

DANCING IN THE "EYE OF THE WORLD":
VOYEURISM, PERFORMANCE, AND THE PUBLIC TEXT
IN JANE AUSTEN'S SCENES OF DANCE

by

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ABSTRACT

Life in Jane Austen's fictional world is carried on under the constant public scrutiny of the "eye of the world." The consciousness of being watched reaches its most intense for Austen's heroines during social dances, one of the only societally sanctioned opportunities for the sexes to intermingle openly. Austen is thereby enabled to use the dance scenario for an investigation of female response to a "surveillance society."

In exploring aspects of the dancing-watching relationship (voyeurism; performance; public text), I have grouped the novels into three pairs, according to the aspect which seems to predominate. In Chapter I, I look at voyeuristic acts of observing dance in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. Marianne Dashwood, an avid dancer, represents the passive watched object; the other, "active" alternative for women is to watch -- both Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot relinquish dance, and thereby preserve themselves from the threats of the performative space. In Chapter II, I focus on performance in Northanger Abbey and Emma: for both Catherine Morland and Emma Woodhouse, awareness of audience becomes a requisite feature of relation to a spectator society, as Austen illustrates the responses of the innocent and the experienced female, respectively, to a performative environment. In Chapter III, I look at Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, where a close examination of Austen's construction of the dance scenes reveals clearly that she emphasises the powerlessness of watched females within the ballroom, and by extension within society.

Austen uses the ballroom as a microcosm of a voyeuristic and performative society: the actions of her heroines during scenes of dance are therefore illustrative of the various ways in which a female may negotiate dancing -- and living -- in the eye of the world.

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PREFACE: On the Treatment of Dance

This paper is not a study of the dances which are done by the characters in Jane Austen's novels. There is already a significant body of scholarship on dance of the Regency period; such work is, in addition, more pertinent to the field of dance history than to literature. For these reasons I have chosen to focus instead on what transpires at dances. This approach is, I believe, in keeping with Jane Austen's own treatment of dancing, as Langdon Elsbree notes: "In none of the novels does Jane Austen devote her attention to the details of dancing per se. Rather, she is interested in the occasion for the dance, the people involved, and the events that result" (DFC 115). These will be my concerns as well.

Critical work focussing on Austen's "politics" (as much of it does) has been of mixed value in contributing to this aim. To the extent that Austen's treatment of dance -- one of the most obviously "gendered" areas of Regency life -- necessarily includes commentary on the (disadvantaged) state of women, discussions of Austen as "feminist" do become relevant (for instance, Margaret Kirkham's assertion that "As a feminist moralist, Jane Austen criticises sexist pride and prejudice as embedded in the laws and customs of her age" (82)); whether or not Austen's dance scenes ought to be "politicised," however, remains problematic:

One problem of the newly politicised Jane Austen is that once the field of politics has been redefined to include the subject of gender difference at its centre, then almost any item can be included in what Claudia Johnson calls 'the lexicon of politically sensitive terms,' a word such as 'sensibility' becomes inevitably loaded with controversial reference, and the thesis is self-confirming, even though nothing like an explicit political position is declared or overt allusions are made. (Wiltshire 4)

I am therefore reluctant to take a stance that posits Jane Austen's scenes of dance as overtly "political" statements. Nonetheless, their socio-critical implications cannot be ignored: "[Austen's] heroines share with their creator the capacity to celebrate what is intrinsically fine in social dancing, despite its secondary co-option into the mercantile and patriarchal scheme of things" (Sulloway 138). Insofar as I attempt to explore Austen's acknowledgement of this "secondary co-option" -- particularly with regard to the public text -- and her concurrent investigation of the state of females under male domination, I have consulted works written from a feminist standpoint; of particular usefulness as well have been evaluations of the gender issues and definitions affecting female characters in Austen (Moreland Perkins' Reshaping the Sexes in *Sense and Sensibility* especially).

Work done specifically on dance in Jane Austen ranges from small sections of larger studies (such as the chapter on "Dancing and Marriage" in Alison Sulloway's Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood) and brief "asides" on relatively minor issues ("Dancing, Romeo and Juliet, and Pride and Prejudice" -- a two-page article by Alan Hertz on a Shakespeare reference made at the first dance in Pride and Prejudice) to detailed discussions of dance in Austen's novels, including a dissertation and two articles by Langdon Elsbree, and articles by Timothy Dow Adams and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh. The common tendency amongst the latter three authors has been to focus primarily on the dance-marriage connection in Austen's work: Elsbree takes up the "fidelity and complaisance" theme suggested in Volume 1, Chapter 10 of Northanger Abbey,

investigating the "ritual" nature of dancing in its connection to the courtship-love-marriage cycle; Adams, in his own words, is "concerned with dancing as a metaphor for marriage and marriage proposals in only four novels" (65); Reid-Walsh includes details on dance conventions and rules of etiquette while analysing the entrance into society -- and onto the marriage market -- of three Austen heroines.

All these authors discuss dance as a "metaphor for marriage"; a related and relatively unexplored issue is the way in which dance, the most visible of the rituals through which Austenian couples must play out their courtship, takes place so entirely in the public eye, becoming a social "performance." Recognising this feature of Austen's dance scenes allows appropriate emphasis to be placed on the fact that it is not only prospective marriage partners, but all members of society -- and, more suggestively, "society" as an undifferentiated whole, an entity in itself¹ -- that are enabled to make their evaluation of various characters through the medium or forum of "the ball." Social dance as a series of codified, socially learned and transmitted symbols or acts -- including both the actual dance figures and the social "movements" that frame them -- becomes a text, one which is read simultaneously by participants and spectators. My concern is with the way in which ballroom scenes in Austen's novels are constructed around acts of performing, watching and interpreting social dance -- an interplay producing a distinct and readable "public text" whose societal ramifications ultimately extend far beyond the ballroom -- and with the different ways in which Austen's heroines respond to these

circumstances.

In exploring aspects of the dancing-watching relationship (voyeurism;² performance; public text), I have grouped the novels into three pairs, an early with a late, according to the aspect which seems to predominate; the issues are interrelated, however, and each is pertinent to all the novels to some degree. The very fact that the same focus and/or approach appears in early and late novels suggests that there is no coherent chronological "line" of development to be traced in Jane Austen's use or presentation of dance.

I have chosen to focus on Austen's female characters for the obvious reason that she focusses on them herself; in addition, however, the female's "disempowered" status within the dance room intersects with Claudia Johnson's claim that "the device of centering her novels in the consciousness of unempowered characters -- that is, women...enables Austen to expose and explore those aspects of traditional institutions -- marriage, primogeniture, patriarchy -- which patently do not serve her heroines well" (xxiv). Although the Regency country dance is notable for the "equality" of its structure ("Both women and men are equal agents while dancing, their movements are largely in parallel, synchronized and in exact balance to one another" (Reid-Walsh 116)), the fact remains that there can be no uniform experience for males and females in this setting, since outside of the actual steps the practice of the dance is still the self-expression of a male-dominated society:

A culture is that which is shared by all of the members of a society. In practice, however, the possibilities of such intersubjectivity will always be limited by

differences of gender. For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish between male and female realities within the context of any social group....

Dance -- the distillation of culture into its most metaphysical form -- always embodies and identifies this gender-generated division of cultural realities. Whenever men and women dance together, therefore, cultures collide: male culture and female culture.

The men's dance style is a crystallisation of what it means to be a male member of their culture. The women's dance style is a crystallisation of what it means to be a female member of that culture. (T. Polhemus 11)

Given that the experience of the dance is always gender-specific, the experience of being watched that accompanies it is also different for women, who must be "sought" by men and therefore must encode their appearances accordingly. Thus investigating the female experience of voyeurism, performance, and the public text simultaneously allows Austen to comment on the general social differences for women within her world.

N.B.: All underlinings in quoted passages are my emphases; all italics are the authors'.



INTRODUCTION

"...she not only longed to be dancing, but was likewise aware that, as the real dignity of her situation could not be known, she was sharing with all the scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the disgrace of wanting a partner. To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence...is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life...."

- Jane Austen, Northanger Abbey, I.VIII

"The narrator describes the ignominy in hyperbolic terms but note the image of the social gaze or 'eye'...."

- Jacqueline Reid-Walsh, p.119

In her book Telling Glances: Voyeurism in the French Novel, Dorothy Kelly refers to a voyeuristic scenario in which the female is "trapped in a structure in which gazes constantly determine her activities and limit her freedom, even in her own home" (193) -- a description that could equally apply to any Jane Austen heroine. Life in Austen's fictional world is carried on under constant public scrutiny: Austenian characters have a ceaseless surveillant and critic in the "eye of the world." In the contained and conservative social sphere upon which Austen focusses her attention, the smallest visible deviation instantly produces public comment; the greatest may result in disgrace and universal condemnation. Isobel Armstrong's diagnosis of the "world" of Sense and Sensibility is applicable to any Austen setting:

Jane Austen lived through probably one of the most repressive political eras of recent history, and her texts understand the culture of espionage.... [Sense and Sensibility] describes a world which is not open, but more important than this Mrs Jennings is part of, caught up in, a chronic *structure* of surveillance and concealment. Surveillance breeds concealment and concealment breeds surveillance: secrets breed gossip and gossip breeds secrecy; there is a presupposition that

everyone has something to hide, whether in the domestic context or at large in the state. (87)

The consciousness of being watched reaches its most intense for Austen's heroines during social dances, one of the only societally sanctioned opportunities for the sexes -- and to a limited extent the classes -- to intermingle openly and with relative freedom. By this means, Austen is enabled to use the dance scenario as the locus for an investigation of female response to a "surveillance society."

Social dances are the forum where evaluations of potential marriage partners may be carried out; as "it was commonly accepted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that ballrooms were arenas of courtship" (Reid-Walsh 115), Austen makes full use of these all-important social occasions as pivotal events in the (love-)lives of her heroines. Although dance scenes comprise a small fraction of any one of Jane Austen's novels, Elsbree notes that "in all of the novels except Persuasion, Jane Austen uses the events of the dance to complicate the actions of the plot" (DFC 115) -- a plot always concerned with the marital aspirations of its central characters.³

By examining dance events, Austen is able to highlight the interdependent relationship of the two acts which concur in ballrooms: dancing and watching. Austen's heroines, whether or not they wish to dance themselves, must by their attendance at social dances participate in the rite of voyeurism which surrounds the act of dancing in public view. The emphasis placed on prestige and social acceptability -- and on the state of disgrace that is their alternative -- shows the value that is given to public approbation

and the fear engendered in Austen's female dancers by an everpresent and inescapable social scrutiny.⁴ The forum of the ballroom, so often the site for important encounters, overheard discoveries, and exposures of character, is the location where the gazes of Austen's characters reach their most complex entanglement. Judith Mackrell states that "Space also connects the dancers -- it is the arena into which they project emotion and movement" (172). Thus for Austen's heroines the ballroom becomes the nexus of intersecting gazes and the desires and intentions these represent.

Under an external gaze, all social acts of dancing become performances; all social acts of observing dance(rs) constitute spectatorship. This constant interplay of dancing and watching and the consequent need to interpret what is seen result in the communal creation of a "public text": a tacit consensus on the signification allotted to the social acts relating to dance. "Movement is a primary not a secondary social 'text'.... Its articulation signals group affiliation and group differences, whether consciously performed or not" (Desmond 31); the observation and judgment of social dance hereby becomes an act of reading and interpretation, the analysis of a text:

...we can ask what movements are considered "appropriate" or even "necessary" within a specific historical and geographical context, and by whom and for whom such necessities obtain. We can ask who dances, when and where, in what ways, with whom, and to what end? And just as importantly, who does not dance, in what ways, under what conditions and why? By looking at dance we can see enacted on a broad scale, and in codified fashion, socially constituted and historically specific attitudes toward the body in general, toward specific social groups' usage of the body in particular, and about the relationships among variously marked bodies.... (Desmond 32)

Taking a similar approach to Jane Austen's scenes of dance and

tracking the "relationships among variously marked bodies" is thus illustrative of the greater social patterns existing in her fictional world and of their implications for her main characters.

Austen's female protagonists are all objects and/or perpetrators of social dance-voyeurism; they are all performers and/or spectators; all both read and write the pervasive public text, with varying levels of fluency. "Because Catherine, Emma and Fanny are competent in ballroom etiquette, to varying degrees they also understand the 'politics' of the ballroom" (Reid-Walsh 115). Given that the ballroom is a symbol of society, the ability of Austen's central characters to grasp "ballroom politics" is of far more moment than simply influencing how they will fare at dances; their adeptness in this arena also signals their maturity, independence, and world-wisdom, and is a measure of their competence in understanding the greater context of their society as the ballroom represents it. Thus the reasons for and ways in which Austen's heroines partake in, accept, defy, subvert, or excel at the social acts of spectating and performing as these occur at dances provide an index to their position on the marriage-market and in society.

Voyeurism

In her essay "An-Other Voice: Young Women Dancing and Talking," Helen Thomas quotes a well-known passage from Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," itself "perhaps the most influential discussion on what has now come to be termed 'the male gaze'" (Thomas, AV note 22, p.91):

...a number of feminist writers have argued that the idea

of the mirror, of looking at oneself as if one were being looked at, the sense of surveillance, the relationship of how one looks to one's sense of identity or self-worth, for the most part, is gender-specific. As Mulvey has argued:

'In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female....In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey 19).
(Thomas 88)

It is possible (though not necessarily desirable) to take such an approach to Jane Austen's female characters, especially as these characters appear at dances. The notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness" is particularly resonant with reference to the more openly "exhibited" female characters such as Fanny Price, but is relevant to any female described by Austen as having a concern that her ballroom appearance be sufficiently "attractive" to garner the coveted (or, for such as the dowerless Bennet girls, requisite) male attention. In this aspect of dance scenes, ideas of the dominating male gaze are relevant; Roger Copeland, however, advises discretion when applying Mulvey's cinema-inspired gaze theories too freely to dance:

...I would caution against too literal a transference of Mulvey's ideas from cinema studies to dance. Mulvey for example is very quick to point out that 'This complex interaction of looks is specific to film'....More importantly, these theories of the omnipresent, inescapable male gaze proceed on the assumption that it's *always* the man who holds the camera (or the brush or the pen) and the woman who holds the pose....'

Indeed, in dance the cinematic notion of the 'male' gaze is less relevant and useful to the theoretician than a more generalised consideration of the gaze itself, whether male or female.... (146)

A different dimension is therefore opened when we consider that within the Austen dances, gazing is not the sole prerogative

of men: there is also the presence of the female gaze. Kelly states that "women write of woman's desire, a desire that is linked to her gaze and to her *different* way of looking and writing" (193). This comment is particularly relevant to Austen -- not only because she is a woman writing of women, but because she often highlights the disparity between male and female perspectives and ways of viewing. Austen investigates from various angles the situation of the female watcher, and suggests the paradox embedded in the actions of this figure: a woman who watches removes herself from the arena of physical involvement and display, and is thus excluded from the dance "action" even as she is most active as viewer (whereas the actively dancing female is nonetheless a passive object of other gazes).

What can compound the difference of the female gaze is its linkage to the desire for invisibility. The exercise of the female gaze is often bound up with a wish to remain unseen; this aspect returns us once again to the active-passive dichotomy endemic to the dance and to society. For the female in a male-dominated society, generally expected to be passive and granted only the power of refusal, the gaze must remain a surreptitious one -- she should not "take the lead" in gazing, one presumes, any more than in dancing or proposing. The female gazer at dances (whose gaze may be considered the visible manifestation of her desire) must be careful not to violate societal protocol by allowing her forthrightness to be apparent to those only too vigilant social sentries surrounding her.⁵

In addition to the gaze of individual male or female characters, Austen's novels acknowledge the presence of a

generalised social or public gaze, the "eye of the world." This gaze is frequently a threat to its objects; recalling Austen's reference in Northanger Abbey to "'a country like this,...where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies....'" (NA 159), Nancy Armstrong comments that "The terrors of aristocratic power have given way to ones that are less terrible and more effective, as Austen represents a social world regulated by surveillance or, in her words, 'voluntary spies'" (206). This image of a society in which one is continually aware of being under scrutiny evokes in turn Foucault's description of "panopticism." According to Foucault, the effect of such a system is "to induce... a state of conscious and permanent visibility" such that "the constant pressure acts even before the offences...have been committed" (201, 206). This description is distinctly reminiscent of the state of affairs in an Austen novel -- especially in ballrooms -- where characters are deterred from "undesirable" behaviours by an awareness of watching eyes. Hence Foucault's statement that "The panoptic schema...was destined to spread throughout the social body; its vocation was to become a generalized function" (207) has most resonance with regard to Jane Austen when related to the poly-gazed ballroom assembly, where a potentially inflammatory mix of movement and desire is kept in check by a multiplicity of watchers.⁶

Performance

A brief reference to dance in Chapter 6 of Persuasion is significant for its depiction of the feminine sphere as composed of mostly performative concerns: "...the females were fully occupied

in all the other common subjects of house-keeping, neighbours, dress, dancing, and music" (P 69). In contrast to the idea of a male-public/female-private division,⁷ four of the five "female" concerns listed here involve other people: neighbours; dress (important only insofar as it is seen by others); dancing and music (which require participants and an audience). What can be concluded from this is that female concerns, as delineated here, are in a sense not at all private, since they are *performative* -- they involve putting on a show, impressing others with appearances. Furthermore, since within these socio-performative areas the women themselves become the "performance piece," we can conclude that women are socialised to be aware of their own visible exterior selves as a vital part of an ongoing public show.

If females are on display even in their everyday lives, how much more so in the overtly performative setting of the ballroom. Terry Castle's study of the masquerade in eighteenth-century English culture and fiction contains a passage that describes Austenian balls nearly as well as it does masquerade:

The masquerade had its undeniably provocative visual elements: one took one's pleasure, above all, in seeing and being seen. With universal privileges granted to voyeurism and self-display, the masquerade was from the start ideally suited to the satisfaction of scopophilic and exhibitionistic urges. (38)⁸

Thus the performative space privileges by its own nature the acts of watching and being watched. Each character, in stepping into the ballroom, is entering a public arena where she is offered, not only to eligible men, but also to all of society, for evaluation. In a social world where privacy is impossible, the dance is one area where eligible young women may assess and be assessed. The

"mercantile" implications are not nonexistent for being subtle: nowhere is the marriage "market" more apparent as such than in a room where nubile young women meet virile young men in a series of requisite and highly codified performative motions, the whole having been arranged by mothers keen to "sell" prospective suitors on the charms of their daughters and by a society eager to see matches made. Within this setting, any action is a performance: just as Foucault comments that within the Panopticon the cells are "like so many small theatres" and the inmates "actors" (200), here too one becomes an actor, a performer, simply by the consciousness of being watched. That the need to put on an impressive performance in this arena should be most heavily felt by women -- a situation of which Austen seems well aware -- is due to the fact that, denied the right to initial action, females must seek to attract and impress solely with their appearances.

Public Text

The consciousness of being continuously viewed and critiqued is responsible for the suffocating, secretive atmosphere often pervading balls. Inside the ballroom there is little certain knowledge -- only conjecture, suspicion, rumours, gossip. With open communication at a minimum, "sexual relations are declared by the slightest gesture or the briefest glance" (N. Armstrong 144); convictions are formed without any solid basis for belief; important knowledge is gained surreptitiously, without any intention of telling or being told. Direct verbal communication is noticeably absent,⁹ and "overhearings" are constant. This is due to the social stigma attached to speaking freely and to a general fear

of self-betrayal; any desire to communicate openly has habitually been neutralised by the social necessity of stringent self-control. Hence Roger Gard's description of a "typically Austenian ethos":

...a group of people with more or less private concerns who are hindered by politeness from expressing them. Really intimate and sensitive matters, especially those concerning the relations of the sexes, cannot come out at all directly. Sociability inhibits expression. The alternative of private meetings is nearly out of the question. (EP 90)

Within such an ethos, evidencing a society with an aversion to the uncivilised and the unrestrained, the vagaries of attraction have been neatly codified and encapsulated in a series of social "motions" which in turn are "acted out" in the ballroom, with a series of eligible partners and for a host of observers. These in turn must be interpreted: "The procedures for reading and writing have extended beyond the page to the dance floor and parlor" (N. Armstrong 138) -- thus the eye of the world observes and "reads" the women who dance. The act of watching is considered the way to find "truth" within a ballroom; public judgments are formed with nothing more than observation for basis. The unreliability and bias inherent in such a process make it potentially highly detrimental to those it takes as its objects, and dissimulation and disguise become necessities as females anticipate their "reading" in the public text.

A motif of concealment characterises all of Austen's ballroom scenes. The interplay of concealed and revealed marking the social relations of Austen's heroines comes to the fore in the charged atmosphere of the ballroom, where the public gaze is at its most intense. The tension between what is shown and unshown, seen and

unseen, known and unknown, emerges as a dominant feature of Austen's scenes of dance, and a connection is drawn between the patterns of ballroom interaction and the undercurrent of social negotiations and divisions these superficial movements represent and reinforce. Austen uses the ballroom as a microcosm of a voyeuristic and performative society: the actions of her heroines during scenes of dance are therefore illustrative of the various ways in which a female may negotiate dancing -- and living -- in the eye of the world.

I. VOYEURISM: Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion

In both these novels, dance appears only as an incidental; while Austen makes clear that social occurrences involving dance are frequent and are attended by all the protagonists, these events are rarely described. Unlike Pride and Prejudice or Mansfield Park, where important social dances occupy entire chapters, dance in Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion is often relegated to no more than a line. This does not diminish the centrality of dance to the characters' lives, however: as a standard social activity, a location for interpersonal evaluations to be carried out, and a purveyor of "the voyeuristic and erotic pleasures that dance has traditionally offered" (Copeland 143), it is very much present.

In the dance scenes of Sense and Sensibility, the focus, as in so much of the novel, is on the contrast between the two sisters. Marianne is fully in and of the dance: she participates wholeheartedly, and, in so doing, embraces the role of passive watched object endemic to the performative dance space. She virtually does not exist as watcher (and hence as active subject), since her gaze is entirely confined within the narcissistic Willoughby connection and she is completely oblivious to everyone and everything else, including social dance decorum. Elinor, on the other hand, opts out of the performance space (going so far, according to Jane Nardin, as to "ma[k]e a fetish of privacy" (41)) in favour of a removed and autonomous position as spectator. Elinor watches; Marianne is watched. Both participate, willingly or unwillingly, knowingly or unknowingly, in the voyeur dynamic of the Austenian dance, and by their actions illustrate two possibilities for females within this ethos.

In Persuasion, Austen does not place any significant focus on the dance participant/passive object. Such characters as do represent this option (Mary, the Musgrove sisters) are relatively unimportant and receive little attention. What is investigated in greater depth is the plight of the female character who chooses the role of spectator while accepting the exclusion from the social sphere which is necessitated by this choice. Anne's deliberate rejection of the dance is made clear in a way which Elinor's is not, as are her motivations for this choice. The desire to "remain unobserved" comes into play as a powerful motivating force; and with it, necessarily, comes an acknowledgement by the female of watching as an integral and inescapable part of the dance scenario. That is, Anne, in order to make the decision to reject dance so that she may remain unseen, has obviously recognised the watched nature of the dancer's role (as Marianne, for instance, has not) and perceives the hazards this presents. Elinor counsels Marianne against allowing all she feels to be so easily discernible to the eye of the world; Anne does not require such counsel, as she is already painfully aware of the pressure of the social eye. Withdrawing entirely from the dance arena, Anne represents the opposite end of the voyeuristic spectrum from Marianne. Being the least participatory physically (and socially), however, allows her not only to be one of Austen's most active onlookers, but also ultimately to attain a kind of victory over the public gaze.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

The first reference to dance in Sense and Sensibility comes from Sir John Middleton, who, in describing Willoughby to the

Dashwood girls as an eligible prospect, asserts that "at a little hop in the Park, [Willoughby] danced from eight o'clock till four, without once sitting down" (SS 38). It is significant that Sir John chooses this particular evidence to support his view of Willoughby as being "as good a sort of fellow...as ever lived"; Willoughby's tireless dancing is proof of both spiritedness and health. (In contrast, characters such as Fanny Price betray their physical frailty by their inability to dance for long periods without fatigue.) The fact that Sir John adds to his testimony Willoughby's having "risen at eight to ride to covert" is further proof that he offers this plea on Willoughby's behalf partly as evidence of physical prowess. In addition, Sir John cites Willoughby's dancing to convey a general sense of the younger man's social adeptness and pleasant demeanour. Unlike Darcy, who cannot bring himself to stand up at a common assembly, Willoughby has no aversion to participating in an event even less prestigious: the "little hop at the Park" is almost certainly one of those spontaneous revelries (elsewhere referred to as "private balls" and "unpremeditated dances") in which Sir John frequently indulges. Thus Willoughby is confirmed for the Dashwoods as being very much "on the market."

These opening remarks of Sir John's on the subject of dancing have a significance beyond the affirmation of Willoughby's status; they show clearly that possession of desire, willingness, and ability to dance is evidence of eligibility, whether male or female. Where, when, why, and how a man or woman in a Jane Austen novel chooses to dance and *to be seen dancing* is proof of his or her status in society and on the marriage market. Darcy ceases to be eligible when he will not stand up to dance (as evidenced by the

fact that Mrs Bennet and presumably other matrons instantly remove him from their list of possible or desirable husbands for their daughters); Bingley reaffirms his eligibility by his willingness to attend, to hold, and to participate in dances; Willoughby is established as a normal, healthy, eligible male by the fact, frequency, and manner of his dancing. In the vigilant eye of the world, evidence presented at dances is translated into an important expression of eligibility. For women a display of vigour in particular may be even more requisite: "Health, for a woman, may be in the first place a commodity, and the novels pay their due to that part of patriarchal culture in which the question of the woman's body is resolved into its appeal to the male gaze" (Wiltshire 9). Already, then, Austen has subtly hinted at the action by which an external gaze evaluates a dancing body, to which process the Dashwood girls themselves will soon be subject.

The eye of the world is personified in this novel partly by the confederacy of Sir John and Mrs Jennings. These two, while superficially benign, have a less innocuous dimension: together, they function as a kind of matchmaking unit, an amalgam of the ever-observing, gossip-mongering "madam" who often serves rather to menace than to protect her young charges (as when Elinor must censure Mrs Jennings for having indiscriminately announced Marianne's "engagement"), and the male pander:

...the spiral of secrecy, censorship, and surveillance is outrageously open and scandalously on display, an open secret of which people are curiously oblivious. Mrs Jennings is its raucous representative, with her perpetual discoveries....Her conversation is one long sexual revelation, one long consent to social spying. (I. Armstrong 85)

If Mrs Jennings is the "representative" of voyeurism, imbuing

social interrelations with her "libidinal energies" (I. Armstrong 85), Sir John is equally active in overseeing male-female interaction, promoting relations between his younger companions by arranging events at which they may encounter each other. The "private balls" and "parties on the water" which Sir John hosts serve to further the evaluative opportunities of eligible young members of society. Specifically, such social events facilitate those acts of watching which constitute a kind of social "appraisal." In Volume 1, Chapter 11, for example, Austen states that the events organised by Sir John give Willoughby the "opportunity of witnessing the excellencies of Marianne" and "of marking his animated admiration" (SS 45). That is, they present the opportunity of watching and being watched that is so vital in a society where private interaction is nearly impossible to achieve. While dances allow Willoughby and Marianne to be watched by each other, however, to "witness" and to "mark" their mutual interest, they also allow the voyeuristic eye of the world an unobstructed view of all that transpires between the young dancers/lovers. Marianne and Willoughby are almost never unobserved even in their "private" moments together; when they do contrive to be alone, they are chastised for their impropriety. Any interactive pleasures allotted to young people in the Austen world must always be voraciously and vicariously enjoyed by a host of onlookers; at dances the presence of an extrinsic gaze magnifies private interactions into public significance.¹⁰

Marianne Dashwood is in many ways the quintessential observed object: not only does she conform to Kelly's description of the watched woman -- "trapped in a world of investigations in which she

fails to guard her inner self from exposure" (193) -- she *wilfully* lowers her guard and displays this inner self to the world, boasting to Elinor of her contempt for all concealment. Heedlessly expressive, "Marianne's inner life is communicated in instantly readable physical signs" (Wiltshire 34). Marianne's behaviour with Willoughby at dances is proof of this carelessness: the two refuse to dance with any partners but each other, even though this is contrary to convention. "Such conduct made them of course most exceedingly laughed at; but ridicule could not shame, and seemed hardly to provoke them" (SS 46).¹¹ Despite Elinor's warnings, Marianne continues to invite public censure by refusing to recognise and respect the voyeuristic aspect of public dances.

While preoccupied with Willoughby, Marianne Dashwood becomes the object of another gaze, in one of the most blatant acts of watching in Austen: "...one evening at the park, ... [Colonel Brandon and Elinor] were sitting down by mutual consent, while the others were dancing. His eyes were fixed on Marianne..." (SS 47). With this image Austen presents Colonel Brandon as the determined and obsessive voyeur. Although he has had "no encouragement" to attach himself to Marianne, he watches her intently without her knowledge or consent. Notable, too, is the fact that he is watching her while she is engaged in a physical activity with another man. Colonel Brandon's having sat down with Elinor Dashwood and elected not to dance, then, is almost certainly his contrivance of an acceptable way to watch Marianne; his choice not to dance, at least, can only be deliberate, since in the case of a man -- gifted with the privilege of asking -- the act of not dancing is always a voluntary one. Brandon's gaze, while not implicated in the general public

one, exemplifies in its intensity the extent to which the dancing Marianne becomes the voyeurs' object -- simply by being a dancer she "connotes to-be-looked-at-ness."

Marianne and Willoughby, meanwhile, are utterly absorbed in one another, and by their actions make their mutual attachment visibly clear: "Marianne abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve....Willoughby thought the same, and their behaviour, at all times, was an illustration of their opinions" (SS 45). In terms of the public text, the "instantly readable" Marianne is quite explicitly declaring herself "off the market" -- yet Colonel Brandon continues to regard her as a desirable object. In fact, throughout most of the novel Colonel Brandon's attachment to Marianne develops through observation (one-way) rather than interaction (two-way). She becomes, in her "watchedness," entirely an object, while he -- since she steadfastly refuses to observe or even to recognise him -- remains entirely a watcher and a subject. (His likening of her to the woman in his past is proof of how much Marianne becomes to him in her objectified state a "type" -- to the point that he actually contradicts Elinor's sensible and concerned desire to see her sister's behaviour change for the better.) The nature of the general attitude toward dance facilitates and renders socially acceptable this continued surveillance. Although Brandon himself does not threaten Marianne, Austen's description of the situation serves to highlight Marianne's vulnerability to external gazes.

Despite the removed and "impotent" quality of Brandon's watching, the watcher, the non-dancer, is in another sense the empowered one, with the dancer or performer as the passive object

of his/her gaze. This is true of female watchers as well, and is the aspect of public behaviour represented by Elinor. At the "musical party" in Volume 2, Chapter 14 (which, while not strictly a "scene of dance," is one of the few described performative occasions in the novel), Elinor, indifferent toward the spectacle ostensibly offered by the gathering, freely turns her power of watching on those surrounding her: "Elinor...made no scruple of turning away her eyes...whenever it suited her, and unrestrained... would fix them at pleasure on any other object in the room" (SS 218). All the phrases used by Austen in this passage serve to emphasise Elinor's bold autonomy: Elinor holds herself above the hypocrisy of petty social decorum ("made no scruple"), is free and independent of any outside control ("unrestrained"), and consults only her own inclination in determining her actions ("whenever it suited her"/"at pleasure"). This firm reliance upon her own judgment and reason is a hallmark of many of Austen's most admirable female characters: strong, decisive women like Elizabeth Bennet and Elinor Dashwood use their own minds as freely and adroitly as they do their own gazes. In contrast are those, like Fanny Price, who are perpetually indecisive and unsure of their own judgment (Fanny's greatest predicament is always to be left without outside guidance, as in her state before her *début*: "young and inexperienced, with...no confidence in her own taste" (MP 210)); those who have a history of allowing themselves to be swayed by outside pressure (Anne Elliot); or those who have a misplaced belief in their own capacity which is proven wrong by time (Marianne Dashwood; Emma Woodhouse). Elinor is already beyond all these, and the power of her free, perceiving, unguarded gaze

becomes the metaphor for her own power as a female and as a character.

The power to watch is the power to make discoveries, and Elinor, having already removed herself from the passive-participatory arena of the performative space, now declares herself the equal of the other spectators, male included, by virtue of her own watching. This forthrightness is evidenced by the way in which she encounters Edward Ferrars' brother. Austen begins by stating that Elinor, ignoring the performers, fixes her eyes randomly on "any other object in the room" (SS 218). There is a subtle irony to the fact that this statement is directly followed by Elinor's discovery of Robert Ferrars, an effete social butterfly transferred by her gaze into the passive and generally female position of watched "object": "In one of these excursive glances she perceived among a group of young men, the very he, who had given them a lecture on toothpick-cases at Gray's. She perceived him soon afterwards looking at herself." This passage is significant because it is Elinor who first perceives Robert Ferrars and *then* becomes aware of his gaze upon her. She has, in a sense, overstepped the male-female protocol which always allocates to the male the prerogative of initial action, upon which Austen herself comments ironically in Northanger Abbey with the notion that Catherine Morland perhaps ought not to dream of Henry Tilney before he dreams of her. If it can be said -- albeit ironically -- that "it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her" (NA 15), then there may also be some ironic truth to the idea that a woman's gaze should not precede a man's. That Elinor is self-assured enough to

disregard such strictures is proof of her as "Austen's most flagrantly gender-dissonant heroine" (Perkins 40). Elinor has already effectively "disarmed" the watching male by taking on the masculine privilege of initiative and by refusing to look submissively away once he returns her gaze.¹² The freedom permitted her by Austen in this arena would therefore seem to support Moreland Perkins' view of Elinor as a female character endowed with "masculine" traits and abilities, one whose characterisation is evidence of Austen's "intention to reshape gender in this early novel" (12); certainly her behaviour at performative occasions is representative of the strongest and "safest" position for females within a watching society.

Even the few references to dance which Austen provides in Sense and Sensibility confirm the voyeuristic nature of the setting within which her characters must function. "This is a novel in which everyone watches each other for good and bad reasons.... 'By indirections find directions out' (*Hamlet*, II i 66) is the motto of everyone in the novel except, perhaps, Marianne, whether they like it or not" (I. Armstrong 85). Marianne is a watched character, so utterly absorbed in acting, in participation, that she is all but unaware of herself as a spectacle. On the dance-voyeurism spectrum, she is at one extreme, dancing without observing, being watched without watching.¹³ The "over-expressiveness" implicated in her carelessness for society's regard and regulations is responsible for Marianne's vulnerability as a character, and contributes to her near-downfall.¹⁴ Marianne's passage from this unrestrained heedlessness to a greater awareness of self, sense, and society is

paralleled by her attitude to dance (her movement from the defiant openness of her dance-conduct with Willoughby to more circumspect behaviour and an alliance with the reserved non-dancer Colonel Brandon). She has endangered herself by being too readable, declaring herself too openly "in the language of gesture and bodily display" (Wiltshire 34). Although her end (marriage to Brandon) has been read by some as a disappointing concession, a containment and quenching of sexual energies (Wiltshire 58-9), it is also possible to conclude that Marianne's personal transformation is indicative of the same sentiments on the part of the author as those that produced in the contemporary minuet a progression from "initial unrestrained expressiveness into the classical ideals of clarity, balance and regularity" (Katz 523).

Elinor -- who personifies the latter ideals -- is never seen dancing in Sense and Sensibility. Her presentation as a non-participant in dance scenes is deliberate on Austen's part, as it enables us to see the antithesis of Marianne's choice. Elinor holds herself back from performative opportunities to a greater extent than any other Austen heroine: she neither dances, plays, nor sings. In contrast to her sister and Willoughby, both "passionately fond" of music and dancing, Elinor and her preferred partner Edward Ferrars are a thoroughly non-performative pair. While this reticence removes Elinor from the "display zone," it also permits her a freedom as watcher that is generally reserved for males, and she exhibits a perspicacity in this role that is, arguably, unexceeded by any other Austen character. Elinor's trespass on the male preserve of initiative and her refusal to become a passively watched dancing body thus allow Austen subtly to showcase more

radical ideas about the rights and abilities of women.

PERSUASION

The first reference to dancing in Persuasion appears only a few pages into Chapter 1 and immediately strikes the usual dancing/watching note: "Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen [Elizabeth Elliot] opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded" (P 38). This statement appears as part of a delineation of the various activities which occupy Elizabeth:

Thirteen years had seen her mistress of Kellynch Hall, presiding and directing....For thirteen years had she been doing the honours, and laying down the domestic law at home, and leading the way to the chaise and four, and walking immediately after Lady Russell out of all the drawing-rooms and dining-rooms in the country. Thirteen winters' revolving frosts had seen her opening every ball of credit which a scanty neighbourhood afforded.... (P 38)

The statement about dance is in obvious counterpoint to the first sentence describing Elizabeth; in both sentences the subject of the "seeing" is left unstated -- an omission which adds to the idea that Elizabeth is observed by society at large, by everyone, by the "eye of the world." The confluence of these opening and closing statements suggests that most of what Elizabeth occupies her time with is immaterial, both to herself and to society -- the important thing is that she be *seen* to occupy a primary position both at her family seat and on the dance floor. The social dance is the social milieu in microcosm, concentrated and magnified, and for Elizabeth to retain her dominion over the latter she must be seen to dominate and lead in both spheres. In this way the status of the "seen" dancer mirrors her stature in society.

This is the only reference in the novel to the "balls of

credit" which Elizabeth patronises. All other dance references in Persuasion (apart from a casual mention by Captain Wentworth of balls on board ship) are in connection with dances of a much lower calibre and prestige, those "unpremeditated little balls" which so delight the Musgrove sisters. That Anne Elliot chooses to efface herself even at these casual, impromptu festivities emphasises the extent to which her position, values, and social ambitions differ from her sister's: evidence once again of Austen using dance response to dramatise a character contrast between sisters.

Far from sharing her sister's desire to be seen at dances, Anne Elliot is the Austen female most determined to avoid dancing altogether. There are two brief passages in Persuasion that actually discuss dance, and Austen emphasises Anne's voluntarily withdrawn role in both. The first passage appears in the middle of Volume 1, Chapter 6, and includes a testament to Anne's "solitude" in the exercise of her musical abilities ("In music she had been always used to feel alone in the world" (P 73)). It is not *despite* this habitual indifference on the part of her listeners, but rather *because* of it, that Anne chooses to remain an accompanist instead of becoming a participant in the dance; unlike the Musgroves and their other guests, who evince a perpetual and insatiable eagerness for all kinds of revelry, Anne continues "very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post" (P 73). The language used here is telling: Anne's choice to forgo dancing for playing is not simply a preference between two equal options, but an intentional choice of the least "active" position. Anne consciously withdraws herself from the participatory, performative, and above all visible role of dancer in favour of the accompanist's "backstage"

invisibility.

The deliberateness of this choice cannot be overstated: Austen herself emphasises it with reference to Anne's complete awareness of the indifference with which her musical efforts are always greeted ("her performance was little thought of, ...as she was well aware"; "She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself"; "In music she had been always used to feel alone in the world" (P 73)). Anne is therefore choosing to play precisely because she knows she will be largely ignored and unnoticed. Steadfast in her celibacy as she was in her attachment, Anne is definitively "off the market," and she shows this by removing herself from the game of gazes endemic to even the most casual of dances.¹⁵

The end of Volume 1, Chapter 8 contains the only described dance scene in the novel; again Anne's withdrawn role is noted:

The evening ended with dancing. On its being proposed, Anne offered her services, as usual, and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved.
(P 95)

Here again we are given testimony of Anne's motivations in choosing to avoid the dance floor and maintain her post at the piano: the "backgrounded" office keeps her both employed (as, were she idle, she would be more likely both to draw unwanted attention and to betray her emotional state to others) and unobserved. Still more important, however -- though not acknowledged by Anne -- is that from where she sits she may herself observe. Like another of the great fictional female recluses, Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe, Anne has actively sought a post "whence unobserved [she] could

observe" (Brontë, 211). Thus the desire to remain unseen is in this case not only to avoid being watched but to avoid being watched *watching*. "It would seem that the loss of power in the self occasioned by the love one feels for the other is the reason why one feels the need to be hidden when one looks" (Kelly 108); the betrayal of her own potentially unrequited sentiments to their object or to the public eye would entail a further loss of power, and is thus the event which Anne is most eager to avoid.

Anne is fairly successful in her aim of observing while unobserved, and the result of her quiet study is to discover at once the current disparity between Captain Wentworth's situation and her own: "She felt that he had everything to elevate him, which general attention and deference, and especially the attention of all the young women could do" (P 95). Wentworth is in high spirits, Anne is hiding her tears; Wentworth is "elevated," Anne is physically and spiritually abased. Most significantly, of course, Anne is -- or hopes to be -- "unobserved," while Wentworth has both "general attention" and "the attention of all the young women." The redundancy of the latter two phrases attesting to Wentworth's visible popularity is clearly evocative of Anne's own fixation and worry as she voyeuristically pins her eyes on the object of her desire now actively dancing with other partners. If Anne has withdrawn from the dancing/watching arena, Wentworth has re-entered it with all flags flying, and is now the satisfied object of "universal...eager admiration." Anne, maintaining a post outside the dance, is able to observe freely -- yet is removed from his regard. This paradox of power within powerlessness is conveyed by Austen with Anne's character more than with any other, as is the

renunciation demanded of a woman who wishes to watch rather than to be watched.

In the paragraph which follows, Anne begins to sense herself being drawn into the voyeur-pattern, for she admits that "Once she felt that he was looking at herself" (P 96). This statement introduces one of the most distinctive features of Austen's dances: uncertainty. Anne is not certain that Wentworth watches her; she only *feels* that it may be so. Looking back over the preceding paragraph, one can see, in the light of Anne's uncertainty here, that the entire passage is filled with similar indefinites: "No one seemed in higher spirits"; "She felt that he had everything to elevate him"; "The Miss Hayters...were apparently admitted to the honour of being in love with him"; "Henrietta and Louisa...both seemed so entirely occupied by him, that nothing but the continued appearance of the most perfect good-will between themselves, could have made it credible that they were not decided rivals"; "If he were a little spoilt, who could wonder?" Nothing is definite here: all is nebulous conjecture, the product of rumour, suspicion, and tacit observation.

Austen's conclusion, at the commencement of the paragraph in which Anne senses Wentworth's gaze, explains the mystery: "These were some of the thoughts which occupied Anne" (P 96). It becomes obvious, then, by means of this easily overlooked comment, that the entire dance scene has been presented through Anne's eyes. This personal perspective is the reason that the scene has such a subjective, even an "internal," feel to it -- we are not receiving an objective reporting of data, the recording of which dances were done and who did them, but rather the scene as Anne's own bias

colours it -- the dance as it appears in her inner world, as it affects her (supporting Gard's assertion that "in Jane Austen the dances are almost always psychological dramas" (JAN 152)). There is no reason to consider Anne an even remotely impartial observer; on the contrary, she is still so involved in the unfolding drama that she sits at the piano with tears in her eyes. Nor can she conceivably be unbiased in her estimation of the other young women's regard for Captain Wentworth. Thus, while he is undoubtedly both popular and attractive, only through the magnification of Anne's tearful gaze do we receive the picture of him as sole and sanguine possessor of every other female glance in the room. "The dance...objectifies the structure of a character's inner life, the way living in the world feels to him" (Elsbree, BC 12); the watcher projects these impressions back onto the scene viewed, imbuing it with private significance. By this means, delving into the consciousness of her central female, Austen is able to explore the nature of the gaze itself, demonstrating the distorting effect of the dance-watcher's own bias on outside reality (a phenomenon that can have negative effects when the female is the object rather than the subject of the gaze -- as with Darcy's biased viewing of Jane Bennet).

The last reference to dancing in Persuasion is one of the most "romantic" lines in Austen's work, and makes a final comment on the gaze-ridden nature of the author's world and the way in which dance is implicated. The reference appears in Chapter 23, after Anne and Wentworth have reconciled; their mutual bliss in the reunion is described -- in unusually ecstatic terms for Austen -- with the use of a poetic dance metaphor: "There could not be an objection. There

could only be a most proper alacrity, a most obliging compliance for public view; and smiles reined in and spirits dancing in private rapture" (P 242). With this phrase Austen postulates an *ideal* dance: one which would not involve the critical commentary of onlookers or the satisfaction of stifling social regulations, but would serve only to please its two participants. Such a dance could never take place in a ballroom, nor even a drawing-room, where the presence of spectators would mar its perfection. Throughout the novel, in fact, Anne and Wentworth have never danced together, even though dancing with one another is an experience that almost all of Austen's other couples (with the notable exception of Edward and Elinor) are permitted to enjoy. If Anne and Wentworth are denied the pleasure of dancing together in reality, however, Austen grants them the far greater privilege, in keeping with their serious and introspective love-story, of dancing together in spirit. Having been cowed and silenced time and again by various external forces, Anne is finally able to assert her own wishes in spite of outside scrutiny in this intensely personal moment with Wentworth.

From the beginning more sombre and subdued than an Elizabeth Bennet or an Emma Woodhouse, Anne finds her greatest satisfaction, not in open defiance, but in this quiet subversion of the public eye (which she has all along denied the pleasure of seeing her dance). Austen's exploration of voyeurism in this novel counterposes Anne's profoundly personal gaze to the intrusive and insensitive scrutiny of the eye of the world; here we see the same dichotomy Kelly identifies in La Chartreuse de Parme: "The world of the gaze in the novel...splits up between the paranoid, aggressive

gaze of the political order and the gaze of the other (usually female) counterposed to that order" (106).¹⁶ This split creates a sense of a female aware of her surroundings and her potential imperilment, and able to assert herself against these. There is a sense in which Anne's response to the eye of the world is ultimately the most satisfactory of anyone's: rather than either consenting to exhibit herself, or continuing to deny herself the pleasure of dance (and by extension any other "felicities of rapid motion" denied to the confirmed celibate¹⁷) Anne now simply internalises her dance, while preserving outwardly "a most obliging compliance for public view." Having at last obtained the male partner of her choice, she dances and is not watched -- a quiet victory befitting her status as Austen's most "serious" and introspective heroine.

Perkins contends that "of the five novels, *Persuasion* is the least aggressive about fictionally remodeling its protagonists' gender" (5), and it is certainly true that Anne nowhere exhibits the kind of "unfeminine" boldness for which Elizabeth Bennet is so famous (though she perhaps does possess a measure of the "masculine" intellect with which Perkins credits Elinor). With Anne, then, Austen would seem to be illustrating the possibility for a female to "work within the system" -- Anne is a "feminine" female who nonetheless is able to achieve her own aims and thereby to defy various repressive outside forces¹⁸ -- a culmination evoked by Austen's proposal in dance imagery of a positive outcome for a female in constraining circumstances.

II. PERFORMANCE: Northanger Abbey and Emma

In these two novels one finds not the largely informal dances of Persuasion and Sense and Sensibility, but more elaborate events. In Northanger Abbey in particular, dances are not spontaneous drawing-room revelries but large-scale public occasions. The primary issue involved in these dance scenes is the individual's relation to society, as figured through the performer-audience relationship at balls. Elsbree refers to the society of Austen's novels as a "play community": "The relationship of the individual to his society in her novels is his relationship to a play community, and his success depends upon how faithfully he follows the rules and how skilfully he performs, whether in dancing or marriage" (PPP 364). As the dancer conducts this performance, he/she is watched by "the community, itself a body of spectators" (PPP 368). For both Catherine Morland and Emma Woodhouse, awareness of audience becomes a requisite feature of relation to a spectator society, as Austen illustrates the responses of the innocent and the experienced female, respectively, to a performative environment.

All of the dancing in Northanger Abbey occurs during the first section of the novel, at Bath, where there are five separate ballroom scenes (in addition to numerous brief references to dancing). Bath is itself the most artificial and "stagey" of Austen's chosen settings, and Catherine Morland's experiences there chronicle her initiation into a society obsessed with performing; at each of the balls Catherine attends is revealed to her some new facet of social performance. She herself almost immediately becomes a participant in these events; more gradually developed are her

awareness of the nature of the "theatre" in which she is now appearing for the first time, and her ability to discern the fundamental insincerity beneath exteriors composed of the showy and artificial -- "the dangers lying in wait beneath the graceful, savage superficiality of the courtship dance" (Hertz 207). Austen uses Catherine's response to these discoveries as a metaphor for her development as a character. Simultaneously, Austen investigates the dilemma of the naïve and powerless female in isolation: "The moral and physical coercion of powerless females which figures so predominantly in gothic fiction is here transposed to the daytime world of drawing room manners" (Johnson 37) -- a world including dance.

Emma Woodhouse thrives in a performative setting. Although she attends only two dances in the course of the novel, her concern with performance is in evidence throughout. Emma is the most aware of Austen's heroines of her own social appearance, and is always calculating the effect she has on those around her. For this reason, the two dance scenes in Emma show her at her most assured. Having recognised the performative nature of her society and the need to put on a memorable show, Emma is able to exploit these factors for her own benefit. That this process should be "acted out" most overtly in an environment that is literally as well as figuratively a performance space shows Austen's full awareness of the ability of a socially experienced female to utilise these best of performance opportunities to her own advantage. This results in the author's perhaps clearest display of female power, and in addition further showcases Austen's use of balls and ballrooms as symbolic of their larger communal context.

NORTHANGER ABBEY

We are informed early in Northanger Abbey that by the time Catherine Morland was fifteen she had already begun to "long for balls"; thus the desire to dance and to attend dances has been a natural part of her maturation process. Even more importantly, this desire is explicitly linked to her *improvement*: "at fifteen, appearances were mending; she began to curl her hair and long for balls" (NA 3). As Catherine's appearance -- complexion, features, figure -- is becoming more pleasing, she experiences a simultaneous desire to display these newly developed visible assets in public. In fact, Catherine's "longing for balls" is the only trait mentioned as part of her improvement which does not directly involve physical attributes. Catherine is growing into "normalcy," and not only is it fully expected that she will want to dance, but she herself has a new vision of her person as now fit to attend and to be seen at public spectacles. This is proof of the link between physical appearance and being in public: Austen's suggestion that a visually attractive woman wishes to be seen at dances complements the idea that a dancing woman "connotes to-be-looked-at-ness."

Attending her first ball, Catherine is anxious to see all she can (similarly, Fanny Price at her *début* is occupied with observing the nature of this new environment: "She must watch the general arrangements and see how everything was done" (MP 227)). With effort, she and Mrs Allen succeed in attaining a position from which "Miss Morland had a comprehensive view of the company beneath her" (NA 8). The "beneath," although evoking the spectators' physical elevation, is also suggestive figuratively: Catherine, although a neophyte, becomes simply by virtue of her ability to

watch the superior spectator, raised above the rank-and-file into a position of (ad)vantage. Austen here portrays the inherent weakness of the watched position in which Catherine will soon be.

Catherine is quickly disenchanted with her removed situation, however. All of the terms used to describe the other people -- "mob," "throng," "crowd" -- emphasise the disturbing mass anonymity of the "general public" attending the ball:

Catherine began to feel something of disappointment -- she was tired of being continually pressed against by people, the generality of whose faces possessed nothing to interest, and with all of whom she was so wholly unacquainted, that she could not relieve the irksomeness of imprisonment by the exchange of a syllable with any of her fellow captives. (NA 8)

Although in constant physical contact with the people around her, Catherine is mentally and emotionally isolated (not least of all from her mindless chaperone, who can only repeat endlessly the same vain and vapid sentiments until Catherine ceases to speak to her). Catherine's attendance at the ball has become "imprisonment": not only because she is physically walled in by bodies, but also because the social etiquette forbidding her to speak to a stranger immures her in silence and solitude. Although another instance of Austen's hyperbolically "Gothic" irony, the choice of imagery is unusual and striking: here as elsewhere (notably in Harriet Smith's need to be "rescued" by Mr Knightley) Austen shows a sensitivity to the plight of a lone female in a ballroom. The woman's inability to rectify this situation on her own is one of the most obvious examples of the way in which female disempowerment within the ballroom mirrors that outside, and while Austen never openly condemns this situation, she repeatedly presents it in an unpleasant light.

Catherine herself is as yet aware of little of this, and if her first ball is a disappointing experience, it is because she, unlike some other Austen heroines, is completely unhappy to be a spectator. Catherine is on the cusp of life; her healthy normalcy has been emphasised; she has neither previous social disgrace nor great personal insecurities to overcome. Like Lizzy, she is lively; like Fanny, she is innocent; like Marianne, she is ardent -- yet she differs from all these in a good-humoured naïveté that has been alloyed neither by recognition of societal evils nor by over-consciousness of her own deficiencies. Catherine is among the most eager of Austen's characters to *participate*. Watching only makes her desire involvement ("It was a splendid sight...she longed to dance" (NA 8)). She is not a perspicacious spectator, and the sight of other people quickly becomes wearisome to her. Her greatest satisfaction in the whole experience of the dance comes at the end of the ball, when she is finally seen:

She was looked at, however, and with some admiration; for, in her own hearing, two gentlemen pronounced her to be a pretty girl...she immediately thought the evening pleasanter than she had found it before -- her humble vanity was contented -- she...went to her chair in good humour with everybody, and perfectly satisfied with her share of public attention. (NA 10)

This being looked at is a far greater reward to the essentially passive Catherine than all the looking she has done throughout the evening. Thus Catherine represents a fairly conservative female, content to accept and even embrace her status as watched object; her passivity is continually emphasised by Austen to this effect.

Not until the third ballroom scene at Bath does Catherine become suddenly and forcefully aware of the negative side to the social eye, when Mr Thorpe's failure to appear compels her to sit

out as though unsolicited:

...as the real dignity of her situation could not be known, she was sharing with the scores of other young ladies still sitting down all the discredit of wanting a partner. To be disgraced in the eye of the world, to wear the appearance of infamy while her heart is all purity, her actions all innocence, and the misconduct of another the true source of her debasement, is one of those circumstances which peculiarly belong to the heroine's life....she suffered, but no murmur passed her lips. (NA 36)

Jane Austen is clearly being ironic here, and "mocks the serious agony of being without a partner" (Adams 58). The author's ironic tone does not take away, however, from the situation's continuing to be felt by Catherine herself as a "serious agony." Not only does Catherine "suffer" under the disparaging scrutiny of the rest of the company, she is also "left to the mercy of Mrs Thorpe and Mrs Allen, between whom she now remained" -- against her will, she is relegated to the ranks of spectators and chaperones.¹⁹ Once again, the emphasis on the extreme unpleasantness of sitting alone or being otherwise isolated or out of place shows the stigma of solitude in a social society, and the shame attached to being insufficiently "attractive" (for which misfortune Darcy will be so scornful toward Elizabeth).

Catherine's situation is not improved when John Thorpe comes to claim her, as she quickly realises that the "engagement" she thought so favourable is also an entrapment with a partner she does not want:

...nor did the particulars which [Thorpe] entered into while they were standing up...interest her so much as to prevent her looking very often towards that part of the room where she had left Mr Tilney. Of her dear Isabella, to whom she longed to point out that gentleman, she could see nothing. They were in different sets. She was separated from all her party, and away from all her acquaintance. (NA 38)

Here Catherine again becomes cognizant of her state of isolation. Only her gaze signals her true focus and desire, and is an expression of her interior self in an extrinsically constraining atmosphere; the futility of this visual gesture is indicative of her true state of powerlessness.

Recognition of this weakness in her position teaches Catherine a new aspect of ballroom interaction: to attract Tilney, she must avoid Thorpe altogether. In order to attain this end, she is forced both to limit her own power (as represented by her gaze or "seeing") and to resort to passive and surreptitious behaviours. Because she is denied the power of openly and actively refusing Thorpe (or at any rate, to refuse him would be to deny herself the opportunity of dancing at all), she must find devious and clandestine ways of avoiding him, all of which consist in freeing herself from the "gaze-net" and pretending neither to see nor to hear. The strategies Catherine is forced to adopt prove how impossible it is for a woman to be truly empowered in a ballroom setting -- how she is compelled even against her will to be passive. Catherine has a distinct desire and plan when she enters the ballroom, but cannot actively carry it out:

She entered the rooms on Thursday evening with feelings very different....She had then been exulting in her engagement to Thorpe, and was now chiefly anxious to avoid his sight, lest he should engage her again; for though she could not, dared not expect that Mr Tilney should ask her a third time to dance, her wishes, hopes and plans all centred in nothing less....As soon as they were joined by the Thorpes, Catherine's agony began; she fidgetted about if John Thorpe came towards her, hid herself as much as possible from his view, and when he spoke to her pretended not to hear....

The others walked away, John Thorpe was still in view, and she gave herself up for lost. That she might not appear, however, to observe or expect him, she kept her eyes intently fixed on her fan.... (NA 54)

Thus although Catherine is clear, decisive, and focussed in her own intentions, she is compelled by ballroom etiquette to behave outwardly with an almost pathetic passivity belying her true state of mind. In order to avoid Thorpe, she "fidgets," "hides herself," "pretends" not to hear him, and finally, in a truly comical action, stares fixedly at her fan to avoid telegraphing unintentional messages to him with her eyes. The gaze appears here to have become a separate entity, virtually uncontrollable. Catherine is therefore at risk not only from Thorpe's gaze (from which she is "hiding herself"), but also from her own -- since it is in order to subdue the latter that she confines her eyes to her fan. A gaze -- especially a female one -- let loose in a room is obviously a peril even to its own wielder. Hiding herself, masking her intentions, and stifling her own power of seeing, Catherine appears so utterly powerless in this scene that there is no surprise when, after finally attaining her wish of dancing with Tilney, she regards his solicitation as a chance occurrence, and cannot even conceive of his having "sought her on purpose."

With Catherine Morland, Austen presents the "unspoilt" female who has yet to learn to dissimulate. The various discomforts and dissatisfactions Catherine experiences within the highly performative setting of the ballroom are evidence of how this arena is not set up to favour straightforwardness or strength of will in women, demanding instead a series of artificial and superficial behaviours. Catherine's initial entry into ballrooms as an avid, active and assured young woman is offset by the fact that, like Fanny Price, she is never in control at dances or able decisively

to arrange her encounters.²⁰ Like all women, she retains the "power of refusal" (NA 57), and does attempt to exercise it -- however, "in Austen's novels...women's power of refusal is severely compromised" (Johnson 36), and, as with Elizabeth Bennet's dilemma regarding Mr Collins (refusal of whom as dance partner disallows Elizabeth to continue dancing), Austen uses Catherine's situation to express a critical attitude toward the limitations of this feminine "power."

Compounding these struggles are Catherine's encounters with constant social performances on the part of those around her; Isabella Thorpe, for instance, "is continually acting out a script" (Gibson 130). Via Henry Tilney, however, Austen introduces to Catherine and to the reader an alternate vision of the dancing female²¹: Henry Tilney's famous dance-marriage speech is notable for proposing an "exclusivity of gazing," in which there will be no performance for outside eyes ("'He has no business to withdraw the attention of my partner from me....Nobody can fasten themselves on the notice of one, without injuring the rights of the other'" (NA 56). In addition, both Henry Tilney and the author juxtapose to the sham Isabella the modest and honest Miss Tilney; in contrast to the voyeuristic commonplace -- feared by men -- that women at a ball must "'want to please all who look at them'" (Kelly 202), Miss Tilney "seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball without wanting to fix the attention of every man near her" (NA 38). Thus Catherine's "education" is utilised by Austen to introduce gradually an alternative to the performer-female model exemplified by Isabella and demanded and created by the ballroom society of Bath.

EMMA

There are two dance scenes in Emma. The first is the party at the Coles' in Volume 2, Chapter 8, where a short informal dance follows the other festivities. Here Emma, taking to the dance floor, is quick to esteem Frank Churchill an apt partner: "she found herself well matched in a partner. They were a couple worth looking at" (E 207). There is a subtle ambiguity to Emma's reason for making this claim, which is illuminated by dividing the statement into two halves: A) She found herself well matched in a partner, B) They were a couple worth looking at. There are two possible interpretations of these halves as they appear together:

1) A --> B

She found herself well matched in a partner [and therefore] they were a couple worth looking at.

I.e., they are a couple worth looking at because Frank is a skilful dancer and well matched to Emma.

2) B --> A

She found herself well matched in a partner [because] they were a couple worth looking at.

I.e., they are a couple worth looking at, and therefore, because of their aesthetic value as a performative object, Emma considers herself to have been well matched.

Either interpretation shows Emma's full cognizance of the relation between dancing and watching. Moreover, both prove that she is not only fully aware of this dynamic -- as characters such as Marianne Dashwood and Fanny Price are not -- she is also *able to exploit it* for her own benefit. Emma, in addition to being a performer (and one who is aware of her role) is the impresario of her own performance; her approval of Frank Churchill as a partner carries the sense of a director's self-congratulation for an apropos casting choice:

Although Frank and Emma seem a perfectly matched pair, Frank's impetuosity in securing Emma's hand so quickly,

and in most likely being the anonymous person who suggested dancing in the first place, and Emma's concern with watching Mr. Knightley suggest that they are both *posing*, using each other to produce 'a couple worthy of looking at.' (Adams 60)

Intent upon making the most memorable stage appearance possible, Emma primes herself for the opportunity, overseeing every theatrical detail. The only other female protagonist to rival her in this respect is Elizabeth Bennet, who prepares for the Netherfield Ball with the express aim of captivating Mr Wickham by her appearance and bearing. The difference between these two, however, is that while Lizzy wishes to conquer one man, Emma, already fatuously convinced that her male prey is secure, is bent upon conquering her *audience*. Able to manipulate public opinion, she not only acknowledges but embraces the opportunity to perform. Thus with this character Austen offers a female who unabashedly "possesses and enjoys power" (Johnson 125) and recognises the opportunities provided by public performance.²²

Austen makes Emma's desire to control the performance space clear right from the beginning of the chapter describing the Coles' party, in Emma's initial reception of Mr Knightley. Due to the latter's having arrived "like a gentleman" (i.e, in his own carriage), Emma declares, "Now I shall really be very happy to walk into the same room with you" (E 192). Only when he conforms to protocol and reifies in appearance and action his elevated social status can Emma approve Mr Knightley as a fit escort for her "entrance." Of the other guests, she is especially pleased with Frank Churchill's behaviour toward her, as he shows "a cheerful eagerness, which marked her as his peculiar object" (E 192). Marked her, that is, in the eye of the world. Emma would not be content

with his esteeming her privately: open display at these public occasions is far more gratifying to her, since it is not really Frank's regard but that of the community at large which she covets. Such regard, she believes, will be more readily attained with this public proof of her desirability gilding her public image. "Emma divined what every body present must be thinking. She was his object, and every body must perceive it" (E 198). Emma continually gauges the wishes of her spectators, what would most impress them, and acts accordingly. The paramount importance of impressing an audience is further augmented by her running interpretation of the success of her performance. If Austen has previously shown a sensitivity to the way in which the spectatorial eye victimises the dancing female, she takes fictional revenge here by portraying a female who regards this situation as desirable rather than daunting and who makes an art of pleasing the public: "*Emma* recuperates a world Austen savages in novels such as *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* in order to explore what was precluded in those novels, the place such a world can afford to women with authority..." (Johnson 127). Emma gains her power from an ability to anticipate and enact what will be most gratifying to the eye of the world.

Emma's constant deference to the public eye constitutes a primary difference between Austen's "strong" heroines: Elizabeth Bennet is prepared to flout public opinion and defy the eye of the world (a recklessness she has to be talked out of by Charlotte Lucas at the Netherfield Ball), and by her willingness to "confuse rank" and openly favour Mr Wickham is even guilty of the same sentiment Emma criticises in Frank Churchill as "inelegance of

mind" (E 178) (when he argues for the revival of dancing at the Crown Inn without crediting Emma's caveat about "the want of proper families"). Emma herself, on the other hand, is ever-conscious of social mores and modes, and asserts her independence, not by defying these, but by upholding them and demonstrating how much better at them she is than others: "She herself obeys the conventional rules to the letter, but she does so only because she wishes to appear ladylike and elegant to herself and others" (Nardin 114). Austen presents Emma as the consummate performer, one who has internalised the need to "appear" well under public scrutiny to such a degree that the wish is no longer separable from her own character, nor identifiable as an extrinsically generated desire. If such a presentation can be read as an exaltation of the female daring enough to take advantage of a potentially victimising situation, it is also Austen's incisive, hyperbolic, and perhaps even ironic vision of the female as society demands that she be: ever-aware of scrutiny, constantly on show, moulded by external forces into the apex of performative excellence.

The response of the eye of the world is aired during the scene at the Bates' in Volume 2, Chapter 10. Miss Bates, speaking for popular opinion, observes to Mr Knightley, "Did you ever see such dancing? Was not it delightful? Miss Woodhouse and Frank Churchill; I never saw anything equal to it" (E 220). Miss Bates vocalises the reaction Emma is already sure of having inspired, proving Emma quite correct in her appraisal of the aesthetic value of partnership with Frank: the public is duly impressed and esteems her all the higher for her fine dancing. Mr Knightley, however, is a dissonant voice, refusing to concur except ironically. Holding

himself aloof from the performance-play enables him (and Jane Austen through him) to comment satirically upon the workings of this social "game":

"Oh, very delightful, indeed! I can say nothing less, for I suppose Miss Woodhouse and Mr Frank Churchill are hearing everything that passes. And" (raising his voice still more) "I do not see why Miss Fairfax should not be mentioned too. I think Miss Fairfax dances very well; and Mrs Weston is the very best country-dance player, without exception, in England. Now, if your friends have any gratitude, they will say something pretty loud about you and me in return; but I cannot stay to hear it." (E 220)

This passage is a comment simultaneously on the gossip engendered by dances, on the learning of others' opinions by overhearing, and on social hyperbole, all of which play a role in the formulation of the public text which is the response to public performance. Mr Knightley mocks the "incurable habits of flattery and deception" (Kirkham 128) of those around him, and is virtually the only character able to see past Emma's performance. The fact that "the novelist grants Knightley authority to read the human character -- authority that is nearly equal to her own" (N. Armstrong 152) argues for his having even more claim than Henry Tilney to be deemed in some measure an "authorial surrogate" (see note 21); neither Knightley nor Austen herself will allow Emma's performance unalloyed praise.

The second dance event in Emma is the ball at the Crown, which finally occurs -- after many debates and delays -- in the second chapter of Volume 3. Emma, already contemplating this event in Volume 2, Chapter 11, is quick to identify her motivation for wishing it to take place: "But still she had inclination enough for shewing people again how delightfully Mr Frank Churchill and Miss

Woodhouse danced" (E 222). The Crown ball will be a prime performance opportunity for her; the pleasure of dancing, admitted by her to be an additional incentive, takes a decided second place to the pleasure of exhibiting. Far from privileging her own private enjoyment, Emma most anticipates the gratification others will receive from the spectacle of the two most eligible young people in the community enjoying the "felicities of rapid motion" together, aware that her own stature in the public eye can only be raised by the visual delight she will present; again Austen emphasises Emma's mastery over the nuances of public appearance and performance.

Mr Knightley, in contrast, responds to the prospect of a ball with stubborn taciturnity, and protests vehemently against the idea of watching dancing. The spectatorial aspect to balls in particular draws the most negative response from him as he denies all complicity in the voyeurist scenario: "Pleasure in seeing dancing! Not I, indeed -- I never look at it -- I do not know who does. Fine dancing, I believe, like virtue, must be its own reward. Those who are standing by are usually thinking of something very different" (E 231). Mr Knightley here sounds something like Mr Tilney, and takes on a similar role: both are aware that the women they are in love with are the objects of other gazes and intentions, and therefore try to suggest to these women an alternate dance-image, in which spectatorship does not figure so prominently. Tilney does this by calling on Catherine to behave with "fidelity and complaisance" to her partner; Knightley draws a similar analogy between "fine dancing" and virtuous behaviour. The presence of this "opposition" suggests that the author herself recognises the need for balance in the performative zone.

Emma's privileged and empowered status at the ball is emphasised by Austen via a contrast with Harriet Smith. Unlike Emma, Harriet enters the ballroom in a state of vulnerability. Dependent, without fortune, and of dubious ancestry, she is at the mercy of the assembly in a way that her confident, wealthy, socially esteemed "sponsor" is not. This vulnerability becomes evident in the altercation between Harriet, Mrs Weston, and the Eltons, which culminates in Mr Elton's "snubbing" Harriet and leaving her without a partner. (The scene in its entirety is witnessed by Emma, who not only overhears Mr Elton's remarks but "perceives" his wife "encouraging him by significant glances" (E 294); the gaze pattern which develops around these characters, as so often, originates with the solitary, passive watched female (see page 57). Being left alone in a ballroom, especially for a character who is already socially vulnerable due to her lack of family, status, and financial stability, is always a perilous situation, and there is a sense in this scene that Harriet is being actively menaced by Mr Elton's refusal to dance with her. In contrast to this position, Emma's own security and strength are clear.

Emma's assurance is further displayed before her dance with Mr Knightley, which comes about through an unusual verbal exchange:

"Whom are you going to dance with?" asked Mr Knightley.

She hesitated a moment and then replied, "With you, if you will ask me."

"Will you?" said he, offering his hand.

"Indeed I will. You have shown that you can dance...." (E 298)

The form of this "proposal" reveals a new dimension to the usual male-initiated overture. Assuming a familiarity few other Austen

females would dare, Emma has already proposed Knightley as a partner before he asks her, and thus virtually shares the initiative in taking the couple to the dance floor. In addition, her reasoning ("You have shown that you can dance") places her clearly in a position that is not only spectatorial but also "evaluative": she has observed Mr Knightley dancing and appraised his social performance, and can now condone him as an appropriate partner. The uniquely "forward" manner of Emma's behaviour with a man suggests that Austen did intend her portrayal to be one of female power -- power that is not "feminine," since Emma comes closer to usurping the male role of forthright "solicitor" than to conforming to coy female delicacy. Once again, ballroom tendencies are used by Austen to reflect and reaffirm those outside: Emma's display of dominance in her "choice" of Knightley as dance partner foretells both her success in gaining him as a husband, and his cession of power to her by moving into her house (Johnson 143).

Whether or not Austen intended to present Emma the performer as a positive authority figure or as a foolish and ostentatious female with something to learn from the older, wiser, detached man, may not be conclusively determinable from the text.²³ What is clearer is that Austen uses Emma's behaviour at dances to show a female who is in command of her surroundings and of the public text -- while at the same time the author continues to comment ironically on performative "games" through Mr Knightley. The ideal reconciliation of these two is a situation wherein "male and female echo one another in a mutually authorizing relationship" (N. Armstrong 151) -- not unlike the evenly balanced country dance

itself. In a gesture that is both radical and conciliatory, Austen proposes a state of shared initiative: just as Emma and Knightley confer and agree on their dance together, so Austen displays with their union both a recognition of female performative power, and a consciousness that it must be tempered. "Emma is an authority figure responsive to the morally corrective influence of public opinion" (Johnson 130); thus one interpretation of Austen's portrayal is that Emma's very performative prowess, the awareness of audience she demonstrates clearly at dances, is intended to convey this character's willingness to improve herself and so to surpass the vanity of performing in becoming a social example.

III. PUBLIC TEXT: Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park

Between the voyeurs and the performers at an Austenian ball subsists a tenuous pattern of interaction; public action produces public reaction, with a general interpretation given to each act. In Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, where dances are large and significant social events, Austen's writing illuminates this public-text-creating process. The relation of dancers to watchers is emphasised, and a series of influential overhearings and conjectures reveals new dimensions to the ever-current public text and its effects on the women it judges.

In Pride and Prejudice, as in Sense and Sensibility, Austen uses dance partly to illuminate a contrast between sisters, one acquiescent and one insurgent when faced with the formal occasion of dance.²⁴ That we should be invited to perceive such differences partly through the medium of the dance points to the analytic progression from dance-performance to basic character which is made by the public eye: "... 'reading' or rereading of behaviour and character becomes a theme within the novel" (Fergus 83), and ballroom dances are a prime opportunity for these readings to be taken. More important than the differences between females, however, are their similarities on the dance floor. The negative aspect of public judgment predominates in this novel, where one of Austen's "preoccupations" is "women's marginality within society" (Fergus 82); through the situation of her female characters at dances, Austen explores the powerful and potentially harmful effects of the external gaze on women, while acknowledging the mitigating effect of an alert female gaze in response.

In Mansfield Park, dance is about public declaration. Those

who watch dancers expect and intend to find couples; Sir Thomas expressly utilises the dance to make a show of Fanny's eligible status, and "*Mansfield Park* is the most explicit about the dance as a ritual which celebrates a girl's desirability and marriageability" (Elsbree, DFC 122). Fanny's relationship to dance is a particularly tenuous one, fraught with all the insecurities and uncertainties bred by her growing consciousness of personal helplessness. Her powerlessness in "real life" is mirrored by her sense of her own objectification within the ballroom. The public and the domestic gazes merge to become an actively threatening force in *Mansfield Park*; Austen uses the introverted Fanny to display the effect concerted watching may have on the psyche. The dance in this novel represents in many ways the worst tendencies and intentions of a "marriage-market" society toward a disempowered female.

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE

Dance, which plays a relatively large role in *Pride and Prejudice*, is introduced into the novel with the assembly ball in Volume 1, Chapter 3. This scene contains Elizabeth's famous first encounter with Darcy: "turning round, he looked for a moment at Elizabeth, till catching her eye, he withdrew his own" (PP 59). Darcy's behaviour in this fleeting moment is significant. He has been coaxed by his friend Bingley -- via many appeals to the eye -- into deigning to bestow a glance on Elizabeth; what he cannot countenance, however, is that she should return his gaze. This is because in such a situation, the one-way becomes two-way, and voyeurism is superseded. Voyeurism implies a one-way gaze, a one-

way exercise of power; there is a dominant and a submissive, a watcher and a watched. The moment the watched object gains awareness of this disempowering gaze, however, the situation is transformed: "The voyeur's sense of power often depends upon invisibility and anonymity. Thus, to openly acknowledge the gaze of the viewer may be more disruptive than to ignore it" (Copeland 144). Darcy is willing to take up a voyeuristic stance toward Elizabeth as a "viewable" female; not permissible is for her to reverse the process. Nancy Armstrong refers to a similar encounter in Wuthering Heights, when Lockwood meets the young Cathy and is disconcerted by her eyes on him: "The woman does not behave like the docile object of the gaze, but returns the gaze in a manner...that displays the presence of subjectivity. Her eyes violate his aesthetically grounded notion of desire as they become the sign of an active female self" (196) (see also note 5). Thus Darcy, having come to the dance solely to survey, is disconcerted by this proof of female subjectivity and by Elizabeth's having taken on a "masculine" forthrightness of action.

Darcy himself justifies his reaction with his subsequent statement: "'She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men'" (PP 59). Darcy here declares openly that not only the unattractiveness of Elizabeth's appearance in his own eyes dissuades him, but also the assumption that her appearance has displeased others, resulting in her inability to "attract" a partner. Thus Elizabeth's stature in the social gaze, the eye of the world, tempers her appearance in Darcy's, and the individual gaze is effectively coöpted into the greater and more

powerful social one.

The most important dance event in Pride and Prejudice is the Netherfield ball. The build-up to it begins in Volume 1, Chapter 17 and the ball itself occupies all of Chapter 18. Near the end of Chapter 17, Austen describes the Bennet family anticipating the various pleasures they are to receive from the ball: Jane looks forward to the "attentions" of Mr Bingley, and Elizabeth the pleasure of "seeing a confirmation of every thing in Mr Darcy's looks and behaviour" (PP 129). Jane, then, anticipates being watched, while Lizzy anticipates watching -- a fitting comment on their respective levels of passivity. Elizabeth, bolder than her sister and in many ways less correctly "feminine," is not afraid to level her gaze at Mr Darcy in order to find out the truth, reversing the "traditional voyeurist scenario" as described by Kelly ("men spy on desired women in order to learn their truths" (Kelly 192)).²⁵ In addition, her intentions introduce the idea that the truth can be gained from observation -- an idea which will recur, to much more detrimental effect, in Darcy.

In contrast to the bold Elizabeth, Charlotte Lucas is the voice of social prudence and feminine orthodoxy at the Netherfield ball; recognising Elizabeth's rebellious intentions, she counsels her friend against disregarding the power and presence of the eye of the world, advising Elizabeth not to "allow her fancy for Wickham to make her appear unpleasant in the eyes of a man of ten times his consequence" (PP 133). Charlotte is fully aware of the watching dynamic prevailing at dances; she is also able to read the public text, and knows the importance of Elizabeth's continuing to be visually "attractive." This means not only looking, but acting

appropriately. Social dances may be the only times Darcy sees Elizabeth, and therefore all his subsequent judgments will be in light of her conduct there. Elizabeth, careful as she is with her dress, is nonetheless attempting to flout convention by being careless of her greater social "appearance."

In spite of this rebelliousness, Elizabeth does evince her own consciousness of the public text during her dance with Darcy. As soon as she stands up with him she is instantly aware of the general surprise, "reading in her neighbours' looks their equal amazement in beholding it" (PP 133). The reading metaphor is one that will recur in Austen with regard to the public text: Elizabeth is able to translate this text because it is made *visibly manifest* in the expressions of her neighbours. She has no doubt as to what their reaction signifies, because the public text is a relatively unambiguous "document." One act elicits one uniform response; each public act has its corresponding public meaning, and these acts and meanings are read visually. In some cases, as here, the chain of visual judgments and apprehensions is self-reflexive (Elizabeth watches others watching her); Elizabeth's ability to watch and analyse the social eye even as it is watching her is the factor which ameliorates her situation.

If Elizabeth is the aware and watching female, Jane Bennet is the unaware and watched. Via Sir William Lucas' address to Elizabeth and Darcy as they are dancing, Austen introduces the devastating effect which the eye of the world can have on such females as Jane represents. In Sir William's words we see the rapidity with which the eye of the world draws its conclusions -- and the way in which it may not only be mistaken in these

judgments, but have a tangible and negative impact on the lives of those it observes:

"Allow me to say, however, that your fair partner does not disgrace you, and that I must hope to have this pleasure often repeated, especially when a certain desirable event, my dear Miss Eliza, (glancing at her sister and Bingley,) shall take place...but let me not interrupt you, Sir. -- You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young lady, whose bright eyes are also upbraiding me."

The latter part of this address was scarcely heard by Darcy; but Sir William's allusion to his friend seemed to strike him forcibly, and his eyes were directed with a very serious expression towards Bingley and Jane, who were dancing together. (PP 135)

Austen shows us here the enormous influence wielded by a single glance. We are told that Sir William's "allusion" to Bingley is what strikes Darcy with such force -- yet Sir William does not ever mention Bingley by name. The allusion, then, is not a verbal but a visual one. Sir William's very visible glance awakens in Darcy's consciousness the knowledge of what may be transpiring between Bingley and Jane. Without the look, the words "a certain desirable event" would be no sure reference to Bingley; the "allusion," as such, is provided by the glance. Here we have clear proof of the way in which the pattern of gazes actually comes to constitute a visually decipherable text: looks are read and interpreted, and even have the power to dislodge or to redirect other gazes. What can be interpreted can equally well be misinterpreted, however (if Elizabeth's eyes are indeed "upbraiding" Sir William, it is for his indelicacy regarding Jane, and not for his interruption of her own converse with Darcy), and this is one of the ways in which the eye of the world ceases to be a benignly watching organ and becomes an active threat to the female objects of its insistent visual inquiry.

Elizabeth has cause to recognise this situation when, having ceased to dance, she retreats to the office of watcher. Her silent train of observations extends over several pages; during this time, she both "reads" the behaviour of those around her while they are watching, and employs a mute language of glances in an attempt to communicate with her family and forestall their imminent humiliation in the public eye:

Elizabeth blushed and blushed again with shame and vexation. She could not help frequently glancing her eye at Mr Darcy, though every glance convinced her of what she dreaded; for though he was not always looking at her mother, she was convinced that his attention was invariably fixed by her. The expression of his face changed gradually from indignant contempt to a composed and steady gravity.

At length however Mrs Bennet had no more to say...Elizabeth now began to revive. But not long was the interval of tranquillity;...singing was talked of, and she had the mortification of seeing Mary, after very little entreaty, preparing to oblige the company. By many significant looks and silent entreaties, did she endeavour to prevent such a proof of complaisance, -- but in vain; Mary would not understand them; such an opportunity of exhibiting was delightful to her...Elizabeth's eyes were fixed on her with most painful sensations; and she watched her progress through the several stanzas...Elizabeth was in agonies. She looked at Jane, to see how she bore it; but Jane was very composedly talking to Bingley. She looked at his two sisters, and saw them making signs of derision at each other, and at Darcy, who continued however impenetrably grave. She looked at her father to entreat his interference....He took the hint.... (PP 141)

This is hardly the fearless Elizabeth we habitually envision: instead, Austen presents her heroine in a state of complete vulnerability. The effect of this placement is to provoke a realisation that even the most powerful of females cannot escape subjection to the power of the external gaze. Out of Elizabeth's desperate series of visual appeals to those around her, she manages to communicate only with her father. She is alone, however, in

witnessing the import of the entire scene, and suffers acutely from her observations.

Elizabeth is reminiscent in this spectatorial guise of Elinor Dashwood or Anne Elliot -- females of perceptive mind who take with them to the role of spectator all the discrimination which they possess in life. Elizabeth's observations are painfully accurate; her gaze is less successful, however, in communicating her desires or influencing her family by non-verbal means, and her awareness thus serves only to frustrate and humiliate her the more:

To 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; and happy did she think it for Bingley and her sister that some of the exhibition had escaped his notice, and that his feelings were not of a sort to be much distressed by the folly which he must have witnessed. That his two sisters and Mr Darcy, however, should have had such an opportunity of ridiculing her relations was bad enough.... (PP 143)

Austen deliberately uses performative language to convey the fact that all this takes place within a public setting, a "theatre" of social appraisal. Elizabeth is left to regard her family's behaviour as an unfortunate performance, with herself, Darcy, and the Bingley sisters as the unimpressed spectators.²⁶

All further instances of dancing in Pride and Prejudice are recollections of or comments on the Netherfield ball. These include the references made in Darcy's letter to Elizabeth, where he mentions several details significant to our understanding of the function of balls and to the vulnerable position in which females attending them are placed. That Darcy draws such important and influential conclusions about Jane Bennet from a single dance gives evidence of the importance of balls, not only as places where young

men and women may have contact with and "evaluate" each other, but also as the locus for other members of the community to form their own judgments of potential relationships -- and thereafter to encourage or to thwart them. The ball provides the occasion for a reading of the public text to be taken; Darcy, preferring the role of spectator at dances, is one of the readiest interpreters of the public text, and does not hesitate to use the information he gathers against a female victim. He writes: "At that ball, while I had the honour of dancing with you, I was first made acquainted, by Sir William Lucas's accidental information, that Bingley's attentions to your sister had given rise to a general expectation of their marriage" (PP 227). This is the operation of the eye of the world as it acts to validate the visually received public text. Suppositions become truths because everyone has seen and believed the visual evidence. The import of the public text is absorbed indirectly or haphazardly, following a chance chain of events.

The initial transactions in this chain -- which originates from Jane as an attractive watchable object -- are purely visual, not verbal: Bingley pays assiduous attention to Jane Bennet; the eye of the world watches him watching her. From this point on, however, the visual evidence is converted into verbal communication (albeit indirectly received). Thus the movement of information can more accurately be seen to proceed in two different directions, one visual (Jane Bennet <-- Bingley <-- eye of the world) and one verbal (eye of the world --> Sir William --> Darcy). When the two are taken together, we can see that all the actions, while originating in Jane's attractiveness (her "to-be-looked-at-ness"), radiate outward from the responses of the eye of the world. This

"entity" is the crux of the entire public text apparatus; it is the watcher and the informant. Without the eye of the world there would be only private actions and reactions, and no public text of any kind. (Again Austen highlights the contrast between the private interactions of individuals and the community's wish to see the "courtship game" being played -- see note 10). At publicly attended venues like dances, however, the public eye is virtually unrestricted in its operations, and thus the "attentions" of Bingley to Jane -- during the course of which no intent regarding marriage is ever verbalised -- are transmuted via the collective gaze and voice of the community into "a general expectation of their marriage" that marks this dubious possibility "as a certain event."

Darcy, holding himself somewhat removed from the gossip of the commonalty, is made privy to these communally drawn conclusions only by the "accidental information" provided by Sir William Lucas. This chance communication is instrumental in redirecting the full force of Darcy's gaze onto Bingley and Jane:

From that moment I observed my friend's behaviour attentively; and I could then perceive that his partiality for Miss Bingley was beyond what I had ever witnessed in him. Your sister I also watched. -- Her look and manners were open, cheerful, and engaging as ever, but without any symptom of peculiar regard, and I remained convinced from the evening's scrutiny, that though she received his attentions with pleasure, she did not invite them. (PP 228)

The phrase "the evening's scrutiny" suggests that Darcy spends a good portion of the ball observing Jane Bennet. This evidence in turn points to the most significant feature of Darcy's speech: the idea that observation may actually lead, without any sort of verbal confirmation, to knowledge. Darcy does not merely have notions and

suppositions -- he is "convinced from the evening's scrutiny."

Twice more in his letter he uses this term:

I shall not scruple to assert, that the serenity of your sister's countenance and air was such, as might have given the most acute observer, a conviction that, however amiable her temper, her heart was not likely to be easily touched....I will venture to say that my investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes or fears. -- I did not believe her indifferent because I wished it; -- I believed it on impartial conviction. (PP 228)

Even having confessed his own bias in this particular case, Darcy nonetheless insists that his silent and solitary observations alone are enough to have produced in him the complete certainty that he is correct about Jane. Although he is in fact incorrect, as Elizabeth's greater knowledge of her sister's feelings proves, he does not hesitate to act on what he calls his "impartial conviction." Having followed a series of unreliable cues (the opinion of the voyeuristic eye of the world, voiced via the gossip-mongering Sir William, as it is accidentally ascertained by Darcy), Darcy observes Jane with his friend for a single evening and then takes the actions which will be so detrimental to Jane's happiness.

Precisely because the external judgments which take place at dances are so swift and their consequences so damaging, the visible female must be constantly on guard against foreign intrusion, and avoid providing any cause for censure. This necessity becomes painfully but belatedly evident to Elizabeth as Mr Darcy's criticisms of the Bennets' social conduct bring her to a full realisation of her own family's complicity in aggravating the ruthlessness of the external gaze against herself and Jane:

...the circumstances to which he particularly alluded, as having passed at the Netherfield ball, and as confirming all his first disapprobation, could not have

made a stronger impression on his mind than on hers. The compliment to herself and her sister, was not unfelt. It soothed, but it could not console her for the contempt which had been thus self-attracted by the rest of her family; -- and as she considered that Jane's disappointment had in fact been the work of her nearest relations, and reflected how materially the credit of both must be hurt by such impropriety of conduct, she felt depressed beyond any thing she had ever known before. (PP 237)

This discovery of Elizabeth's is a clear example of how victimising to the "unprotected" female (Jane, Elizabeth, Harriet Smith, and all others not protected by the mantle of independent wealth, status, et cetera) are the operations of the public eye, the public voice, and the public text.

With the dances in Pride and Prejudice Austen intends to expose the way in which a female's stature in the social gaze influences her marriage (and hence life) prospects. To this end, Austen uses Elizabeth and Jane Bennet much as she used Elinor and Marianne Dashwood -- to dramatise different aspects of and responses to the same situation. The differences between Elizabeth and Jane are by no means so striking, however, and an examination of the two at dances produces a surprisingly similar picture of females under threat. The substantial difference here is Elizabeth's awareness of her circumstances -- yet even this, as we see, does little more than make her suffer. This unusual aspect of a character generally imagined as Austen's strongest, brightest, and most empowered shows how deeply ingrained in Austen's own consciousness was an awareness of the public gaze as a power to be reckoned with. This novel demonstrates that ballrooms are the location where Austen's heroines must take the greatest care to

ensure that no infraction of the unwritten dogma of the public text will bring down on them an external judgment possessing the power irreparably to sully their reputations and blight their prospects.

MANSFIELD PARK

The central dance event in Mansfield Park -- as well as one of the most important in Austen's fiction -- is Fanny's "coming-out" ball, in Volume 2, Chapter 10. If Marianne Dashwood's dancing allows her to be the object of one man's voyeurism, Fanny Price's at her "début" will invite a much wider scrutiny. Through the end of Chapter 7 and beginning of Chapter 8 in the second volume of Mansfield Park, where this ball is first introduced, Austen provides clear evidence of the voyeuristic motives of those who hold and/or attend dances, and of the objectified position in which this places the watched female dancer. This section could logically be re-entitled "Seeing Fanny Dance," since it contains no fewer than ten variations on this phrase, all spoken by male characters who hold influence over Fanny:

1. "'I should like to go to a ball with you and see you dance'" (William) (MP 207)
2. "'I should like to see you dance'" (same)
3. "'I have never seen Fanny dance since...'" (Sir Thomas) (MP 208)
4. "'when we do see her, which perhaps we may have an opportunity of doing ere long'" (same)
5. "'I have had the pleasure of seeing your sister dance'" (Henry Crawford) (MP 208)
6. "he had once seen Fanny dance" (narrator/Henry) (MP 208)

7. "he passed...for an admirer of her dancing" (same)
8. "William's desire of seeing Fanny dance" (narrator/William) (MP 209)
9. "to gratify anybody else who might wish to see Fanny dance" (narrator/Sir Thomas) (MP 209)
10. "'It would give me great pleasure to see you both dance'" (Sir Thomas) (MP 209)

The cumulative effect of all these references to seeing Fanny dance is that she, like Mulvey's film heroines, comes in her watched state virtually to "connote to-be-looked-at-ness." Having been entirely objectified, she almost ceases to exist as an autonomous individual; her only actions throughout the two-page discussion are to feel "dismay," to "not know which way to look," and to "look distressed." One is not surprised to find that the retiring Fanny experiences only dismay and distress as she is talked over by three of the four males who hold most sway over her life.²⁷ That she should be so entirely unconsulted on a matter which is purportedly about and for her is already proof of her objectification; but that the purpose behind the giving of the ball should be, not to allow Fanny to dance, but to allow her to *be seen dancing*, is perhaps the clearest instance in Austen of how the dance functions to further the watcher-watched dichotomy prevailing in this society and most intimidating for the powerless and voiceless female on display. Even the supposedly beneficent William is not exempt from collaboration here -- indeed, the unpleasantness of Fanny's situation is compounded by the fact that there is not a single character of all those surrounding her whose motives are entirely clear or who does not in some way threaten her. Chapter 8 begins

with the phrase "William's desire of seeing Fanny dance," and this driving male force propels forward the plans for the ball which is to be a virtual "showcase" of his sister. We are told that this desire is an "amiable" feeling on William's part (an ambiguous word in Austen, often used to whitewash other feelings), but it is Sir Thomas who says so. *His* motives in pursuing the idea of the ball are even more questionable than William's, since he extends his wish to "gratify" Fanny's brother to a wish to "gratify anybody else who might wish to see Fanny dance, and to give pleasure to the young people" (MP 209). This intention is an even clearer instance of the "pandering" evident in Sir John's behaviour in Sense and Sensibility. Fanny's nubility and eligibility are to be displayed openly by her male guardian, with or without her consent, and a host of onlookers to be "gratified" by the vicarious enjoyment of her charms.

According to the practice of "coming out," Fanny is now viewed as "making her first appearance"; the sense that she has never been seen before (whereas in fact she has technically already attended her first ball in Volume 1, Chapter 12) is due to the fact that she is now appearing as an available female and an economically advantageous match, her display as such sanctioned by her male guardian and "exhibitor." She herself, although anxious about public scrutiny, has little awareness of the all-important mercenary aspect to her *début*:

Miss Price had not been brought up to the trade of coming out; and had she known in what light this ball was in general considered respecting her, it would very much have lessened her comfort by increasing the fears she already had, of doing wrong and being looked at. (MP 220)

The word "trade" is crucial here, especially considering Sir Thomas' occupations outside the home. Having returned from his business dealings in Antigua (a volatile and much commented upon subtext²⁸), he transfers his mercantile, acquisitive influence and approach to the domestic sphere, with Fanny as one more valuable cargo to be exhibited and exported.²⁹

In contrast to Sir Thomas' plan of making clear to all the readers of the public text the availability or "marketability" of his niece, she herself is entertaining Anne Elliot-esque hopes of being able to participate "without much observation" (MP 221). Unlike Anne, however, Fanny is completely unable to realise this ambition. Both she and Anne are quiet and passive, yet Anne is able to determine her own actions where Fanny is at the mercy of those who decide for her. Anne has removed herself from the performative arena -- at the cost of renouncing participation in social events -- whereas Fanny is continually thrust into it by other hands. Fanny's inability to make any autonomous decisions regarding the ball -- or to feel confident in those she does make -- causes her repeated feelings of unhappiness and unease. Although as retiring in character as Elinor Dashwood or Anne Elliot (in some sense more so, since Fanny's desire for invisibility is a consequence of her own nature rather than of a disappointment in love), she is enabled neither by personality nor position decisively to background herself as they do, and instead is pushed inexorably forward into a position of greater and greater social visibility.

The two pages detailing the arrival of guests and commencement of the ball are written almost entirely without dialogue; instead, Austen gives a description of Fanny's mobile gaze, as once again

Fanny becomes the focal point of a "net" of surrounding males. Called upon to greet the arriving guests, Fanny cannot perform this fearsome task "without looking at William, as he walked about at his ease in the back ground of the scene, and longing to be with him" (MP 226). As the female on display, she is not permitted the freedom of her male counterpart, and her gaze surreptitiously and fruitlessly expresses her regret that this is so. As with Catherine Morland's gaze during her dance with Thorpe or Elizabeth Bennet's toward the misdemeanours of her family, Austen uses the futile and "unreceived" female gaze to symbolise the helplessness and isolation of its wielder.

The culmination of the conflict of interest between Fanny and Sir Thomas will be the revelation of his plan that she open the ball. This communication is never made straightforwardly to her, and even at the ball is put in such a way that at first she cannot credit its truth. So distressed is she by the idea that she is even momentarily empowered to challenge Sir Thomas -- the only time until Henry Crawford's proposal that she does so. The aims of Fanny and her uncle are utterly at odds here: she wishes "to dance without much observation"; her uncle wishes to ensure that she is observed by everyone.³⁰ Austen makes clear Fanny's extreme powerlessness in this situation -- there is never a question of whose will is to prevail.

The moment Fanny begins to dance before the assembly, the public text coalesces around her out of the usual blend of visual cues, established prestige, and hearsay. The result of the spectatorial inquiry is approbative: "She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece, and she was soon said to be

admired by Mr Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour" (MP 228). In two sentences, Austen conveys the rapidity with which the public text is formulated, the materials of its construction, and the voyeuristic pleasure which is taken in its reception.

Among those so gratified, one of the keenest and most voyeuristically and vicariously satisfied observers of Fanny's dancing is her uncle: "Sir Thomas himself was watching her progress down the dance with much complacency." Austen's image evokes Fanny's uncle as a kind of "Pygmalion," supremely pleased with his own creation. This comparison is apt as well because Sir Thomas' intentions and inclinations shape and govern this ball, and he has predetermined the public reception which will be afforded to every spectacle offered up. Thus, if Fanny's dance with Henry is intended by her uncle to show the assembled company that the two may make a match, her dance with Edmund is intended to show that *these* two will not: "they went down their two dances together with such sober tranquillity as might satisfy any looker-on, that Sir Thomas had been bringing up no wife for his younger son" (MP 230). Sir Thomas' will dominates every significant event in the ballroom, proving him a master manipulator of a public text Fanny has barely even begun to fathom, and yet at whose mercy she will continue to be.

Jacqueline Reid-Walsh investigates the response of several Austen heroines to the "pressure of the societal gaze on their conduct," and notes that this pressure is particularly heavily felt by Fanny:

She is the focus of everyone's gaze for different reasons....Sir Thomas's benign but evaluative gaze represents the power he wields over Fanny. Sir Thomas's generalized approval of Fanny's assets as an attractive young woman is paralleled by the very specific, admiring

gaze of Fanny's potential suitor, Henry Crawford. There is a sense that everything Fanny does is watched with almost microscopic attention. (118)

Reid-Walsh here identifies the real nature of Fanny's position: she is not only a debutante at her first official ball, enduring "the critical regard of her contemporaries and their parents" (Wood, SHD 145), but also a trapped and owned object, pinned like a microscopic specimen beneath the powerful and imprisoning gazes of those -- primarily male -- who control her and her destiny. The nature of the dance no less than of Fanny's position in her family allows male figures to determine all of her actions within the ballroom.

This patriarchal control is further emphasised when, as Reid-Walsh notes, Sir Thomas "makes a spectacle" of sending Fanny to bed. The fact that Sir Thomas would include this action as part of his "show" proves that he means not only to display Fanny's docility and tractability, but simultaneously to make an exhibit of his own power. Reid-Walsh opines that by sending Fanny to bed, Sir Thomas may be "preventing further obvious attentions by Henry Crawford, or showing to Henry by her biddable behaviour that he 'might mean to recommend her as a wife by showing her persuadableness'" (123). Either way, Sir Thomas' action is evidence of his intention to retain sole control over the acts of showing and seeing within the ballroom. Having allowed Henry and the others to see Fanny dance ("gratified" them, as he himself views it), he now concludes the spectacle by removing her from their gaze. Fanny becomes the quintessential displayed object, titillatingly offered and withdrawn at will, and her participation in the dance is used by Sir Thomas to make a display of his own beneficence (in raising

her), prestige (in offering her on the market), and power (in removing her when he sees fit).

Fanny's powerlessness and lack of autonomy as a character, signalled right from the beginning of the novel in her being denied her own family or place of abode, are clearly expressed by Austen through Fanny's troubled relationship with the dance. At Fanny's very first ball, she shows an unwillingness to remain among the gossiping spectators; this suggests an incipient consciousness that she herself will be similarly observed and critiqued:

The feeling of shame...is based on what we believe others to think of us: it is our response to an awareness that we are or may be the object of an unfavourable judgement from outside. Thus, given the primacy of sight as the medium of perception, shame is the product of the sense of being seen, or rather of the possibility of being seen; so that, paradoxically, what deters us from being watchers is the fear of being watched. (Spearing 10)

Later, at her *début*, the same fear promotes a wish to participate unobserved. In neither case is Fanny successful -- undesired notice descends on her from all quarters in spite of her wishes to the contrary. Fanny's relationship with dominating males -- and especially with her "tyrant" uncle -- is dramatised by Austen using the by now familiar tropes of the active male watcher and passive female dancer. Fanny represents an extreme of this dynamic, being almost totally passive at dance scenes, where she hovers fragilely within a web of male gazes and intentions. Her own gaze is feeble at best against this massed male force, and serves only to convey a sense of her isolation.

What is significant in all this is that Austen so clearly indicates Fanny's lack of autonomy via a dance scenario. This

setting, with its built-in bias toward male leadership, provides the ideal means with which to portray Fanny's disempowerment under Sir Thomas' patriarchy. Austen's tone even becomes overtly critical when she discusses the ramifications of the "coming-out" arranged by Fanny's uncle:

It is clear that the novelist sees that this ceremony simply clinches the patriarchal conception of its heroines as commodities, and of which Fanny's romanticism cannot prevent her from being a victim. This paradox is captured in the novel's shifts of tone, between the tender sympathy with which Fanny's consciousness is represented, and the surrounding narrative's worldly and astringent irony, whose harsher imperatives cannot indefinitely be refused. (Wiltshire 101)

Here, more than anywhere else in her discussions of dance, Austen pays tribute to social dance's "co-option into the mercantile and patriarchal scheme of things." With Fanny Price she showcases the worst and weakest position in which the dance can place a female -- and in the process makes some of her sharpest comments against the state of females within her society.

CONCLUSION

In Jane Austen's novels, dance is a metaphor for marriage (Elsbree, Adams *passim*); marriage is a "microcosm of society" (Fergus 88). Therefore dance becomes by syllogistic progression a microcosmic symbol for society. When Jane Austen investigates the position of her heroines in a dance scenario, she is simultaneously and by extension commenting on their position in society. As each main character illustrates a different facet of dance-interaction and a different place on the voyeuristic "spectrum," so she also represents a different option for women in a surveillance society. The dance space is a theatricalised representation of life -- who is watching, who is watched, and the way in which the strictly gendered, codified structure of the dance and of ballroom conventions permits and furthers this interplay of gazes all serve to reflect and reinforce gender divisions and social hierarchies within Austen's world.

The disparity between having and lacking the male privilege of initiative -- common to both dance and marriage -- is central to Austen's exploration of the female experience of dance. Within a voyeuristic society, both males and females are watched; however, females are additionally disempowered because lacking the ability to choose. In the dance, in love, and in marriage, the female "must be reactionary...she can only respond to men, she cannot initiate relations with them or take the lead in showing feeling without great risk. Austen shows us assembly halls and drawing rooms that, for women, are like disguised mine fields" (R. Polhemus 48). All of Austen's heroines must at some point negotiate these dangerous arenas; the different strategies Austen allots to them allow her to

comment upon the various options available to women within this setting. For instance, Jan Fergus notes that in the late novels particularly, Austen is interested in exploring "the complex power relationships between women and a social world that reduces their options and makes them marginal" (146). Austen can use dance to explore such power relations, including the one between watcher and watched, because these relations are inscribed in the dance environment; questions of disempowerment and lack of initiative may thus be subtly broached by means of dance scenarios.

Voyeuristic acts of observing dance pervade all of Austen's novels, including Sense and Sensibility and Persuasion. Marianne Dashwood, one of Austen's most avid dancers, represents the passive watched object. With Marianne, Austen exposes a crucial paradox inherent in the status of women within the ballroom, which is that even as they act (dancing) they are at their most passive:

...there is a disjuncture between the active doing female body and the appearing body....The active doing female body is countered by a more passive image of the body as one which is looked at and which is surveyed and perceived in terms of its 'to-be-looked-at-ness'....this asymmetrical relation between the active doing body and the passive appearing body of the women does not seem to come through in the case of men. Rather, their ideas of both the dancing body and the appearing body are located in terms of activity and strength. (Thomas, AV 89)

Thus Marianne as watched female dancer is at risk in a way that the watched male dancer (Willoughby) is not; Austen uses this discrepancy to reinforce the "gendered" nature of ballroom participation.

The other, "active" alternative for women is to watch -- both Elinor Dashwood and Anne Elliot relinquish dance, and thereby preserve themselves from the threats of the performative space.

However, they also remove themselves from involvement and display. Characters who dance and are watched (Marianne Dashwood; Fanny Price; Catherine Morland) are passive and threatened, but also nubile and on the marriage market; those who watch (Elinor Dashwood; Anne Elliot) are in the stronger active position, but are in some sense "sterile" -- Elinor, for instance, Austen's only entirely non-performative female heroine, is not coincidentally also the least pursued by men. Austen does not shy away from presenting the ballroom as what it is: a marriage market, in which the female must make an appropriate display of herself in order to be sought.

This exhibitionistic, performative aspect of dances comes to the fore in Northanger Abbey and Emma. Austen uses Catherine Morland and Emma Woodhouse to illustrate two kinds of female response to performance: Catherine's is naïve, Emma's experienced. Whereas Catherine is a novice at performing and not yet entirely "literate" in the public text, Emma is both a veteran performer and an accomplished reader of public opinion. Austen furnishes Emma with her most developed images of female power, presenting this character as the decisive manipulatrix of her position within the ballroom; Catherine's ballroom encounters, on the other hand, are opportunities for Austen to reemphasise -- albeit humorously -- the plight of female innocence, ignorance, and "impotence." Thus although both are characters who embrace the opportunity to perform, their characterisations are utilised by Austen toward different ends. What links the two together, however, is that in both cases Austen includes a male who represents the opposite view of the performance issue: Tilney and Knightley both oppose

performance and all it stands for, proposing instead an "ideal" state in which dance will no longer be for the benefit of outside spectators. Whether or not this is Austen's vision as well cannot be said for certain; however, she does seem to present it in a favourable light.

Furthermore, the less savoury aspects of dancing in public view receive a thoroughly unfavourable depiction in Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park. Here, a close examination of Austen's construction of the dance scenes reveals clearly that she emphasises the powerlessness of females within the ballroom (and by extension within society). Even such a confident character as Elizabeth is forced to adopt a more realistic view of the gravity of public opinion, coming to acknowledge the onus on females themselves to see that external judgments remain favourable. In this sense, Elizabeth Bennet, Jane Bennet, and Fanny Price, despite all their differences in character, represent facets of the same situation: pinned under the eye of the world, a female's destiny may be determined by her behaviour (or that of her family) at dances. The public gaze scrutinises and subdues, and the verdict of the public text is often final.

Counterposed to the "societal" gaze (the "eye of the world") is the individual female's gaze. The threat of this gaze is that it represents her capacity to desire -- an active want as opposed to passive submission -- and her wish to choose for herself rather than to be chosen for (or simply chosen). This is the reason that Austen's heroines often chafe under the restrictive decorum of the dance floor: Elizabeth can refuse Mr Collins in the dance (as well as in marriage), but ballroom etiquette then forbids her from

dancing further with anyone else; Catherine Morland cannot actively choose Tilney over Thorpe, but must hope that this situation arises by itself; Fanny Price cannot choose whether or not to greet guests, to lead dances, or to retire early. In addition, when characters such as Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, and Anne Elliot attempt to make partner choices for themselves outside the dance, they are swiftly discouraged by the "eye of the world" characters (Mrs Bennet; Fanny Dashwood; Lady Russell) who guard them and keep them under surveillance. Austen makes clear that a female's trust in her own judgment is discouraged, and men deferred to; in life as in the dance, "the heroine cannot choose her own partner but must wait passively to be chosen" (Adams 56). For this reason, the exercise of the female gaze is itself often a futile expression of frustrated power and an acknowledgement of passivity.

This points to Austen's clear consciousness that, whatever the varying details of plot and differences of character, female dancers are all subject to the same forces and the same limitations. Individual choices regarding dancing and watching are therefore superseded and constrained by the constants of female ballroom experience -- which, in turn, symbolise greater societal exigencies:

In Austen's novels...women simply do not have 'the advantage of choice'....They can only wait for proposals. They can scrutinize their suitors' gestures, review their every word, differentiate acts of civility from acts of particular affection, and form all manner of conjectures about the likelihood of receiving proposals. But finally they can only wait. As bold as they are in every other respect, even Emma and Elizabeth Bennet can only wait. And of course waiting is practically all that Fanny Price and Anne Elliot ever do. (Johnson 59)

Thus, dancing or spectating, watcher or watched, females remain

dependent on male intervention to ameliorate their state of passivity and powerlessness.

For this reason, Austen's most favourable dance images show a male and female acting in concert, "mutually authorizing" each other and thereby forming a defence against an intrusive public. At a dance in Sense and Sensibility, Elinor Dashwood and Colonel Brandon are described as "sitting down together by mutual consent" while the others dance: here, even though the choice has been *not* to dance rather than to dance, the distribution of power is even and equal, since the wording suggests that the consent of both male and female has figuratively been asked. Similarly, Emma's dancing with Knightley is determined upon by an exchange in which it is not completely clear who is doing the asking -- a situation appropriate to Austen's desire to show a powerful female character while remaining deferent to societal requirements for feminine behaviour. Finally, the image of Anne and Wentworth's "spirits dancing in private rapture," away from all spectatorship or public knowledge, evokes an ideal realm wherein the question of initiative and consent is rendered irrelevant. The dance, then, ideally represents equality between the sexes: Austen's positive dance images can be seen as illustrations of what Robert Polhemus identifies in both Elizabeth Bennet and the author herself as "the wish to unite the quality of her being with male power and opportunity" (31). Ultimately, it is only in such a union, balanced and equal like the country dance figures themselves, that a Jane Austen heroine may hope to attain in her life the even equipoise of an ideal dance partnership, screened from the hazards of living and dancing in the eye of the world.

NOTES

1. Foucault refers to this panoptic presence as "a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on the alert..." (214). See page 7 of this paper.

2. I have chosen this term to refer to the acts of watching that occur at dances in Austen's novels because of its connotations of purposeful or obsessive watching, and of the taking of vicarious gratification from watching others, both of which I believe to be applicable to the acts of dance-spectatorship which take place in Austen's novels. In addition, I feel that the sexual implications of the term are apt, given the intrinsically sexualised nature of dancing: "dance itself is not just a means to sex (although of course it may well be such) but...it is or can be a form of sexual expression in itself. Frith understands this well: 'the most obvious feature of dancing as an activity is its sexuality -- institutionalised dancing...is redolent with sexual tensions and possibilities, as private desires get public display, as repressed needs are proudly shared...'" (Ward 21). Thus when any one character watches another two dancing together, he/she is in a sense engaging in an act of voyeurism.

3. Terry Castle includes commentary that could be applied to the Austenian ball, with the qualifications mentioned in note 8: "The masquerade episode serves as...a privileged site of plot. Above all, masquerade is the place where significant events 'take place'.... This plot-producing function follows from the nature of the diversion....The eighteenth-century masquerade was a cultural locus of intimacy. There, persons otherwise rigidly segregated by class and sex distinctions might come together in unprecedented and sometimes disruptive combinations. Masquerading substituted randomness and novelty...for the highly stylized patterns of everyday public and private exchange" (120). Regency dances, of course, lacking the "licensing" effect of costume, retain "highly stylized patterns," and thus fall somewhere between masquerade and "everyday public...exchange."

4. "Their entrances are moments of scrutiny when their gestures, actions and words are studied and discussed by the company at large" (Reid-Walsh 115).

5. Nancy Armstrong raises this issue in connection with Wuthering Heights; she cites Lockwood's relation of his encounter with a young female who subsequently douses his attraction by showing signs of interest in him ("a real goddess in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me"). Armstrong explains that "Lockwood brings to his understanding of human relations a notion of sexuality that designates the female as an object of desire. What spoils her beauty are signs of her desire for him; she does some looking of her own" (195). Such an explanation can also be applied to the response of certain Austen characters to gazing females (see Pride and Prejudice section, page 51 of this paper).

6. An interesting comparison is with the dance scene in Volume 1, Chapter 14 of Charlotte Brontë's Villette, where Madame Beck's enforcement of a constant state of surveillance not only controls but *supplants* the dangers of actual physical dance-interaction.

7. Nancy Armstrong, for instance, states that the "domestic woman" possessed "dominance over all those objects and practices we associate with private life. To her went authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations..." (3). I would argue in contrast that dance, as one of these same activities (included with both "leisure time" and "courtship procedures") becomes in another sense, due to the presence of the evaluative external gaze, among the most public of concerns -- especially as contrasted in this passage from Persuasion with the distinctive activities of the "domestic male." It is even possible to see in such a contrast evidence of "feministic" subversiveness on Austen's part (commented on at length by Margaret Kirkham and Claudia Johnson) as she subtly redefines the nature of the female realm.

8. Castle also refers briefly to two events in Jane Austen's work -- the "Lovers' Vows" episode of Mansfield Park, and Lydia Bennet's participation in "cross-dressing" a soldier -- among incidences of masquerade in fiction. The applicability of Castle's research to my topic, however, is limited by two factors: first, her note that the era of the English masquerade was already waning by the 1780s; second, the fact that the "promiscuous freedom" (41) and "hallucinatory reversals" (6) associated with masquerade were permitted by a donning *en masse* of concealing disguises, masks, and personae, and are in no way characteristic of the eminently ordered and "proper" Regency dance and assembly. In addition, although Castle emphasises the mixing of classes and sexes -- which I have referred to as a characteristic of Austen's balls -- she also states that this intermingling surpassed that of other public events, and that this was due to the presence of costumes: "Individual behaviour was freer at the masquerade than at virtually any other public occasion where the classes and sexes mixed openly. The presence of masks and costumes was responsible for this collective sense of increased liberty" (34). Hence there are few useful similarities beyond this point.

9. Alan Hertz notes that within the ballroom, communication takes place in a "language of veiled signals and enigmatic, double-edged remarks" (207).

10. "Jane Austen acknowledges a contradiction between the community view of courtship as a serious game and the individual's view of it as a matter of personal passion, and this contradiction is clearly seen in the way she handles the dance" (Elsbree, PPP 369); thus what Marianne assumes to belong solely to herself is vicariously and voyeuristically partaken of by all around her by virtue of her willingness to dance in public.

11. Austen refers to a similar instance in her own life, in a letter to Cassandra: "Imagine to yourself everything most

profligate and shocking in the way of dancing and sitting down together (L 1-2; 9 Jan. 1796)" (Fergus 76). Despite her humorous tone, the choice of terminology -- profligate, shocking -- bespeaks a developed awareness of public response to dance behaviour.

12. Notable in connection is Robert Polhemus' comment on Elizabeth's effect on Darcy in Pride and Prejudice: "'Disarming' perfectly characterizes the function and effect of love in the novel" (34). While the contexts are different, the actions of both Elinor and Elizabeth might suggest that for the most part, females can only *disarm* -- they themselves are weaponless and from the outset are at a disadvantage vis-à-vis male power.

13. This invites comparison with Foucault's description of the prisoner in the Panopticon ("He is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200)), and thereby points up the extent to which Marianne is representative of vulnerability within a panoptic schema.

14. Claudia Johnson suggests that Austen is not condemnatory of this trait in Marianne herself, but rather in Marianne's environment: "*Sense and Sensibility*, then, criticizes, not the unseemliness or the rebelliousness of Marianne's emotionality, but rather its horrifying conformity to the social context she lives within" (69). This is not an issue I hope to resolve; in either case, Marianne's behaviours on and off the dance floor are in parallel, supporting the idea that Austen uses a female's ballroom choices and actions to evoke her condition in society.

15. The self-effacing nature of such a decision -- to accompany while others dance -- is emphasised by the wording chosen by Claire Tomalin in this passage from her biography of Jane Austen: "sacrifice herself when there were older fingers to work in the good cause of the young people's pleasure" (101). Unlike her creator, Anne, though still relatively young herself, does opt for "self-sacrifice," deliberately negating herself as a participant and denying herself any share in active communal enjoyments.

16. Similar is the contrast between Mrs Jennings and Elinor as watchers: Mrs Jennings "betrays her citizenship in the community of 'voluntary spies' (Henry Tilney's phrase...), which surrounds the small, civilised community of good sense, good feeling, and good manners eventually established as the emotional centre of every Austen novel.... the good community as a whole is immeasurably superior to the larger social community" (Fergus 92).

17. See Alison Sulloway, page 140, where she quotes Robert Polhemus' "delightfully frank gloss" on this phrase: "All dances are essentially mating dances, and the end, as well as the means, of dancing, is the felicity of rapid motion." Similarly, the coupling of the words "dancing" and "private rapture" could be seen to contain a suggestion of the long-delayed physical consummation which awaits the two lovers.

18. Given that these outside forces include both Sir Walter and Mr Elliot on one side, and Elizabeth Elliot and Lady Russell on the other, it seems doubtful, as Perkins suggests, that Austen's portrayal of Anne's "victory" can or should be read as a revolt against gender definition, as that of other Austen females perhaps might be.

19. This is a situation which equally nonplusses the sensitive Fanny Price: "glad would she have been not to be obliged to listen, for it was while all the other young people were dancing, and she sitting, most unwillingly, among the chaperons at the fire...." (MP 98). In Fanny's case, I would argue, the unwillingness to spectate is due not only to a desire to dance but also to a personal rejection of subjectivity: her aversion to watching -- and to the gossiping that goes with it -- is indirectly attributable to her own fear of being watched and discussed (see quotation page 68 of this paper). In Catherine's case, it is no more than frustrated desire to participate which occasions her dissatisfaction with being confined to the "sidelines." Catherine is altogether a simpler and more straightforward character than Fanny -- not least of all because she is part of a parody!

20. Jan Fergus, on the other hand, envisions Catherine as a strong female character who defies the restrictions imposed on her: "Catherine Morland is unique among Austen's heroines in her naïve, unaffected pursuit of the hero, who learns to care for her only because he cannot help perceiving that she prefers him. In this respect, Catherine violates conventional norms for female behaviour even more radically and more successfully than Elizabeth Bennet" (95). This picture of Catherine as taking the lead or initiative does not seem equally applicable to her behaviour within the ballroom (especially with Thorpe), where she must wait passively to be sought.

21. Although Claudia Johnson states that Henry Tilney is "too often mistaken for an authorial surrogate" (34), I must continue to regard him as at least occasionally the mouthpiece for some of Austen's own ideas -- approval of Miss Tilney, for instance, seems common to both character and author, as does disapproval of excessive artifice.

22. I am for the most part in agreement with Johnson's analysis of Emma as the novel in which Austen shows "willingness to explore positive versions of female power" (126) -- power which includes taking initiative inside and outside the ballroom. However, it seems to me that Austen's approval of Emma as performer in particular is heavily qualified. Thus I cannot concur with a passage such as the following, which implies that Emma, along with Elizabeth Bennet, is rewarded for her performative prowess and breaking of feminine norms: "Here choosy men prefer saucy women -- not women who place themselves at the margins, letting themselves be noticed only so they may show that they are not so vain as to crave attention, but women who love even the unflattering limelight" (Johnson 142). This seems overstated -- after all, is it possible that Austen's views had changed so much since her

presentation of Miss Tilney as a laudable female? A woman loving "even the unflattering limelight" is rather reminiscent of Isabella Thorpe. Emma needs and is given correction, which surely includes learning to be less in love with the "spotlight."

23. I lean toward a "traditional" view of Knightley as teacher and to some extent authorial voice. Although I acknowledge that such a view is problematised by Knightley's own excesses and errors in some areas, I have found views on the opposite side to be equally problematic; I concur with Edward Neill, for instance, that "One can also see what is a 'definite false note' in a recent book by Margaret Kirkham when she congratulates 'Jane Austen' on her ability to free herself from 'that extensive class of literature which makes Gods of Baronets or Dukes', en route to the implausible conclusion that *Emma* 'subverts the stereotype in which the heroine is educated by a hero-guardian'" (100).

24. "Jane falls in love conveniently, while dining or dancing. On the other hand, when Elizabeth and Darcy meet formally, they alienate even more than they attract each other" (Hertz 207).

25. The same might be said of Emma: "'Imaginism' of Emma's sort, then, is not a private matter; it refuses to rest content with placid surfaces defenders of public order call reality, and it arrogates to itself the right to penetrate...secrets some would not wish to see brought to light" (Johnson 133).

26. This passage could be one of those that inspired Robert Polhemus' assertion that in Pride and Prejudice Austen "shows an almost unmediated yearning to find means to transform feminine powerlessness to influence" (48).

27. Similarly and symbolically, Fanny will appear at the ball with the proprietary "mark" of three males on her person, in the shape of her much discussed jewellery (William's cross; Edmund's chain; Henry's necklace).

28. See Edward Said's chapter on "Jane Austen and Empire" in Culture and Imperialism.

29. It seems likely that the terminology Austen employs to describe this "coming out" practice also "makes plain her feminist distaste for the ritual" (Wiltshire 100).)

30. Emma and Mrs Elton, in contrast, wish to begin the ball precisely *because* they will be seen by everyone; each covets the visible affirmation of status attained by this action (Lange 92). For these socially aggressive females, the ball becomes a battle of vanities and the dance formation itself a site of contention for social power. The less worldly Fanny, on the other hand, places little value on the status that extra visibility conveys.

NOMENCLATURE

Austen: E = Emma
MP = Mansfield Park
NA = Northanger Abbey
P = Persuasion
PP = Pride and Prejudice
SS = Sense and Sensibility

Elsbree: BC = The Breaking Chain
DFC = "Jane Austen and the Dance of Fidelity and
Complaisance"
PPP = "The Purest and Most Perfect Form of Play"

Gard: EP = Emma and Persuasion
JAN = Jane Austen's Novels

Thomas: AV = "An-Other Voice"

Wood: SHD = Some Historical Dances

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