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***Jane Austen's Invisible Men: Beyond the Drawing Room***

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Jane Austen's Invisible Man: Beyond the Drawing Room

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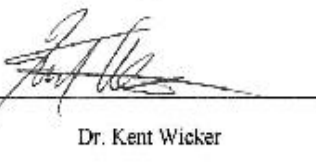
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Male characters in Jane Austen's novels are predominately represented from the perspective of the central female protagonist and focalizer. Substantial parts of the men's lives are hidden, not because they are inconsequential, but because their relationship to the protagonist defines their place in the story. The protagonist only encounters other aspects of men's lives through brief references to them in social discussions among characters, leaving much unknown, such as Christopher Brandon's military career in *Sense and Sensibility*. The nature of his service, bravery or influence is not revealed, though it is likely that he has been shaped by his military experience. The men live much of their lives beyond the drawing-rooms and other socially acceptable places where men and women interact. While in the confines of the acceptable spaces, the men often present themselves in ways appropriate for the setting, thus obscuring many aspects of their individual personalities.

Male characters enter the narrow confines of Jane Austen's social spaces shaped by their individual experiences in the masculine networks of larger society, such as military service, family politics, societal political trends and societal concepts of masculinity. Men are a major focus of Jane Austen's stories because the heroines must interact with and understand them to determine the nature of further interactions. Christopher Gillie suggests that the significant men are those "who deeply influence the heroine, but are open to her misjudgment because of the complexity of their natures, of their circumstances, or of both" (Gillie 111). However, it is difficult to ascertain the larger influences on the male characters that contribute to the complexity of their natures or circumstances. The reader is left to interpret contributive influences on the men's actions if these are not suggested by diegesis, the author's narrative, or demonstrated through mimesis, the behavior of the characters. Furthermore, the reader must view many interactions through the same limited view which the heroine experiences within the confined social settings. Influences on the men from beyond those settings may be suggested within the novels or may remain invisible. As a result, I speculate that the reader encounters more

difficulty in understanding the men, or errs when interpreting them. Investigating the male characters' broader experiences provides insight into the male experience of the long eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, while illuminating additional influences that shape interactions between Jane Austen's heroes and other characters, thus enriching the conceptualization of her male characters.

David Castronovo notes that "gentle birth and wealth did not presuppose gentle manners and breeding, but they offered a favorable precondition for certain patterns of conduct" (Castronovo 19). There are standards of behavior that Austen's male characters achieve, but also at times fail to meet. Through her male characters Austen explores these aspects of personality as she contrasts the conversations and actions of the men, especially the ways in which they influence and impact the lives of her heroines. Nuances of position, manners, the role of wealth or the lack of it, breeding, appearance, communication, fashionable behavior and family interactions are some of the characteristics that the men exhibit, both for constructive and detrimental impacts on others. But, it is difficult to discern whether the causes of their actions are self-determined or shaped by other influences within the community in which they live. As a result, it seems useful to pose the following question: How does Jane Austen portray the unseen lives of her male characters through diegesis and mimesis, particularly the ways in which masculine networks, as well as expectations from within communities regarding gentlemanly behavior, influence the men's actions as gentlemen, including their interactions with Austen's female characters? In this paper I attempt to demonstrate that the term "gentleman" has an ambiguous and imprecise interpretation, both among Austen's characters as well as within the contexts generated by the author, thus causing unique social pressures on the men who must fulfill their roles as gentlemen.

Jane Austen introduces the first of her male characters within her first published novel concerning two sisters with disparate personalities. But she begins *Sense and Sensibility* by describing the actions of the men who shape the context in which the women must live, rather than through the two main female characters, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 3). The author focuses her narrative on the details of the estate owner's disposal of his estate, the nature of his relationships to the possible heirs within his family and the possible impact of his decision on the family, especially the women who are heavily dependent on the owner's financial support. However, it is sobering to note that the owner chooses his much younger great-nephew as the heir, despite the heir's substantial financial status (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4). John Dashwood, his great-nephew, "was amply provided for by the fortune of his mother, which had been large . . . By his own marriage . . . he added to his wealth" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 3).

The four Dashwood women remain dependent on income from the estate, first on Mr. Henry Dashwood's income until his death, then on the commitment of Mrs. Dashwood's stepson (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4, 5). At first glance it appears to be a circuitous approach to caring for his family. David Castronovo provides multiple insights into concepts of gentlemen which can help illuminate their actions as described by Austen. The late owner has considered it necessary because a "gentleman had to preserve a continuity with the past; he had to live up to the achievements and contributions of his ancestors. At the same time he had to consider his descendants; he had to leave his properties intact" (Castronovo 77). Primogeniture was an established practice. Rather than reduce the future value and earning capacity of his estate by dividing the properties, the owner chose a single heir to ensure the continued or improved status of his significant family estate, but also so that the income from the estate would allow the next heir to provide for the financial needs of the extended family, servants and townspeople. A

single owner insured a sizable income to support not just the heir's nuclear family, but many others also:

The country gentleman's function was to give life coherence and stability. The medium by means of which he acted out his role was the landed estate. For it was his duty to preserve his property as the visible symbol of the social order and to see that life on the land gave each member of the community his place in the social hierarchy (Castronovo 77).

The new heir's responsibility does not end with the members of his nuclear and extended families, servants and tenants, though it does represent the livelihoods of many in a large estate. For example, the long-lived and particularly large Chatsworth estate currently employs seven hundred workers to address its modern needs ("Chatsworth"). Without modern conveniences and with labor-intensive support required, the staff demands would be great. Furthermore, the modern estate of Chatsworth encompasses three towns, providing further evidence of the extended reach into additional lives. Many livelihoods would be affected by the financial solvency of the estate. Historically, heirs were also responsible for the care of the poor within their parish. "Along with the church – which of course was an arm of gentlemanly power – the gentleman and his lady were the first to undertake the task of seeing to the needs of the poor. The individualistic benevolence of the country house was something that the poor had come to depend on" (Castronovo 78). The new heir to an estate ideally accepts the responsibility of caring for many people.

Perhaps the late owner provides for the longer-term care of those dependent on the success of his estate by choosing, in this case, a young heir who will presumably provide more years of service than someone older, such as the heir's father, Henry (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4). Furthermore, an heir with a young son offers the possibility of two more

generations of service to the estate community. It is because of the “protracted contract with land and enjoyment of privilege that the historical fact of a class of gentry grew” (Castronovo 9). Young John Dashwood acquires the estate as a gentleman of birth, with a similar future path provided to his son, the late owner’s great grand-nephew, Harry (Castronovo 5). The late owner and his successor belong to a group of men whose long lineage constructs a way for them to interpret themselves. As men of blood whose ancestors were, ideally, gentlemen “before a patent of arms was conferred,” they receive both their genteel status and an estate from their ancestors (Castronovo 7). The connection of blood automatically confers status for the heir and his family, while justifying the previous landowner’s choice of an heir, regardless of the personal characteristics. The late owner apparently believes his choice to be the right one.

Jane Austen does not suggest in her narrative that the late owner chooses his heir out of any concern for those beyond his extended family who are supported by the estate. Austen notes that the little great great grand-nephew, Harry, had “gained on the affections of his uncle . . . as to outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his niece and her daughters” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4). However, the fact that he bypasses his nephew, despite his fondness for Henry as well as Henry’s second wife and daughters, does imply that the late owner took into account other considerations as he made his decision. The late owner, if he had pursued the ideals of his role, would have remained actively involved with the members of his estate community to render:

essential services to his country by assisting in the disinterested administration of the laws; by watching over the opinions and principles of the lower orders around him; by diffusing among them those rights important to their welfare; by mingling frankly among them, gaining their confidence, becoming the immediate auditor of their complaints, informing himself of their wants, making himself a channel through which their grievances may be quietly communicated to the

proper sources of mitigation and relief; or by becoming, if need be, the intrepid and incorruptible guardian of their liberties – the enlightened champion of their rights (Castronovo 76).

The late owner would have been attentive to and probably influenced by the many needs within his community at the time he writes his will, if he is actively committed to the ideals of his role. The people under his care would have actively sought him out to discuss difficulties they face and request his help. The owner would have actively made himself available by visiting them in their places of work and celebration, searching to understand their circumstances and build warm relationships with them. Though changing due to industrialization and war, these historical but unseen activities within the narrative, still had adherents within the male-dominated society in which the late owner lives.

The late owner could have named Henry as the heir with the intent for him to pass the estate to his son, John; however, Henry has three daughters with no sons by his second marriage, so the late owner may be concerned that his nephew will bequeath substantial ownership to his daughters, thereby conveying parts of the estate to their future husbands and thus reducing its size and earning capacity (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 302). Naming someone younger could provide stability over a greater period of time while protecting the completeness of the estate. It may be important to note that, although Henry Dashwood does have a substantial income to support his family, the late owner leaves a very modest income to each of the three Dashwood daughters, an unnecessary provision for those who are already supported by their father and who are likely to marry in the future, thereby gaining financial support (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 302).

No mention is made of a confidant with whom the owner may have shared his deliberations, so it may be assumed that his decision is a very private one based on his own



individual interpretation of the circumstances or his own emotions. The final decision is consistent with the role the late owner fills, a role evolved by the male squirearchy over time to the point of institutionalization (Castronovo 7). It is not clear whether the late owner also chooses his great-nephew out of concern for the many supported by his estate, though by insuring that the estate remains intact he provides for them. But, an “estate...was not so much a financial venture as an effort to make a caste survive from generation to generation” (Castronovo 78). Unfortunately, the practice of passing property to the next generation did not insure the well-being of all family members involved. Such a simple approach to a decision impacting so many would seem irresponsible, but also suggests the potential for short-sighted decisions. However, this information is relayed after the disclosure of the will, possibly suggesting an apparent explanation for Henry Dashwood, his wife and daughters regarding the unexpected turn of events. The narrative does offer simple affection for a small child as a reason for the choice of his father, John, as the heir (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4).

Jane Austen invites more questions than she answers through her description of the property disposal, perhaps highlighting the complexities and potential misunderstandings involved, as well as the far-reaching implications of any whimsical decisions made by the landed gentry. Furthermore, she seems to suggest through the death of Henry Dashwood, and the resulting financial distress it causes his immediate family, that the late owner’s intent for adequate provision is unfulfilled, thus the widely accepted system of succession is inherently flawed. The unknown reasons for the owner’s decisions can only be surmised from the novel, but remain critical in defining the changing context of the Dashwood women in *Sense and Sensibility*. Austen portrays the substantial ambiguity inherent in the concept of the estate and its impact on her various characters.

Jane Austen provides additional evidence regarding the gentry as she describes John Dashwood's advancement into his role as the new owner of the Norland estate and his initial actions as he assumes control of the related financial resources. Though described as "rather cold-hearted, and rather selfish" he is regarded as someone who fulfills his duties with propriety" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4). Furthermore, he seems genuinely excited and committed to address his father's request for financial support to the new owner's half-sisters (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 5). As a gentleman, his openhandedness is connected to his pride of rank, so his ability to provide well for them is proof of his rank (Castronovo 87). Simultaneously, his pride is also likely to be influenced by the fact that his own father, before his own death, implored John to support his step-mother and half-sisters well (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 4). But the nature of the John's private relationship with his wife surges into view as she intervenes to disrupt his benevolent plans as the new heir of Norland (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 5). It seems ironic that it is a woman who further disenfranchises the fatherless Dashwood women, using her four-year-old's projected future financial requirements for the support of a greater number of dependents, to reduce the new heir's financial support of the Dashwood women (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 7).

Austen describes John's wife as "narrow-minded and selfish," and even more so than her husband. But her ability to privately sway his actions away from his ideals suggests that the gentlemanly ideal of benevolence has a limited influence on John Dashwood, the new heir, and less impact on his pride than seems initially evident (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 8). John gives a clear commitment to his father, restating it by saying, "The promise, therefore, was given, and must be performed. Something must be done for them whenever they leave Norland and settle in a new home" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 7). By substantially reducing his promised support, he reneges on a promise made directly to his father. In doing so, he threatens the harmony of his family, an ideal for the gentleman, is disrespectful toward his

father, a questionable action for a leader in the local Anglican Church, and he seems unaware of the full impact of his actions on his step-mother's family. The ideal expressed in the poem, "The Fine Old English Gentleman," of "benevolence and sense of duty [...] were matched by men of the period," (Castronovo 86) but John seems either unaffected by the priorities of his society and peers or distracted by his wife's reasoning. More specific to the male familial relationships, the paternal network that his father represents appears to be of waning effectiveness.

Jason Solinger notes that the eighteenth century is a "period that saw the unprecedented expansion of Britain's overseas commerce" and is the "same period in which Britons began to revise their culture's notion of what it meant to be a gentleman" (95). In a time of increasing wealth, the concept of the gentleman involved the "waste of time and conspicuous consumption," creating an increasing chasm between "men of leisure" and country squires (Castronovo 102). While John Dashwood initially appears to pursue the traditional role of an estate owner, his wife aggressively seeks to increase their wealth without regard for serving those dependent on their support. She offers no explanation beyond the expressed concern for the future capacity of her son to support a large family.

John's wife appears Chesterfieldian (Carter 79) in her approach to Mrs. Henry Dashwood and her daughters when she shows "them with how little attention to the comfort of other people she could act when the occasion required it," while at the same time "they were treated by her with quiet civility" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 5, 6). Philip Carter explains that Chesterfield was prominent "as a cynical exponent of a brand of male refinement characterized by self-advancement disguised under a civil veneer (79). Carter provides a comparison point for John's wife in his description of the Chesterfieldian gap between "polish and morals" (79). Mrs. Henry Dashwood's manners toward the Dashwood women and her arguments regarding them to her husband seem to demonstrate that her "manners were motivated not by a sensitivity

to others but by a duplicitous bid for personal advancement” (Carter 79). Her husband, John, indicates that he recognizes the harshness of his wife’s approach when he objects at one point in their discussion to the reduction in support: “I would not wish to do anything mean [...] One had rather, on such occasions, do too much than too little” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 8). John’s wife is cold, calculating and unrelenting in her acquisition of most of the Dashwood women’s funds. She discounts the worth of other women for the purpose of taking their funds to incrementally increase the financial status of a very young gentleman within a society dominated by men. Of course, she does increase her own resources and status by doing so. Austen seems to provide no further explanation through her narrative, though the motivation appears to be simply greed, thus highlighting the many issues potentially affecting the welfare of those supported by an estate and the many variations of supposed gentlemanly action.

Kate Behr notes that In Gothic literature, “When looking for the father . . . one begins with an absence” (113). Austen seems to emulate an aspect of the Gothic formula as she removes the old gentleman from his role as provider for the Dashwood women, following this by removing Mr. Henry Dashwood from his role as a temporary provider and advocate. Though not physically removed through death, young John Dashwood accepts his wife’s arguments, leaving the Dashwood women in diminished circumstances. Their livelihood, living quarters and status within the household and, therefore, larger society are greatly reduced. As a result, Mrs. Henry Dashwood undertakes the challenge of locating suitable quarters for them, though it is difficult for her because of her now limited financial resources. The removal of support seems to emphasize how pervasive within society the concept of the male role is, as well as the capacity for the collective consciousness to shape the actions of men, such as Sir John extending his help to his extended family. Without the presence of a father and protector, the Dashwood women are in a precarious situation. They are moving outside of the insular world of the estate

and no longer feel adequately provided for by the men who previously accepted responsibility for their well-being. Furthermore, Austen notes that Mrs. Henry Dashwood “was suffering under the cold and unfeeling behaviour of her nearer connections,” also indicating some removal from their emotional family ties (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 18). Of course, the source of the ill-will is Mrs. Dashwood’s daughter-in-law. Perhaps Austen emphasizes the disparity caused by dissimilar personalities drawn into the same family through marriage and the variations in gentlemanly action caused by it.

Mrs. Henry Dashwood receives an offer for relief from a distant location when “a letter was delivered to her from the post, which contained a proposal particularly well timed. It was the offer of a small house, on very easy terms, belonging to a relation of her own, a gentleman of consequence and property . . . and written in a true spirit of friendly accommodation” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 18). Her distant relative, a country squire, is “a sportsman . . . He hunted and shot . . . demonstrating a “total want of talent and taste which confined . . . employments . . . within a very narrow compass” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 25). But, though not necessarily polished, Sir John does not seem to be an archetypical boor who’s “behavior was that of a yeoman rather than a gentleman” (Castronovo 33). His manner, at times, does seem rough. When he invites the Dashwood women to dine at Barton Park, “his entreaties were carried to a point of perseverance beyond civility, they could not give offence” due to his kindness (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 23). Sir John Middleton’s awareness of his cousins’ needs suggests attentiveness to the well-being of his extended family. Perhaps upon reading a notice regarding Mr. Dashwood’s death in a newspaper or in a letter from relatives he took definitive action to protect his distant relatives, the Dashwood women. Despite the initial lack of clarity, Austen provides some explanation for his awareness of their plight, mentioning that “the Middletons . . . confined their employments, unconnected with such as society produced . . . [yet] were scarcely ever without some friends staying with them in the house, and they kept more company of every

kind than any other family in the neighbourhood” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 25). While Sir John most likely received written notice from his relatives regarding the death of the late owner, he also maintained an active communication network which may have delivered more information to him regarding the plight of the Dashwood women. The contrasts within Sir John’s character demonstrate something of the variations that one gentlemanly personality can contain.

There is little shown of the late owner’s actions beyond his family interactions. By contrast, Sir John Middleton is described as actively involved with those who live outside the walls of his home. “Gentlemanly hospitality is one of the major forces that unifies the rural community” and such hospitality seems evident in the Middleton home (Castronovo 86). This gregarious gentleman actively gathers with the members of his community, “mingling frankly among them, gaining their confidence . . . informing himself of their wants, making himself a channel through which their grievances may be quietly communicated to the proper sources of mitigation and relief” (Castronovo 76). It appears that this male character uses his communication channels, both local and familial; to learn of and actively address issues of distress in his extended family, such as those of the Dashwood women. It also seems that the men involved in Sir John’s social circles would be aware of his responsibility for the protection of others and, therefore, provide any information to him of use in his role.

While the Dashwood womens’ closer male familial connections fail them in the decisions apportioning the original estate, thereby making them more susceptible to the vagaries of fate, it is interesting to note that it is family connections and an estate that rescue them as well. Just as Jane Austen’s wealthy brother, Edward Austen Knight, supported Jane, her mother and sister by offering them a house, Sir John demonstrates, through his benevolent actions that family relationships, in conjunction with the resources of the estate, provide an alternative means for the Dashwood womens’ survival (Chawton). Leon Gautier explains in his nineteenth-

century discussion of chivalry that within the chivalric code, “the Knight was bound to defend in this world all that was defenseless, and particularly the priests and monks . . . the women and children, widows and orphans” (40). Sir John’s actions, as a gentleman, are consistent with the code. Austen does not mention Sir John’s concern for family reputation that must have existed due to the irresponsible actions taken by the new heir of Norland, but the potential impact is also evident. Through Sir John’s actions the male conceptual framework generates something of a “safety net” for the disenfranchised women. The solution to their problem is not as desirable as their father’s initial request for their financial support. However, the Dashwood women at least have a workable solution, just as Jane and her family were able to live comfortably, but very modestly after their rescue (Chawton). Perhaps greed is the source of the problem, but the historical concept of the estate places power and resources centrally, providing the possibility for greater abuse than a decentralized framework of power. Yet, in the hands of someone like Sir John, power, applied in the form of resources, demonstrates something of the result of actions that are consistent with the widely accepted code of chivalry. However, through her characters, Austen contrasts the wide range of actions available to those considered to be gentlemen and the drastic variations in their impact on others as they take them.

Just as the Dashwood women are provided with new living quarters through the Middleton estate, they are also quickly introduced to the local society via the same channel. The social settings in which men and women interact within *Sense and Sensitivity* vary, but homes are a primary location, including estates owned by friends, such as The Vyne which was visited by Austen in her earlier years (The Vyne). There, introductions are made, relationships develop or erode and dynamic exchanges occur. Jane Austen traveled approximately ten miles to visit the Chutes’ estate as a young woman, a distance that would allow some previous knowledge of neighboring families through local communication (The Vyne). Furthermore,

family connections and friendships would provide additional knowledge. Edward Ferrars is a member of Mrs. John Dashwood's family at Norland, while Colonel Christopher Brandon is a friend of the Middletons at Barton Park. Barbara Hardy notes that the social context defines the nature of interactions between men and women. "It is in public that Jane Austen's men and women have to get to know each other, and have to endure the hazards and inconveniences of social encounters . . . It may be too polite for intimacy to flourish quickly" (111). The limited time they are together provides the context in which they must mutually evaluate one another, develop their relationships and decide whether a lifelong commitment is possible. Protagonists appear to have many opportunities for superficial assessments, as well as the possibility of erroneous conclusions within such constrained social settings. As a result, it seems likely that protagonists' initial mutual interpretations are likely to change due to subsequent improvements in understanding. Austen demonstrates the consequences of bad choices within her novels.

Despite the male and female hero's lack of initial familiarity, there is often a previous knowledge of them by the families who provide a context for their initial introduction. Edward Ferrars is the brother of Mrs. John Dashwood; Colonel Christopher Brandon is a friend of Sir John Middleton, as is John Willoughby (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 12, 26, 34). While these relationships may provide the heroines with some foreknowledge of the male characters, Austen demonstrates the limitations of this type of information through Sir John as he recommends Willoughby. He describes him "as good a kind of fellow as ever lived . . . A very decent shot, and there is not a bolder rider in England" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 34). The squire reveals his own valuation of sportsmanship when considering the merits of other men, though his recommendation may be lacking for the purpose of matchmaking. It seems that mutual evaluation between the interested parties may be more useful in determining possible matches. Elinor reveals her preferences for a good match, noting Edward's "sense and . . . goodness"



while Marianne also reveals something of hers by noting that Edward's eyes "want all that spirit, that fire, which at once announce virtue and intelligence" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 16, 14).

The term "hero" does not seem well-suited to Edward:

He was not handsome, and his manners required intimacy to make them pleasing. He was too diffident to do justice to himself; but when his natural shyness was overcome; his behaviour gave every indication of an open affectionate heart. His understanding was good, and his education had given it solid improvement (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 12).

Of course, the term "hero" does address his role as one of the male protagonists in the novel. But, Austen's initial description of him suggests that he lacks characteristics that his society considers preferable.

It is not difficult to appreciate the circumstances that provoked expectations of toughness for men in Britain of the time. For example, men who acquired a commission in the Navy would be required to perform in harsh conditions, such as working among men who live in cramped conditions, performing routine but undesirable tasks while they are boys or endure some corporal punishment, supervising past criminals and capturing other ships not only through canon fire, but possibly by fighting and killing enemy sailors in hand-to-hand combat (H.M.S. Victory). Phillip Carter's description of the more established English notions of manhood, including "hardiness, confidence and physical and mental poise," may provide initial measures for Edward's performance within his society (73). Austen indicates that he is uncomfortable in social settings, with his hesitancy to speak demonstrating a lack of self-confidence among others that makes them less comfortable around him. His lack of confidence limits his self-presentation through a lack of poise, making him appear less hardy than he might otherwise. Austen uses Mrs. Dashwood's personal interpretation of masculine presence to clarify Edward's

limitations in her initial view of him by referring to “that quietness of manner which militated against all her established ideas of what a young man’s address ought to be” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 13). While these notions of manhood which he lacks are viable considerations within his community, other measures of masculinity are coincidental to them. To avoid the past errors found in the cold, self-serving courtier or the “formal rural gentleman,” new standards for gentlemanly behavior were developed for “an elite social group seemingly detached from the values of a respectable majority,” but with a genuine concern for others (Carter 124). “The early eighteenth-century polite male was expected to be more relaxed or ‘easy’ in company, to move more freely across social divisions . . . and to seek to please his audience through displays of self-control and genuine fellow feeling” (Carter 124). It is in the latter characteristic of this description, self-control and genuine fellow feeling, that Mrs. Dashwood considers Edward to redeem himself socially.

Austen describes Mrs. Dashwood’s emotional response to Edward as she becomes more familiar with him. She “took pains to get acquainted with him . . . and soon banished his reserve. She speedily comprehended all his merits . . . she knew his heart to be warm and his temper affectionate” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 13). A “harmony between inner virtue and social expression” is emphasized in the discourses of male refinement. Edward seems to demonstrate this in less formal settings, especially in his “displays of sympathy and constructive benevolence” (Carter 124). While Edward does not seem to possess all the ideal masculine characteristics of his time, he does appear to exhibit those considered to be of greater importance by Mrs. Dashwood. It is interesting to note that the other characteristics appear subservient. As Edward relaxes and becomes more confident he even teases Marianne (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 70). However, it seems unlikely that he might achieve the characteristics of sportsmanship that Sir John expressed in his ideal. Austen demonstrates

wide disparities in the interpretation of gentlemanly attributes in the contrast of Mrs. Dashwood and Sir John.

It is not difficult to attribute a reason to Edward's social awkwardness. In the course of another discussion he seems to provide one: "My mother did not make my home in every respect comfortable, as I had no friend, no companion in my brother, and disliked new acquaintance" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 275). Though his shyness may be partly a result of his natural disposition, the atmosphere of his home detracts from his social skills, while demonstrating the potential impact of women on the development of young men who are expected to become gentlemen. While Austen selects Edward to provide a brief description of the circumstances within his home, she chooses a narrative description for his mother. She describes Mrs. Ferrars as "serious, even to sourness, in her aspect" and someone who communicates little (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 174). Edward does not mention Mrs. John Dashwood, his sister, in the discussion of his home environment, so she remains less visible than his brother, Robert. However, his sister's presence has been noted as cold and calculating. She very likely added no warmth to his early family setting. He has been previously influenced by a sister who is emotionally cold, a brother who is self-absorbed and a mother who offers little warmth (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 187). Not only does Edward have difficulty in developing the social skills considered desirable within his culture, but he also receives little support from home to develop a masculine confidence that projects strength of individual will and even purpose. For obvious reasons, Edward finds a warm, encouraging home atmosphere to be very enticing.

As Michele Cohen notes, "the conviction that conversation between men and women 'improved' and refined them both was so abiding that by the end of the [eighteenth] century, it had become a virtual commonplace that 'free communication between the sexes' was an index of the refinement and polish of a nation" (4). It was commonly accepted that interaction with

women polished men out of their naturally rude nature. Edward is encouraged to join the presence of Elinor and her family by their warmth and hospitality, but also encouraged by society to be in the company of women. Perhaps he is unaware of the influence this company has on him as his relationship with the Dashwoods deepens.

Of his youthful, secret engagement to Lucy Steele, Edward says, "it was not unnatural for me to be very often at Longstaple, where I always felt myself at home, and was always sure of a welcome" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 275). He finds a welcome similar to the Steeles' home in the home of Mrs. Dashwood and her daughters. There, he is accepted and encouraged to feel comfortable among them. Edward keeps his engagement to Lucy Steele a secret from necessity, but apparently allows himself to enjoy an attraction to Elinor without initially considering the possible repercussions for her and Lucy, as well as himself. Due to his engagement, Edward risks placing his own honor in question if he reneges on his promise to marry Lucy. "Not to tell lies, and to keep to one's word, are . . . the two chief traits in the character of a gentleman" (Gautier 67). His behavior with Elinor could also be interpreted as untruthful because he allows her to believe that his actions demonstrate an attachment to her, an inappropriate implication for an engaged gentleman.

Edward's inner struggle with his error of self-representation causes him to appear aloof, then troubled during a later, unexpected visit to Barton Park. Austen chooses for Marianne to witness the meeting between Elinor and Edward in which he demonstrates an undisclosed problem in their relationship. Marianne, suffering from the disappearance of John Willoughby, provides a description of Edward:

There was a deficiency of all that a lover ought to look and say on such an occasion. He was confused, seemed scarcely sensible of pleasure in seeing them, looked neither rapturous nor gay, said little but what was forced from him

by questions, and distinguished Elinor by no mark of affection (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 66).

Marianne had been anticipating the arrival of Willoughby, but despite her bitter disappointment that he had not arrived, finds the appearance of Edward consoling, only to discover that Edward's demeanor is disappointing, this further emphasizing the emotional impact of the scene. Perhaps Austen uses Marianne's circumstances to express the deeper emotions that Elinor does not express, but experiences upon Edward's confusing approach. Marianne seems to relate this soon after the incident, when she says, "No; my feelings are not often shared, not often understood. But *sometimes* they are" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 67). Edward's discomfort appears to be from an unwillingness to interact further with Elinor, perhaps to avoid further self-misrepresentation or to protect his commitment to Lucy. At the same time, as a gentleman, Edward must struggle with aspects of the code of chivalry that influence his thoughts. Developed from some admonitions of the primitive church, "it was necessary to begin by saying, 'you shall do them [widows and orphans] no wrong . . . You shall not permit any one to do them harm' " (Gautier 42). Edward knows he is a future heir and could offer a better life should he marry Elinor, but would be unfair in encouraging her hopes.

There seem to be additional reasons for Edward's indecisive nature, which are revealed in a discussion he has with Mrs. Dashwood. Edward's social awkwardness probably contributes to his uncertainty in a variety of settings, including academic ones. Michele Cohen explains that "in the eighteenth century, the social aptitudes of the gentleman had prevailed over his scholarly attainments" (105). Edward's brother, Robert, even suggests that Edward's private education has interfered with his social abilities, while Robert perceives his own university education as cultivating his greater social ability (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 188). However, Robert's interpretation of the worth of public education seems to omit the failings. "There was a

long-standing tradition . . . of flogging and rioting...With no conception of supervising and monitoring the boys in their leisure time, the schools tolerated . . . "liberties" like uncontrolled roughhouse, thieving, food riots, and sadistic games and tricks" (Castranovo 56, 57). Academically, "a boy's intellectual life was sacrificed on the altar of the classics" (Castronovo 58). Perhaps the Westminster environment did not refine Robert in the ways he claimed. Furthermore, Robert seems to reveal some competitiveness toward his brother, thus limiting the dependability of his own report. In so doing he also demonstrates the disparate ways that gentlemen interpreted one another as well as themselves.

While inhibited at home by a less than warm mother, it appears that Edward feels pressure from her to choose a career. He reports that they "never could agree in our choice of a profession. I always preferred the church . . . But that was not smart enough for my family. They recommended the army" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 77). His motivation for productive engagements seems to be ignored by those who attempt to influence his future. Their action is typical because "throughout the eighteenth century, parents, particularly mothers, had been blamed for interfering with their children's education – especially their sons" (Cohen 105). After rejecting several career options including the army and law, Edward finds the navy inaccessible to him, so he simply enters university for lack of another option. There, he is involved in a "Classical education," though Edward's remarks do not seem to indicate an enjoyment of his academic challenges ( 62). He is discouraged from pursuing a preferred career interest and is apparently in a setting which is not motivating for him.

Edward apparently dislikes his lack of direction and considers his circumstances to be interfering with his ability to choose: "It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me anything like independence" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 77). Despite his role as the next heir for his family, his greater concern appears to be his own

freedom. He dislikes being emasculated by Mrs. Ferrars' because she holds the purse-strings of his family's estate. Edward emphasizes his unhappiness by relating how different he wants the lives of his future children to be: "They will be brought up,' said he, in a serious accent, 'to be as unlike myself as is possible. In feeling, in action, in condition, in everything' " (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 78). Though his lament is at a particularly discouraging time, Edward reveals the depth of his discomfort with the context in which he is required to live. Perhaps Austen is also revealing, through Edward, the many potential shortcomings of primogeniture for the oldest son and the possible dissolute nature of his life. Edward's nature and family create a life experience for him that falls short of the ideal. This revelation suggests additional reasons, through a confidential discussion between Edward and Mrs. Dashwood, for Edward being drawn towards more accepting family settings (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 77). Austen also reveals through Edward some of the disparity between the desired ideal of being a gentleman and heir, and the inherent losses an individual must incur by achieving it for some individuals.

It is interesting to note the parallel among three of Austen's male characters with respect to their financial dependence on women. Austen chooses mainly mimesis as a way of revealing the nature of each woman, rather than through narration. Perhaps this personalizes the direct impact that the powerful women have on the lives of the men that they seek to control. Frank Churchill, in *Emma*, is afraid of his arrogant aunt should he displease Mrs. Churchill with a wrong attachment, despite his aunt's fondness for him (Austen, *Emma* 243, 313, 240). Powerful parent figures obstruct both him and Edward Ferrars from pursuing attachments of low monetary value, yet tremendous emotional worth, thus disregarding their future happiness as male heirs. John Willoughby is unique by comparison in that it is his wife who controls him (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 249).

Each of the three attempts to conceal his attachments, though Edward Ferrars' circumstances seem to demonstrate the outcome when a forbidden relationship is revealed,

while Frank Churchill apparently demonstrates the result of a successful concealment. Though these two represent alternate extremes, Austen seems to exhibit the potential variety of outcomes through John Willoughby's circumstances. Rather than controlling disinheritance or inheritance, his wife uses her financial power to successfully force a disassembly of his relationship with Marianne against his own wishes (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 249). Edward and Frank both challenge their patroness' attempts at control covertly and one overtly, this resulting in greater happiness for both of them despite Edward's significant financial loss. However, John Willoughby cedes control to his wife only due to his attachment to her wealth, this leaving him distraught over forfeiting Marianne, his deeply felt attachment (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 249). Austen seems to subtly suggest, through the circumstances of each of these male characters, that financial gain is of secondary importance in comparison to attachment. She also seems to suggest that, while attempts at financial manipulation by powerful women may temporarily confuse the male character being emasculated, that character's assertion or at least retention of his preferences is preferable to the misery caused by relinquishing personal control to another.

Austen chooses to reveal, through Anne Steele during a confidential discussion with Elinor, that Edward offered Lucy her freedom, ostensibly due to his vastly reduced financial circumstances resulting from his announcement to his family of their engagement (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 206). Perhaps Austen chooses to make the revelation through Anne because she is a minor character who can serve as a simple voice to provide the information without creating additional dynamics. As a result, the revelation is focused on Edward and Lucy, with Elinor simply receiving the information. Lucy refuses to void Edward's proposal, even under the circumstances, thus indicating her resolve toward the marriage, which raises the question of whether their secret agreement is a legally binding one. Charles MacColla, in his discussion of breach of promise, notes that "a promise of marriage is not in itself binding, that is



to say, there must be an acceptance of the promise and mutual promises of marriage” (17). During Lucy’s initial revelation to Elinor of her engagement to Edward, she does not indicate how the agreement occurred, but only that it occurred four years prior (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 77). Both Lucy and Edward appear mutually committed since they both affirm the agreement in varied contexts, so it seems to be binding. MacColla further explains that “contracts to marry must, as a general rule, be founded upon reciprocity, and an obligation on both sides to fulfill them” (MacColla 17). However, only the two engaged and members of their families are aware of their engagement at different times. “An express promise to marry (i.e., a promise in so many words) cannot always be shown . . . the conduct of the parties during the alleged engagement, and evidence may be given showing whether their friends and relatives regarded and received them as persons engaged to be married” (MacColla 20).

It seems possible that Edward’s engagement to Lucy could be ignored if his family refuses to acknowledge it, since it was done secretly. Mrs. Ferrars appears adamant that he should marry for money, in particular to a Miss Morton who has £30,000 to bring to a marriage (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 168). Perhaps the Chatsworth estate provides a modern comparison point against which Miss Morton’s wealth can be evaluated, since it is located in Derbyshire, the site of Mr. Darcy’s estate (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 6, 313). Chatsworth estate encompasses three hundred rooms, thirty two thousand acres and three towns (Chatsworth). Fitzwilliam Darcy’s comparable estate of Pemberly produces £10,000 p.a., twice as much as Bingley’s, though Bingley inherited £100,000 from his father (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 6, 10). While Miss Morton’s wealth is approximately one-third of Bingley’s, it is well over the one thousand pounds per year that Elinor considers being wealth (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 69). Anne relates a rumor that may even suggest some intentional misinformation circulating: “People may say what they want about Mr. Ferrars declaring he would not have Lucy” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 205). Because Anne is Lucy’s sister, it seems likely that

she would dismiss anything demeaning of her own sibling, but the incident does raise the question of whether an event actually occurred that gave rise to the rumor. In the same discussion Anne notes that “it all came out, he had been sent for Wednesday to Harley-street, and been talked to by his mother and all of them [his family]” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 205). It appears that he was forced to be adamant in defense of his engagement in order to overcome his family’s insistence. Perhaps his family forced some previous statement in their attempts to disrupt the relationship and protect Edward’s opportunities. However, Edward demonstrates, at least, the strength of his honor in his defense of his engagement with Lucy (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 206).

It is not until Lucy abandons him for his younger brother, Robert, that Edward communicates his love to Elinor (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 273). With either choice, the choice of commitment to honor or of commitment to attraction, Edward loses his inheritance. Yet, he defies his mother’s financial power over him to choose first honor, then attraction (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 205). However, it is difficult to see which is most important for him since Lucy, rather than Edward, decides the final outcome by ending their engagement. Austen does provide some insight into Edward’s emotional reaction to the final outcome through her narrative:

He had more than the ordinary triumph of accepted love to swell his heart, and raise his spirits. He was released without any reproach to himself from an entanglement which had long formed his misery, from a woman whom he had long ceased to love; - and elevated at once to that security with another, which he must have thought of almost with despair, as soon as he had learnt to consider it with desire (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 274).

Austen leaves the interpretation of Edward's character uncertain until the end of the story, when she reveals the depth of his commitment. Edward, though uncertain with his lot in life, feels deeply for both the principles that guide his actions, as well as the woman for whom he develops an attachment. Even family pressure and great loss cannot dislodge his commitment to take the actions that his principles indicate are correct for him. In this light, he does not seem uncertain or indecisive, but rather courageous in view of the financial and personal losses he faces. Jane Austen substantially disrupts the concept of the gentleman through the revelation of Edward's preferences as she portrays his eschewing of estate responsibility. However, she reinforces it with his commitment to chivalric ideals, while expanding it through her emphasis on the importance of attachment in his final commitment.

Edward's brother, Robert Ferrars, appears to be of a different nature to that of Edward. Perhaps Jane Austen draws attention to this through his introduction within the story. While the greater majority of characters are introduced through formal and informal social gatherings hosted by families, Robert's introduction occurs through an accidental meeting (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). Furthermore, it is in Mr. Gray's shop, a place of business, where Robert demonstrates his self-absorption by thoroughly perusing toothpick cases in search of their desirable characteristics. Austen chooses to provide this introduction via narration, though she uses Elinor's emotional reaction to interpret the nature of Robert's presence. Austen relates that he left "an imprint on Elinor . . . of a person and face, of strong, natural, sterling insignificance, though adorned in the first style of fashion" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). Elinor's impression presents one interpretation of a man's appearance and manner, while the narrator introduces one man of the times who exhibits some traits prevalent in the thoughts of his society.

Both critics and proponents of polite society assessed modern gentlemanliness in terms of its proximity to the nebulous yet always troubling state of 'effeminacy'. Detractors anticipated the substitution of traditionally manly qualities such as physical vigour, civic-mindedness and independence, for effeminate conduct defined in terms of delicacy, triviality and debilitating self-indulgence (Carter 7).

Robert's demeanor does not seem to demonstrate physical vigor or civic-mindedness. He simply ignores his opportunity for courtesy toward the Dashwood sisters. Austen notes that "Elinor was not without hopes of exciting his politeness to a quicker dispatch" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). But, Robert does not conclude his business more quickly, thereby allowing them to speed their own. He seems to attribute too much importance to his own affairs to address or even notice their needs, though his stares indicate an awareness of the Dashwood sisters' presence.

Robert Ferrars demonstrates self-indulgence by committing an undue amount of time for the purpose of choosing features for something as trivial as a toothpick case. While at first glance his actions may not seem debilitating, they do interfere with his interactions in the community. Elinor seems to consider her initial expectations for his conduct reasonable before she is ignored by Robert. His dismissal of their presence suggests that he does not fulfill commonly accepted actions for a gentleman. As a gentleman, he demonstrates no benevolence or generosity. Austen subtly notes Elinor's feelings by explaining that her sister, fortunately, did not have to share them. Elinor felt "feelings of contempt and resentment, on this impertinent examination of their features, and on the puppyism of his manner" or affectation during his perusal of the toothpick cases (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). Robert seems to appear to Elinor as someone who is "foolish, vain and immoderate" (Carter 139). Philip Carter adds further depth to his description by explaining that a "preoccupation with the finer points of

his own and others' . . . dress . . . the fop was . . . 'a whimsical empty fellow, one whose mind is totally taken up with modes and fashions'" (Carter 141). Robert appears to be a fop or dandy. Elinor's thoughts imply this on her second meeting with him, when she considers him to be a coxcomb (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 187).

Austen does not describe Robert's dress, but notes that Elinor considers him to be "adorned in the first style of fashion" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, originally named *Elinor and Marianne*, in 1796 and revised it in 1797 (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* xlviii), when fashions had not yet changed due to the influence of Beau Brummell (Laudermilk and Hamlin 61). However, Austen's publication of the novel in 1811 provided much time for revisions to match the change in fashions. Previously, "Fops' dress typically differed little from the three-piece suit – waistcoat, breeches and frock coat – periwig (or later bag wig) and tricorne hat favoured by gentlemen" (Carter 141). Fops did stand out in dress by the "colourfulness, quality and, in some cases, the sheer scale of . . . clothing" (Carter 141). Ian Kelly explains that Beau Brummell, by changing this male fashion sense, assumed the role "as poster-boy for a new version of metropolitan masculinity" (169). "Pure clean lines and fabrics appeared classically egalitarian but to the trained eye the new classical wardrobe also signified wealth, status and style. Less . . . was more" (Kelly 167). Elinor recognizes Robert's emphasis on his personal wardrobe. "Matte fabrics – especially wool, and tailoring that either held the body or sculpted it – replaced draped silk, glitter and swathing. A radical restriction of colour to white, skin tones, blue, grey and black no longer signified humility or even sobriety" (Kelly 171). Men wore a white shirt and a vest covering suspenders used to support breeches or long pantaloons (Kelly 166, 174). A dark, cutaway riding jacket with tails, "tumbled neckcloth" and Hessian boots, or pumps for evening wear, completed the unified ensemble (Kelly 164, 172, 174, 175). A current exhibit of an 1815 to 1820 deep blue Coat (tailcoat) with metal buttons, light, tan waistcoat and under-waistcoat with metal buttons and ruffled neck cloth

present a well-tailored and understated formal look, while exhibiting elegance in their totality (Victoria and Albert). However, the clothes in themselves do not appear extravagant.

Though Elinor notes Robert's fine dress, she seems to exhibit some caution as she evaluates him. After Robert finishes his decision regarding the toothpick case, he draws on "his gloves with leisurely care, and bestowing another glance on the Miss Dashwoods, but such a one as seemed rather to demand than express admiration" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 166). Robert apparently represents an established belief of his time that his clothes should be the focus of attention, subtly representing power and wealth. But, Austen seems to highlight the limitations of this emphasis by noting Robert's obvious shortcomings as a gentleman in his interaction with the Dashwood sisters. If he is a gentleman, how can the impact of his actions on them socially be so counter-productive and at odds with commonly accepted chivalric beliefs?

Austen generates a character in Robert whose individual traits detract from gentlemanly ideals despite his carefully chosen appearance. When Robert learns of his brother's financial losses due to their mother's reassignment of the inheritance, Robert laughs at Edward's predicament (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 225). Not only does he find his older brother's loss funny, but also his brother's choice of profession, thus further disgusting Elinor. He demonstrates a lack of generosity and protectiveness, but also an obvious disregard for the church. This representation of Robert emphasizes the shallowness of genteel fashion and education, especially when contrasted with Edward's personal dilemma. Robert seems to represent something gone wrong in his over-emphasis on fashion. Rather than representing characteristics that serve society while revealing admirable qualities, Robert's approach suggests the futility of emphasizing gentlemanly dress as a measure of societal worth. He does not seem to represent chivalry. Simultaneously, however, Edward does not suggest that an individual's principles ensure greater competence in managing life. He is distraught as he

honors his principles at the expense of his own emotions, while grappling with his engagement to Lucy despite his love of Elinor. Much confusion is evident as these people interact with one another in circumstances that supposedly require actions consistent with basic gentlemanly concepts.

Colonel Christopher Brandon seems as unassuming as Edward Ferrars, but might well be a hero beyond his role as a protagonist. While he is considerate of others and remains unobtrusive most of the time, there are instances when Austen demonstrates his protective nature, a characteristic that seems appropriate for an army officer. Geoff Chapman speculates that "Brandon had a good contact and was able to pull strings to join the Honourable East India Company's very own large private army. It seems he exchanged units to remain in India, so he came to India in a British Army unit" (Chapman 2). Though it is possible for a professional soldier to serve without experiencing combat, it appears that this is not the case for Colonel Brandon. Based on his speculation, Chapman suggests that "what neither army lacked was engagements, i.e., active service such as skirmishing and some sieges, but occasionally a fairly bloody battle" (Chapman 2). It seems likely that Brandon served and commanded in battle. His subdued demeanor seems consistent with the nature of a soldier who has survived battle and is therefore less threatened by the discourtesies of civilian life, such as those from Marianne and Willoughby (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*). Austen initially describes him as "silent and grave," a characteristic that seems consistent with a soldier who survived the worst (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 27). Austen only describes Brandon's demeanor and reactions to the social setting, so it is difficult to ascribe specific reasons for them. However, with some knowledge of the times it seems possible to make some informative assumptions.

Chapman speculates that “Brandon rises to at least a Majority, and perhaps a Lieutenant-Colonelcy, but not to command of a regiment” which suggests that he accepted the responsibility for the well-being and accomplishments of many soldiers (Chapman 3). Since he goes by “Colonel” Brandon, it can be assumed that he at least rose to a Lieutenant-Colonelcy, if Chapman is correct. Marianne and Willoughby’s immature assessments of Colonel Brandon would be inconsequential to someone who faced the difficult task of keeping his subordinate soldiers alive while effectively fighting a battle consistent with the orders he received from his superiors. And, also for an officer who suffered the loss of subordinates, or perhaps colleagues. Elinor even notes that “his reserve appeared rather the result of some oppression of spirits” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 38). Perhaps it is not only the result of his ward’s tragedy, but also of his military service.

It is conceivable that Colonel Brandon, during his military service, lost touch with current fashions or returned to find his wardrobe outdated. Brandon indicates that he found Eliza’s mother fourteen years and six months earlier when her mother was near death (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 155). Five years earlier, or nine years after his return from service, Brandon inherited Delaford upon his brother’s death (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 156). As a result, Colonel Brandon has had a substantial amount of time to upgrade his wardrobe to the current fashions. However, he does not choose to do so for a reason that Austen does not explain. Though it is possible that Brandon simply is uninterested in clothes, it also seems possible that he may consider clothes to be of lesser value due to the severe nature of his service, this resulting in his greater appreciation for the basics necessary for survival.

Willoughby summarizes his interpretation of the Colonel by saying, “I do not dislike him. I consider him, on the contrary, as a very respectable man, who has every body’s good word and nobody’s notice; who has more money than he can spend, more time than he knows how to employ, and two new coats every year” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 41). It seems that



Willoughby is implying that Colonel Brandon is perfectly acceptable as a gentleman, but captures no attention by the nature of his presence. Willoughby has even discredited the waistcoats that Brandon wears. Perhaps Colonel Brandon simply prefers flannel waistcoats due to comfort or as a personal fashion preference, but Willoughby's interpretations of him tend toward the superficial. Willoughby may be assuming that Brandon purchases the coats he wears annually, while the Colonel simply continues wearing older waistcoats. It is difficult to say why Willoughby considers the Colonel to be socially obscure. Brandon is quiet and much older, but perhaps Willoughby feels it necessary to highlight those differences because Willoughby feels some threat to his relationship with Marianne due to Brandon's subtle, but noticeable interest in her. Though it is late in the novel when Willoughby's financial difficulties surface, he is struggling financially as Brandon becomes somewhat familiar with Marianne. Willoughby's derogatory statement implies that Brandon's personality detracts substantially from the attractiveness of his societal standing and wealth. Of course, it is telling that Willoughby eventually ignores Marianne as he pursues the wealth of another woman to secure his own solvency (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 242). Willoughby's assessment of the Colonel appears substantially skewed by his emotional reactions to both Brandon's and his own financial and societal circumstances. Brandon is financial stable and a respected soldier who is infatuated with Marianne, while Willoughby is secretly in financial distress.

Perhaps Austen's concept of Colonel Brandon highlights the uniqueness of each of the male characters she creates in this first published novel. The late owner of Norland is heavily influenced in the dispensation of his estate by his fondness for a small child. The new heir, John Dashwood, is manipulated by his wife to the financial detriment of his half-sisters. Edward Ferrars is infantilized by a mother who determines whether he will have a fortune while he is attracted by women without wealth, an attraction she disapproves of. He is distinctively different from his brother who is a conceited dandy. Colonel Brandon has an income of some

significance, but appears to use it sparingly. He has access to social settings suitable for gentlemen, yet is subdued in his approach to them. He is apparently an accomplished and distinguished soldier, but impeded socially by initially hidden burdens. These characters make up the gentry in Austen's novel, but appear less than ideal. Austen seems to present imperfection as an inherent part of the human condition, gentlemen included. Furthermore, financial control does not cleanly rest in the hands of those designated by society for its benevolent application, but also in the hands of some women who choose to influence its use. Not only is the accepted societal structure inconsistent with the commonly accepted concept of it, but some women appear to be greedy, self-serving and callous, rather than benevolent by nature. Imperfection can be found in all members of the gentry. It is interesting to note that it is a soldier who has experienced significant personal losses and who is socially marginalized who emerges as a hero.

Janet Todd suggests that "the men seem interchangeable" in *Sense and Sensibility* and that "repeated substitutions make men appear an alien species to the women who wait for them, flitting about with little forewarning of their exits and entrances" (49). There are instances when one character is anticipated by a heroine while another actually arrives, as in the scene where Willoughby is expected by Marianne but it is Edward who arrives. However, to call them interchangeable is to accept a superficial view of the male characters. Though the women in the novel are sometimes confused by the unanticipated and confusing actions of the male characters, the men themselves are distinctly different characters who each bring a unique dynamic to the plot upon closer examination. And, those who are expected to fulfill their roles responsibly, such as the new heir or Edward Ferrars, do so for unique reasons. John Dashwood is controlled by his selfish wife, while Edward is in love with a woman who lacks the wealth his family prefers for his future wife. Willoughby is not the only male character who ignores conventions, though he is perhaps the most romantically extravagant. A closer look at

the male characters seems to suggest changing mores as the livelihoods of relatives are ignored, family wealth is forfeited in favor of affection and a marginalized gentleman emerges as a hero to the heroine who rejected him.

John Willoughby is of gentle birth and, at least earlier, wealth. However, he is deficient in the code of behavior represented by “honor” for the English gentleman, defined as “reputation, morality, precedence, personal attribute, and manifestation of social status” (Castronovo 19). Yet, it is Brandon who feels that his own reputation is at stake as the protector of Eliza. It is the offended party rather than the offender who risks shame (Castronovo 25). And, “the English gentleman’s honor was a private matter; it was defended in secret at dawn” (Castronovo 24). Perhaps it is through the duel between Brandon and Willoughby that Austen emphasizes that something is wrong in many of the relationships represented within the novel (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 158). A brave soldier acts to rectify self-centered action on the part of another male character as Brandon challenges Willoughby because of Willoughby’s seduction and subsequent abandonment of Brandon’s ward, Eliza.

Vince Brewton suggests that Brandon’s reference to the unsuccessful outcome of the duel “propels the duel and its force into the Dashwood domestic sphere” (82). There is something wrong which a man of honor must rectify. This seems to highlight the degree of disruption caused through the actions of both men and women who forfeit their concern for the well-being of others in favor of their own individual gratification. Brewton further states that the duel “...is significant as an emblem of the power relations informing the plot of *Sense and Sensibility*” (78). The formal roles represented by multiple male characters suggest the erosion of emotional commitment to the ideals of gentlemen’s roles and the impact those same roles have on others. Brandon the gentleman and soldier, however, emerges from the shadows of his local society to act in defense of someone whose well-being has been disregarded by another male character. He regards the circumstances as so important that he asserts, “One

meeting was unavoidable” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 158). Brandon seems to consider their duel a rectification that is absolutely necessary, given the failure of a peer to fulfill an ideal that Brandon ascribes to and expects him to also, rather than creating circumstances detrimental to others.

Austen implies that it is Brandon who challenges Willoughby because Brandon indicates that Willoughby assumes a defensive role in their duel (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 158). Brandon places Willoughby’s honor at stake by challenging him. David Castronovo reminds us that “fate decided the winner: losing a duel did not carry any social stigma; it was refusing to fight a duel – refusing to put one’s life on the line for honor’s sake – that made a man unworthy of the society of gentlemen” (Castronovo 20). The fact that Willoughby is challenged forces him to prove that he is a gentleman by participating in a duel with Brandon. It must be unnerving for Willoughby to face a trained and experienced soldier such as Brandon in combat, this perhaps adding to the uncertainty of the outcome for Willoughby. Austen does not imply whether they chose pistols or swords, but pistols are an obvious possibility because there are no injuries. A sword requires close combat and Brandon is likely skilled with one. Perhaps Brandon is somewhat appeased by Willoughby’s participation since they returned “unwounded” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 158). Despite the severe impact of Willoughby’s actions, Brandon the gentleman, rights the relationships by challenging the offender.

It is interesting to note that Brandon also provides some rectification for Edward Ferrars’ circumstances by offering him a living, thus providing him with a return to a modest role after Edward’s loss of the family inheritance (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 213). Brandon then gradually wins the respect of Marianne, someone whose opinions of Brandon were shaped earlier by the self-centered Willoughby. The man of honor also wins the hand of the heroine as he sets things right. His actions echo those of John Middleton who provides the initial rescue, thereby generating the new setting within which the plot continues. Even though they both are

gentlemen, Sir John's country roughness and Colonel Brandon's grave, subtle presence seem to remove them from the more prominent social roles that the new heir, John Dashwood, and the dashing, though rakish, John Willoughby appear to assume. Yet, their honorable inner natures propel them into leadership as they fulfill the patterns of behavior which protect the well-being of other characters, both female and male. Perhaps this is a significant representation by Austen and a comment on the rectification of changing societal mores through her male characters. Through them she seems to demonstrate the importance of gentlemen within the community through their actions that are consistent with their role. She also seems to matter-of-factly state that there are many who are inconsistent. To Austen there appear to be many individual variations and inconsistencies within the gentlemanly role; so many that the role seems to be inherently ambiguous.

Sir John Middleton, the more rustic country gentleman, and Colonel Christopher Brandon, the experienced military man, are both benevolent to those around them, yet contrast with each other in manner and experience. Edward Ferrars is also substantially different from his brother, though they are from the same family and both stand to inherit wealth. John Willoughby, who disregards social convention, is also a gentleman. These and other contrasts among the gentlemen in *Sense and Sensibility* seem to raise the question of what a gentleman is.

The frequency with which Jane Austen uses the word "gentleman" appears in each of her six major works ranges between twenty-nine and forty-three times (Matsuoka). Her average usage is approximately thirty-four occurrences per novel, which makes twenty-nine occurrences relatively few by comparison. Twenty-nine represents the minimal number of references that she makes, and occurs only in her first and third publications, *Sense and Sensibility* and

*Mansfield Park*. In many instances the term is simply used as a descriptor, as in the case when Sir John mentions his anticipation of “only one gentleman there” at Barton Park during the Dashwood women’s first visit (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 26). In other references Austen makes to the term, “gentleman,” she seems to imply a more specific interpretation. The contexts in which Austen uses the term “gentleman” may offer some indication of her intent for its interpretation, as well as its application to the wide variations in the personalities of her male characters. There are some obvious variations in Austen’s uses of the term. For example, eleven instances provide evidence of distinct references and offer noteworthy evidence.

Austen’s first use of “gentleman,” and my first selection for consideration, occurs in her narrative at the beginning of *Sense and Sensibility* when she refers to the “old gentleman” (3). He is obviously a man of wealth who has the power to impact the well-being of many people. His family has enjoyed this privilege through many generations. David Castronovo, in *The English Gentleman*, suggests six categories which represent variations in the ideal which the term, “gentleman,” represents. The late owner is a man who, to use Thorstein Veblen’s memorable phrase, has “blood which has been ennobled by protracted contact with accumulated wealth or unbroken prerogative” (53). Therefore Castronovo’s first category, “Gentleman of Birth,” (5) is representative of the late owner’s status. Austen introduces him by describing the late owner’s estate as large, containing “valuable woods” and producing an income of £4,000 per annum to support “a country gentleman in a big house on independent land (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 3, 4, 5, 302). She does not reveal the nature of the late owner’s formal rank, other than that he controls the estate. How his family came to be prominent is also not explained. Austen’s vagueness leaves much to speculation.

My second selected instance is another introduction of a male character, where Austen refers to Edward Ferrars as a “gentleman-like and pleasing young man” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 12). He is designated as the future heir to his family’s wealth, but Austen appears to

be referring to Edward's manners or social behavior as a defining trait. David Castronovo notes that "good blood probably sired the concept of good behavior, but the two concepts were not inseparable" (31). "Behavior – manners, breeding, life-style, feelings in action" is a salient component within the concept of "gentleman" and seems applicable to Austen's description of Edward (*Castronovo* 31). Austen provides insight into Edward's behavior through the conversation in which Elinor counters Marianne's dislike of his artistic taste (*Austen, Sense and Sensibility* 15). Marianne cedes that she has "the highest opinion in the world of his goodness and sense" and considers him "worthy and amiable" (*Austen, Sense and Sensibility* 15). Elinor, in her response, also refers to the "sweetness of his countenance" (*Austen, Sense and Sensibility* 16). It is difficult to separate the gentleman-like behavior from the pleasing, but perhaps the two are blended in this concept of the gentleman. Edward's goodness and sense represent a kindness and fairness in his social interactions, as well as a friendly manner once he is comfortable with others. Interestingly, Elinor notes that he eschews the pretensions that many of his peers demonstrate (*Austen, Sense and Sensibility* 73). This seems to suggest that he is more personable than the other gentlemen she knows. It is through Edward that modesty and shyness appear to be pleasing in a gentleman; however, Fitzwilliam Darcy demonstrates that reserve can become unpleasing if it is perceived by others as arrogance or a disdain toward others (*Austen, Pride and Prejudice* 6).

In my third selection, Austen again uses narrative voice when she mentions the term "gentleman" while introducing Sir John Middleton, as Mrs. Dashwood receives his initial letter (*Austen, Sense and Sensibility* 18). Austen refers to him as "a gentleman of consequence and property," which implies that it is possible to be a gentleman without consequence and/or property as well. Castronovo discusses six categories representing the varieties of gentlemen to be found. Four of these types are not representative of wealth, but rather other attributes (vii). Austen appears to have mentioned Sir John's wealth to emphasize the role such a male

character might play in the deliverance of the Dashwood women from their precarious financial circumstances. However, by doing so Austen also implies that there are other roles that may represent a gentleman who does not benefit through the control of wealth. It is important to note the pervasive nature of estate wealth in the creation of all gentlemen. Though not all heirs, many gentlemen benefit from the income and status provided by the estates and the associated family incomes. But Castronovo notes that wealth is also an agent of social mobility (14).

Wealthy members of the merchant class could transition into gentlemen through conversion to their “values and ways of life” (Castronovo 14). Bingley is an example of this process at work in *Pride and Prejudice*, as he is advised in the ways of gentlemen by his friend and mentor, Darcy.

In my fourth selection, Austen uses narrative voice as she describes Marianne’s reaction to Willoughby. She notes that Marianne “saw that to the perfect good-breeding of the gentleman, he united frankness and vivacity” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 36). Because this is a first impression of Willoughby by Marianne, it can be assumed that she is noting the manner of Willoughby’s social interactions. However, at this point Willoughby has already demonstrated chivalry by rescuing Marianne after her injury in the storm (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 32). It is likely that she already assumes he has chivalrous instincts, even though it is only a single event rather than a pattern of behavior and it was a rescue almost anyone would have undertaken. Nevertheless, Marianne seems to be judging his nature by noting his manner within in the social setting. Castronovo notes that the word, gentleman, “is a spectrum containing many possible models: their least common denominator is that they all involve a man’s actions in society as a measure of his gentlemanliness” (31). While instincts are associated with birth, behavior does not necessarily have the same association (Castronovo 31). Courtesy, the appearance of honesty and liberality are likely examples of the manners Marianne may have noted in Willoughby (Castronovo 31). It is poignant to note that Willoughby would eventually demonstrate the impermanence of these characteristics. Through this



example Austen seems to demonstrate some ambiguity in the term she uses. Breeding may have referred to birth to some degree, while also referring to manners cultivated through childhood. Perhaps characters using the term in her novels may even have a lack of understanding to some extent regarding its exact meaning.

In my fifth selection, Austen suggests that appearance is used to determine whether an unknown person is a gentleman. When Elinor and Marianne spot someone at a distance, Austen notes that “it was a man on horseback riding towards them. In a few minutes they could distinguish him to be a gentleman” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 65). At thirty yards they discern the rider to be Edward Ferrars. However, previous to that distance Elinor comments on the rider’s height and air to determine that he is not Willoughby. It can be assumed that, as he initially approached, he was much farther away since they could not identify him as a gentleman. In the middle distance they must be only able to see something of his horse and his clothes. Marianne notes not only his air, but his coat and horse as well. These observations provide some of the superficial distinguishing features of a gentleman, noted by those with experience in such recognition.

In my sixth selection, the letter written by Willoughby to dismiss Marianne provides a unique look into Elinor’s interpretation of gentlemanly behavior by contrasting the omissions of his letter with her expectations. Austen uses narrative to provide a subjective view of Elinor’s reaction to the letter as Elinor reads it. She notes Elinor’s indignation in response to Willoughby’s “departing so far from the appearance of every honourable and delicate feeling – so far from the common decorum of a gentleman, as to send a letter so impudently cruel” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 136). Elinor apparently accepts his right to request release from the relationship he has formed with Marianne, but describes his faults as lack of honesty and the omission of expressed concern for Marianne’s well-being. Elinor notes that Willoughby’s letter brought no “professions of regret, acknowledged no breach of faith, denied all peculiar

affection whatever -- a letter of which every line was an insult" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 137). Marianne's distraught reaction provides a measure of the damage that Willoughby's message inflicts. The cold and callous tone evident within the letter provides something of an objective evaluation. Elinor is unaware that Willoughby's fiancée composed the letter and equates the omissions with "villainy," thus demonstrating the degree to which she interprets the negligence in gentlemanly communication.

Willoughby pointedly ignores several aspects of chivalry within his letter of dismissal to Marianne. By the code he is "bound to defend in this world all that was defenceless . . . the women and children" (Gautier 40). While Elinor accepts his right to end his relationship with her sister, it seems that she considers Marianne defenseless against his harsh dismissal. Marianne has opened her heart to him, thus leaving herself defenseless emotionally against his rebuff, but Elinor interprets his comments as being taken to the point of cruelty, beyond what is necessary for his communication. Though Willoughby acknowledges a fondness for Marianne's family, he ignores his own coldness toward her in their recent meeting. He omits any traces of compassion that may offer an acknowledgement of the difficulty she faces. He offers no regrets nor acknowledges any previous partiality toward Marianne. Willoughby's lack of acknowledgement might be equated with a lie, one of the chivalric points a gentleman should avoid at all costs (Gautier 66). Furthermore, he previously acted toward Marianne in a manner that implied a reason for her to anticipate a forthcoming engagement. The nature of Willoughby's letter, instead, implies that he not only intentionally misled Marianne and was unfaithful to his implied word to her, but that he is abusing her trust in his actions, both an offense from the standpoint of truthfulness and the protection of women. Willoughby's letter also provides evidence of a lack of generosity as he ignores the impact he is having on Marianne by refusing to acknowledge the extent of their past relationship, though he cannot publicly do so because of his fiancée (Gautier 26).

My seventh selection is the incident in which Elinor reports Robert Ferrars shopping for a toothpick case. She does not seem to show him directly violating the code of chivalry; however, she does portray him as a man whose commitment to chivalry may be questionable (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 165). Could a man who exhibits such self-absorption fulfill the tenets of chivalry, which emphasizes a self-sacrificing approach to the well-being of others (Gautier 3)? Robert neglects even the common courtesy of allowing two women, who are obviously waiting for service, to conduct their business before he monopolizes the storekeeper's time. His multiple looks toward the Dashwood sisters not only ignore their shopping circumstances, but appear to Elinor to be self-serving, simply allowing them to see and admire his choice of clothes. Apparently, he does not choose to offer attention to their dress. Through this behavior, he seems to dispense with the intent of the code of chivalry, which is to serve the church and others (Gautier 3). Instead, he appears to substitute fashionable dress and behaviors for chivalric ideals, negating the importance of other people by promoting his own image, delicacy and self-determined importance. His is only a veneer of chivalry which is unconvincing and quickly noticed by Elinor as triviality and self-indulgence (Carter 7). Perhaps Austen creates Robert as a male character partly to demonstrate how protean the concept of a gentleman can be (Carter 20). While Robert may be considered "polite" because he is "polished, neat or orderly," the nature of his "sociability" remains in question (Carter 20). Yet, he is still referred to by Austen as a gentleman, providing evidence of a generic usage of the term.

In my eighth selection Austen portrays an attempt by John Dashwood to use a gentleman as a commodity in the fulfillment of his own obligations to his family. Austen uses diegesis to describe Mr. John Dashwood's interest in applying Colonel Brandon's eligibility and finances to resolve Elinor's uncertain status which John himself caused. Austen notes that John "was really resolved on seeking an intimacy with that gentleman, and promoting the marriage by every possible attention. He had just compunction enough for having done nothing for his

sisters himself, to be exceedingly anxious that everybody else should do a great deal" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 171). Rather than respect the code of chivalry in protecting the women in his own family, John neglects those assigned to his care. Austen does not explain why he feels it necessary after his neglect to seek support for them. It could be because he realizes that he did not fulfill the promise he made to his father, that he is concerned for the reputation he may gain for providing poorly for the needs of his sisters and mother, or that he is concerned that he risks failing them as a gentleman. John also expresses some concern at his mother moving away to accommodate her reduction in income. But, his concern is apparently only mildly motivating, according to Austen. She seems to raise the question of whether something in the Dashwoods' community has changed, thus eroding John's interpretation of his obligation to his extended family. Otherwise, he would have been greatly motivated to provide well for them initially.

Either the circumstances allow John Dashwood great leeway in performing his duties, or the situation has changed so that he feels little pressure to fully address the needs of his family. While other men do act to reduce the difficulties that the Dashwood women face, as the inheritor of the estate John Dashwood seems unencumbered by the code of chivalry. Yet, he is still regarded as a gentleman despite his neglect. Austen seems to emphasize the lack of connection between wealth and the code of chivalry as wealth becomes the defining factor for John to remain a gentleman after his negligence, regardless of the opinions of the men and women who view his decisions. John seems to value his family less than his wealth as the Dashwood women struggle to make their way. But, rather than revise his financial approach to rectify the problem, he advocates a marriage that Elinor has expressed no interest in. John does not seem to consider attraction, compatibility and the circumstances of a marriage between Colonel Brandon and Elinor as he seeks such a union. Austen states that John considers "an offer from Colonel Brandon...the easiest means of atoning for his own neglect"

(Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 171). He simply treats another gentleman as a means of financial support as he attempts to coerce Elinor into the relationship. Austen presents a very different view of wealth that suggests that chivalry can be ignored.

Philip Carter explains the amalgam of characteristics considered important for gentlemen of the time:

Central to the refined gentleman's genuine sociability was his synthesis of external manners with an inner virtue based on a Christian morality which theorists considered a necessary requirement for participation in polite society. However, it remained a persistent fear that politeness, detached from its moral obligations, would become a tool for selfish deception (10).

Austen appears to have demonstrated a variation on such a tool through the gentleman, John Dashwood.

In my ninth selection, Austen uses diegesis again as she provides insight into Elinor's evaluative reaction to Mr. Palmer (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 230). She apparently likes him, but with some reservation, thus providing additional points of comparison for her interpretation of a gentleman, in particular his treatment of his family. She notes that Mr. Palmer is "perfectly the gentleman in his behavior to all his visitors, and only occasionally rude to his wife and her mother" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 230). It is ironic that a gentleman's treatment of his family appears to be of less concern than his treatment of guests. Perhaps it is a pragmatic acknowledgement that a person may be less attentive to others during less formal times in the home and therefore at times mildly offensive. Elinor's assessment does reveal the emphasis her community places on conduct before guests, but it suggests greater formality with them also. The dismissal of occasional rudeness to family members may also indicate a veneer of sociability that is not representative of the gentleman's true nature. It may also imply a lesser

regard for family members than is portrayed publicly. External manners presented publicly may not be actually representative of inner virtues, but rather the outer expectations of guests. Perhaps the family sees more of Mr. Palmer's true self. Elinor provides more observations regarding Mr. Palmer's true nature by noting "his Epicurism, his selfishness, and his conceit" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 230). Perhaps these represent more of the man with whom the family must live, rather than the external manners unrepresentative of his true self. Perhaps it is also evidence that Mr. Palmer falls short of the code of chivalry because he is generous to his guests, but not to all (Gautier 107).

My tenth selection notes a very brief comment that offers an additional insight into Austen's interpretation of "gentleman." When a servant mistakenly identifies Edward as Mr. Ferrars, subsequent to Robert's marriage to Lucy, he notes in the discussion that "he never was a gentleman much for talking" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 269). While "sociability" might imply some degree of finesse with conversation, Austen seems to reduce its importance to the gentleman through this comment. Perhaps the nature of the conversation is important for the gentleman, but Austen implies through Thomas' comment that garrulousness is not an important factor. Without further clarification in the text it is difficult to determine whether the context in which conversations are held may change the associated expectations. Servants are more likely overhear Edward in the home and related settings; therefore it is difficult to find points for comparison.

Finally, in my eleventh selection Austen refers forty-one times in *Sense and Sensibility* to the wealth of individuals (Matsuoka). By doing so she provides a vast range of resources that allow for a comparison of ownership amounts. Willoughby marries a Miss. Grey who has fifty thousand pounds, the largest amount mentioned (145). This is forty percent more than the thirty thousand pounds held by Miss Morton, the woman Mrs. Ferrars encourages Edward to marry (284). Elinor Dashwood's resources are on the low end of the spectrum at two thousand

pounds, only seven percent of the amount Miss Morton holds. Edward accepts Elinor's minimal resources in combination with his own one thousand pounds and the living he accepts at Delaford of two hundred fifty per annum (280, 284). This provides them with an expected three hundred fifty pounds a year to live on. The sum is less than one third of the fifteen hundred pounds a year Miss Morton's total amount may have produced alone. The annual sum Elinor is expecting to generate with Edward is also less than one third of the one thousand pounds a year she regards as wealth (69). But, despite his substantial reduction in wealth, Edward is still regarded as a gentleman. So, though the key characteristics of a gentleman include birth, wealth and breeding, in Edward's predicament, birth and perhaps breeding seem to be priorities.

While the eleven selections I have examined are not comprehensive, they do demonstrate many subtleties in the interpretation of the word "gentleman" that Austen incorporates into her representations. These selections also demonstrate many variations in the men whom she portrays as they interact with her heroines through their own behavior and through the thoughts that the men choose to communicate. Rather than only demonstrating an ideal, Austen provides views of gentlemen that are sometimes less than complimentary, thereby portraying individuals whose human failings seem detrimental to their role. Austen also demonstrates the impact that they have on others in their community, providing insight into the potential negative consequences of selfish or thoughtless actions. Furthermore, she seems to depict the vagueness of the concept of "gentleman," a term widely used and accepted, yet with many aspects that can be unclear and that are further confused by current fashion, personality differences and multiple characteristics. With so many variations in wealth, position, manners, fashion, and birth, there seem to be few characteristics that remain critical to the concept of "gentleman." Birth, wealth and role in the community seem to remain as primary determining

features, though in varying degrees. Values and behavior remain topics of discussion, but seem superseded by the characteristics previously mentioned.

The eleven selections I have reviewed from *Sense and Sensibility* demonstrate a range of characteristics that Austen uses to describe gentlemen. The novel also exhibits great variation in the male characters. While the experiences of Elinor and Marianne remain in the forefront of the novel, the presence of the male characters also provides many insights into the lives of the gentlemen with whom they interact. Austen seems to quickly focus attention on the unfortunate circumstances of the Dashwood women, but it is the dealings of both men and influential women who create those circumstances. As the Dashwood women become immersed in a new community, they remain in the forefront of the novel. Austen is more subtle in her depiction of the male characters. However the world of the gentlemen becomes evident through many small occurrences that are visible to the heroines at various times throughout the novel. The expected role of the gentleman, failings within that role, variations in behavior and thought affecting the role and the characteristics that are noticed by others become evident through the interactions that the men have with the female characters. These interactions occur during the limited times that they are together in shared social settings. And, variations from accepted norms for the social spaces are visible, as is the case when Willoughby ignores social convention while taking a carriage ride with Marianne (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 51).

In addition to the range of characteristics that Austen uses to describe the gentlemen in her novel, she also demonstrates a range of communal influences on their behavior. For example, the late owner's personal preference for an heir is based on the influence of the simple human emotion of fondness for his little relation, yet the position that gives him the right to bestow his wealth on another is bestowed by the law (4). Edward Ferrars is in a family position that offers him the potential for direct control of future wealth similar to the later owner, but it is his manner and choices that Austen suggests distinguishes him as a gentleman to the



heroine. While Edward is from a wealthy family that supports his education, the nature of his family's interactions with others casts some doubt on whether his family cultivates Edward's manners which impress Elinor. Perhaps Edward's birth and wealth created the conditions for his admirable behavior by placing him in proximity to other men from whom he learns behavior that is well-suited to his natural personality or instincts (Castronovo 19). Sir John uses his wealth to aid the Dashwood women, consistent with chivalry, a code with a long evolution among gentlemen and with mutual expectations incumbent on each man in such a role (Gautier 16). His benevolent impact on the Dashwoods is evident in their improved circumstances.

John Willoughby, though initially exhibiting behavior that seems socially preferable, becomes puzzling as he withdraws his attention from Marianne after implying a deep affection for her. As his questionable past becomes more visible, so does the extent of the sanctions that gentlemen place on each other when Colonel Brandon challenges him to a duel for Willoughby's villainy. The strength of mutual opinion is evident as Brandon reacts with loathing toward a man whose impact on others is the opposite of benevolence. Willoughby also knowingly errs in his written letter to Marianne to dismiss their relationship, causing Elinor to be aghast at his cruelty. She notes the reaction that most people would have to his actions by referring to his departure from "common decorum" (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 137). Apparently everyone knows that Willoughby's actions are not those of other gentlemen, and anyone would view his wanton written communication with consternation. All gentlemen must be aware of these common expectations, given their pervasive nature.

While a superficial measure, the Dashwood sisters indicate that dress is a clear indicator of the presence of a gentleman. At a distance, it is dress that allows them to determine that the unclear figure approaching them is a gentleman. Though they do not indicate the necessity for a gentleman to be dressed a certain way, their evaluation of the distant rider does indicate that members of their community have expectations regarding the look that identifies a gentleman, a

measure gentlemen would know is being used for them. However, Elinor acknowledges a wide range of dress acceptable for gentlemen when she notes Robert's dress in Mr. Grey's shop. Rather than a commonly accepted form of dress, his choice represents both his personal disposition towards dress as well as a fashion likely pursued by many others with similar tastes and a preference to be noticed by those tastes. Elinor does not seem to consider it unusual, but rather a distinctive, noticeable style. However, Robert's dress does seem to make her attentive to his demeanor, with some question regarding the kind of regard that he will have toward others in the community.

Austen seems to show gradations of the questionable side of genteel life as she portrays both John Dashwood and Mr. Palmer as imperfect gentlemen. Despite the substantial family expectations that the new heir will provide for his step-mother and step-sisters, John Dashwood apparently does not respond to the standards of a gentleman, the expectations of his family, or the opinions of other gentlemen as he bequeaths an insufficient sum to the Dashwood women. Furthermore, he simply attempts to manipulate the resources of other gentlemen for the women's support, presenting himself as their advocate in the process. His approach to a solution appears to be a twisting of benevolence for self-service, rather than as a true concern for both his family and a gentleman that he purportedly respects. With his attention focused on financial concerns, John Dashwood gives little attention to the emotional well-being of either party in the potential match. Mr. Palmer exhibits another aspect of gentlemanly imperfection which seems to emphasize the importance of good conduct with guests, with a lesser standard for family life. Perhaps this dichotomy is representative of the pressures present due to the communal expectations of a gentleman in social settings, contrasted with lesser expectations surrounding family interactions. Both John Dashwood and Mr. Palmer seem to show evidence of deviations from the gentlemanly ideal, perhaps caused by a lack of concern for the expectations of others or settings in which expectations are absent or substantially reduced.

Finally, as a gentleman Edward is faced with more than one marriage choice. Though his mother expects a match with Miss. Morton, he can only ignore the expectation with great financial loss as she withdraws his inheritance. It seems telling that Austen implies that he first chooses principle instead of financial gain. Once he loses Lucy's commitment, he again ignores financial gain, next in favor of affection. Perhaps it is just Edward's personality, since Willoughby forfeits affection in favor of financial gain, but despite his loss of wealth Edward not only remains a gentleman, but seems to become more visible as a hero as he holds fast to the relationships in his life that he deems to be of greater priority. In so doing, he rejects what appear to be commonly held expectations that he will increase the wealth he is anticipated to receive through a shrewd marriage. It almost seems as if Austen is intertwining Sense and Sensibility in new ways. Willoughby represents sensibility in his cavalier relationship with Marianne, but seems to exhibit sense as he pragmatically makes a marriage choice for financial stability. In contrast, Edward seems to exhibit sense in his subdued approach to his relationship with Elinor and even with Lucy as he makes decisions based on what he thinks is right. However, in the end he forfeits almost all financial gain in favor of affection, which might represent sensibility. Through all of the uncertainty he remains a gentleman, but perhaps he adds a greater depth to his representation of the ideal by choosing Elinor, despite the circumstances it places him in as a gentleman.

Each gentleman in *Sense and Sensibility* is unique in his role and subtly exhibits some evidence of networks that influence his individual actions through the expectations of others and the thoughts guiding them. At times, the network is a clearly masculine one, such as the one in which Colonel Brandon gains his military experience. At other times, it seems to be a network that is not exclusively masculine, such as the communal one in evidence as Elinor evaluates Mr. Palmer's gentlemanly nature. However, the expectations of male networks are pervasive and, though multiple male characters ignore them at times, correct action is sometimes implied by

the actions or through the communication of other male characters, such as Sir John's intervention to help Mrs. Dashwood and her two daughters. Austen centers the estate and finances centrally in the story, thus highlighting variations in male behavior as the male characters act according to their individual preferences which, in turn, greatly impact her female characters. The financial relationships between the male characters and the female characters magnify the actions of the men, as do the romantic possibilities. These serve as catalysts that invite actions by the men, which often imply networks of male thought and provide opportunities for contrasts among the reactions of the men.

Perhaps it is useful to consider some of the male characters in other novels by Jane Austen to explore their potential contribution to the understanding of eighteenth-century male networks. General similarities among the men may provide opportunities for comparison, while differences will provide contrasts, thus revealing additional insights. Perhaps additional characteristics and variations will be evident as well.

Mr. Bingley is introduced in Austen's second novel with two identifying characteristics. He is single and very wealthy (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1). These appear to be the top priorities in an initial assessment. At £ 5,000 p.a. Bingley makes forty per cent more than the amount held by Miss. Grey in *Sense and Sensibility*, a substantial sum (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 6). Perhaps further details are not known, since his arrival is impending in the locale, but there is no mention of birth or breeding at this early stage. Austen seems to present Bingley as a commodity. However, the Bennett women do attempt to gain additional information regarding him. Mrs. Bennet even attempts to ply an unwilling Mr. Bennet as a tool for that purpose, thus showing some evidence of the exchange between male and female networks within the community.

Specific details about Mr. Bingley emerge in the post-ball discussion between Jane and Elizabeth, which reveal aspects of his character that they consider desirable and possibly represent traits that most members of their community value (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 9). Jane Bennet states that “he is just what a young man ought to be . . . sensible, good humoured, lively . . . such happy manners -- so much ease, with such perfect good breeding.” But Elizabeth finds her sisters discussion of “character” incomplete. She seems compelled to fill the omission, saying “he is also handsome . . . which a young man ought likewise to be, if he possibly can. His character is thereby complete.” Wealth is already established, but birth seems ignored as the sisters define some traits that might be attributable to good-breeding. Jane’s reference to “sense” is consistent with Elinor’s appraisal of Edward, suggesting a commonly sought trait (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 16). While “good breeding” seems to be a separate characteristic, it may be that good humour, lively, happy manners and ease comprise the “perfect good breeding” that Jane notices.

However, Elizabeth’s emphasis on Darcy’s handsome visage is uniquely absent from birth, wealth and good breeding as key characteristics of a gentleman. Attractive features may be passed to offspring due to birth, but it is not a certainty. While Elizabeth may be describing her own preferences, she may be also relating an informal preference, held by many, for a trait not more formally considered necessary. But, it is through her emphasis and verbiage that Elizabeth redefines a physical characteristic for inclusion with social characteristics. But it is Jane Austen who, through diegesis, sums up Mr. Bingley’s presence during the initial ball: he “was good looking and gentlemanlike; he had a pleasant countenance, and easy, unaffected manners” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 6). It seems that she differs with Elizabeth by separating Bingley’s looks from his gentlemanlike manner, while noting some additional aspects of his personality that contribute to his presence. However, Austen does not call Bingley a gentleman. It is difficult to discriminate between the term “gentlemanlike” and some of the other

traits she mentions. And, additional implications are difficult to find, suggesting that she also uses the term in an ambiguous manner.

It is interesting to note that Mr. Bingley is not referred to as a gentleman in the introduction or the first part of the novel. This would be consistent with the fact that his vast fortune was acquired by trade (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 10). Therefore, he lacks birth and a family with a “protracted contract with the land and enjoyment of privilege” (Castronovo 9). Though it has been his intent to purchase an estate, Bingley has yet to do so, and would be a first-generation owner if he did, so he does not have a protracted contract with the land (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 10). However, in a later discussion, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet do identify Bingley as a gentleman: “The person of whom I speak, is a gentleman and a stranger. Mrs. Bennet’s eyes sparkled. – ‘A gentleman and a stranger! It is Mr. Bingley I am sure’” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 46). Despite his lack of birth, Bingley seems to be accepted into the ranks of gentlemen by the community. This seems to indicate a more porous dividing line for the ranks of gentlemen at this time.

Fitzwilliam Darcy is clearly considered a gentleman and seems to exhibit the characteristic that Elizabeth identified during her discussion with Jane.

His brother-in-law, Mr. Hurst, merely looked the gentleman; but his friend Mr. Darcy soon drew the attention of the room by his fine, tall person, handsome features, noble mien; and the report which was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 6).

Darcy’s physical appearance seems to encapsulate the characteristics of a gentleman in conjunction with his demeanor. However, his wealth seems to preempt all other considerations, producing a subjective response on the part of his audience that holds him in high regard

without much familiarity. Austen even uses the term “popularity” when referring to his audience’s reaction (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 6). It seems that the term “gentleman” is inherently a social representation that is measured by both the nature of a man’s interactions with others and his objective manner and behavior. But, “popularity” also suggests a more whimsical interpretation that is rooted in the subjective reaction of a local audience. Perhaps one implication is that a gentleman is adept in adjusting to the nature of his audience, which suggests an even more fluid interpretation of the term.

Darcy provides a contrast to Bingley’s gentlemanly manners which are accepted by the same audience that is initially impressed by Darcy. Despite the laudatory reaction to Darcy’s visage and wealth, his audience does not approve of his manners as they do Bingley’s (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 6). This raises a question regarding gentlemanly priorities as well as interpretation of characteristics. Both Elizabeth, through mimesis, and Austen, through diegesis, confirm that being handsome seems to be a characteristic of a gentleman. Darcy’s wealth also riveted his audience’s attention and secured their approval. However, despite the strength of these two traits in the eyes of his audience, it is his manners that cause them to find Darcy distasteful (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 6, 313). He is found to be “proud,” which is clarified in the next descriptor as “above his company” or haughty, this producing a “forbidding, disagreeable countenance” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 6). Later, Austen clarifies Darcy’s demeanor further through diegesis. She notes that, to Bingley, “Darcy was the superior . . . was clever . . . at the same time haughty, reserved, and fastidious, and his manners, though well bred, were not inviting” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 11). If “manners” are how he behaves with other people, then separating “haughty, reserved, and fastidious” seems to narrow the nature of the behaviors being addressed, yet leaves them undefined. Perhaps mannerisms are the intended descriptor.

At the same time, this assessment raises the question of whether wealth and visage are considered to be of less importance than manners as gentlemanly characteristics, or if there is some other interpretation. It seems that the nature of the audience may suggest an answer. Austen explains that “the report...was in general circulation within five minutes after his entrance, of his having ten thousand a year. The gentlemen pronounced him to be a fine figure of a man, the ladies declared he was much handsomer than Bingley, and he was looked at with great admiration for about half the evening” (Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* 6). Many young ladies in the audience arrive to pursue a husband, while mothers and fathers seek a son-in-law. Perhaps Mrs. Bennet’s outlook serves as a representative example of other mothers like her. Austen portrays Mrs. Bennet’s outlook regarding Mr. Bingley and her daughters as Mrs. Bennet states to her husband, “you must know that I am thinking of his marrying one of them” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 1). In order to pursue the possibility, women must have access to Mr. Darcy through social interaction, which he denies them through his cold demeanor. Perhaps he appears much less attractive partly because he obstructs their preferred interactions, thus removing the possibility for a young woman to develop a relationship that could progress toward matrimony and simultaneous wealth. Of course, Darcy’s demeaning approach to others will reduce any innocent social enjoyment to be sought.

With regard to manners, there is some additional insight provided through a discussion between Mr. Knightley and Emma at a point when Frank Churchill has not arrived as expected (*Emma* 113). Mr. Knightley expresses his displeasure by stating “Emma, your amiable young man can be amiable only in French, not in English. He may be very ‘aimable,’ have very good manners, and be very agreeable; but he can have no English delicacy towards the feelings of other people: nothing really amiable about him” (*Emma* 118). The French “aimable” represents superficial politeness (*Emma* 395), demonstrating good manners and that he is agreeable (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 313). Mr. Knightley believes that Frank Churchill does not exhibit



the traits associated with the English word, “amiable,” because Churchill’s do not show a “delicacy toward towards the feelings of other people” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 313), by demonstrating “an innate, fundamental warmth of temper or disposition” (*Emma* 396). Yet again, there are multiple interpretations of the fine points of gentlemanly characteristics that require translation. However, Churchill’s indelicacy provides further evidence that Darcy’s good manners may be best referred to as mannerisms since demeanor during interactions seems to be kept separate from manners. Furthermore, Mr. Knightley’s discussion of the fine points in behavior provide evidence of the many ways that an individual’s behavior can be interpreted among gentlemen, requiring an understanding of many fine points upon which there may be the possibility of disagreement.

Mr. Darcy presents an ironic contrast in the role of the gentleman during the discussion with Elizabeth in which he proposes to her. He defends his feelings as “natural and just,” saying “could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections? To congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 148) Despite the expectation that a gentleman demonstrate a warmth and consideration toward others, there is a separation in status from others that is accepted as appropriate. To Darcy these circumstances are obvious. But he seems oblivious to the fact that others feel offended by such a rebuff from him. Furthermore, Darcy is stunned that Elizabeth would even consider a proposal from him to be unattractive. When she stated this clearly, “his astonishment was obvious; and he looked at her with an expression of mingled incredulity and mortification” (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 148). How could anyone from such an undesirable background refuse such an opportunity of improvement? Of course, Elizabeth knows the worth of those for whom she cares. It is interesting to note that Darcy starts when Elizabeth states that his un-gentlemanlike manner removed any difficulty from her refusal. He appears stung at the possibility of being seen as less than a gentleman. While she also outlines his offenses,

including his arrogance, conceit and disregard for others' feelings, he does not attempt to offer a rebuttal. While he obviously struggles with a human rejection, this leading to his exit from the discussion, the contrasts among his assumption of superiority, a perception that he failed as a gentleman and a rejection by someone of lower social status present seemingly unresolvable circumstances. With Darcy's outlook, it would seem appropriate that he feels superior to others; however, doing so conflicts with the role of a gentleman and such a rejection might confirm that he has failed in his role.

Darcy clarifies his perspective in the subsequent letter that he writes to Elizabeth, providing further insight into his priorities as a gentleman. While other gentlemen are not mentioned within it, a safe assumption may well be that his thoughts represent many others like himself who hold similar estate responsibilities. He appears deeply offended at Elizabeth's suggestion that he treated Wickham cruelly (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 149). The critical aspect seems to be his responsibility for the well-being of others and the appropriate use of the power that he wields as an estate owner. Darcy objects to Elizabeth suggesting that he,

had, in defiance of various claims, in defiance of honour and humanity, ruined the immediate prosperity, and blasted the prospects of Mr. Wickham. – Wilfully and wantonly to have thrown off the companion of my youth, the acknowledged favourite of my father, a young man who had scarcely any other dependence than on our patronage, and who had been brought up to expect its exertion, would be a depravity, to which the separation of two young persons, whose affection could be the growth of only a few weeks, could bear no comparison (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 150).

He still appears to feel justified in discouraging his friend, Bingley, from pursuing Jane romantically, though the context in which he acted was more complicated than was initially

evident. He also remains factual regarding the lower status of Elizabeth's family (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 152). But, his passionate defense of his actions toward Wickham is evident. The relationships on the estate are valued, as is the ability of the owner to provide for those dependent on its resources. Darcy could bear no accusation that he would act less than responsibly in his care of others, even though there may perhaps be some emotional interference, such as Darcy's father's favoritism toward Wickham (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 153). At another point in the discussion Darcy states, "my investigations and decisions are not usually influenced by my hopes and fears," so he seems to take some pride in the control of his emotions while making decisions (Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* 151). This is in stark contrast to the new heir, John Dashwood, whose decisions appear almost whimsical by comparison. It also seems to stress that even owners of massive estates would look down on John's decisions regarding his relatives. However, it seems that Darcy makes decisions more objectively than the late owner of Norland. Perhaps this is further evidence of the vast variations in estate owner characteristics that may impact greater and greater numbers of people with the increase in estate size.

Sir Walter Elliot echoes the Netherfield community's opinion of Darcy regarding the importance of a handsome visage. Austen states that Sir Walter "considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion" (Austen, *Persuasion* 10). While Sir Walter may just naturally have a self-preoccupation, it is also possible that laudatory reactions from others helped cultivate it. Both he and Darcy are arrogant. Jane, Elizabeth, Austen, through diegesis, and Sir Walter Elliot offer a consensus opinion that "handsome" is integrally related to a gentleman's character. However, the Netherfield community seems consistent with Sir Walter's outlook in being most impressed by wealth. He seems to personify the superficial traits that the community pursues most heavily, yet demonstrates the limitations

of their importance because he is arrogant. Darcy was also found wanting despite his possession of the same two characteristics. Apparently, Sir Walter's wife had found a way to use them to her advantage since she "humoured, or softened, or concealed his failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years . . . though not the very happiest being in the world herself" (Austen, *Persuasion* 10). Lady Elliot achieved what many in the Netherfield community sought, but, through this achievement, revealed how much could be lacking for the successful recipient.

Sir Walter Elliot reveals his opinions toward men whom he does not consider to be gentlemen during a discussion with Mr. Shepherd, his lawyer, regarding the possibility of accepting a successful naval officer as a tenant of Kellynch Hall. Though Sir Walter's own fiscal mistakes result in his inability to afford his continued residence in the estate, he continues to consider potential renters as lesser men. He presents two objections towards naval men: "first, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of" (Austen, *Persuasion* 22). Ancestral status is critical from his perspective, consistent with the requirement of birth. His comment has something of an institutional tone to it, as in preventing others from achieving what one of his ancestors did, thereby establishing a new status for Sir Walter's family. Achieved merit is inconsistent, not required to retain the status previously gained. He automatically considers himself of greater status than others.

Sir Walter's second point is that "a sailor grows old sooner than any other man . . . A man is in greater danger in the navy of being insulted by the rise of one whose father, his father might have disdained to speak to, and of becoming prematurely an object of disgust himself" (Austen, *Persuasion* 22). He suggests again the importance of how one looks to others, while objecting to changes in status. His resistance to changes in status provides evidence of the resistance to change that many men like him may provide. Yet, the times are forcing change

through the service of naval officers and their subsequent wealth, leaving men like Sir Walter reliant on the willingness of officers to share their wealth in pursuit of improved status. The circumstances seem vaguely reminiscent of ambitious men seeking opportunities through the Herald's College which acknowledge status on behalf of the king. It also seems poignant that wealth is the driving factor for change. Despite the emphasis on handsome physical features and good breeding, wealth and earned military advancement are the deciding factors.

In conclusion, an investigation of the male characters within Jane Austen's novels reveals many intricacies in them. Rather than being interchangeable, each character is distinct and presents unique insights into the social forces which shape their thoughts and behavior. Though evidence of the forces affecting them is exhibited to varying degrees and within different scenes, a broader perspective is gained by considering the many male characters that influence Austen's heroines. And, greater complexity in the characters becomes evident. Furthermore, human networks begin to appear which shape the thoughts and behavior of the male characters. The male characters demonstrate a wide variation in the forces that shape them, as well as variation in their individual reactions to those forces. John Willoughby eschews attraction for financial gain. Edward Ferrars eschews financial gain for attraction.

Rather than the word "gentleman" representing a simple, coherent concept understood by all, it is much more ambiguous in its interpretation by the various characters. For example, Edward's shyness includes warmth toward others which Mrs. Dashwood values, though he does not meet her initial standards of confident behavior for gentlemen. Furthermore, the characteristics that are more widely accepted as representative of gentlemen are not given the same value by all characters. For example, Darcy's emphasizes on his own birth while Marianne's emphasizes Willoughby's breeding, or manners.

In some cases, characteristics are devalued to varying degrees by both men and women. Edward is less concerned about wealth than Willoughby, while Sir Walter Elliot is fascinated with his own birth in contrast to Sir John Middleton, who is more gregarious. Yet, despite the fact that some male characters also disregard characteristics widely accepted as necessary for gentlemen, the same male characters continue to be accepted as gentleman by all. Willoughby acts in a villainous manner, yet is still assumed to remain a gentleman. Beyond the more widely accepted gentlemanly characteristics of birth, wealth and breeding, there are additional characteristics which are identified by various characters, such as Marianne's addition of "handsome" to the list. This results in a range of characteristics which are identified by various characters, suggesting that even the characters who conceptualize gentlemen do so in different ways. Therefore, the ambiguous nature of the concept of "gentleman" is evident. Pleasing, unaffected, good-humored, handsome, lively and a number of other descriptors are suggested for gentlemanly behavior by varied characters.

Opinions that shape the thoughts and actions of gentlemen are transmitted through a range of human networks, some male and some female, as well as communities consisting of both genders. Laws and the politics which shaped them govern the transfer of estate ownership, while spouses, families and extended families exert influence on the decisions of the gentlemen who manage the estates. Such is the case with John Dashwood's wife, who influenced John's reduced support of the Dashwood women, as well as John's son, who appealed to the late owner's emotions. Estate owners are presented as fallible human beings by Austen. Sir John Middleton, though a rough country gentleman and distant relation, stepped in to ensure the well-being of the Dashwood women when they lost standing, thereby rectifying an injustice and demonstrating a constructive application of chivalry.

The actions of the owners who manage estate resources, either intentionally or unintentionally, affect the well-being of the many people who are dependent on the estate,

including the poor. Members of the community also aspire to benefit from estate wealth, such as young women seeking husbands who are, or will become heirs. And, within communities, mothers and fathers maintain networks to gain information about potential suitors, including the suitors' financial standings, circumstances and personal characteristics. While women exchange information among themselves, they also seek an exchange from the men to whom they have access, such as fathers and husbands, as is the case between Mrs. and Mr. Bennet.

Austen also demonstrates through her heroes that there are many influences on the gentlemen as they develop. While breeding and education are expected for gentlemen, the home can be a cold, un-nurturing place, as with Edward's family. Education imposes undesirable experiences as well, through antagonist relationships and even physical fighting within the schools. These are experiences that interfere with the expectation that men be relaxed in the company of others, among other traits. There are additional social inhibitors as well. Darcy's demeanor demonstrates the difficulty of moving freely among social divisions when he regards Elizabeth's family as undesirable. And, displaying genuine fellow feeling is difficult if one carries memories of combat or an injustice, as does Colonel Brandon, or of arrogance as does Robert.

Jane Austen reveals many variations on gentlemanly behavior and the human networks that influence them. While the term "gentleman" appears to be accepted and understood by all, it is clearly interpreted differently by most. Even the most common characteristics receive different emphasis, depending on the person or their circumstances. And, there are offenses that appear in the behaviors of "gentleman." Willoughby acts the villain, Sir Walter Elliot, Fitzwilliam Darcy and Robert Ferrars have difficulty expressing a genuine concern for others across social divisions and Sir John has coarse manners though he is gregarious. However, in the many variations, all of the men are considered gentlemen, even those like Bingley who don't meet all of the requirements as they move into the ranks of peers through their wealth.

Perhaps, as a matter of course, Austen's heroes greatly affect her heroines because the male characters are so varied and complex that the female characters must struggle to interpret, react to and adapt to the many confusing circumstances that they generate as "gentlemen."



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