says of Sophie that she has "considerable taste in dressing herself up to advantage" (394), but her clothing never looks studied or artful. The total effect seems simple and modest. However, a man observing her for any length of time would find his eyes roaming "over her whole person without his being able to take them away; and one would say that all this very simple attire was put on only to be taken off piece by piece by the imagination" (394). Fordyce also says that simplicity of attire allows the imagination--which does not like to be confined--free reign. He affirms that "We are never highly delighted, where something is not left us to fancy" (I, 38-39). And he declares that simplicity and frugality in dress also indicate a lack of vanity, and "The less vanity you betray, the more merit we shall be disposed to allow you."

Consequently,
men of ordinary fortunes, and proper sentiments, will not be afraid of connecting themselves with persons too prudent to be profuse, and too wise, as well as too worthy, when married, to court the admiration of all but their husbands. (I, 54)

Gregory too recommends regulating one's expenses in matters of dress and wearing clothing that leaves something to the imagination, for "A fine woman shews her charms to most advantage, when she seems most to conceal them. The finest bosom in nature is not so fine as what imagination forms" (56). He adds that dress should appear unstudied and easy and that females should always be neat because

You will not easily believe how much we consider your dress as expressive of your characters. Vanity, levity, slovenliness, folly, appear through it. An elegant simplicity is an equal proof of taste and delicacy. (57)

Even Mrs. Piozzi tells a new husband "That your own superiority should always be seen but never felt, seems an excellent rule. A wife should outshine her husband in nothing, not even in her dress" (132).

The female's "natural" predisposition to piety is also endorsed by the writers of conduct literature. Gregory recommends religion for three reasons: First it offers consolation to women, who must often suffer in silence and
seclusion. Second, he believes that religion checks dissipation brought on by "the natural vivacity, and perhaps the natural vanity of your sex" (12). Third, men dislike religious "infidelity" in women because they connect "a religious taste in your sex with softness and sensibility of heart; at least we always consider the want of it as a proof of that hard and masculine spirit, which of all your faults we dislike the most" (20). In addition, men consider religious principles in a woman to be a security of her virtue.

Fordyce too suggests that piety in women is attractive to men: "The veriest infidel of them all, I am apt to believe, would be sorry to find his sister, daughter, or wife, under no restraint from religious principle" (II, 116). He further advises females to maintain a reflective and solemn demeanor at places of public worship because then

Men of sense and sobriety would entertain a much better opinion of your principles; nor would it be any disadvantage to your persons. Never perhaps does a fine woman strike more deeply than when composed into pious recollection, and possessed with the noblest consideration, she assumes without knowing it, superior dignity and new graces; so that the beauties of holiness seem to radiate about her, and the by-standers are almost
induced to fancy her already worshiping among her kindred angels. (166-167)

Fordyce also states that for those who have acquired piety, there are many benefits, among them "the great article of Filial Duty" (II, 129); for "She who truly reverences her parent in heaven, would tremble at the thought of dishonoring his representatives on earth" (II, 130). He asserts that this is particularly true when parents are pious and exemplary in their behavior. It should, however, apply even if the parents lack principles, since "the want of principles in your parents will not dissolve the ties of duty" (II, 131). Fordyce argues that so profound is the conviction implanted by nature of the sacredness of filial piety that it should "demand submission in every case, where your duty to God or your peace of mind does not interfere" (II, 135). Young women should do more than submit to their parents, however. Their good behavior toward their parents should proceed from affection. A girl whose filial demeanor is respectful and tender will, in Fordyce's opinion, make the best wife because such behavior and habits "will not fail to render her a mild and obliging companion" (II, 136).

Rousseau appears to agree with Fordyce about the importance of filial affection, for he says that "It is very difficult for girls who do not enjoy themselves more with
their mothers than with anyone else in the world to turn out well one day" (369). This contention is supported by an interpolated narrative in Madame de Genlis' work, in which the Dutchess [sic] of C--- imparts her history to the Baroness D'Almane, the mother of Adelaide and Theodore. The Dutchess had been imprisoned for nine years in a dungeon by her husband, the Duke of C---, who, jealous of her innocent love for another, had feigned her death and entombed her in the lowest recesses of his castle. She was finally found by her erstwhile love when the Duke was on his deathbed, but, having had nine years to reflect on her youthful errors, she declined to leave the dungeon with her respectful admirer, insisting that she must be taken out by her father and mother, refusing to tell him her story until her parents were present, and spending two additional days in captivity until her parents arrived. At the beginning of her story, the Dutchess explains that she had failed to make her mother her friend and had instead chosen another young woman to be her confidante. She avers, "That imprudence cost me dear, and was the principal cause of all my misfortunes" (II, 197).

Filial piety is advocated in part because it offers some assurance of female virtue (read chastity), which is the one quality above all others that the feminine ideal
must possess. Although she is devoured with the need to love, Rousseau's Sophie loves virtue because virtue constitutes woman's glory and because to her a virtuous woman appears almost equal to the angels. She loves it as the only route of true happiness and because she sees only misery, abandonment, unhappiness, and ignominy in the life of a shameless woman. She loves it, finally, as a thing that is dear to her respectable father and to her tender and worthy mother. They are not content with being happy because of their own virtue; they also want to be happy because of hers, and her chief happiness for herself is the hope of causing theirs. (397)

Fordyce also makes virtue a daughter's responsibility: The world, I know not how, overlooks in our sex, a thousand irregularities, which it never forgives in yours; so that the honours and peace of a family are, in this view, much more dependent on the conduct of daughters than of sons; and one young lady going astray shall subject her relations to such discredit and distress, as the united good conduct of all her brothers and sisters, supposing them numerous, shall scarce be
Rousseau insists that it is the work of reason, not prejudice, that women should be more chaste than men. A woman is the link between a man and his children, and her infidelity is joined to perfidy because it dissolves familial bonds. A woman must not only be faithful but be judged faithful. Thus she must adopt a modest, attentive, and reserved demeanor and pay scrupulous attention to her reputation.

Fordyce describes male responses to female impudence:

To say, the truth, there is not, I verily believe, a man living, who in his sober senses would not prefer a modest to an impudent woman. An impudent woman——Who can tell which is greater, the disgrace thrown on humanity by such a character, or the honour reflected on our natures by that abhorrence, which is raised by the bare idea in every breath not totally degenerate? (I, 67-68)

He insists that the "all presiding power" not only instilled a strong sense of reputation in women but also an esteem for chastity in men. However, if a young woman breaks "loose through each domestic enclosure," she becomes fair game for destroyers.

And if her virtue, or (which to a woman is nearly the same in effect) her reputation, should be
lost, what will it avail the poor wanderer, to plead that she meant only a little harmless amusement, and never thought of straying into the abhorred path of vice? (I, 75 underlining mine)

Even within the domestic enclosure, Gregory claims that until a man declares himself, a woman should not reveal her attachment to him—not even to herself—for "Nature, whose authority is superior to philosophy has annexed a sense of shame to it" (67). Also a suitor would be repelled to learn that the object of his affections had previously been attached to another, "as no man of spirit and delicacy ever valued a heart much hackneyed in the ways of love" (68-69). Even after marriage, a woman should not betray the extent of her desires and affection to her husband:

[Marriage] sufficiently shews your preference, which is all he is intitled [sic] to know. If he has delicacy, he will ask for no stronger proof of your affection, for your sake; if he has sense, he will not ask it for his own. This is an unpleasant truth, but it is my duty to let you know it. Violent love cannot subsist, at least cannot be expressed, for any time together, on both sides; otherwise the certain consequences, however concealed is satiety and disgust. Nature in this case has laid the reserve on you. (88-89)
In short, the female ideal will comport herself so that infidelity/impudence/immodesty/indelicacy—even connubial love—can never be imputed to her.

Women who display virtue will, according to the writers of conduct literature, exercise enormous influence over men. Rousseau asserts that

the woman who is at once decent, lovable, and self-controlled, who forces those about her to respect her, who has reserve and modesty, who, in a word, sustains love by means of esteem, sends her lovers with a nod to the end of the world, to combat, to glory, to death, to anything she pleases. This seems to me to be a noble empire, and one well worth the price of its purchase. (393)

Fordyce asks, "Youth and beauty set off with sweetness and virtue, capacity and discretion—what have they not accomplished?" (I, 13); and he states that women of virtue and understanding can by their society inspire better manners and gentler more humane sentiments in men. Honorable love "converts the savage into a man, and lifts the man into a hero!" (I, 17). Gregory, in describing a man in love, states that "His heart and his character will be improved in every respect by this attachment. His manners
will become more gentle, and his conversation more agreeable. . . "(87).

Ironically, although these writers wax lyrical about the beneficial influence that women can have on men, and Rousseau asks, "Who wants to be despised by women?" and answers, "No one in the world" (390), their texts reflect much ambivalence about women. The male writers extol the virtues of women in one paragraph and speak contemptuously of women in the next; the female writers seem to have embraced both the stereotype of the feminine ideal and its negative contrary. Underlying this ambivalence, as critics like Mary Poovey and Nancy Armstrong have pointed out, is anxiety and fear. Women seemed to fear that if they did not transform themselves into submissive and dutiful objects of desire, they would upset the status quo and lose what power they had, and the male conduct book writers were constantly reminding them of this danger. Men seemed afraid of female desire unrestrained and running amok--upsetting the "natural" order of things. Obviously, men had a strong interest in maintaining that order, but, once again ironically, the order was dependent on women becoming other than men believed them "naturally" to be. Hence the need for conduct literature.

The conduct prescribed in this literature required that women exercise self-control and regulate their behavior at
all times with a view to attracting and pleasing men. As Alice Browne points out,

all the advice on dealing with men emphasises keeping them at a distance without alienating them. The double bind of demanding that women be both seductive and chaste is completely articulated in the eighteenth century in a way that it was not in earlier periods. (34)

Thus, women were encouraged to be retiring and pauciloquent because the less that men saw and heard women, the greater would be their appeal. Female modesty was—paradoxically—to be advertised by simplicity of attire, relative silence, and an apparent reluctance to draw attention to oneself in any way at all. Mary Poovey discusses the appeal of modesty, which, she argues, perpetuated "the paradoxical formulation of female sexuality":

a modest demeanor served not only to assure the world that a woman's appetites were under control; it also indicated that female sexuality was still assertive enough to require control. That is, even as modesty was proclaimed to be the most reliable guardian of a woman's chastity—and hence the external sign of her internal integrity—it was also declared to be an
advertisement for—and hence an attraction to—her sexuality. (21)

Nonetheless, she was exhorted to remain chaste and to believe, like Sophie, that "virtue constitutes woman's glory" because, as Poovey points out, "to do so enhanced her social value and promised her the eventual gratification of the very desires that modesty was supposed to deny" (23). Lest she forget that, the conduct book writers (despite their contention that a concern for reputation is natural to women) reiterated the importance of maintaining a spotless reputation and the disastrous consequences ensuing from loss of reputation.

Women were also encouraged to like domestic life and employments. The study of domestic economy, needlework, drawing, and reading (of appropriate books) were activities endorsed by the writers of conduct literature. However, the grounds for their approval seem to have had less to do with the value of the activities themselves than it had to do with the fact that they would keep women at home and safely occupied—away from public places with their attendant temptations. In addition, the right kind of reading allowed women vicarious experiences and presented moral lessons that would inhibit their desire for direct experience. Singing and dancing served a similar function, providing women with
a safe outlet for their energies, while at the same time
giving them talents that could be employed to enhance men's
lives. Even religious practice was recommended because it
occupied idle hours and because piety in women was
attractive to men—in large part because it implied virtue
in a woman. Filial piety was urged for the same reason.
The dutiful, affectionate daughter was less likely to engage
in conduct that would be displeasing or disgraceful to her
parents; she was more likely to be fond of home. Virtuous,
obedient, and domesticated, she gave promise of being a
docile and pleasing wife.

Conduct literature tended to be more proscriptive than
prescriptive; women were more often being told what not to
do than what to do. Inevitably, first among the
proscriptions was the injunction against sexual misconduct,
and most of the other interdictions related to sexuality—
involving activities that might lead females into temptation
or endanger their reputations by signifying that they had
appetites of any kind. Frequenting public places or
sallying out in search of amusement; exhibiting vanity and
"immoderate fondness for external embellishment"; reading
sentimental novels or other improper books and attending
unseemly plays; eating and drinking too much—women were
enjoined from all such conduct because it signified
assertive female appetite.
Assertion was viewed as masculine behavior, and females were exhorted to act always like "women" and never like "men". In company, they were not to put themselves forward, be disputatious, critical, or witty. Although all the writers averred that women were incapable of rational thought, women, paradoxically, were cautioned against competing with men in their intellectual pursuits. If they did, however, acquire learning beyond the expected female accomplishments, they were never to display it; nor were they to boast of good health or demonstrate intrepidity.

In short, they had to transform themselves into models of feminine propriety, contentedly occupied within the confines of the home where they regulated their desires to please their husbands. And/or, as Wollstonecraft says, "always to seem to be this and that" (99).

Poovey offers an explanation of this male fear of female appetite, suggesting that behind the warnings against self-indulgence, which were connected to sexual profligacy, is "the desire to secure both men's property and their peace of mind" (21). One act of infidelity and a woman might present her husband with a child which was not his, thus imperiling "both a man's security and his dynastic ambitions" (5): the child being, in Rousseau's words, "the token of his dishonor, the plunderer of his own children's property" (361).
Armstrong offers a further explanation of the "specific configuration of sexual features" that conduct books defined and delineated as appropriate for women:

[Conduct literature] assumed that an education ideally made a woman desire to be what a prosperous man desires, which is above all else a female. She therefore had to lack the competitive desires and worldly ambitions that consequently belonged—as if by some natural principle—to the male. For such a man, her desirability hinged upon an education in frugal domestic practices. She was supposed to complement his role as an earner and producer with hers as a wise spender and tasteful consumer. Such an ideal relationship presupposed a woman whose desires were not of necessity attracted to material things. But because a woman's desire could in fact be manipulated by signs of wealth and position, she required an education. (59)

This education was, thus, motivated, at least in part, by economic considerations relating to the rise in the eighteenth century of the middle class with its attendant capitalistic values.
Apparently, men were afraid that women with their naturally voracious appetites would consume their wealth and patrimony unless those appetites were checked and channelled into socially appropriate activities. In his sermon on female reserve, Fordyce insists that it is possible to tell from a woman's demeanor whether she is given over to vice or genuinely modest. He says that Nature brands women in this way and tells men to "Treat [the modest] with tenderness and honour" and from the vicious to "Fly, my sons, fly these destructive Syrens. They smile, only to tempt; and they tempt, in order to devour" (I, 69 underlining mine).

Although Wollstonecraft was dismissive of Fordyce and the way in which he would "interlard his discourse with . . . fooleries" (95), she recognized that Fordyce's sermons, along with most other works of conduct literature, "have contributed to vitiate the taste, and enervate the understanding of many of my fellow-creatures" (96). She was concerned about the way in which conduct literature presented—and therefore helped to render—women as intellectually limited, childlike, voluptuous, and useless. Poovey explains why this was so:

Because their contributions to society were rewarded both by men's grateful approval and by a sense of their own worth, women had a clear investment in accepting the naturalization
of the feminine ideal. But as women accepted a definition of "female nature" that was derived from a social role, they found it increasingly difficult to acknowledge or to integrate into their self-perceptions desires that did not support this stereotype. And, by the same token, they found it increasingly difficult to recognize that the stereotype was prescription, not description, and thus to renounce it. (15)

Wollstonecraft, however, appears to have been more cognizant than most women of the tendencies and the impact of the conduct literature on female behavior—of its prescriptive rather than descriptive nature. She characterized Fordyce's representation of a patient, respectful, and attentive wife as "the portrait of a house slave," (95), and she stated that

Such a woman ought to be an angel—or she is an ass—for I discern not a trace of the human character, neither reason nor passion in this domestic drudge, whose being is absorbed in that of a tyrant's. (96)

Her project then was to expose the way in which society made women what they were and to redefine the nature of women—depicting them as neither angels nor asses.
CHAPTER II: THE FEMINISTS

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published in 1792, and it was to make Mary Wollstonecraft the most famous of the early feminists. After her death in 1797, her husband, William Godwin, wrote a biography of her, Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and in discussing the vindication, he claimed that "The spirited and decisive way in which the author explodes the system of gallantry, and the species of homage with which the sex is usually treated, shocked the majority," and many "were in arms against the author of so heretical and blasphemous a doctrine" (231). Although Godwin was being ironic in the latter statement, the suggestion that Wollstonecraft was an iconoclast whose work was reviled by conservatives from the time of its publication because her views were so new and radical has been disproved by recent scholarship. In fact, many of the ideas that Wollstonecraft advanced had been circulating since at least the end of the previous century. In the late seventeenth century, Mary Astell presented some of the same arguments about the nature and condition of women that Wollstonecraft would tender, and her criticism of men and marriage was far more acerbic than that of Wollstonecraft. Another of Wollstonecraft's predecessors
was Catherine Graham Macaulay, a noted historian, whose discussion of women in her *Letters on Education* in 1790 was very influential on Wollstonecraft. Thus, much of Wollstonecraft’s polemic was not new, nor to modern readers does it seem particularly radical; and when the vindication was first published, the responses to it were generally approving (Janes 297). It was not until the publication of Godwin’s candid memoirs of his wife in 1798 along with the conservative backlash that accompanied the progress of the French Revolution that Wollstonecraft’s name came to be vilified, and eighteenth-century Enlightenment feminism, for which Wollstonecraft was perhaps the most vocal proponent, came to be misconstrued.

Describing responses to Wollstonecraft after the publication of the *Rights of Woman*, Godwin writes in the memoirs,

The contradiction, to the public apprehension, was equally great, as to the person of the author, as it was when they considered the temper of the book. . . . [T]hose whom curiosity prompted to seek the occasion of beholding her, expected to find a sturdy, muscular, raw-boned virago and they were not a little surprised, when, instead of all this, they found a woman, lovely in her person,
and in the best and most engaging sense, feminine in her manners. (232)

It is tempting to speculate on how Wollstonecraft would have responded to that passage in which her lovely person and engaging feminine manners are being offered as a counterweight to the "masculine description" and "stern and rugged" (231) passages in her text. In the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft had written (although she expected her remarks to "excite a horse-laugh"), "I do earnestly wish to see the distinction of sex confounded in society, unless where love animates the behavior" (57), and central to her philosophy was the idea that too much attention is paid to the female person and manners and not enough to the female mind.

Wollstonecraft's argument is extended and discursive, but she sets out to establish certain principles about God and humanity, to examine the condition of women in society, and to offer solutions to the problems she perceives. In brief, addressing herself to women in the middle class, she asserts that a benevolent God has created all human beings with the capacity to reason. Reason is an "emanation of the divinity" (53), which enables individuals to rise to excellence. She views the rights and duties of mankind as the acquisition of virtue and knowledge that comes from the exercise of reason. She insists that virtue should be the
same in men and women. And she argues that female faults and weaknesses can be ascribed to their education.

She claims that traditionally men have argued that because women are physically weak, they lack reason. Women have consequently been denied an education that would enable them "to unfold their own faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue," which ought to be "the grand end of [female] exertions" (26); and deprived of legal and civil rights and the means to earn their own subsistence and function as independent beings.

Wollstonecraft contends that men are voluptuaries, and "not content with [their physical] pre-eminence, [they] endeavour to sink us still lower, merely to render us alluring objects for a moment" (8). Therefore, female education consists of developing corporeal charms and accomplishments to please men. She describes the consequences of such an education:

[Females] spend many of the first years of their lives in acquiring a smattering of accomplishments; meanwhile strength of body and mind are sacrificed to libertine notions of beauty, to the desire of establishing themselves,—the only way women can rise in the world,—by marriage. And this desire making mere animals of them, when they marry they act as such children may be
expected to act:—they dress; they paint, and nickname God's creatures.—Surely these weak beings are only fit for a seraglio! (10)

Because they have never been taught to exercise their reason (which, of course, they are told they do not possess), women are made complicit in their own degradation. The required confinement of their early years leads to physical weakness, which they subsequently foster— or feign— because they are told that it is appealing to men. They are preoccupied with their appearance and having homage paid to their charms. Pleasure becomes the end for which they exert themselves, and since they are only allowed trifling concerns, their conduct is trifling. "[T]hey become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling" (60).

Wollstonecraft says that female sensibility is further endorsed by the prevailing opinion that women "were created rather to feel than reason, and that all the power they obtain, must be obtained by their charms and weakness" (62). Thus encouraged— even required— to obtain power illicitly through sexual wiles, cunning, and dissimulation, and lacking the abilities to acquire virtue through reasoning, women are subject to folly and vice.

Wollstonecraft asks how such weak beings can "be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of
the poor babes whom they bring into the world?" (10) She maintains that "speaking of women at large, their first duty is to themselves as rational creatures, and the next, in point of importance, as citizens, is that, which includes so many, of a mother" (145). However, "In the regulation of a family, in the education of children, understanding, in an unsophisticated sense, is particularly required," (64) and women with weak bodies and cramped minds are unfit for such domestic duties. Furthermore, she argues that they make poor wives because when love (or sexual passion) subsides— as it inevitably will—friendship or indifference will succeed it, and women are only prepared to be the mistresses and humble dependents of men rather than rational companions and friends.

To rectify the situation, Wollstonecraft advocates educating boys and girls together and having them pursue the same studies; allowing girls to romp and "run wild," (43) rather than confining them to sedentary employments indoors, because a healthy constitution is necessary for a strong understanding and a good temper; and giving married women the protection of civil laws. She posits the idea of permitting women to earn their own subsistence by practicing medicine, regulating a farm, or running a business, as opposed to the degrading or menial occupations (prostitute,
milliner, mantua maker, governess) currently their only recourse. She suggests that women might study politics. And she hints at political representation for women. Nonetheless, she assumes that the majority of women will become wives and mothers, and she appeals to men to become more chaste and less tyrannical and to stop promoting ignorance in women because

Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers—in a word, better citizens. (150)

Wollstonecraft makes frequent use of analogies, comparing women to courtiers, soldiers, sailors, clergymen, the rich, savages, dissenters, and boys who learn about life through precept before experience, to show the similarities between females and males, and her rhetoric is sometimes radical. She alludes to "the tyrannical abuse of power by kings and the efficiency of their courts" and "the detrimental effects upon society of the existence of a standing army and navy" (Guralnick 308), and she is highly critical of the rich and of arbitrary authority of any kind. Elissa Guralnick has argued that the work constitutes "a
radical critique of society from broad egalitarian premises (308), and such criticism is clearly present but subsidiary to Wollstonecraft's arguments about women.

Other critics have noted that, with the exception of her suggestions and hints about career opportunities and political rights for women--points that she does not belabor--and her radical rhetoric, "Much of what Wollstonecraft says about women's education and place in society was relatively uncontroversial" (Brown 157-158), and "her demands are typical of a wide spectrum of women writers" (Myers 331). And if one examines the work of Astell and Macaulay, it is clear that Wollstonecraft was not the first woman to present such views to the public.

In marked contrast to the Jacobin Wollstonecraft, Mary Astell (1666-1731), the daughter of a Newcastle coal merchant, is described by Bridget Hill as "a sincerely devout woman of high Anglican and Tory sympathies," and "a passionate believer in the divine right of kings" (The First English Feminist 2), and Ruth Perry says that "The stamp of her ultraconservative attitudes are [sic] impressed on everything she wrote" (13). Despite her religious and political conservatism, however, she was also a passionate advocate for women, and she is sometimes referred to as the first English feminist on the basis of two of her works: A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of
their True and Greatest Interest and Some Reflections upon Marriage Occasion'd by the Duke and Dutchess of Mazarine's Case which is also considered.

Astell's A Serious Proposal to the Ladies was published in two parts. Part I appeared in 1694 and provided the general outline of her plan for a "Religious Retirement" for women and her reasons for presenting it. By 1697, however, the original proposal had done no more than generate a lot of commentary, so Astell presented a second part, which provided a more detailed account of the projected religious retirement. Astell addressed herself to single women in the upper classes, those whose families could afford to expend 500 pounds to establish and/or educate their daughters.

In the earlier proposal, Astell begins by asking the "Ladies" how they can be satisfied to lead such frivolous lives: "How can you be content to be in the World like Tulips in a Garden, to make a fine shew and be good for nothing?" (141). (Wollstonecraft was to introduce her argument by stating that "like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, [female] strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty" (7).) Astell tells her readers that they value themselves too little and men too much, "if we place any part of our desert in their Opinions, and don't think our selves capable of Nobler Things than the pitiful Conquest of some worthless heart" (141). She asserts that
pleasing God is more important than pleasing men.

She apologizes for seeming to find fault with women and explains that her intent is to rectify female failures, which men find diverting but for which men have been largely responsible. Astell asserts that female "Incapacity, if there be any, is acquired not natural" (143). She insists that "The Cause therefore of the defects we labour under is, if not wholly, yet at least in the first place, to be ascribed to the mistakes of our Education" (143). She explains that "Women are from their very Infancy debar'd those Advantages with the want of which they are afterwards reproached, and nursed up in those vices which will hereafter be upbraided to them" (143). She believes that parents abdicate their responsibilities to themselves as well as their children when they fail to properly educate their daughters, who are "nurs'd up in Ignorance and Vanity" and taught to be "Proud and Petulant, Delicate and Fantastick [sic], Humourous and Inconstant" (144); and denied "an ingenuous and liberal Education" (145).

Astell argues that women are capable of improvement and that "A desire to advance and perfect its Being, is implanted by GOD in all Rational Natures" (145). However, women are "denied the means of examining and judging what is so" and kept ignorant "wherein the perfection of [their] nature consists" (145). Consequently, they overvalue beauty
and money, and, unable to discern the difference between truth and artifice because they have been kept in ignorance, they are susceptible to flattery and deception which can lead to vice. In short, they do not learn to use the reason that God has given them.

Astell concludes that "Thus Ignorance and a narrow Education lay the Foundation of vice, and Imitation and Custom rear it up" (147). Even if a young woman is "taught the Principles and Duties of Religion," she is "not Acquainted with the Reasons and Grounds of them; being told 'tis enough for her to believe, to examine why, and wherefore, belongs not to her" (148). Astell contends that such piety lacks foundation and that to be truly good a woman needs to be able to give a reason why she is so.

In order to correct these deficiencies, Astell, therefore, proposes the establishment of a kind of college: a place which would provide a retreat from the world for those who desire it, or education and preparation for those who would go back into the world. Although the main objective of the Retirement would be to study religious ideas and principles, the inhabitants would also pursue intellectual improvement by careful study of a few well-chosen works, like those of the French philosophers Descartes and Malebranche. Astell asks, "since GOD has given Women as well as Men intelligent Souls, why should
they be forbidden to improve them?" (153). She insists that "We pretend not that Women shou'd teach in the Church, or usurp Authority where it is not allow'd them; permit us only to understand our own duty, and not be forc'd to take it upon trust from others" (154).

Astell delineates the benefits of retirement to an institution such as she proposes, among them the deliverance from temptation and the machinations of designing men; the removal of querulousness, delicacy, and inconstancy that result from too great a preoccupation with external objects; the formation of true friendships with other women; and the acquisition of the virtue, prudence, piety, and wisdom that will enable women to better form their children and to reform bad husbands. She also avers that learning, rather than making women vain, will cause them to be less forward and talkative.

In many ways, Astell's admonitions to the ladies anticipate the criticisms of women explicit and implicit in the later conduct books. The fundamental difference is that Astell insists that female education not female nature is at fault. As Fordyce was to do some seventy years later, she uses the metaphor of weeds to illustrate the problem:

For that Ignorance is the cause of most Feminine Vices, may be instanc'd in that Pride and Vanity which is [sic] usually imputed to us, and which
I suppose if thoroughly sifted, will appear to be some way or other, the rise and Original of all the rest. These, tho' very bad Weeds, are the product of a good Soil, they are nothing else but Generosity degenerated and corrupted. (145)

She argues for the great potential of women as moral and intellectual beings, and although she indicates the benefits to society that would accrue from her educational program, as Alice Brown points out, she asserts that "women should be educated for their own moral and religious good," (95 underlining mine) and she scoffingly dismisses the idea that women are made only to please men: "She who has opportunities of making an interest in Heaven, of obtaining the love and admiration of GOD and Angels, is too prodigal of her Time, and injurious to her Charms, to throw them away on vain insignificant men" (141).

Furthermore, as can be seen from the epithets that she applies to them, Astell is at least as caustic in her criticism of men as the later conduct book writers are of women. At one point, she speculates:

Were the Men as much neglected, and as little care taken to cultivate and improve them, perhaps they wou'd be so far from surpassing those whom they now dispise [sic], that they themselves wou'd sink into the greatest stupidity and brutality. The
preposterous returns that the most of them make, to all the care and pains that is [sic] bestow'd on them, renders this no uncharitable, nor improbable Conjecture. (142)

In her second feminist work, she is even more sardonic in her responses to and her analysis of men and marriage. *Some Reflections on Marriage* was first published in 1700 with a short preface, but Astell added a long preface to the third edition of 1706, which set the iconoclastic and combative tone of the work. In this Preface, Astell takes on those critics who argue for the natural inferiority of women and who cite biblical mandate for the subjection of women. She was responding to ideas expressed by such writers as clergyman Richard Allestree, who argued in *The Ladies Calling* of 1673 that women were intellectually inferior to men and that wives owed their husbands submission by divine decree, as punishment for Eve's original disobedience to God; and John Sprint, another clergyman, whose work *The Bride-Woman's Counsellor* of 1699 expressed the same ideas in even more misogynistic terms.

Astell's central question is

*If all Men are born free, how is that all Women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will of Men, be the perfect Condition*
of Slavery? and if the essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a standing Rule to live by? and why is Slavery so much condemned and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded, and held so necessary and so sacred in another? (76)

(Elsewhere, she exclaims, "how much soever Arbitrary Power may be dislik'd on a Throne, not Milton himself wou'd cry Liberty to poor Female Slaves, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny" (102).)

She then proceeds to use scriptural references to women to confound those who would claim scriptural authority for the subjugation of women, and she alludes to such admirable Old and New Testament figures as Priscilla, Ruth, Esther, Miriam, Deborah, Elizabeth, Martha, and Tabitha, among others, to demonstrate that whatever Great and Wise Reasons Men may have for despising Women, and keeping them in Ignorance and Slavery, it can't be from their having learnt to do so in Holy Scripture. The Bible is for, and not against us, and cannot without great violence done to it, be urg'd to our Prejudice" (84).

By means of reductio ad absurdum, she even argues that Paul's letter to the Corinthians ostensibly prohibiting
women from preaching in the Church can be read literally to mean that "Praying and Prophesying in the Church are allow'd the women, provided they do it with their Head Cover'd as well as the Men" (72) because in the text, "there is much more said against the present Fashion of Men's wearing long Hair, than for that Supremacy they lay claim to." She adds, "For all that appears in the Text, it is not so much a law of Nature, that women shou'd Obey Men, as that Men shou'd not wear long hair" (73). Astell insists that "'tis certainly no Arrogance in a Women to conclude, that she was made for the Service of GOD, and that this is her End. Because GOD made all Things for Himself, and a Rational Mind is too noble a Being to be Made for the Sake and Service of any Creature" (72).

Astell also asserts that "Sense is a Portion that GOD Himself has been pleas'd to distribute to both Sexes with an Impartial Hand, but Learning is what Men have engross'd to themselves, and [she adds ironically] one can't but admire their great Improvements!" (78). Women, on the other hand, are restrained and ridiculed to keep them from pursuing knowledge, and if they happen to acquire any, they are "star'd upon as Monsters, Censur'd, Envy'd, and every way Discourage'd" (85). She also argues that men have had the further advantage over women of power: "they make Laws and exercise Magistracy" (85). Thus, it is to the combination
of education and power that men owe their "Superiority and Pre-eminence" (85), not to any natural or divinely mandated sovereignty.

Astell notes, however, that as a result of this "Immemorial Prescription," "Antient Tradition and Modern Usage" (85), many women have come "to Love their Chains" and "think as humbly of themselves as their Masters can wish, with respect to the other Sex" (86); and she sarcasticallycatalogues the characteristics and behavior of such women—who would represent the conduct book ideal in the years to come:

... let them enjoy the great Honour and Felicity of their Tame, Submissive, and Depending Temper! Let the Men applaud, and let them Glory in, this wonderful Humility!... Let them Huswife or Play, Dress and be pretty entertaining Company! Or which is better, relieve the Poor to ease their own Compassions, reade Pious Books, say their Prayers and go to Church, because they have been Taught and Us'd to do so, without being able to give a better Reason for their Faith and Practice! Let them not by any means aspire at being Women of Understanding, because no Man can endure a Woman of Superior Sense, or wou'd treat a reasonable Woman Civilly... Let them in short
be what is call'd very Women, for this is most acceptable to all sorts of Men. . . . (86-87)

Nonetheless, Astell concludes her preface by looking forward to those Halcyon, or if you will Millenium Days, in which the Wolf and the Lamb shall feed together, and a Tyrannous domination which Nature never meant, shall no longer render useless if not hurtful, the Industry and Understandings of half Mankind! (87)

In Reflections Upon Marriage (as the third edition of the work was retitled), Astell uses the notorious case of the Duchess of Mazarine, who ran away from her insane and autocratic husband and subsequently led a scandalous existence, from which to extrapolate about marriage and to examine the relative obligations of men and women within marriage. She argues that the Duchess serves "as an unhappy Shipwreck to point out the dangers of an ill Education and unequal Marriage" (90). Because her education had failed to make "a right Improvement of her Wit and Sense," (91) the Duchess lacked discretion and did not act in a fit and becoming way, although she had the potential to be "a great Ornament to her Family and Blessing to the Age she liv'd in" (90). Astell is, however, understanding of the plight of the Duchess in having made a bad marriage:

To be yok'd for Life to a disagreeable Person and
Temper; to have Folly and Ignorance tyrannize over Wit and Sense; to be contradicted in every thing one does or says and bore down not by Reason but Authority; to be denied ones [sic] most innocent desires, for no other cause but the Will and Pleasure of an absolute Lord and Master, whose Follies a Woman with all her Prudence cannot hide, and whose Commands she cannot but despise at the same time she obeys them; is a misery none can have a just Idea of, but those who have felt it.

(90)

Astell defends marriage against its detractors and asserts that it is not "The Christian Institution of Marriage"--which "provides the best that may be for Domestic Quiet and content, and for the Education of Children; so that if we were not under the tye of Religion, even the Good of Society and civil Duty would oblige us to what that requires at our Hands" (93-94)--but the poor choices and the foolish conduct of those who are in it, which cause so much marital unhappiness.

Despite her defense of marriage, however, Astell paints a bleak portrait of the average upper class marriage. Men invariably marry for money, or for love of beauty or wit, or for custom's sake. They rarely value the women they marry;
they think meanly of women in general; and they exact the services of their wives as their divine right—a right that Astell strongly disputes. She also delineates the hard fate in store for women who marry men with disagreeable tempers, fine gentlemen, or men of unequal station or fortune.

Her conservatism is evident in her condemnation of unequal marriages, which she views as degrading to the women who enter into them and who thus show "ill Manners to Heaven, and an irreligious contempt for its Favours" (107), her argument being that "GOD has plac'd different Ranks in the World, put some in higher and some in lower Station, for Order and beauty's sake, and for many good Reasons" (107).

Perry explains that Astell derived much of her psychic strength from the English class system, which she assumed institutionalized the natural order of things. It gave her a sense of entitlement which enabled her to resist the culture's insidious message that she was inferior, and to perceive the pervasive sexism of her society. (24)

In The Eighteenth Century Feminist Mind, Alice Brown says of Astell, "For her, the duty to obey a husband's authority, like the duty to obey political authority is unconditional" (93); and Katherine Rogers, in Feminism in
Eighteenth-Century England, says that "The only course of action Astell can recommend to a wife is stoical resignation" (76). However, these statements seem to be an over-simplification of Astell's complex stance on the subject of a woman's marital duty—a position made more ambiguous by Astell's use of irony. She does indeed say at one point that

She then who Marrys [sic] ought to lay it down for an indisputable Maxim, that her husband must govern absolutely and entirely [sic], and that she has nothing else to do but to Please and Obey. She must not attempt to divide his Authority, or so much as dispute it, to struggle with her Yoke will only make it gall the more, but must believe him Wise and good and in all respects the best, at least he must be so to her. (116)

However, this exhortation appears after a lengthy and ironic catalogue of male folly, and it is followed by the hypothetical responses of "some refractory Woman" who wants to know how it is possible to believe a man wise and good when "a thousand Demonstrations convinces her and all the World of the contrary"—"a wise Man and a Husband not [being] Terms convertible" (116).
In her 1706 Preface, Astell defends herself against apparent charges that she was trying to stir up sedition and undermine the masculine empire. She states that her work exhorts women "not to expect to have their own Will in any thing, but to be entirely Submissive, when once they have made choice of a Lord and Master," but she continues in an ironic vein:

tho' he happen not to be so Wise, so Kind, or even so Just a governor as was expected[.]

She did not indeed advise them to think his Folly Wisdom, nor his Brutality that Love and worship he promised in his Matrimonial Oath, for this required a Flight of Wit and Sense much above her poor Ability, and proper only to Masculine Understandings. However she did not in any manner prompt them to Resist, or to Abdicate the Perjur'd Spouse, tho' the Laws of GOD and the Land make special Provision for it, in a case wherein, as is to be fear'd, few Men can truly plead Not Guilty.

(70-71)

Astell does not, in fact, exhort women to resistance or disobedience, although she makes it clear that marriage will disappoint most of their expectations and that the lot of the majority of married women is a hard one because men will
flatter and deceive women before marriage and play the tyrant after marriage. Her attitude toward the obedience that a wife owes to a husband is reflected in another analogy in the Preface:

The Service [a woman] at any time becomes oblig'd to pay to a Man, is only a Business by the Bye. Just as it may be any Man's Business and Duty to keep Hogs; he was not Made for this, but if he hires himself out to such an employment, he ought conscientiously to perform it. (72)

Astell's position is better understood in terms of her devout Anglicanism and her ideas about social good and civil duty. She views marriage as a Christian institution, and the marriage vows stipulate "Love, Honour, and Obedience" on the part of women. Thus when a woman promises to obey her husband, she has taken a religious vow at the same time as she has contracted herself to perform the duties involved in the business of being a wife. Astell states that "nothing can assure Obedience, and render it what it ought to be, but the Conscience of Duty, the paying it for GOD's sake" (128). And although she claims that "the Mind is free, nothing but Reason can oblige it, 'tis out of the reach of the most absolute tyrant," she states that "the Order of the World requires an Outward Respect and Obedience from some to others" (110)--even to those who may not deserve them.
However, she refers to obedience as "This bitter Cup," (109) and sees the obedient wife as a heroine/martyr. Nonetheless, Astell is realistic enough to realize that most women are unlikely to behave like martyrs in marriage, that, in fact, ignorant but with sense enough to recognize their husbands' defects, they are more likely to pay their husbands back in kind for the mistreatment they suffer. In Astell's view, the unhappy wife needs to have religious faith because the prospect of heaven is the only consolation afforded to her for her sufferings in marriage. Consequently, it is in the best interests of men to encourage women to improve their minds and be good Christians, for "She has need of a strong Reason, of a truly Christian and well-temper'd Spirit, of all the Assistance the best Education can give her, and ought to have some assurance of her firmness and Vertue, who ventures on such a Trial [as marriage]" (131). She also argues that if women were properly educated and allowed to gain some knowledge of the world, they would be less susceptible to male flattery and deceit and consequently less likely to marry men who will prove to be bad husbands.

Astell does, however, proffer two solutions in addition to more education for and Christian fortitude in women. The first is that women who are unable to submit to the tyranny of a husband ought never to marry at all (and she had
offered women an alternative in the form of her "Religious Retirement"). The second is that men should change their attitudes and improve their behavior in marriage. She avers that "He who does not make Friendship the chief inducement to his Choice, and prefer it before any other consideration, does not deserve a good Wife, and therefore should not complain if he goes without one" (93). She also points out that "there is a mutual Stipulation [in the marriage vows], and Love, Honour, and Worship, by which certain Civility and Respect at least are meant, are as much the woman's due, as Love, Honour, and Obedience are the Man's" (108).

Furthermore, she advises that men sweeten the bitter cup of obedience by preserving authority "without that nauseous Ostentation of Power" (109). She recommends that men be less arbitrary and tyrannical because "A woman will value him the more who is Wise and Good, when she discerns how much he excels the rest of his noble Sex; the less [a man] requires, the more will he Merit that Esteem and Deference, which those who are so forward to exact seem conscious they don't deserve" (132).

Astell's use of the words *halcyon* and *millennium* in the 1706 Preface would suggest that she was not overly optimistic that the reformation in male manners that she called for would ever come about, but it is clear that she
believed that marital unhappiness was largely a function of men's poor choices and dictatorial behavior compounded by inadequate female education. Although she also recognized that the marriage laws favored men over women, she did not agitate for legal reform of those laws, for, as Rogers says, she believed "them determined by Church and State"--against which she would overtly not contend. Nonetheless, as Rogers also notes, "her stark presentation of their [the laws of marriage] oppressiveness functions as a tacit criticism" (76). And, at one point, she does posit equal opportunities for women--albeit in another life:

She will discern a time when her Sex shall be no bar to the best Employments, the highest Honour; a time when that distinction, now as much us'd to her Prejudice, shall be no more, but provided she is not wanting to her self, her Soul shall shine as bright as the greatest Heroe's. (128)

Although Astell was not alone in her advocacy of women and her recognition that women were flawed because of the way they were educated (Fraser 120, 329-330), hers were the first systematic works of feminism published in England, and nearly a century was to pass before another woman would essay comparable work. In 1790, Catharine Sawbridge Macaulay Graham (1731-1791), a historian who was the subject
of both praise and opprobrium for her liberal
intellectualism and for having "stepped out of the province
of her sex" (Macaulay 6), published her *Letters on
Education: With Observations on Religious and Metaphysical
Subjects*, and although it has been described as a feminist
work (Kirkham 11), it would be more accurate to say that it
contained feminist ideas. As the title indicates,
Macaulay's work is epistolary, a series of letters written
by an unnamed correspondent to a fictive Hortensia outlining
an educational program for young people, examining earlier
societies, and making "Observations on Religious and
Metaphysical Subjects." Katherine Rogers argues that
Macaulay "devoted as much space to banal religious
discussion and conventional moralizing as did [the
ostensibly anti-feminist] Hannah More" (204), and indeed
only a few of the more than 500 pages of the work are
explicitly devoted to discussing and making recommendations
for the plight of women. Nonetheless, Wollstonecraft, who
reviewed the work for the *Analytical*, was impressed by what
Macaulay had to say about women, and she drew on Macaulay's
ideas when she wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

Fundamental to Macaulay's discussion about women is her
belief in the primacy of nurture over nature in the
development of human beings. She writes to Hortensia:

I have often smiled, when I have heard persons
talk of their natural propensities; for I am convinced, that these have undergone so great a change by domestic education, and the converse of the world, that their primitive modes are not in many beings even discernable [sic]. No; there is not a virtue or a vice that belongs to humanity, which we do not make ourselves; and if their qualities should be hostile to our happiness, we may ascribe their malignancy to human agency (10-11).

She later tells Hortensia that "all those vices and imperfections which have been generally regarded as inseparable from the female character, do not in any manners proceed from sexual causes, but are entirely the effects of situation and education" (202). Macaulay also takes issue with the prevailing view that there are sexual differences in the human character, an opinion which she says that "a close observation of Nature, and a more accurate way of reasoning would disprove" (204). She claims that virtue and vice are the same in both sexes because "there is but one rule for the conduct of all rational beings" (201). Consequently, she contends against the idea of male superiority and states that "a wise and just Providence [did not] intend to make the condition of slavery an unalterable law of female nature" (206).
Macaulay maintains that the education of women and their civil and legal powerlessness "must necessarily tend to corrupt and debilitate both the powers of mind and body" (207). In reference to the body, she censures the convention that girls should be required to suppress their natural vivacity and desire for locomotion and asks, "How many nervous diseases have been contracted? How much feebleness of constitution has been acquired, by forming a false idea of female excellence, and endeavouring by our art, to bring Nature to the ply of our imagination" (47). She later adds that

From a false notion of beauty and delicacy, their system of nerves is depraved before they come out of their nursery; and this kind of depravity has more influence over the mind, and consequently over morals, than is commonly apprehended. (207)

In reference to the mind, Macaulay further condemns the "degrading difference in the culture of the understanding, which has prevailed for several centuries in all European societies" (49) and which stems from a dislike of female pedantry; and she is critical of a female education which stresses the acquisition of accomplishments, like dancing, music, and drawing. She exclaims, "I would dispense with some of those dazzling accomplishments, in order to preserve
to [women] that rank which God has given them among his creatures" (62).

Macaulay also examines the ways in which women are morally corrupted by their education. She writes,

[T]heir moral education is, if possible, more absurd than their physical. The principles and nature of virtue, which is never properly explained to boys, is kept quite a mystery to girls. They are told indeed, that they must abstain from those vices which are contrary to their personal happiness, or they will be regarded as criminals, both by God and man; but all the higher parts of rectitude, every thing that ennobles our being, and that renders us both innoxious and useful, is either not taught, or is taught in such a manner as to leave no proper impression on the mind. (207-208)

Instead, females are taught that the highest honor they can attain is male admiration, and "whilst this is considered their sumnum bonum, and the beauty of their persons the chief desideratum of men, Vanity, and its companion Envy, must taint, in their characters, every native and acquired excellence" (208). According to Macaulay, the problem is compounded by women's lack of civil rights and by writers like Rousseau who tell women that they can exercise power by
cultivating their beauty and their subtlety, with which
nature has compensated them for their lack of strength.
Deprived of political power, women are thus encouraged to
intrigue for personal power and importance by means of
coquetry.

Macaulay recognized both the insidious appeal and the
paradoxes inherent in Rousseau's doctrine of femininity, and
she cites Rousseau as the most conspicuous proponent of
sexual difference in character and says, "never did
enthusiasm and the love of paradox, those enemies to
philosophical disquisition, appear in more strong opposition
to plain sense than in Rousseau's definition of this
difference" (205). She explains that Rousseau began with
the assumption that Nature intended the subjection of women
to men and that consequently women must be intellectually
inferior. However, he claimed that Nature also bestowed
attractive graces and an insinuating address on women to
turn the balance in their favor because man is apt to play
the capricious tyrant. Says Macaulay, "Thus nature, in a
giddy mood, recedes from her purposes, and subjects
prerogative to an influence which must produce confusion and
disorder in the system of human affairs" (205-206).
According to Macaulay, perceiving the weakness in his
argument, Rousseau

has made up a moral person of the union of the
two sexes, which for contradiction and absurdity, outdoes every metaphysical riddle that was ever formed in school. In short, it is not reason, it is not wit; it is pride and sensuality that speak in Rousseau, and in this instance, has lowered the man of genius to the licentious pedant. (206)

Macaulay does state that "the two sexes are so reciprocally dependant on one another, that, till both are reformed there is no expecting excellence in either" (216). However, like Astell before her and Wollstonecraft after her, Macaulay asserts that women are independent moral agents, and should not be deprived of the means to acquire perfection, upon which their state of happiness in another world might depend. Consequently, she argues for co-education, exhorting parents to educate their offspring together and to let their children's studies and their sports be the same. She recommends teaching women virtue by giving them rational—and practical—reasons why they should be virtuous. And she hints at additional civil rights:

and when the sex has been taught wisdom by education, they will be glad to give up indirect influence for rational privileges; and the precarious sovereignty of an hour enjoyed with the meanest and most infamous of the species, for
those established rights which, independent of accidental circumstances, may afford protection to the whole sex. (215)

Nonetheless, like Astell, she does not agitate for political rights for women and she believes that women need a rational education to recognize their duty, and like Wollstonecraft she stresses the social advantages to be gained from educating women:

a mind, irradiated by the clear light of wisdom, must be equal to every task which reason imposes on it. The social duties in the interesting characters of daughter, wife, and mother, will be but ill performed by ignorance and levity; and the domestic converse of husband and wife, the alternative of an enlightened or an unenlightened companion cannot be indifferent to any man of taste and true knowledge. (49)

Clearly, in many respects Astell, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft shared similar views about the nature and condition of women. Each writer offered religious arguments in favor of the perfectability of females. They contended against the belief that women should be slaves to men. They argued that women were rational creatures who should aspire to more than pleasing men, an aspiration that could lead to their degradation. They asserted that female folly and
vices were the product of female situation and education. Each believed strongly in the efficacy of education to eradicate intellectual and moral differences between men and women—differences that they refused to recognize as innate. And they all averred that men were responsible for the very faults in women of which men were so critical, and they challenged male writers who argued for the subjection of women.

In the Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft takes her cue from Macaulay in presenting and refuting arguments by Rousseau and other writers who she believed had embraced his ideas about women. In Chapter II, Wollstonecraft first takes issue with the contention of conduct book writers that certain traits are natural in women. Responding to Gregory's assertion that a fondness for dress is "natural" to women, she says,

I am unable to comprehend what either he or Rousseau mean, when they frequently use this indefinite term. If they told us that in a pre-existent state the soul was fond of dress, and brought this inclination with it into a new body, I should listen to them with a half smile, as I often do when I hear a rant about innate elegance. --But if he only meant to say that the exercise of the faculties will produce this fondness--I deny
it.—It is not natural; but arises like false ambition in men, from a love of power. (28)

In Chapter III, she explores the issue further and says that several writers have echoed Rousseau's claims that females "have naturally, that is from their birth, independent of education, a fondness for dolls, dressing, and talking" (42). Wollstonecraft maintains that such remarks "are so puerile as not to merit a serious refutation," but she does point out that Rousseau has ignored the daily activities of young girls and the examples they receive, which would lead them to such activities. She is particularly contemptuous of Rousseau's conclusion that females are naturally coquettes, and she attributes such a claim to Rousseau's imagination which fueled his "inflammable senses" (42).

Asserting (undoubtedly with some accuracy since she ran a girls' school from 1784 to 1786) that she has "probably had an opportunity of observing more girls in their infancy than J.J. Rousseau" (43), she argues that if young girls were allowed to run wild, they would care little for dolls and that "Girls and boys in short, would play harmlessly together if the distinction of sex was not inculcated long before nature makes any difference" (43). In her final chapter, she plays upon the meaning of the word natural, arguing that it is "very natural" for women to be fond of dress—
for they have not any business to interest them, have not a taste for literature, and they find politics dry, because they have not acquired a love for mankind by turning their thoughts to the grand pursuits that exalt the human race, and promote general happiness. (187)

These defects, however, Wollstonecraft attributes to "want of cultivation of mind" (187).

Wollstonecraft was very conscious of the power of language to shape attitudes, and she dissected some of the conduct-book rhetoric to show how the writers used key terms, like natural, to define and contain women. She examines the word gentleness, which recurs often in conduct literature, and says that "Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering, are such amiable Godlike qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them" (33). When applied to God the word connotes both grandeur and condescension, but, she argues, what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. Abject as this picture appears, it is
the portrait of an accomplished woman, according to the received opinion of female excellence, separated by specious reasoners from human excellence. (33)

Another word that she redefines is modesty. She alludes to "Rousseau's and Dr. Gregory's advice respecting modesty, strangely miscalled!", and she criticizes their desire that a wife "leave it in doubt whether sensibility or weakness led her to her husband's arms," stating that "—The woman is immodest who can let the shadow of such a doubt remain in her husband's mind a moment" (125). She differentiates modesty from bashfulness and humility, and she argues that the word has two meanings: "that purity of mind, which is the effect of chastity" and "a simplicity of character that leads us to form a just opinion of ourselves, equally distant from vanity or presumption, though by no means incompatible with a lofty consciousness of our own dignity" (121-122). According to Wollstonecraft's latter definition of the word, a modest woman is not blushingly bashful nor self-abasingly humble, and she is certainly not guilty of dissimulation in her relations with her husband. Wollstonecraft insists that

the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will, by managing her family and practicing various virtues, become the friend,
and not the humble dependent of her husband; and if she, by possessing such substantial qualities, merit his regard, she will not find it necessary to conceal her affection, nor to pretend to an unnatural coldness of constitution to excite her husband's passions. (29)

Wollstonecraft also takes exception to the term masculine, under the rubric of which are placed such traits as strength, assertiveness, resolution, courage, and rationality, but which takes on negative connotations when the conduct-book writers apply it to women. In response to women who are afraid of being inveighed against as "masculine," she says

if it be against the imitation of manly virtues, or, more properly speaking, the attainment of those talents and virtues, the exercise of which ennobles the human character, and which raise females in the scale of animal beings, when they are comprehensively termed mankind;--all those who view them with a philosophic eye must, I should think, wish with me, that they may every day grow more and more masculine. (8)

She responds to Rousseau's threat that if women are educated like men, the more they resemble men the less power they
will have over men: "This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men; but over themselves" (62).

**Sensibility** is the word that most excites Wollstonecraft's ire because Rousseau and others, in arguing for the superiority of man,

to soften the argument, . . . have laboured to prove, with chivalrous generosity, that the sexes ought not to be compared; man was made to reason, woman to feel: and that together, flesh and spirit, they make the most perfect whole, by blending happily reason and sensibility into one character. (63)

Wollstonecraft disagrees with this theory of male-female complementarity, which she claims has been used to keep women in ignorance and subjection. She gives Dr. Johnson's definition of **sensibility**: "'quickness of sensation; quickness of perception; delicacy'" and exclaims "I discern not a trace of the image of God in either sensation or matter. . . . [I]ntellect dwells not there" (63). Her arguments are that "if woman be allowed to have an immortal soul, she must have, as the employment of life, an understanding to improve" (63) and "that reason is absolutely necessary to enable a woman to perform any duty properly" (64). And she repeats "that sensibility is not
Wollstonecraft insists that "Without knowledge there can be no morality" (63). And she contends against those like Rousseau who argued that "As authority ought to regulate the religion of the women, it is not so needful to explain to them the reasons for their belief, as lay down precisely the tenets they are to believe" (87). According to Wollstonecraft, a rational foundation for religious faith was a right—if not an obligation—of humanity, and Rousseau's injunction that a daughter's religion should be that of her mother and a wife's that of her husband meant that "The rights of humanity have been thus confined to the male line from Adam downwards" (87).

Wollstonecraft also objects to "blind obedience" to parents, "for the absurd duty, too often inculcated, of obeying a parent only on account of his being a parent, shackles the mind, and prepares it for a slavish submission to any power but reason" (153). She notes that girls "are more kept down by their parents, in every sense of the word, than boys" and that "thus taught slavishly to submit to their parents, they are prepared for the slavery of marriage" (155), or they become tyrants because blind submission weakens the faculties and renders their tempers imperious or abject. She asserts that

Children cannot, ought not, to be taught to make
allowance for the faults of their parents, because every such allowance weakens the force of reason in their minds, and makes them still more indulgent to their own. (156)

Finally, although Wollstonecraft is an advocate of chastity in women, she argues that the constant injunctions to women to maintain a good reputation insidiously undermine morality "by the attention being turned to the shew [sic] instead of the substance" (135). And she disputes the idea that chastity and honor are synonymous:

The leading principles which run through all my disquisition, would render it unnecessary to enlarge on this subject, if a constant attention to keep the varnish of the character fresh, and in good condition, were not often inculcated as the sum total of female duty; if rules to regulate the behavior, and to preserve the reputation, did not too frequently supersede moral obligations. But, with respect to the reputation, the attention is confined to a single virtue—chastity. If the honour of a woman, as it is absurdly called, be safe, she may neglect every social duty; nay, ruin her family by gaming and extravagance; yet still present a shameless front—for truly she is an honourable woman! (136-137)
She adds that women should learn "the real virtue of chastity" because "to little respect has that woman a claim, on the score of modesty, though her reputation be white as the driven snow, who smiles on the libertine whilst she spurns the victims of his lawless appetites and their own folly" (139).

It is clear that Wollstonecraft did not view women as angels, but it is also clear that she believed that the blame rested largely with men. She asserts that "all the causes of female weakness, as well as depravity, which I have already enlarged on, branch out of one grand cause—want of chastity in men" (138). An education that prepared women to be only sexual objects or "gentle domestic brutes" (20) stifled all potential and deprived them of the opportunity to develop as rational human beings. Wollstonecraft also believed that conduct book writers helped to canonize this system, and she asserted that "The pernicious tendency of those books, in which writers insidiously degrade the sex whilst they prostrate before their personal charms, cannot be too often or too severely exposed" (91-92).

When the A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published in 1792, with the exception of a negative notice in the Critical Review, "the first reviews and recorded
reactions to the work were generally favourable" (Janes 297). According to R.M. Janes, "Most reviewers took it to be a sensible treatise on female education and ignored those recommendations in the work that might unsettle the relations between the sexes" (298). However, after the appearance of Godwin's memoirs of his wife in 1798, Wollstonecraft's name was brandished "at feminists as evidence of the horrific consequences of female emancipation" and "The furious clamorings of 1798 quite overwhelmed the calm approbation of 1792 in both intensity and duration" (Janes 297).

In the biography, Godwin, apparently ingenuously, told of Wollstonecraft's infatuation with the married Henry Fuseli, her affair with Gilbert Imlay and the subsequent birth of an illegitimate daughter, her two attempts at suicide, her pre-marital involvement with Godwin himself, and the pregnancy which led the couple to marry. The memoirs also "praised her (not altogether accurately) for her rejection of Christianity" (Tomalin 232). According to Claire Tomalin, "The public's reaction was made up of fascination and horror in more or less equal parts" (233). And "People who were prepared to consider the doctrines of A Vindication seriously simply could not swallow the account of Mary's character that emerged from the latter books [the
memoirs, her letters to Imlay, and an unfinished novel *Maria, or the Wrongs of Woman*, all of which appeared posthumously]" (Tomalin 233). Tomalin is only one among many to note that Godwin not only did a terrible disservice to Wollstonecraft but also struck a severe blow at the feminist cause.

The *ad hominem* argument prevailed. According to Margaret Kirkham,

> Everything written on the subject of female emancipation for the next two decades, if not for much longer, has to be understood in the light of public reaction to the *Memoirs*, and the violent personal abuse which they provoked. Wollstonecraft was now branded as a whore and an atheist, and other women who dared to show sympathy with her ideas could not expect to escape calumny. (49)

In addition, reactionary responses to the revolution in France were in the ascendant, and the radical and revolutionary fervor of the early 1790s waned as the French Revolution pursued its disappointing course. As Mary Poovey has noted, it was during this period that the idea of "the Proper Lady" fully evolved "into the etherealized Angel of the House," and women were adjured to become the saviors
"of all that is valuable in England" (33). Many years later, Virginia Woolf was to tell of how she had to kill the "Angel in the House" in order to be a writer, but her predecessors, unable to kill the angel, often used the act of writing as a means of self-expression. Poovey tells us that

In addition to the act of writing itself, women created opportunities for self-expression through strategies of indirection, obliqueness, and doubling that were the imaginative counterparts of the paradoxical behavior they were encouraged to cultivate in everyday life. (42)

Such strategies can be found in the novels of Jane Austen, and it is Kirkham's contention that

Austen's subject-matter is the central subject-matter of rational, or Enlightenment feminism and that her viewpoint on the moral nature and status of women, female education, marriage, authority and the family, and the representation of women in literature is strikingly similar to that shown by Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. (xi)

Austen was long viewed as a conservative—even a reactionary—in her acceptance of the values of church and
state. However, an examination of the work of Mary Astell demonstrates that a writer can be both a conservative and an advocate for women. Writing of Astell, Ruth Perry says:

> It is as if Jane Austen were preaching to a church full of women, teasing them, wheedling, explaining, flattering, cajoling. If Austen had given her conservative heroine of *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price, a freer rein—had let her speak to her heart's content—this is what she would have sounded like. (102)

Although I think that Perry is wrong about the similarity between Astell and Fanny Price, the language of the narrator of *Mansfield Park* and the other Austen novels is strongly reminiscent of that of Astell—in its perspicuity, its irony, and its wit. Perry adds that Astell's influence "can be traced in the novels of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, and Virginia Woolf, in their efforts to present heroines with sufficient spiritual and psychological strength to hold their own in a patriarchal society" (329).

Despite the political differences between the Tory Astell and the Jacobin Wollstonecraft, it is clear that they shared many ideas about the situation, character, and potential of women, and a study of Austen's novels in the context of the ideas of Astell, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft...
will disclose Austen's empathy with many of their views about women. Poovey says of Austen,

Writing from inside the ideology of propriety, Austen gradually perfected a form of irony that enabled her to present her personal values in such a way as to make them seem natural correctives to the restrictions of decorum. Simultaneously part and apart from her society's values, Jane Austen eventually achieved the freedom necessary not only to identify this ideology but--always tactfully and with ladylike restraint--to criticize the way it shaped and deformed women's desires. (47)

As the following chapters will demonstrate, Austen responded with antipathy to the two stereotypes of women delineated in the conduct literature and created female characters--both protagonists and antagonists--and situations that illustrate the speciousness of the arguments about women presented in the conduct literature.
"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren" and sisters "to dwell together in unity!" Precious ointment is not more grateful to the smell, nor morning dew more refreshing to the sight, than domestic love is to the soul. Represent to yourselves a numerous young family, free from care and animosity, full of reverence for their maker and their parents, ambitious to please and to excel, in a word, pious, dutiful, friendly, happy; where good humour and good sense contribute to the ease and entertainment of all, while those agreeable diversities of temper and understanding that take place among them serve, like discords in music, to carry on the intellectual harmony. (Fordyce II, 138)

The preceding passage appears in Sermon XI of Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women*, and it provides an example of what Mary Wollstonecraft terms Fordyce's "sentimental rant" (*Vindication* 93). It seems likely that Jane Austen shared Wollstonecraft's opinion of Fordyce, for in *Pride and Prejudice* she associates Fordyce's sermons with Mr. Collins, one of her most foolish characters, who is subject to "the
self-conceit of a weak head" (48). Furthermore, the Bennet family hardly represents a domestic enclave of good humor and good sense; conjugal happiness, parental responsibility, and filial reverence are largely absent in the household. I would suggest that Austen provides this ironic contrast to Fordyce's sentimental effusions to demonstrate that familial discord and disharmony are the inevitable consequence of the female education advocated by Fordyce and other conduct-book writers. In fact, if one examines the novel in relationship to conduct books for and about women, one can see that Jane Austen's views, like those of Wollstonecraft, diverged widely from those expressed by Fordyce et al. Her heroine, Elizabeth Bennet (of whom she was to write in a letter to her sister, Cassandra, "I must confess that I think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, and how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like her at least I do not know" (Jane Austen's Letters 297)), is in many respects the antithesis of the conduct book ideal; and the characters and activities of other female characters in the novel illustrate the weakness of the conventional wisdom disseminated by conduct book writers about women.

In Volume I, Chapter XIV of Pride and Prejudice, Mr. Bennet, his appetite for listening to absurdity satiated, invites his visiting relative Mr. Collins to read aloud to
the ladies. "After some deliberation" (47), Mr. Collins selects Fordyce's sermons, much to the consternation of his two youngest female cousins. He begins to read "with very monotonous solemnity" (47), but before he has read three pages he is interrupted by the bold Lydia, who is more interested in redcoats than in sermons on female conduct. Although the two oldest Bennet daughters attempt to apologize for their sister's rudeness, Mr. Collins is offended and lays the book aside, saying,

"I have often observed how little young ladies are interested by books of a serious stamp, though written solely for their benefit. It amazes me, I confess;--for certainly, there can be nothing so advantageous to them as instruction. But I will no longer importune my young cousin." (48)

Chapter XIV ends soon after, and Chapter XV begins with the narrator informing readers that "Mr. Collins was not a sensible man" and summing up his character as "altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self importance and humility" (48).

Linda Hunts says that

We cannot assume that Austen laughed at [Fordyce's sermons] because she makes it the choice of her most foolish male character; after all, Lydia, perhaps her most mindless female character, "gaped
as he opened the volume," and rudely interrupted his reading. Since Lydia is sorely in need of Fordyce's advice, her response is delightfully ironic. (23)

However, I would argue that it is plain that by having the foolish Mr. Collins approve of Fordyce's sermons, Jane Austen is demonstrating her disdain for a work, which, rather than being written solely for the benefit of young ladies, attempts to make young ladies more tractable and pleasing to men. Fordyce states that since "the state of matrimony is necessary to the support, order, and comfort of society," and since women will be subjected to "solicitude and pain" in marriage, they need to form "strong and almost unconquerable attachments." Consequently, he asks,

To produce these, is it not fit they should be peculiarly sensible to the attention and regards of the men? Upon the same ground, does it not seem agreeable to the purposes of Providence that the securing this attention, and those regards, should be a principal aim? (I, 115)

Thus, while Lydia's behavior is undoubtedly in need of amendment, Fordyce's advice would effect no moral or intellectual improvement in Lydia. In fact, ironically, she is a typical product of a female education, which actually fosters in women the very traits it is attempting to sup-
press, by stressing the importance of matrimony and the
need of females to be sensible to and to secure male
attention.

Although Mary Wollstonecraft concedes that there are
"many sensible observations" (Vindication 93) in them, she
says of Fordyce's sermons, "I should instantly dismiss them
from my pupil's [library], if I wished to strengthen her
understanding, by leading her to form sound principles on a
broad basis" (92-93). Wollstonecraft's objections to
Fordyce's work were twofold: She believed that it was
designed to "hunt every spark of nature out of [a girl's]
composition, melting every human quality into female
meekness and artificial grace" (93); and she was critical of
Fordyce's "affected" style--his "declamatory periods" (93)
and his "artful flattery and sexual compliments" (94), which
could only lead to "vanity and folly" (95) in women. She
says of the work, "Throughout there is a display of cold
artificial feelings, and that parade of sensibility which
boys and girls should be taught to despise as the sure marks
of a little vain mind" (94). She might have been describing
Mr. Collins.

There are, in fact, a number of intriguing
correspondences between the image of the implied author that
emerges from Fordyce's rhetoric, and the character of Mr.
Collins—correspondences which suggest that Austen may have had Fordyce in mind when she created Mr. Collins. Like Fordyce, Mr. Collins is a clergyman. Like Fordyce, Mr. Collins is given to declamatory periods; Austen calls them "pompous nothings" (49). They are both inclined to use clichés. Fordyce tells his female readers that their best "emblem... is the smiling form of Peace, robed in white and bearing a branch of olive" (II, 182); Mr. Collins, in his first letter to Mr. Bennet, expresses the hope that the Bennet family will not "reject the offered olive branch" (43).

Fordyce, although he claims that his character and principles are averse to flattery (I, 16), defends his "style of peculiar tenderness" (II, 232) in addressing his readers, claiming that such an approach is more conducive to his goals than rudeness or rigor. In his twelfth sermon, he commends the Queen of England for her affability, goodness, and meekness, and states, "But certain it is, that from those who are placed in the higher walks of life, a little condescension, a little favour, gives great delight" (II, 198). Like Fordyce, Mr. Collins is prone to artful flattery to promote his own interests, and he delights in the condescension of high rank. He tells Mr. Bennet that "he had never in his life witnessed such behaviour in a person of rank--such affability and condescension, as he had
himself experienced from Lady Catherine [De Bourgh]" (46). He is so proud of the trite panegyric he addresses to Lady Catherine that he repeats some of it to Mr. Bennet. He informs Mr. Bennet that he is "happy on every occasion to offer those little delicate compliments which are always acceptable to the ladies" (47), thus demonstrating his acceptance of the stereotype that women are vain and susceptible to flattery— a stereotype that Austen undermines by having the Bennet daughters largely disregard Mr. Collins and his flattery. When Mr. Bennet asks him if the compliments are spontaneous or prepared in advance, Mr. Collins admits that "though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible" (47). Fordyce frequently makes use of epithets like "fair pupils," "beloved hearers," "amiable hearers," and "dear clients" when addressing females. Mr. Collins does the same, referring to Mr. Bennet's "amiable daughters," to Mrs. Bennet's "fair daughter Elizabeth," and to the Bennet's "amiable neighbor, Miss Lucas," who subsequently becomes his "dear Charlotte." Like Fordyce, he rarely speaks to or about women without appending some flattering adjective.
Wollstonecraft accuses Fordyce of cold, artificial feelings, and Mr. Collins betrays no warmth or naturalness in his matrimonial endeavors. Within three days, he proposes to two women, imbued more by a desire to please his patroness, Lady Catherine, than by any attachment to either prospective mate. In his lengthy preamble to his proposal to Elizabeth Bennet, he speaks of being "run away with by my feelings," a claim that nearly prompts Elizabeth to laughter, in light of his "solemn composure" (74). When Elizabeth rejects his offer, his vanity and self-complacency will not allow him to believe her to be serious, and he tells her, "in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications" (76). The same admixture of flattery, condescension, and intimidation characterizes Fordyce's rhetoric, as in the following passage:

Who is not shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman, that wants to dazzle by the supposed superiority of her powers? If you, my fair ones, have knowledge and capacity? [sic] let it be seen, by your not affecting to show them, that you have something much more valuable, humility and wisdom. (I, 134)
Fordyce's tendency to paradoxical generalizations about the female sex is also echoed in Mr. Collins's interpretation of Elizabeth's rejection of his proposal. Although he has had more than five weeks to study Elizabeth's actual character at close quarters and has noted her "wit and vivacity" (74), he attributes her refusal to "bashful modesty and the genuine delicacy of her character" (77), yet concludes that she is trying to increase his love "by suspense, according to the usual practice of elegant females" (76). When Mrs. Bennet unguardedly tells him that Elizabeth "is a very headstrong foolish girl" (77), Mr. Collins is equally ready to accept this misrepresentation of the intended companion of his future life--demonstrating that he has a very confused idea of both the practice and character of elegant females.

Fordyce delineates the faults of temper and character in wives which are a life-long plague on husbands and concludes that "nor can any charm of understanding, or of person compensate the want of soft compliance, and meek submission, in a woman" (II, 203). Mr. Collins tells Mrs. Bennet that he "naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state" and that Elizabeth, "if liable to such defects of temper, . . . . could not contribute much to my felicity" (77). Therefore, instead of persevering in his
courtship of Elizabeth, he transfers his attentions and offers his hand and his humble abode to the more pragmatic Charlotte Lucas. Austen shows that Charlotte's happiness in the marriage state will depend on the compensations offered by home and housekeeping, parish and poultry (149); and the soft compliance that she can counterfeit and the guile that she can employ in order to tolerate a man whom she deems as neither sensible nor agreeable and whose society she finds irksome (86).

The similarities between Fordyce's and Mr. Collins' views of female misconduct and its consequences are also reflected in the latter part of the novel. Fordyce tells his readers to remember "how tender a thing a woman's reputation is; how hard to preserve, and when lost how impossible to recover" (I, 32), and he also states that "one young lady going astray shall subject her relations to such discredit and distress, as the united good conduct of all her brothers and sisters, supposing them numerous, shall scarce be able to repair!" (I, 12). In his letter to Mr. Bennet after Lydia's elopement with Wickham, Mr. Collins, full of self-congratulation that he is not allied by marriage to the Bennets, offers his sympathy "in your present distress, which must be of the bitterest kind, because proceeding from a cause which no time can remove"
(203). He adds that "this false step in one daughter, will be injurious to the fortunes of all the others, for who, as lady Catherine herself condescendingly says, will connect themselves with such a family" (203). Ironically, Austen belies Mr. Collins's pessimism and Lady Catherine's condescending pronouncement by having the dowager's nephew and his close friend subsequently connect themselves with the Bennet family.

Austen depicts Mr. Collins as a sycophant and a fool, and she undermines his conventional views of the world, particularly as they relate to women. He is deluded by wealth, rank, and power in his aggrandizement of Lady Catherine and her daughter; he is blind to Elizabeth's virtues and her true character; he is unable to discern his wife's contempt for him; he is wrong about the consequences of Lydia's misconduct—and he believes that works like Fordyce's sermons are advantageous to young ladies. Criticism of Fordyce and his work is implicit in Austen's characterization of Mr. Collins. Elizabeth tells Jane that "Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrow-minded, silly man" (94). She might have been describing Fordyce.

Mr. Collins, who is Mr. Bennet's cousin, is not the only silly member of the Bennet clan, and the diversities of temper and understanding in the Bennet household are neither agreeable nor harmonious. When his two oldest daughters
return from their sojourn at Netherfield, Mr. Bennet is genuinely glad to see them because "The evening conversation when they were all assembled, had lost much of its animation, and almost all its sense, by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth" (41). Mrs. Bennet is described as "a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper" whose husband is "very little otherwise indebted [to her], than as her ignorance and folly contributed to his amusement" (162). She is also a source of discomfiture to both Jane and Elizabeth and of embarrassment to Elizabeth. Mr. Bennet tells Elizabeth that she has "three very silly sisters" (159): Mary is sententious; Kitty is peevish; and Lydia is audacious. Elizabeth herself says of Kitty and Lydia that they are "Vain, ignorant, idle, and absolutely uncontrouled [sic]!" (159). And at the Netherfield ball, to the mortified Elizabeth,

it appeared, that had her family made an agreement to expose themselves as much as they could during the evening, it would have been impossible for them to play their parts with more spirit, or finer success. (71).

In Chapter I, I noted Fordyce's admonitions to his female readers on the subject of duty to parents. His argument is that "so profound is the conviction implanted by nature of the sacredness of filial piety" that it should
"demand submission in every case, where your duty to God or your peace of mind does not interfere" (I, 135); and he further states that "the want of principles in your parents will not dissolve the ties of duty" (I, 131). Mary Wollstonecraft, on the other hand, calls it a "weakness" to continue "relying almost implicitly on the opinion of a respected parent... even when matured reason convinces the child that his father is not the wisest man in the world" (Vindication 153). She argues against submission to parents simply because they are parents and making allowances for the faults of parents, claiming that to do either weakens the force of reason in an individual. On the basis of her characterization of father-daughter relationships, Austen would appear to have agreed more with Wollstonecraft than Fordyce.

Austen makes it clear that the folly of the younger Bennet daughters can largely be attributed to Mr. and Mrs. Bennet's lack of sound parental judgment. Lydia is described as "a favorite with her mother, whose affection had brought her into public at an early age," (31) and when she decamps with Wickham, Mrs. Bennet, typically, takes to her bed and complains "of her own sufferings and ill usage; blaming everybody but the person to whose ill judging indulgence the errors of her daughter must be principally
owing" (196). Nonetheless, the largest share of the blame belongs to Mr. Bennet. Mary Burgan, who sees in Austen's novels an "implicit critique of the patriarchal hierarchy as a proper foundation for social organization," says,

Mr. Bennet's retreat from familial responsibility—his leaving the field almost exclusively to the exertions of his wife—has meant that the younger three daughters have grown up to be silly and useless girls. They, like his wife, have become too enjoyable as objects of Mr. Bennet's irony to be given up by him to a long process of education into good sense. . . . (540)

Mr. Bennet is perhaps the most ambiguous of all of Austen's characters. He is characterized as an "odd mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve, and caprice" (3). An intelligent man, Mr. Bennet nonetheless falls prey in his youth to the charms of a pretty face and finds himself yoked for life to the inveterately foolish Mrs. Bennet. This youthful lapse in judgment causes him to seek solace in his studies, sardonic humor, and the affection of his second—and most engaging—daughter, Elizabeth. Because of his preference for Elizabeth, who is also the daughter most like him in terms of wit and intelligence, and because Mrs. Bennet is so insufferable, it is initially easy to overlook Mr. Bennet's shortcomings as husband and father. Margaret
Kirkham calls him "Austen's most lovable and sympathetically defective patriarch" (31). Kenneth Moler says that he "gets a number of the best lines in the novel and, in many instances. . . , has his author's approval" (22-23).

Moler does qualify this assertion, however, and later he adds that Mr. Bennet's social irreverence gets its comeuppance, for its concomitant proves to be social irresponsibility. Mr. Bennet, we know, has never been an adequate head of his family: he has failed to manage his estate in such a way as to accumulate a financial provision for his wife and daughters in the event of his death, and his only contribution to his daughters' education has been to undermine what little authority their air-headed mother has with them. (32)

Mr. Bennet's most flagrantly irresponsible act is in allowing his youngest daughter, Lydia, to follow the militia to Brighton—against the advice of Elizabeth, who warns him, "If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the present business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the
most determined flirt that ever made herself and her family ridiculous." (159)

Mr. Bennet ignores this warning and justifies his acquiescence to the Brighton plan by explaining to Elizabeth, "Lydia will never be easy till she has exposed herself in some public place or other, and we can never expect her to do it with so little expense or inconvenience to her family as under the present circumstances" (159). It is perhaps ironic that no little expense and inconvenience to her family ensue from Lydia's trip to Brighton, and Mr. Bennet is proved very wrong indeed. Mary Poovey says that

Mr. Bennet is finally a failure, for he is lax when it comes to the social duties that are most important to the Bennet family as a whole and to Elizabeth in particular. Like Elizabeth's society in general, Mr. Bennet's character is a moral vacuum; his "indolence and the little attention he has [given] to what was going forward in his family". . . finally permit, if they do not encourage, Lydia's rebellion. Mr. Bennet tries to make light of his moral irresponsibility by describing social relations as an amusing game. "For what do we live," he asks rhetorically, "but to make sport for our neighbours, and laugh at them in our turn?". . . But the pain that
unthinking Lydia visits on the rest of the family proves conclusively how serious—and how selfish—his evasion really is. (198)

Although critics like Burgan, Moler, and Poovey allude to Mr. Bennet's social and moral irresponsibility and point out his more egregious errors as husband and father, Moler can still argue that the character often has his author's approval. Certainly, Austen shares Mr. Bennet's irreverent wit, but she employs hers constructively to point up social and moral irresponsibility—not indiscriminately and selfishly, as Mr. Bennet does. Disappointed in his marriage, Mr. Bennet makes no attempt to correct the follies and foibles of his wife and younger children, but instead, like a "true philosopher" (162), derives amusement from them. Burgan notes the "personal meanness" (543) of Mr. Bennet's actions near the conclusion of the novel, but I would contend that throughout the novel, Austen delineates in Mr. Bennet's treatment of his wife and daughters a pattern of teasing, tantalizing, and withholding that is meant to be seen as reprehensible.

At the beginning of the novel, when Mrs. Bennet asks Mr. Bennet to call on Mr. Bingley, he apparently demurs. However, we are told that "He had always intended to visit [Mr. Bingley], though to the last always assuring his wife
that he should not go" (3). Even after the visit has been paid, he does not immediately inform his wife and daughters, teasing Mrs. Bennet with references to Bingley and provoking her into an expostulation against their new neighbor before he informs her that the acquaintance has been made. In another instance, although he has had Mr. Collins' letter for about a month, he does not inform his family of his cousin's impending visit until the day of Mr. Collins' arrival. After Mr. Collins proposes to and is rejected by Elizabeth, Mrs. Bennet rushes to her husband to enlist his assistance in making Elizabeth marry the pompous clergyman. Without giving his wife any indication of his intentions, he summons Elizabeth, and offers her an ultimatum:

An unhappy alternative is before you Elisabeth. From this day you must be a stranger to one of your parents.--Your mother will never see you again if do not marry Mr. Collins, and I will never see you again if you do. (78)

Like Elizabeth, one cannot "but smile at such a conclusion of such a beginning" (78), but upon reflection one perceives the impropriety and cruelty of Mr. Bennet's behavior in undermining and ridiculing his wife in front of his daughter. When Mrs. Bennet is canvassing for a family trip to Brighton,

Elizabeth saw directly that her father had not the
smallest intention of yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired of succeeding at last. (153)

During the time Mr. Bennet is in London looking for Lydia and Wickham, he does not write even a single line to his anxious family, who "knew him to be on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent, but at such a time, they had hoped for exertion" (201).

For the reader, one of the most painful scenes in the novel occurs after Mr. Bennet has received a letter from Mr. Collins warning him that a marriage between Elizabeth and Darcy would not have Lady Catherine's approbation. Unaware of Darcy's proposal and Elizabeth's changed sentiments, Mr. Bennet invites Elizabeth to laugh with him over the apparent absurdity of a union between herself and Darcy. For Elizabeth, "It was necessary to laugh, when she would rather have cried" (251); she is mortified by her father's assumption of Darcy's indifference. Once again, however, Mr. Bennet is to be proved wrong, and there is evidence of a widening gap between him and his favorite daughter.

We learn earlier in the novel, however, that Elizabeth is cognizant of the faults of her father. After Lydia leaves for Brighton, we are told that Elizabeth had never been blind to the impropriety of her
father's behavior as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful for his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavoured to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now, the disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from so ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife. (163)

Although Elizabeth's "own socially irreverent wit is part of her paternal inheritance" (Moler 33), she is eventually drawn to Darcy because he takes his responsibilities seriously. Initially, the sober Darcy seems an unlikely mate for the lively Elizabeth, and Tony Tanner says of Darcy, "He is not Benedick to Elizabeth's Beatrice" (126); however, Burgan suggests that

Elizabeth chooses a man without ready irony in her
husband; in so doing she seeks to repair the defects of her parents' marriage without rejecting her father outright, but with the wisdom gained from a diminished sense of the use of wit as a weapon against the absurdities of the world and the responsibilities of living in it. (543)

Moler also posits the idea that "Austen sets up Mr. Bennet as a sort of foil to Mr. Darcy, and Elizabeth is meant to perceive the contrast between the two men, to her moral advantage" (32). And Kirkham asserts that Austen criticizes the belief that women's problems are to be solved by benevolent patriarchs. She does this by showing patriarchal figures as at best defective, like Mr. Bennet, and at worst vicious, like General Tilney. Her heroines... solve their own problems before making marriages with men who see themselves in a fraternal, rather than patriarchal relationship as husbands. (32)

A key idea in each of these statements is that Elizabeth is a rational being capable of judicious moral judgments and choices—a capacity that eighteenth-century feminists like Wollstonecraft claimed for women yet one that conduct literature largely denied in women.

Significantly, Elizabeth Bennet fits neither of the stereotypes described in the conduct literature. Although
Fordyce insists that men want in women "a form not robust" (II, 183), we learn early in the novel that Elizabeth is not frail. When Jane is taken ill at Netherfield, anxiety for her sister impels Elizabeth to walk three miles in bad weather to be at her sister's side. She walks much of the way alone,

crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ankles [sic], dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise. (22)

And Darcy, far from being repelled, admires "the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion" (22).

Fordyce also says that he suspects that close friendship between sisters, uncompromised by envy or jealousy, is an uncommon phenomenon. Elizabeth, however, demonstrates her genuine affection for her sister in her walk to Netherfield, where she spends the night attending at her sister's bedside. She is even briefly disposed to like Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst "when she saw how much affection and solicitude they shewed for Jane" (22). She admires Jane's beauty and candor without envy and observes Bingley's growing partiality for her sister not only without jealousy
but with pleasure. At the Netherfield ball, frustrated in her expectations of personal pleasure, all her disappointment and animosity "gave way before the hope of Jane's being in the fairest way to happiness" (67). After Charlotte Lucas accepts Mr. Collins proposal, Elizabeth's disillusionment in her intimate friend's behavior, "made her turn with fonder regard to her sister, of whose rectitude and delicacy she was sure her opinion could never be shaken" (90).

Another assertion that Fordyce makes is that "the most sensible men have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female" (I, 132). Elizabeth is not only physically but mentally vigorous, and one of her most salient characteristics is her wit. She is described as having "a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous" (7); and although she tells Darcy that her first object in life is not a joke and "I hope I never ridicule what is wise or good," she adds that "Follies and nonsense, whims and inconsistencies do divert me, I own, and I laugh at them whenever I can" (39). Darcy, who is the most sensible man in Pride and Prejudice, is initially drawn to Elizabeth when he notices that her face is "rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes" (underlining mine); and even though her "manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by
their easy playfulness" (15). In a passage quoted earlier, Fordyce asks his readers "Who is not shocked by the flippant impertinence of a self-conceited woman. . .' ?" Referring to Elizabeth, a jealous Caroline Bingley twits Darcy about "that little something, bordering on conceit and impertinence, which your lady possesses" (36). And later Elizabeth herself, wanting to know why Darcy had fallen in love with her, asks him, "did you admire me for my impertinence?" Darcy, however, redefines her behavior and tells her "For the liveliness of your mind, I did" (262).

In addition to wit, Elizabeth also demonstrates what Fordyce alludes to as those "terrible" "masculine" characteristics: assertiveness and intrepidity. She is not afraid to voice her scepticism about the existence of "accomplished" women as Miss Bingley and Darcy define the accomplished woman: one who, according to Miss Bingley, has "a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages"; and "a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions"; and who, according to Darcy, "must yet add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (26). This description might have been culled from conduct literature, and Elizabeth asserts that "I never saw such a women. I never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you
describe united" (26). She is equally ready to argue for "the efficacy of poetry in driving away love" (30); to defend the right of her younger sisters to be out before their elder sisters are married— an assertion that prompts Lady Catherine to exclaim, "Upon my word, . . . you give your opinion very decidedly for so young a person" (115); to reject Darcy without equivocation and to tell him that his marriage proposal was not gentlemanlike; and later to claim her equality with Darcy as a gentleman's daughter and to refuse to promise Lady Catherine that she will never enter into an engagement with him, accusing the dowager of intimidation and insult. Tony Tanner says of Elizabeth that "She will put truth to self before truth to role" and "we see her refusing to take on the roles which people in socially superior positions attempt to impose on her" (125).

Elizabeth, however, is not without fault, but her faults allow for the climactic scene in the novel: a woman exercising her reason. In the first half of the work, she is quick to make up her mind, and although often correct in her assessments of people (Miss Bingley, Mr. Collins, and Lady Catherine De Bourgh, for instance), she is proved radically wrong in her judgments of Darcy and Wickham. Her first impressions of Darcy are justified by his pride and—more importantly—by his rudeness in rejecting her as a dancing partner "not handsome enough to tempt [him]" (7).
As she says, "I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine" (12). Nonetheless, as Marilyn Butler argues, she "quite unreasonably persists in thinking ill of Darcy, and, just as perversely, in thinking well of Wickham, even when the evidence that he is a fortune-hunter is placed before her" (207). Her responses to Wickham are from the start conditioned by his apparent preference for her and by his appearance and air. He is described as having "all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address" (50). Because Elizabeth thinks that his "very countenance may vouch for [his] being amiable" (56), she is unable to discern the impropriety of his confiding in a virtual stranger, and, already prejudiced against Darcy, she is only too ready to believe Wickham's charges against him. Poovey says of Elizabeth that "she is encouraged to credit her feelings instead of testing her perceptions against reality" (196). When Jane attempts to extenuate Darcy, Elizabeth will have none of it and insists that "there was truth in [Wickham's] looks" (60).

Elizabeth's judgments prove equally relative at other times. While she is staying at Netherfield, she comes to the defense of Bingley when Darcy accuses him of having too pliant and yielding a temper. At the time, secure in the belief of Bingley's growing affection for Jane, Elizabeth
wants to argue with Darcy for the merit of yielding "readily--easily--to the persuasion of a friend". She adds that "We may as well wait, perhaps, till the circumstance occurs, before we discuss the discretion of [Bingley's hypothetical] behaviour thereupon" (34); but when those circumstances do, in fact, occur, and Darcy contrives to persuade Bingley not to return to Netherfield and Jane, Elizabeth accuses Bingley of "Thoughtlessness, want of attention to other people's feelings, and want of resolution" (95). In another instance, she is quick to condemn her friend Charlotte when Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins' offer of marriage. Having assumed that Charlotte was very like herself, she had always chosen to take Charlotte's unromantic pronouncements on men and marriage as ironic, and when Charlotte acts on those pronouncements, Elizabeth condemns her and tells Jane,

"You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavour to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger, security for happiness." (94)

However, when Wickham begins paying court to a young woman "whose most remarkable charm" was "the sudden acquisition of ten thousand pounds," Elizabeth, as we are told, "less
clear-sighted perhaps in his case than in Charlotte's, did not quarrel with him for his wish for independence." She thought that "Nothing, on the contrary could be more natural" (104).

Austen shows us that Elizabeth is no angel, but nor is she an ass. Tanner says of her that she has "the quickest and furthest-ranging mind" (127) in the novel. Consequently, confronted with the facts in Darcy's letter, she abandons her subjective stance and adopts a position of objectivity from which she can "unfold" her "faculties" and rationally analyze the situation. Although she is reluctant to accept Darcy's account of his dealings with Wickham, she "commanded herself so far as to examine the meaning of every sentence" (141). When she has finished,

She put down the letter, weighed ever circumstance with what she meant to be impartiality—deliberated on the probability of each statement—but with little success. On both sides it was only assertion. Again she read on. But every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent, as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole. (141-142)
She then proceeds to assess Wickham's behavior in light of these new ideas—to test her own experiences against the facts that Darcy has given her—and she finally concludes "that she has been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd" (143). She says of herself,

Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself. (144)

She is also unable to deny the "justice" of Darcy's description of Jane's behavior—that she showed no "symptom of peculiar regard" (136) for Bingley—and the "merited reproach" against other members of her family because her own impressions confirm the truth of his assertions. "After wandering along the lane for two hours, giving way to every variety of thought; reconsidering events, determining probabilities, and reconciling herself as well as she could, to a change so sudden and so important" (144), she returns home fatigued. Tanner says

That there are internal expenditures of energy quite as exhausting as any bout of external action is a truth which Jane Austen, with her restricted position in a fairly immobile society, was
peculiarly able to appreciate. Elizabeth's particular ordeal is indeed a very ancient one, for she has been confronting for the first time the problematical discrepancies between appearances and reality, and the unsuspected limits of cognition. (114)

Tanner likens Elizabeth's act of recognition to that of Oedipus Rex, and it is not insignificant that she is being compared to a flawed male hero. Austen obviously did not subscribe to the idea that "woman observes, and man reasons" (Rousseau 387), and in Elizabeth she presents a female character whose feelings sometimes lead her astray but whose capacity for reasoning and self-analysis enables her to seek and find true answers and to correct her own opinions and behavior. As she tells Mr. Collins when he stubbornly persists in his suit, "Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from the heart" (76).

Tanner also says of Elizabeth that she "has a dimension of complexity, a questing awareness, [and] a mental range and depth which almost make her an isolated figure trapped in a constricting web of a small number of simple people" (126). Certainly if one compares her to her sisters, the differences are striking. The five Bennet daughters could
hardly be less alike, and in her depiction of these siblings Austen clearly demonstrates the problems of generalizing about women. She also indicates the ways in which education and situation can affect a female's character and behavior and shows the limitations of some conduct-book prescriptions and proscriptions for women.

Of the five sisters, Jane Bennet comes closest to being naturally like the conduct-book ideal: She is beautiful, modest, gentle, tractable, and—in the archaic sense of the term—candid. Elizabeth tells her,

"With your good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others! Affectation of candour is common enough;—one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design—to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better and say nothing of the bad—belongs to you alone." (9)

Jane is also characterized by "a composure of temper and a uniform cheerfulness of manner"—an amiable reserve—which conceal her "great strength of feeling" (13). Austen shows us, however, that Jane's candour, modesty, and reserve—qualities extolled by conduct book writers—are almost her undoing. Her propensity to think well of everyone allows her to be imposed upon by Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst. Her modesty convinces her that Bingley's regard was "an error of
fancy on [her] side" (93). And her reserve causes others to misinterpret her feelings.

Conduct books advised women to conceal their affections for a man until he had declared himself. Although Jane is falling in love with Bingley, Elizabeth takes pleasure in the idea that Jane's amiable reserve will "guard her from the suspicions of the impudent" and that it is "not likely to be discovered by the world in general" (13). Charlotte Lucas, more practical and in this instance more astute than Elizabeth, tells her friend,

"It may perhaps be pleasant... to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark... Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on." (14)

Of course, this conversation foreshadows events to come: even after careful scrutiny, Darcy is unable to see that Jane loves Bingley, and he is able to persuade his modest and diffident friend that Bingley's affections are not returned and keep him away from Netherfield. Although the
exigencies of the plot require this separation, and Jane is not acting by design, Austen also shows that conduct-book prescriptions can work to a woman's disadvantage.

Jane Bennet's "good sense" and good nature are not accounted for in the novel, but Mary's efforts to acquire knowledge and accomplishments are explained as a consequence of her "being the only plain one in the family" (16). Another of the many paradoxes of conduct literature was that it both extolled and belittled beauty. In a typical passage, Fordyce asks, "who so capable of delighting by the manner, yet more than by the deed itself, as a lovely young woman, whose words, and smiles, and softness, are ... , what a beautiful symphony and judicious accompaniment in music are to a well managed voice? (II, 144). However, in another sermon he states that although

There is in beauty a magic, which certainly does engage for a time the generality of beholders ... [,] this will by no means excuse the injustice of neglecting merit in those who want the advantage. Let it be remembered however, that the triumph of their rivals is commonly like that of the wicked, short. (11, 27)

And he insists that the more they are seen "External allurements are continually losing; internal attractions are continually gaining" (II, 28). Thus, he encourages females
to acquire "domestic," "elegant," and "intellectual" accomplishments, a conduct-book prescription which would explain Mary Bennet's application to her music and her reading. Nonetheless, it should be noted that when the attractive Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins, he does not turn his attentions to the plain but accomplished Mary (who is his female counterpart in the novel, who would not have been reluctant to accept him, and who would certainly have been a more equal mate than Charlotte Lucas).

The middle sister—sandwiched between the two most attractive, sensible, and worthy sisters and the two frivolous and flighty younger sisters—Mary is the most anomalous of the Bennet daughters—and the one who most adheres to conduct-book precepts. Humorless and moralistic, she leads a more retiring life than her sisters do, only venturing out of the domestic circle occasionally to display her musical talents. Mr. Bennet, with his habitual irony, addresses her as "a young lady of deep reflection" who "read[s] great books, and make[s] extracts" (4); but despite her "study of thorough bass and human nature," (41), we are told that "Mary wished to say something very sensible, but knew not how" (4).

While conduct-book writers endeavored to persuade women to stay at home and acquire experience vicariously through
reading, Wollstonecraft argued for the efficacy of direct as opposed to vicarious experience for women. She writes,

If we mean, in short, to live in the world to grow wiser and better, and not merely to enjoy the good things of life, we must attain a knowledge of others at the same time that we become acquainted with ourselves—knowledge acquired any other way only hardens the heart and perplexes the understanding. (Vindication 112)

According to Tanner, Austen would have agreed with Wollstonecraft, for he says that

For Jane Austen, . . . the individual needs to be both an experiencer and a reasoner: the former without the latter is error-prone, the latter without the former is useless if not impossible (as exemplified by Mary Bennet's sententious comments; she is all 'cool and disengaged' reason, and thus no reasoner at all). (110)

Mary Bennet is shown to lack not only reason but feeling. When Elizabeth determines to walk to Netherfield to see Jane, Mary tells her, "I admire the activity of your benevolence, . . . but every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required" (21). After Lydia's
elopement, Mary speaks in clichés of "stem[ming] the tide of malice, and pour[ing] into the wounded bosoms of each other, the balm of sisterly consolation." Then, to Elizabeth's amazement, she adds,

"Unhappy as the event must be for Lydia, we may draw from it this useful lesson; the loss of virtue in a female is irretrievable— that one false step involves her in endless ruin— that her reputation is no less brittle than it is beautiful,— and that she cannot be too much guarded in her behaviour towards the undeserving of the other sex." (198)

This passage reflects Fordyce's advice that

A female that acts on the same plan [as men, by trying to acquire direct knowledge of the world] is lost; and she who would effectively escape dishonour and remorse, reproach and ridicule, must endeavour to know the world from books, to collect experience from those who bought it, and to shun misconduct herself by observing the calamities it has occasioned in others. (II, 44)

And it certainly supports Wollstonecraft's contention that "the present mode of education does not tend to enlarge the heart any more than the understanding" (Vindication 65).

It is also proved to be radically wrong: Lydia is not
involved in endless ruin. After her marriage to Wickham, she returns home unchastened. "Lydia was Lydia still: untamed, unabashed, wild, noisy, and fearless" (216). And we are told at the end of the novel that "in spite of her youth and manners, she retained all the claims to reputation which her marriage had given her" (267).

Critics have suggested that the Bennet sisters "are arranged along a spectrum from an extreme of 'art' to an extreme of 'nature'--with Mary, "buried in books and coldly cerebral," on one end of the scale, Elizabeth and Jane as the mean, and Lydia and Kitty, "empty-headed, mannerless followers of their impulses and of anything that wears a uniform," on the other (Moler 43). As we have seen, the term nature or natural is one that is frequently bandied about by the writers of conduct-book literature to explain and fix the female character and one with which Wollstonecraft takes issue. To argue that Lydia and Kitty are "naturally" empty-headed and mannerless is to ignore the indications that Austen gives for their behavior: the emphasis, promulgated in the conduct-literature, that society placed on attracting men and finding a husband, the example and encouragement of Mrs. Bennet; Mrs. Bennet's preference for Lydia which had allowed Lydia to mix in society, where she was exposed to the attention of officers,
at an early age; Kitty's tendency to be a follower in Lydia's tracks; and Mr. Bennet's contempt for and total neglect of his younger daughters. The undisciplined nature of the Bennet daughters' education is also touched on. Elizabeth tells Lady Catherine that, without a governess, compared to some families they were neglected,

"but such of us as wished to learn, never wanted the means. We were always encouraged to read, and had all the masters that were necessary. Those who chose to be idle, certainly might."

(114)

Encouraged by the example of their son-in-law-hunting mother and disregarded by their father, Lydia and Kitty obviously chose to be idle. Thus, it is clear that they are a product of their upbringing and education (or lack thereof)—an idea that is central in all of the feminist writings in the eighteenth century. As Wollstonecraft says, criticizing the education that women typically received,

Women have been allowed to remain in ignorance, and slavish dependence, many, very many years, and still we hear of nothing but their fondness for pleasure and sway, their preference of rakes and soldiers, their childish attachment to toys, and the vanity that makes them value accomplishments more than virtues. (Vindication 167)
Significantly, we are also told at the end of the novel that Kitty, to her very material advantage, spent the chief of her time with her two elder sisters. In society so superior to what she had generally known, her improvement was great. She was not of so ungovernable a temper as Lydia, and, removed from the influence of Lydia's example, she became, by proper attention and management, less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid. (266)

Although Austen is not claiming a complete metamorphosis for Kitty in this ironic list of negative virtues, she is showing that under the right conditions women can overcome what Wollstonecraft calls the "littlenesses" that "degrade their character" (Vindication 169), and she demonstrates the importance of nurture over nature.

That is not to say that Austen ignores the part which nature plays in the development of individuals. We are told that Mr. Gardiner is "greatly superior to his sister as well by nature as education" (96), so evidently Austen did not believe that all individuals have equal potential. However, it is important to note the latter part of the statement. Mrs. Bennet had earlier been described as a woman of "little information," a fact which can be attributed to her inferior education as well as her "mean understanding." Even she
is—at least partially—a product of her education, and she vividly illustrates the thesis of the eighteenth-century feminists that the desultory education most women receive poorly prepares them for their roles as wives and mothers. We are told that "Had Elizabeth's opinion been all drawn from her own family, she could not have formed a very pleasing picture of conjugal felicity or domestic comfort" (162); and Mr. Bennet's faults are largely attributed to the fact that he "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." Consequently, "Respect, esteem, and confidence had vanished for ever; and all his views of domestic happiness were overthrown" (162).

Austen ruthlessly dissects the Bennet marriage and shows the consequences to all parties involved of a union between an intelligent man and a foolish and ignorant woman. There are also strong parallels in the relationship of Lydia and Wickham. Wollstonecraft contends that "Friendship or indifference inevitably succeeds love" (Vindication 30), and we learn that Wickham's "affection for [Lydia] soon sunk into indifference" (267). Austen shows us that women who have only been taught to be pleasing, whose (to quote Wollstonecraft) uncultivated understandings make them entirely dependent on their senses for employment and
amusement, when no noble pursuit sets them above the little vanities of the day, or enables them to curb the wild emotions that agitate a reed over which every passing breeze has power (29), will soon cease to please because they can be neither congenial companions nor friends to their husbands. Nor will they be good mothers. Wollstonecraft asks if such "weak beings" can "be expected to govern a family with judgment, or take care of the poor babes whom they bring into the world" (10). And she later answers her own question when she says that "Woman, . . . a slave in every situation to prejudice, seldom exerts enlightened maternal affection; for she either neglects her children, or spoils them by improper indulgence" (Vindication 151). Mrs. Bennet has spoiled Lydia, whom she has encouraged in her pursuit of and flirtations with the officers; and although she has a monomaniacal desire to get her daughters married off to men with good incomes, she does not care about the characters of the men they marry. She exults in Lydia's marriage to Wickham, although he has proved himself to be a scoundrel; and when Mr. Collins indicates his intentions toward Elizabeth, we learn that "Elizabeth was the least dear to her of all her children" and that Mr. Collins is "quite good enough for her" (73).
Given Mr. Bennet's treatment of his wife and his obvious preference for his second daughter, Mrs. Bennet's resentment toward Elizabeth is another understandable, if regrettable, consequence of the Bennet misalliance. Such misalliances, however, are shown to be inevitable as long as women are encouraged to view marriage—any marriage—as the be all and end all of existence. And Austen ironically underscores this point when she has Charlotte Lucas sacrifice her better self in her "pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (85). Charlotte is presented as "a sensible, intelligent young woman," (11) yet we learn that

Without thinking highly either of men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was [she thought] the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (86)

When she becomes engaged to Mr. Collins her parents are overjoyed at the prospect of this eligible match for a daughter "to whom they could give little fortune," and her brothers are relieved of their apprehension of "Charlotte's dying an old maid"; Charlotte, on the other hand, is described as "tolerably composed" and "at the age of twenty-seven, without ever having been handsome, she felt all the
good luck of it" (86). After her marriage to Mr. Collins, to keep him out of her way, she encourages him to spend as much as time as possible working in the garden; she chooses a small room at the back of the house as the sitting room so that he will not be tempted to spend much time there; and she "wisely [does] not hear" when Mr. Collins says things of which she might be ashamed—"which was certainly not unseldom" (108).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen exposes the dilemma of middle class women of small fortune for whom marriage to men they despise is their "pleasantest preservative from want." Poovey points out that the alternative was spinsterhood, which entailed "dependence on a generous relative [which would explain why Charlotte's brothers were overjoyed that she was not going to be an old maid--dependent on their generosity], or, most ominous of all, work as a governess or lady's companion" (197). Given these options, Charlotte's decision was perhaps more prudent than selfish, for as either spinster or wife of Mr. Collins, Charlotte's future happiness was uncertain; and there is a tacit criticism of the limited choices available to many women in Austen's representation of Charlotte's situation.

What is clear is that Austen was an advocate of mutual "respect, esteem, and confidence" in marriage--those
qualities of which Mr. Bennet was disappointed in his own marriage. When Mr. Bennet learns of Elizabeth's projected marriage to Darcy, he summons Elizabeth to the library, and, in a rare moment of sincerity and paternal responsibility, tells her,

"I know your disposition, Lizzy, I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. Your lively talents would place you in the greatest danger in an unequal marriage. You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life." (260)

Elizabeth is able to assure her father that she both loves and esteems Darcy, and it is clear from Darcy's admissions that the feelings are reciprocal. Marilyn Butler states that

The confrontation between these two central characters naturally brings about mutual illumination, not because one has opposite qualities which the other must learn to adopt, but because each discovers the other to be worthy of respect. (208)
The ideal being posited here then is an equal marriage between two rational and principled individuals, who have overcome their initial pride and prejudices. It is the kind of union that Wollstonecraft, who advocated rational fellowship in marriage, would have applauded, and it represents a very different relationship from those advocated by conduct-book writers like Fordyce, who writes in the following terms of the satisfaction in store for women in an "equal" marriage:

Ah! My young friends, what pleasure can be compared to that of conferring felicity? What honour can be enjoyed by your sex, equal to that of showing yourselves every way worthy of a virtuous tenderness from ours? What can be conceived so properly female as the inspiring, improving, and continuing such a tenderness, in all its charming extent? (I, 23).

In this passage, Fordyce's rhetorical questions all convey the same message: Nothing is more important for females than to render themselves pleasing to men. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen exposes the weakness of this assumption by illustrating the long-term effects of such short-sighted aspirations: Women who fail to cultivate their understanding, to exercise their reason, and to develop as moral beings will not inspire, improve, and continue tenderness;
and domestic love will be no more than a sentimental ideal as long as women adhere to such conduct-book precepts.
CHAPTER IV: JANE AUSTEN'S WOMEN

It has been argued that between the writing of Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, Jane Austen's attitudes about female "spiritedness, vivacity, celerity, and lightness" (Trilling 89) underwent a significant revision and that in the later novel Mary Crawford, who is "another version of Elizabeth Bennet," is rejected because of her vitality "in favor of Fanny's debility" (Trilling 90). The chief explanation offered for the fact that Mansfield Park "seems to controvert everything that its predecessor tells us about life" (Trilling 89) is that Pride and Prejudice was the conception of Austen's youth, whereas Mansfield Park was the product of her maturity and reflected her increasing suspicion of individual energy and social change. However, some knowledge of Austen's biography, careful examination of the characters of Fanny Price and Mary Crawford, and a review of female characters in this and Austen's other novels reveal that Austen's views about female character remained quite consistent throughout her career as an author. She clearly believed that women were capable of rational thought, that they should strive to know themselves, that they should regulate their behavior in consideration of others, and that their conduct should be
founded on a principle of right, derived from education and introspection, that enabled them to balance their duty to self and others. She just as clearly believed that the typical female education, which laid stress on "person, manner, and accomplishments" and had the making of an advantageous marriage as its objective, and the code of feminine conduct, which demanded total subordination of self, were incompatible not only with one another but also with female intellectual and moral development.

Many critics have divided Austen's writing life into two periods—1796-1799 and 1811-1816—and her six novels are divided into two "trilogies": Pride and Prejudice, Sense and Sensibility, and Northanger Abbey being the first and Mansfield Park, Emma, and Persuasion the second. Pride and Prejudice was originally entitled First Impressions, and that earlier version was begun in October 1796 and finished in August 1797. In November of 1797, Austen's father wrote to the publisher Cadell to offer the novel for publication, but he received no encouragement, and he did not pursue the matter (The Jane Austen Companion 51). R. W Chapman suggests that the novel was "very largely recast" (79) between 1811 and its publication in January 1813 and that Austen used the calendar of 1811-1812 to construct most of the dates. Mansfield Park was begun early in 1811 and finished in 1813, so Austen was working on her new novel and
re-writing her earlier novel during the same time period—a concurrence that should undermine the idea of a major shift in Austen's attitude between the writing of the two novels. Furthermore, on January 29, 1813, Austen wrote to her sister and described *Pride and Prejudice* as "my own darling child" (*Jane Austen's Letters* 76) and (as quoted in the previous chapter) expressed her delight in the character of Elizabeth Bennet. Such evidence would indicate that Austen was far from rejecting Elizabeth Bennet in favor of Fanny Price, and there is no reason to think that Austen's values could not accommodate dissimilar heroines.

Nonetheless, Fanny Price is certainly the most controversial of Austen's heroines. Alistair Duckworth says of her that she is

> the representative of Jane Austen's own fundamental commitment to an inherited culture—not merely to the "ceremonies of life," but to the "conduct... the result of good principles" of which Edmund Bertram speaks... to a social order founded in religion... *(73)*

Avrom Fleishman, on the other hand, states that

> Fanny is presented not as a paragon of virtue but as a weak woman with self-defensive and self-aggrandizing impulses who, because of her economic
dependency and her social inferiority, is forced
to adopt what Alfred Adler has called a feminine,
submissive style of life. . . . The offensive
weapons are her society's store of conventional
moral attitudes. (45)

A third interpretation is offered by LeRoy Smith:
Austen presents Fanny Price as representative of
an oppressed sex. Unaware of the conflict between
herself and the family structures that have
provided a crippling security, she is forced by
necessity to speak from the self. But in
defending her integrity and her personal freedom
to choose, . . . alone and weak, against the
patriarchal family and the world, Fanny Price
defends the birthright of every human being. (128)

In contrast, Reginald Farrer calls her "the most terrible
incarnation we have of the female prig-pharisee" (86). Thus
Fanny is viewed by one critic as a symbol of the inherited
culture based on religious principles, by another as
Austen's intentional psychological profile of "a frail
spirit fighting the battle of life with weapons inadequate
to cope with the society in which she exists" (Fleishman
44), by a third as a symbol of pre-feminist resistance to
patriarchy, and by a fourth as Austen's unintentional
portrait of a hypocrite.
Initially, it would seem impossible to reconcile these widely disparate interpretations of the same character, but I would suggest that they are all partially accurate and that taken together they reflect the complexity of Austen's portrayal of Fanny Price—a character whose abilities, needs, and desires are often in conflict with the realities of her situation and the codes of conduct by which she attempts to live. Lionel Trilling says, "Nobody, I believe, has ever found it possible to like the heroine of Mansfield Park" (89). Part of the problem that twentieth-century readers have had with the character of Fanny is that they cannot relate to her physical weakness (what Trilling calls her "debility"), her submissiveness, her meekness, and her passivity—traits of the ideal woman as delineated in conduct literature that have been inculcated in her by her upbringing. The trouble with Fanny, however, is that she also possesses attributes that conflict with the conduct-book ideal: she is intelligent, introspective, strongly principled—traits that feminist writers claimed for women—and, despite her youth and inexperience, a shrewd critic of manners and morals. Furthermore, she has needs and desires that are infrequently satisfied because of her subordinate position—first as a daughter in a family in which sons are favored and later as a poor, dependent relation in the Bertram household. As a consequence, she is often in
conflict with herself, and she is almost universally misunderstood—by the other characters in the novel and by Jane Austen critics.

Alistair Duckworth, Marilyn Butler, and Lionel Trilling see Fanny as a "Christian heroine" (Trilling 90), the representative of orthodoxy and "the champion of Christianity" in the novel, who is "attacked directly by the forces of materialism" (Butler 246). Without a doubt, Fanny is presented as the most principled and most steadfast character; and although her piety is not overt it is suggested by her advocacy of the clerical life as a profession, by her regret at the disuse of the chapel at Sotherton, and by her quiet, meditative demeanor. We are told that Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to know them by their proper name; but when he talked of [Fanny] having such a steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence of her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and
Moreover, in contrast to the other female characters in the novel, Fanny does not allow wealth or position to influence her when it comes to matrimony, the foundation of which she believes should be love and compatibility of taste and character. Although we recognize that her (seemingly hopeless) love for Edmund Bertram is one of the reasons that she is not susceptible to the charms of Henry Crawford, we are also given the example of Maria Bertram, who prepared for matrimony by a hatred of home, restraint and tranquility; by the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt for the man she was to marry, (147) marries Mr. Rushworth with his 12,000 pounds a year, despite her love for Henry Crawford. And the selfishness and materialism of most of the other characters in the novel is contrasted with Fanny's outward complaisance, her ability to understand and sympathize with others, and her high-mindedness.

The difficulty of the interpretation of Fanny as a symbol of Christian heroism is that one is forced to ignore many of Fanny's other--less heroic--attributes. Marilyn Butler, who views the novel as largely exemplary and didactic, argues that
Given the ideological theme, Fanny's experience on a subjective level cannot be the matter at issue. The theme of *Mansfield Park* is the contrast of man-centered or selfish habits of mind, with a temper that is sceptical of self and that refers beyond self to objective values. Since Fanny is the representative of this orthodoxy, the individuality of her consciousness must to a large extent be denied. (247)

And she sees Fanny's as "To some extent... a negation of what is commonly meant by character" (247).

In contrast, Avrom Fleishman sees Fanny not as "a moral spokesperson" but as "the main human subject of the novel" (46)—"not as a paragon of virtue who, despite her author's intentions offends us, but rather as an object of sympathy" (44). And he alludes to "Fanny's mind, with its mixture of self-abnegation and hostility, of egoistic claims and frosty judgments of others" (45). Fleishman's psychological analysis of the character of Fanny is certainly acute; he notes the conflicting traits in Fanny's character, and he cites Adler's description of the "feminine" personality type to explain Austen's characterization of her heroine:

Such traits as timidity, indecision, insecurity, shyness, cowardliness, increased need for support,
submissive obedience. . ., as well as phantasies and even wishes which one can summarize as ideas of "smallness" or masochistic tendencies, correspond to the inferiority feeling. Above this network of personality traits there appear, with defensive and compensatory intent, impudence, courage, impertinence, inclination towards rebellion, stubbornness, and defiance. . . .

The inferiority feeling finally culminates in a never-ceasing, always exaggerated feeling of being slighted. . . . (58)

Adler's model is useful in terms of understanding Austen's rendition of Fanny's character. Although Fanny could never be accused of impudence, impertinence, and conscious inclination toward rebellion and defiance, the characteristics Adler lists represent many of the positive and negative attributes that comprise the two female stereotypes in conduct book literature; and Adler shows how unapproved traits can--indeed must--coexist in a female who is trying to conform to the socially-approved and self-limiting ideal.

Fanny certainly has a number of the "feminine" traits he lists. Her timidity, insecurity, shyness, and feelings of inferiority are explicable, however, in terms of her position and treatment in the Bertram household, where she
is a poor relation, treated as a general factotum by both her aunts and three of her four cousins, and constantly reminded, particularly by Mrs. Norris, of both her lowly status and the gratitude she owes the family for their benefaction toward her. We are told that despite Edmund's "advice, consolation, and encouragement," "Kept back as she was by everybody else, his single support could not bring her forward" (18). Her outward submissiveness is early explained, when the narrator tells us that Fanny "began at least to know [the family's] ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them" (15). Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris conclude that Fanny "showed a tractable disposition, and seemed likely to give them little trouble" (15), and so Fanny conforms to their expectations as well as their ways, and at one point in the story, we are told that she was anxious that "she might not be able to appear properly submissive and indifferent" (158). Fanny's "feminine" personality is thus shown to be largely an artificial construct, imposed on her by the exigencies of her situation.

However, Fanny's personal desires conflict with the ideas of feminine duty, submissiveness, and selflessness that she has tried to internalize and with her subordinate position at Mansfield Park, where she is primarily valued
for her usefulness and as a silent symbol of Bertram benevolence, and this conflict often leads to self-pity and sometimes to self-deception. Fanny wants to be of consequence to others. When she first arrives at Mansfield Park, she is treated with contempt by a number of the inhabitants, and her sorrows are aggravated by "the idea of the brothers and sisters among whom she had always been important as playfellow, instructress, and nurse." (13).

During the early stages of the Mansfield theatricals,

   Everybody around her was gay and busy, prosperous and important. . . . She alone was sad and insignificant; she had no share in anything; she might go or stay, she might be in the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the east room, without being seen or missed. She could almost think anything would have been preferable to this. (117)

This self-pity leads her to envy of the amiable Mrs. Grant, who had taken the part rejected by Fanny. "Mrs. Grant was of consequence: her good-nature had honourable mention--her taste and her time were considered--her presence was wanted--she was sought for, and attended, and praised" (117)

   In another instance, when Edmund offers his mare, which he has bought for Fanny's use, to Mary Crawford, and Mary's second ride extends beyond the allotted time period, Fanny
goes out to look for Edmund and sees the group in the meadow.

A happy party it appeared to her—all interested in one object; cheerful beyond a doubt, for the sound of merriment ascended even to her. It was a sound which did not make her cheerful; she wondered that Edmund could forget her, and felt a pang. (51)

Since resentment for self is incompatible with selflessness, Fanny displaces her self-pity by expressing concern for the horse: "She began to think it rather hard upon the mare to have such double duty; if she were forgotten, the poor mare should be remembered" (52). Marilyn Butler speaks of Fanny's "genuinely objective concern for the horse" (223), but since Fanny does subsequently go riding on the poor mare, it seems more reasonable to assume that Fanny's concerns were subjective.

Furthermore, we learn that Fanny's debility is partly related to her state of mind. After she is kept from riding for several days because Edmund wants to indulge Mary Crawford's desire to see the country, and her selfish aunts have her cutting roses and running errands in the hot sunshine, she is stricken with a bad headache. However, we are told that
The state of her spirits had probably had its share in her indisposition; for she had been feeling neglected, and been struggling against envy and discontent, for some days past. As she leaned on the sofa, to which she had retreated that she might not be seen, the pain of her mind had been much beyond that in her head. . . . (57)

Interestingly, prior to the conclusion of the novel, Fanny is most happy when others are in distress. Overcome by Tom's illness, Maria's flight with Henry Crawford, and Julia's elopement with Mr. Yates, Sir Thomas recalls Fanny from Portsmouth. Consequently,

She was, she felt she was, in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many others were miserable. The evil which brought such good to her! She dreaded lest she should learn to be insensible to it. To be going so soon, sent for so kindly, sent for as a comfort, and with leave to take Susan, was altogether such a combination of blessings as set her heart in a glow, and for a time seemed to distance every pain, and make her incapable of suitably sharing the distress even of those whose distress she thought of most. (320).
And in the concluding chapter, the narrator tells us that during this period of unhappiness for the Bertram family, "in spite of everything," Fanny "must have been a happy creature in spite of all that she felt, or thought she felt, for the distress of those around her" (332-333 underlining mine). The word suitably in the earlier quotation is significant: it reflects appropriate behavior rather than genuine sentiments. The selfless feminine ideal should be more concerned for others than for self in times of crisis, so she must either pretend to have emotions that she does not feel or pretend to herself, as Fanny does, that she has the requisite emotions.

In the character of Fanny Price, Austen shows how subjectivity is at variance with the feminine ideal, and she demonstrates the psychic— and even physical— costs of conformity to that ideal. Fleishman states that

The lesson of feeling and morality learned by readers of the novel, though not by the hero and heroine, is that a life lived by repeatedly using morality for defense and attack is likely to be a self-limiting life. (54)

I would argue, however, that it is not Fanny's morality which is in question here, but the code of feminine conduct that has been imposed upon her, which functions as a kind of false conscience, and to which she attempts to acquiesce.
Ironically, in light of her refusal to take a role in the amateur theatricals, Fanny has been early cast and has accepted the role prescribed by the writers of conduct literature, but it is not a part that can accommodate all her desires or all her abilities.

Leroy Smith, who sees "In Mansfield Park the abuses of the patriarchal system, not the transgressions or follies of individuals, [as] Austen's main subject" (114), speaks of the 'feminine' role that a woman plays in a patriarchal society. He says that "Fanny Price first appears to be the model of a passive, submissive female, formed for and created by a patriarchal society," but he goes on to describe her two "revolts" against patriarchy: her refusal to participate in the theatricals and her rejection of Henry Crawford's marriage proposal. In his view,

Placed in the most humble and humbling of circumstances of all of Austen's heroines and apparently imbued with the sense of otherness of the indoctrinated female, Fanny, in extreme circumstances, clings to the power to judge and to act. . . . (125)

Smith, however, fails to note the less extreme circumstances in which Fanny demonstrates that she is not a completely indoctrinated female.
Edmund Bertram tells Fanny that he has always believed her to be born for "the perfect model of a woman" (251), and it is he who forms her mind and gains her affections. Fanny's love for Edmund is not fraternal, and she first violates the conduct-book proscriptions by loving him long before he learns "to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones" (340). We are told that "It was her intention, as she felt it to be her duty, to try to overcome all that was excessive, all that bordered on selfishness, in her affection for Edmund." And we are privy to her internal struggles with her desire that she be more than a friend to Edmund. She asks herself, "Why did such an idea occur to her even enough to be reprobated and forbidden? It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination."

The narrator tells us that

She had all the heroism of principle, and was determined to do her duty; but having also many of the feelings of youth and nature, let her not be much wondered at if, after making all these good resolutions on the side of self-government, she seized the scrap of paper [an unfinished note to accompany his gift of a gold chain] to her as a treasure beyond all her hopes, and reading with the tenderest emotion these words, "My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept--"
In light of the indulgent tone of this passage, Austen's use of the term heroism of principle is obviously ironic, and it points up another way in which the feminine code of conduct functions as a false conscience, demanding that a young woman in love suppress her natural feelings.

Despite her love for Edmund and his influence on her, Fanny, nonetheless, gradually learns to think for herself, and Austen demonstrates that mental weakness is not a necessary concomitant of physical weakness. We get an early indication of this development when Edmund tries to reconcile Fanny to the idea of living with Mrs. Norris and argues that the move would be to Fanny's benefit.

Fanny sighed and said, "I cannot see things as you do, but I ought to believe you to be right rather than myself, and I am very much obliged to you for trying to reconcile me to what must be. If I could suppose my aunt to care for me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to anybody!" (22)

At this point, Fanny feels that she ought to defer to Edmund's judgment, and she would like to suppose that her aunt cares for her—despite all the evidence to the
contrary. By the time she has reached the age of eighteen, we are told that "Having formed her mind and gained her affections, [Edmund] had a good chance of her thinking like him" (49). However, the subject of Mary Crawford is the first in which inevitably "there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity" (49) in their views. Fanny and Edmund both discern impropriety in Mary's behavior, but Fanny becomes aware that Mary has "a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of it being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light" (265). Fanny is also more perspicacious than Edmund and the others about Henry Crawford, but when she tries to hazard a hint to Edmund about Henry's dalliance with Maria, he dismisses the idea. Consequently,

Fanny supposed she must have been mistaken, and meant to think differently in future; but with all that submission to Edmund could do, and all the help of coinciding looks and hint which she occasionally noticed in some of the others, and which seemed to say that Julia was Mr. Crawford's choice, she knew not always what to think. (87)

She does, however, know what to think when Edmund capitulates and agrees to participate in the play: she cannot give him the approbation he requests because "Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund's decision;
she could not acquit his unsteadiness. . ." (117). Fanny's most decided rejection of Edmund's opinions is demonstrated when he tries to appeal to her gratitude and tender-heartedness on behalf of Crawford, informs her that she would have a beneficial moral influence on Crawford, and tells her that others think she is out of her senses for refusing such a man as Crawford. Fanny, by this time, knows what to think of Henry Crawford's character, of which she cannot approve, and rather than gratitude, she feels resentment "at a perseverance so selfish and ungenerous" (236). She shrinks from the responsibility of reforming Crawford and tells Edmund,

"I should have thought. . .that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being approved, not being loved, by some one of her sex at least, let him be ever so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think that it ought not to be set down as certain that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself." (255)

One of Edmund's appeals is to Fanny's tender heart. Early in the novel, we are told that Edmund determines that Fanny has "an affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right" (15). However, Fleishman astutely observes that Fanny possesses "imaginative sympathy," but that "For
the most part, [her] consciousness extends to but does not embrace the persons in her environment" (53). When Sir Thomas leaves for Antigua, we learn that Fanny's relief and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to her cousins's; but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve. "Sir Thomas, who had done so much for her and her brothers, and who was gone perhaps never to return—that she should see him go without a tear, it was shameful insensibility!" (26)

This shameful insensibility recurs throughout the novel: Fanny's affectionate heart, in fact, embraces only her brother William, her sister Susan, and Edmund. She is grateful to Sir Thomas for his benevolence to herself and her family, but, although she respects him, she can still think that "He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth--romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him" (238). She enjoys "being avowedly useful as her aunt's companion" (28), but she recognizes that "If her aunt's feelings were against her, nothing could be hoped from attacking her understanding" (240). She does not like Mrs. Norris, and her sister Susan, who has learned of Mansfield Park from Fanny, "came there perfectly aware that nothing but ill humour was to be expected from aunt Norris"
After some initial regrets, she scarcely seems to miss her female cousins when they depart for Brighton. She also shows a singular lack of filial piety. She is embarrassed and repelled by her father, who "scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke" (281). Although she had hoped that she and her mother "should soon be what mother and daughter ought to be to each other" (268), she concludes that her mother was a partial, ill-judging parent, a dawdle, a slattern, who neither taught or restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement and discomfort from beginning to end, and who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself, no curiosity to know her better, no desire of her friendship, and no inclination for her company that could lessen her sense of such feelings. (282)

She is unable to return Mary Crawford's friendship or Henry Crawford's love, in part because of her own love for Edmund, but also because she judges them both to be morally defective. And when her cousin Tom is seemingly on his deathbed, we are told that Without any particular affection for her eldest cousin, her tenderness of heart made her feel that she could not spare him; and the purity of her
principles added yet a keener solicitude, when she considered how little useful, how little self-denying, his life had (apparently) been. 309

In this passage, Austen is drawing a distinction between the terms affection and tenderness of heart. Fanny possesses the latter, and it enables her to sympathize with others, but her affection is not bestowed indiscriminately. On the whole, Fanny's lack of affection for and harsh judgments of individuals who have mistreated and/or neglected her or who lack her principles is comprehensible, but her actual feelings ironically contrast with the general perception of her, with her outward demeanor, and with the conduct-book stereotype of the feminine ideal. Mary Crawford tells her brother, "You will have a sweet little wife, all gratitude and devotion" (211). And when Fanny rejects Henry, the narrator tells us that Fanny's manner was incurably gentle, and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness, made every expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial—seem, at least, to be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him. (235-236)

Henry, who, like the male writers of conduct literature,
finds frailty, modesty, reserve, and piety sexually alluring, speaks of "Fanny's graces of manner and goodness of heart" (213), and he tells her "You have qualities which I had not before supposed to exist in such a degree in any human creature. You have some touches of the angel in you. . . " (248). Austen, however, shows us the rational intelligence, hardheaded judgments, and stern principles that underlie the seemingly angelic surface of this tender-hearted perfect model of a woman.

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen not only undermines the stereotype of the conduct-book ideal, but, as Smith and a number of other critics have pointed out, she also stresses the failure of female education. Smith says, "At issue is the difference between an education that emphasises 'accomplishments' and that models behavior on social example and one that emphasises the interiorisation of values" (115). This problem, as we have seen, was the main concern of Astell, Macaulay, and Wollstonecraft, who asserts that women's reason will never acquire sufficient strength to enable it to regulate their conduct, whilst the making an appearance in the world is the first wish of the majority of mankind. To this weak wish the natural affections, and the most useful virtues are sacrificed. (*Vindication* 75)
Austen's similar views on education are made most explicit in *Mansfield Park*.

The first reference to education in the novel is an ironic one: Mrs. Norris tells Sir Thomas that "It will be an education for [Fanny]. . . only being with her cousins; if Miss Lee taught her nothing, she would learn to be good and clever from them" (10) We soon learn how wrong this is, for despite the ability of the Bertram daughters to "tell the principal rivers in Russia"; "repeat the chronological order of the Kings of England, with dates of their accession, and most of the principal events of their reigns"; recite "the Roman emperors as low as Severus, besides a great deal of the heathen mythology"; and list "metals, semi-metals, planets, and distinguished philosophers" (16), we are told that

with all their promising talents and early information, they [are] entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In everything but disposition they were admirably taught. (17)

Fanny, in contrast, is criticized for having a poor memory, and she refuses to learn music or drawing, thus—in an early instance of revolt—rejecting the typical female education involving rote memorization and the acquirement of
accomplishments. Instead, under the tutelage of Edmund, she reads and talks of what she had read, has her taste encouraged, and her judgment corrected (18-19). Because Fanny is poor and dependent and is not being brought up to make an appearance in the world, it is not thought necessary that she be as accomplished as her cousins. Thus, while "the Miss Bertrams continued to exercise their memories, practice their duets, and grow tall and womanly; and their father saw them becoming in person, manner, and accomplishments, everything that could satisfy his anxiety" (17 underlining mine), Fanny escapes the worst effects of a feminine education and cultivates her mind and develops moral judgment.

Austen illustrates the vanity, selfishness, and materialism that result from the feminine education that Maria and Julia receive, the consequences of which are exacerbated by their mother's total indolence and her indulgence "when it did not put herself to inconvenience," their father's reserve, which "repressed all the flow of their spirits before him," (17) and his concern that his daughters form "respectable alliances" (18), and their aunt's "excessive indulgence and flattery" (334). We are told that the Miss Bertrams' vanity was in such good order that they seemed to
be quite free from it, and gave themselves no airs; while the praises attending such behaviour, secured and brought round by their aunt, served to strengthen them in believing they had no faults. (27).

More than once, Fanny's situation is compared to that of Julia Bertram. They are both made unhappy during the outing to Sotherton. Julia is left behind by Maria and Henry and forced to walk with Mrs. Rushworth, and

The politeness which she had been brought up to practice as a duty made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it. (68)

Fanny, on the other hand, possesses most of the attributes that Julia lacks, and her pain, depression, and disappointment at being abandoned by Edmund and Mary do not prevent her sympathizing with the vexations of Julia and Mr. Rushworth.

After the onset of the Mansfield theatricals, both Fanny and Julia refuse to participate. Fanny, however, questions her own motives for doing so:
she had begun to feel undecided as to what she ought to do, and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for—what might be so essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest complaisance had set their hearts? Was it not illnature, selfishness, and a fear of exposing herself? . . . . It would be so horrible to her to act, that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples. . . . (113)

Both she and Julia are full of jealousy and agitation as the play progresses, but

[Julia's] heart was sore and angry, and she was capable only of angry consolations. The sister with whom she was used to be on easy terms was now become her greatest enemy—they were alienated from each other; . . . . With no material fault of temper of difference of opinion to prevent their being very good friends while their interests were the same, the sister, under such a trial as this, had not effection [sic] or principle enough to make them merciful or just, to give them honour or compassion. . . . and Julia could never see Maria distinguished by Henry Crawford without
trusting that it would create jealousy, and bring a public disturbance at last. (119-120)

Fanny, in spite—or because—of her own anxieties about Edmund and Mary Crawford, "saw and pitied much of this in Julia. . . . They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny's consciousness" (120).

Maria proves to be even worse than Julia. When Mr. Rushworth first appears on the scene,

Being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's as well as ensure her a house in town, which was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could. (30)

For Maria, duty and moral obligation are no more than rationalizations for the indulgence of her worst impulses, and she demonstrates her lack of principles first in her engagement to Rushworth, next in her flirtation with Henry Crawford, then in her marriage to Rushworth, and finally in her flight with Crawford.

After the last of these events, a chastened Sir Thomas is left to reflect that principle, active principle had been wanting—
[his daughters] had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments—the authorized object of their youth—could have no useful influence that way, no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and of the necessity of self-denial and humility he feared they had never heard from any lips that could profit them. (334)

It is clear that when Austen uses the term understanding in this passage, she is alluding to the education involving rote memorization that the Bertram daughters receive from Miss Lee, for, in fact, their understanding is no more developed than their principles. Fanny, on the other hand, has learned to exercise her reason and is more virtuous than her cousins because her principles and her piety have a rational foundation, and it is for this reason that, although she is often inhibited and conflicted by the feminine code of conduct, she is able to think for herself, judge others accurately, and act—or refuse to act—on the
basis of principle.

Smith regards Fanny as a 'heroine of principle' (126), and although, like Duckworth, Butler, and Trilling, he is inclined to view Fanny too symbolically and idealistically, in contrast to them, he sees the novel as expressive of Austen's concern "about the threat to selfhood of a social system that subordinates the needs of the individual to those of society," the "most pressing and disturbing form of this danger" being "the victimisation of the female" (127).

Unlike Smith, Reginald Farrer does not see Fanny idealistically, and he does not see her as a victim. He asserts that

Gentle and timid and shrinking and ineffectual as she seems, fiction holds no heroine more repulsive in her cast-iron self-righteousness and steely rigidity of prejudice. (86)

And he accuses Austen of being at cross-purposes in Mansfield Park, in which Mary Crawford "is by far the most consistently brilliant of Jane Austen's heroines" and "would be the most delightful as a wife" (86). Farrer is only one of many critics who have preferred Mary Crawford to Fanny Price, seeing in Mary another Elizabeth Bennet, who is apparently being rejected in this novel.
Mary Crawford undoubtedly possesses vitality, wit, and spirit like Elizabeth Bennet, and she is also shown to have some good qualities and to appreciate good qualities in others. In spite of her own intentions, she finds herself falling in love with Edmund Bertram. As the narrator tells us,

to the credit of the lady it may be added that, without his being a man of the world or an elder brother, without any of the arts of flattery or the gaieties of small talk, he began to be agreeable to her. . . . There was a charm, perhaps in his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity, which Miss Crawford might be equal to feel, though not equal to discuss with herself. (50)

During the Mansfield theatricals, when Fanny is under attack for her refusal to participate, and Mrs. Norris has been particularly obnoxious to her, Mary, "almost purely governed" by "really good feelings" endeavors "to raise [Fanny's] spirits, in spite of being out of spirits herself" (109), and she subsequently persuades her sister to take the part in the play that Fanny has rejected, in order to save Fanny from further harrassment. Furthermore, she comes to appreciate Fanny's virtues and endorses her brother's choice of Fanny as a wife, even though he would be "marrying a
little beneath him" (211). Like Elizabeth Bennet, she is an affectionate sister, is "active and fearless" (51), and has a lively, playful manner. However, there the similarities end.

Shortly, after Mary appears on the scene, we are told that her sister foresaw in her "elegance and accomplishments," and we learn that "Matrimony was [Mary's] object, provided she could marry well" (33). She is, therefore, initially quite ready to attach herself to Tom Bertram, the eldest son of a baronet, with, she reflects, "a park—a real park five miles round" and "a spacious modern-built house, so well placed and well screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen's seats in the kingdom" (38). And she has imbibed "the true London maxim, that everything is to be got with money" (45). From the start it is clear that, as Edmund later says of her, she has "faults of principle. . .--of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind" (329). She is horrified when she discovers that Edmund is to be a clergyman, and she does her best to change his mind, because to her "A clergyman is nothing" (69). She is willing to allow her brother to indulge his vanity and sport with Fanny's heart, although she claims Fanny for a friend and believes that "she is as good a little creature as ever lived, and has a great deal of feeling" (167). She hopes for the death of Tom Bertram
so that Edmund will be the heir to the Mansfield estate and the baronetcy, abandon his clerical profession, and become an eligible suitor. And her chief regret about the liaison between her brother and Maria Rushworth is that it should have become public knowledge. In most situations, she is motivated by self interest, befriending Fanny because of "her desire of something new" (150), approving her as a wife for Henry in part because she "was in a state of mind to rejoice in a connection with the Bertram family" (211), and writing to Fanny primarily as a medium for communicating with Edmund. Moreover, despite her intelligence, she is singularly lacking in knowledge of herself and other more virtuous characters like Fanny and Edmund—as her letter of inquiry to Fanny about Tom Bertram's condition, with her admission that "If [Tom] is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world" (313), and her last conversation with Edmund, in which she alludes to Maria's adultery with Henry as "folly" (328), illustrate.

Mary Crawford is no Elizabeth Bennet who learns to know herself and correct her judgment of others; she is not repelled, as Elizabeth is, by sexual misconduct, and she totally lacks Elizabeth's—and Fanny's—uprightness and disinterestedness when it come to marriage. As with Maria and Julia Bertram, Mary's defects are attributed to her upbringing and education. She has received her education in
the home of an aunt and uncle, Admiral and Mrs. Crawford, who, "though agreeing in nothing else, were united in affection" for Mary and her brother: "The admiral delighted in the boy, Mrs. Crawford doted on the girl" (32). Mary later gives Fanny some indication of Mrs. Crawford's character—and her own moral blindness—when she tells her that "my late dear aunt, whose knowledge of the world made her judgment very generally and deservedly looked up to by all the young people of our acquaintance" (261) had recommended that Mary's friend Janet marry a Mr. Fraser, "for he was rich, and she had nothing," although the pair were incompatible and ended up "about as unhappy as most other married people" (260). Admiral Crawford is described as "a man of vicious conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his own roof" (32) upon the death of his wife. Growing up in such a household, Mary Crawford, although she has "beauty, wit, and good humour" (49), has developed "none of Fanny's delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling" (61). She is cynical, materialistic, and finally lacking in principle. In Mansfield Park it is not Mary's vitality which is being rejected; it is, as Edmund tells her, her lack of "the most valuable knowledge we could any of us acquire—the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty" (331).
Fanny, unlike all the other female characters in *Mansfield Park*, does have some knowledge of herself, and she recognizes her duty: to regulate her behavior in consideration of others, to live by Christian principles, and to be true to herself. Austen shows us, however, that for women these objectives are not easily achieved in a society that places a premium on female elegance and accomplishments and educates females, as Lady Bertram tells Fanny (in "the only rule of conduct, the only piece of advice, which Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half"), that "it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as [Henry Crawford's marriage proposal]" (240). The difficulties are further compounded by a code of feminine conduct, stressing weakness, meekness, submissiveness, and passivity, that conflicts not only with these educational objectives but also with, as Wollstonecraft argues, "the exercise of reason [from which] knowledge and virtue naturally flow" (*Vindication* 12). As a consequence, many women are rendered ineffectual or hypocritical.

Which brings us back to Fanny Price and the fact that so few critics like her. As we have seen, Fanny Price, as Austen delineates her, is a mixed character, far from the angel in the house that other characters perceive her to be.
Some critics might like her more if she were perfectly virtuous—without taint of egoism, envy, jealousy, and self-pity and with more of the gratitude and tenderness of heart that Edmund urges on her in her treatment of Crawford—and less intelligent, discerning, and judgmental, but then she would bear no resemblance to a real woman and would indeed represent the artificial conduct-book ideal. (Austen wrote to her niece Fanny Knight in 1817 on the subject of "Novels and Heroines" that "pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked" (Jane Austen’s Letters 486).) Other critics would undoubtedly like Fanny better if she showed more vitality, wit, and spirit, but then she would not illustrate the ways in which the feminine code of conduct is incompatible with youth and nature and impairs female energy and behavior. Mary Lascelles says of Elizabeth Bennet,

our chief reason for accepting her point of view as a reflection of her author's is the impression that she bears of sympathy between them—an impression of which almost every reader would be sensible, even if it had not the explicit confirmation of Jane Austen's letters. (200)

Of Fanny Price, she writes that "on the moral issues of the story [Austen and Fanny] share a point of view," but there is a distance of a generation between them, and
From the author who knows, and from us who are made acquainted with, much that she cannot or will not understand, Fanny is bound to keep this distance, to remain youth sympathetically observed, not youth re-lived. (201)

Fanny is not exemplary, but nor is she the "female prig-pharisee" that Farrer wants to cast her as. She may be no Elizabeth Bennet with whom her author can identify, but we should view her sympathetically as an individual who must contend with the conflicting expectations placed upon women in her society and who manages to develop as a rational and virtuous—if imperfect—heroine in spite of them.

* * * * * * * *

In point of fact, Austen's heroines are a heterogeneous group. From the youthful and ingenuous Catherine Morland to the mature and self-aware Anne Elliot, from the sensible and self-disciplined Elinor Dashwood to the fanciful and self-indulgent Emma Woodhouse, from the lively and witty Elizabeth Bennet to the passive and sober Fanny Price—Austen's female protagonists reflect the variety and multiplicity of personalities to be found among women. These personalities are also shown to be largely dependent on the respective situations of the heroines: Fanny is self-effacing and submissive because she has been kept back and is entirely dependent on the benevolence of others; Emma
has "a disposition to think a little too well of herself" (Emma 5) because she has been indulged and will inherit 30,000 pounds; Anne Elliot is unassuming and happy to be of use to others because she is unvalued and disregarded by her father and eldest sister; Elizabeth Bennet is pert and playful because of her father's example and encouragement; Catherine Morland is ignorant and idle because her mother's time and attention have been occupied in bearing and raising ten children; Elinor Dashwood is outwardly cool and imperturable, presumably because she has had to counteract "the eagerness of mind in [her mother] which must generally have led to imprudence" (Sense and Sensibility 4)—an eagerness of mind that Mrs. Dashwood values, cherishes, and encourages in her middle daughter, Marianne. Each of these young women has more or fewer natural abilities, but each has been shaped by her environment, and those natural abilities have been fostered or blunted by those with whom they associate, by their education, and by their relative situations in society.

Despite their differences, however, Austen's heroines share a capacity for introspection and self-correction and an integrity that distinguishes them from most of the other female (and male) characters in the novels—reflecting Austen's belief in the rational and moral potential of women. On the other hand, many of Austen's minor female
characters, like Mary Crawford, illustrate the ways in which the female education advocated by the writers of conduct literature fosters negative traits in women, appeals to their self-interest, and limits their capacities for self-development. Wollstonecraft claimed that "the whole tenour of female education (the education of society) tends to render the best disposed romantic and inconstant; and the remainder vain and mean" (Vindication 75). Marriage was the end of female education, and pleasing men was presented as the means to that end. Women were informed that they had more sensibility than sense and that furthermore men did not like learning in women. Therefore, their intellects were neglected in favor of their emotions and their persons. The advice that females received on pleasing men was often self-contradictory: they were told that they cared too much about personal adornment yet informed that such concerns were natural to them and that men judged them on their appearance; they were told to be modest yet advised to dress simply in order to stimulate erotic imagination in men; they were told to be accommodating and submissive yet counseled to maintain a dignified reserve; they were told to be right-minded yet urged to prevaricate about the extent of their knowledge, their health and strength, their appetites, and their affections. Although the writers of conduct literature censured women for dissimulation,
vanity, malice, and lasciviousness and exhorted females to be humble, gentle, pious, and virtuous, the main inducement that they offered was that the latter qualities were alluring to men. Paradoxically, they were appealing to and promoting female vanity and immodesty at the same time that they condemned them, and encouraging dissimulation and malice in women who had to compete with one another for eligible men in a society in which matrimony was still largely governed by economic considerations—a fact that is generally ignored in the conduct literature and well explored by Jane Austen.

Among Austen's women there is a veritable rogues' gallery of female flirts, adventuresses, and upstarts, who, lacking independent means, will do what they can to catch a man: Lucy Steele in *Sense and Sensibility*, Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Isabella Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, and Mrs. Clay in *Persuasion*. Lucy Steele is the most successful and the best developed of these characters. Elinor Dashwood assesses Lucy early in their acquaintance and determines that she was naturally clever...; but her powers had received no aid from education, she was ignorant and illiterate, and her deficiency of all mental improvements, her want of information in the most common particulars, could not be concealed from
Miss Dashwood, in spite of her constant endeavours to appear to advantage. Elinor saw, and pitied her for, the neglect of abilities which education might have rendered so respectable; but she saw with less tenderness of feeling, the thorough want of delicacy, of rectitude, and integrity of mind, which her attentions, her assiduities, her flatteries at the Park betrayed. ... (Sense and Sensibility 107).

Despite her educational deficiencies and because she is totally without principle, Lucy first entraps Edward Ferrars into a long engagement and sadistically makes Elinor, who loves Edward, her confidante; and when Edward is disinherited by his capricious mother, Lucy inveigles his brother, Robert, into a marriage that results in his brief disinherittance, until she is able to insinuate both her husband and herself into Mrs. Ferrars' good graces. The narrator tells us ironically that

The whole of Lucy's behaviour in the affair, and the prosperity which crowned it, therefore, may be held forth as a most encouraging instance of what an earnest, an unceasing attention to self-interest, however its progress may be apparently obstructed, will do in securing every advantage of fortune, with no other sacrifice than that of
Lucy's conduct is condemned in the novel, but it becomes explicable in light of the fact that she has not had an education that would have increased her sense and virtue, that she and her sister seem to have no settled address and must ingratiate themselves with relatives and acquaintances to secure a temporary residence. Lucy's fate if she had not been successful in her machinations might be that of her sister: to be nearly thirty years old, talking about bonnets and beaux, and telling Elinor, "if any thing should happen to take you and your sister away, and Mrs. Jennings should want company, I am sure we should be very glad to come and stay with her for as long a times as she likes" (231).

As a wife, Lucy would surely be no worse than her sister-in-law and the majority of married women in Austen's fiction. Fanny Dashwood is one of Austen's awful wives, and she is compared in the novel to Lady Middleton:

There was a kind of cold hearted selfishness on both sides, which mutually attracted them; and they sympathised with each other in an insipid propriety of demeanour, and a general want of understanding. (193)

Married to a man "amply provided for by the fortune of his mother" (1) and further enriched by her own dowry, Mrs. John
Dashwood nonetheless objects when her husband, who has inherited the Norland estate, wants to give his three sisters a thousand pounds apiece, and, by claiming that he would be "impoverishing [their dear little boy] to the most dreadful degree" (6) and playing off his greed against his sense of duty, she manages to convince him finally that, on an income of 500 pounds a year, his mother and sisters "will be much more able to give you something" (9). This scene is intriguingly similar to a scenario described by Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Wollstonecraft, inveighing against the cult of sensibility in women, examines the plight of females of sensibility who are left without provision and must depend "not only on the reason, but the bounty of their brothers." However, when the brother marries, the sister "is viewed with averted looks as an intruder, an unnecessary burden on the benevolence of the master of the house, and his new partner" because

The wife, a cold-hearted, narrow minded, woman, and this is not an unfair supposition; for the present mode of education does not tend to enlarge the heart any more than the understanding, is jealous of the little kindness which her husband shews [sic] to his relations; and her sensibility
not rising to humanity, she is displeased at seeing the property of her children lavished on an helpless sister.

. . . . The consequence is obvious, the wife has recourse to cunning to undermine the habitual affection, which she is afraid openly to oppose; and neither tears nor caresses are spared till the spy is worked out of her home, and thrown on the world, unprepared for its difficulties; or sent, as a great effort of generosity, or with some regard to propriety, with a small stipend, and an uncultivated mind, into joyless solitude. (65)

Wollstonecraft adds that had the wife been differently educated, she "would not have had that sensibility, of which self is the centre, and reason might have taught her not to expect, and not even to be flattered by, the affection of her husband, if it led him to violate prior duties" (66).

The same moral is manifestly illustrated in Sense and Sensibility when Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters are driven out of Norland and into exile in Devonshire, and sensibility is shown to be another word for selfishness and self-indulgence.

Not all of Austen's wives are as selfish and malevolent as Fanny Dashwood, but many of them do not have much to
recommend them. Lady Bertram in Mansfield Park is described as

a woman who spent her days in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty; thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience; guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. (17)

On the other hand, the days of her sister Price were spent in a kind of slow bustle—always busy, without getting on; always behind-hand and lamenting it, without altering her ways; wishing to be an economist, without contrivance or regularity; dissatisfied with her servants, without skill to make them better, and whether helping or reprimanding or indulging them, without any power of engaging their respect. (282)

In Northanger Abbey, Mrs. Allen is represented as one of that numerous class of females whose society can raise no other emotion than surprise at there being any men in the world who could like them well enough to marry them. She had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner. The
air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind, were all that could account for her being the choice of a sensible, intelligent man like Mr. Allen. . . . Dress was her passion. She had a most harmless delight in being fine. . . . (20)

We learn that Mary Musgrove in *Persuasion* lacks her sister Anne's understanding and temper and that

While well and happy, and properly attended to, she had great good humour and excellent spirits; but any indisposition sunk her completely; she had no resources for solitude; and inheriting a considerable share of the Elliot self-importance, was very prone to add to every other distress that of fancying herself neglected and ill-used. (64)

We are further told that "a more equal match might have greatly improved [Mary's husband, Charles Musgrove]; and that a woman of real understanding might have given more consequence to his character, and more usefulness, rationality, and elegance to his habits and pursuits" (70).

A similar observation is made by Emma in her evaluation of Mrs. Elton:

[she] was a vain woman, extremely well satisfied with herself, and thinking much of her own import-
ance; that she meant to shine and be very
superior, but with manners which had been formed
in a bad school, pert and familiar, that all her
notions were drawn from one set of people, and one
style of living; that if not foolish she was
ignorant, and that her society would certainly
do Mr. Elton no good. (Emma 245)

While Emma herself is subject to some of the same failings
that she finds in Mrs. Elton, she has a much better head and
heart, and she is never guilty of Mrs. Elton's sneering
officiousness nor of Mrs. Elton's constant refrain about the
Sucklings, Maple Grove, the barouche landau, and her caro
sposo.

In each of her novels, Austen demonstrates that many
women are either perverted or impaired by their education
and/or upbringing and that the emphasis that society places
on marriage for women causes females to neglect intellectual
and moral development in favor of securing a husband and an
establishment. Ignorant and sometimes unprincipled, they
are, therefore, ill-prepared for domestic duties or to be
rational companions to their husbands—and the conduct-book
notion that women will improve the men they marry is shown
to be nonsensical in the majority of cases. These were the
same claims that feminists—from Astell to Macaulay to
Wollstonecraft—made. Like them, Austen obviously believed
in female capacity for rationality and in moral standards that applied equally to men and women. Like them, Austen advocated mutual esteem in marriage, and Austen's heroines will be the companions and friends of their husbands. As Mrs. Weston reflects on Emma's projected marriage to George Knightley, "It was all right, all open, all equal" (Emma 423 underlining mine). Like them Austen objected to those male writers who stereotyped women. In Persuasion, Anne Elliot debates with Captain Harville about the relative constancy of men and women. Harville tells her that "I do not think I ever opened a book in my life which had not something to say about woman's inconstancy. Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness." Anne, undoubtedly speaking for Austen, responds:

if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books [by men] to prove anything. (237)

With the pen in her own hand, however, Austen, like Wollstonecraft, essayed her own vindication of women.
NOTES

1. Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* cites Patricia Crawford's "Women's Published Writings 1600-1700," which indicates that there was a virtual explosion of conduct literature in the period following the failure of the licensing act of 1695. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, however, Mary Poovey says that conduct literature proliferated from about 1740 on, and Joyce Hemlow in "Fanny Burney and the Courtesy Books" puts 1760-1820 as the high point of the writing of manners.


----------. *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*. London: Collins Clear-Type Press, ND.


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