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STRATEGIES OF SILENCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS


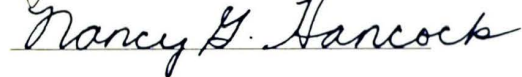
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STRATEGIES OF SILENCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

Austin Peay State University

Ann A. Thompson

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother
the late Jeanne Bellamy Austin
who inspired me to do the best I could
by loving me as much when I did not.

Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light for my path.
Psalms 119

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ABSTRACT

This essay attempts to identify what message Jane Austen's novels send to her readers regarding silence and feminine behavior. Austen agrees with proponents of keeping intact the rights and recognition women had earned earlier in the eighteenth century. In the ways she presents and analyzes women's silence in her novels, Austen is clearly reacting to the changing social moods of her age. She examines the women who are silent as well as those who are not and the impact the new code of silence has on the individual. This essay analyzes *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. In the former two novels, Austen sets up a dichotomy of women with silent reserve and of women who are outspoken in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each and to explore societal roles played by women possessing each set of traits. *Persuasion* examines one of Austen's most silent heroines whose passive independence ultimately leads to her own happiness, though Austen does not present Anne Elliot as an ideal nineteenth-century woman. The conclusion is that no ideal model for female behavior exists in Jane Austen's novels, and this is precisely the point she intended to make to authors of conduct manuals as well as to her readers. Furthermore, Austen's work realizes that society as a whole, not just its women, pays a price for the rigid imposition of rules.

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Chapter I

The Silent Woman Debate:

A Historical Perspective

Eighteenth-century England asked important questions about the roles women should play in Enlightenment society. Throughout most of the century, debate about women's roles centered on female nature. Early in the eighteenth century Mary Astell, an early English feminist, and Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, authors of the popular *Tatler* (1709-1711) and *Spectator* (1711-1712), produced essays advising readers how to behave in virtually every aspect of life. These authors all argued with varying degrees of intensity against the traditional European view that women's positions and potential are determined by their biology—i.e., their reproductive roles. Instead, they contended that women are equipped with the same senses and capability for reason that men have and are therefore entitled to a similar education. As her biographer Ruth Perry tells us, Astell was the first to speak out in *A Serious Proposal To the Ladies* (1694) on the concept of having a "Protestant nunnery," an all-female college, where women could receive an education equal to that given to men. Her proposal was later championed by Steele, Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Samuel Johnson, and others (Perry 101). Astell urged women to reach their full potential and not to become entrenched in societal expectations for female mediocrity (Perry 101). Meanwhile, in *Spectator* essay No. 66 (1711), Steele argued that, under the current method of educating girls, "we take Care of their Persons and neglect their Minds" (Addison 208). This practice contrasted with what Steele saw as the ideal, for the "Body [to] express the Virtues of the Mind" (Addison 209). The attitude emerging in the early

eighteenth century was that if women were educated as their abilities suggested they should be, they would become better able to rationally discuss matters of interest such as literature or religion and therefore become better companions to men. Astell spoke in favor of this view, questioning, “Were not Pertinent and Ingenious Discourse more becoming in a visit than Idle twattle and uncharitable remarks?” (qtd. in Perry 102). Later authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft continued the tradition of advocacy for women’s education through the end of the eighteenth century. According to critic Mary Poovey, by the 1790s most widely-read and recognized authors began to react against the active roles women had been urged to play in society and shifted focus away from female rationality and the need for women’s education. Instead, they concentrated on what they defined as the innate passivity and modesty of women and began dictating standards for female conduct, defining feminine nature anew and advocating more limited and conservative roles for women. During the middle to late 1700s, these self-appointed authorities on women’s behavior emerged and wrote conduct books and articles, many of which were published in pocketbooks or in journals such as the *Female Spectator*, first published in 1744. Essentially, by the late eighteenth century, so much conduct material was available that a young woman had no excuse for acting improperly according to societal prescripts. Consequently, women could be—and were—severely censured for refusing to obey the instructions given them (Poovey 7-11). Authors of conduct books began their instructions to women at the very basic level of everyday conversation with friends and acquaintances. Women were uniformly instructed not to take too large a part in conversation. As Dr. John Gregory advises in the “Conduct and Behaviour” section of his

“Legacy to His Daughters” (1744), “You will more readily hear than talk yourselves into [men’s] good graces” (95). Popular conduct writer Hannah More also emphasized the importance of women’s reticence in conversation. This had to be frustrating for lively, intelligent young women who wanted to enjoy life fully and to participate actively in what was happening around them. Not surprisingly, during this period women novelists became increasingly active, although many published anonymously (or made an initial attempt to do so), perhaps in reaction to forced silence in company. Maybe these women, especially Jane Austen, recognized the desire both to maintain their positions in proper eighteenth-century society and to make their voices heard.

Jane Austen provides unique insight into the issue of women’s silence in late eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century English society. Although Austen has long been considered a traditional and “proper” enough author to be included in the male-dominated canon, examination of her work from a feminist perspective reveals a deep concern for women and their roles in society. In the ways she presents and analyzes women’s silence in her novels, Austen is clearly reacting to the changing social moods of her age imposing codes of silence on women. In her early novels, she examines women who will not be silenced and the impact the new code has on the individual. With the conduct authors making their dictates, Austen’s earlier novels reflect the natural reaction of concern for the rights of the many individual women, like herself, who would lose personal freedom under the new codes. However, over time, perhaps Austen realized that society as a whole, not just its women, was paying a price for the imposition of its rules, as her later novels illustrate.

Two of Austen's earlier novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Emma* (1815), do not fit the patterns established by her four later novels. Each of these novels has two heroines, one of whom is silent and one of whom is not. The main characters in *Sense and Sensibility*, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, operate at extreme ends of the conversational scale; Elinor is frustratingly silent, while Marianne refuses to withhold her opinion on anything. The extremes of behavior in this novel suggest that Austen is dissatisfied with rigid behavior of either kind and that an attainable ideal is a blend of the two traits. However, Austen refuses to leave her audience with this comforting thought. In Marianne's radical transformation at the end of the novel, Austen raises doubts about whether the ideal balance can actually be attained. In *Emma*, the author continues to raise questions about whether the suggested ideal can be achieved. Emma Woodhouse seems to have found the balance between speech and silence Austen hints at in *Sense and Sensibility*. Emma certainly fills a middle position between her Highbury neighbors, the silent Jane Fairfax, and her foils, the voluble Mrs. Elton and Miss Bates. However, as my argument will illustrate, it is not quite possible for the reader to be comfortable with Emma as a role model. Emma's unacceptability as the perfect model suggests that Austen thinks the ideal cannot actually exist and makes even more compelling the question of exactly what message Austen intends to convey about women's natures and the silence imposed on them by conservative conduct manual authors.

Chapter II

The Heroines of *Sense and Sensibility*

Sense and Sensibility was the second completed novel of Jane Austen's career. Begun during the 1790s, its first incarnation was as an epistolary novel, now lost, entitled *Elinor and Marianne*. This period when Austen was beginning to work on her novels was, as has been discussed, a time of debate concerning the roles women would be assigned in society. *Sense and Sensibility* demonstrates Austen's concern about where this debate would lead women. In *Elinor and Marianne Dashwood* she presents two very different heroines, one extremely silent and reserved, the other unable to conceal her feelings. Austen consciously dichotomizes her society's contrasting definitions of female nature. Elinor, the quiet sister, personifies the naturally reserved woman as she was being newly defined in the eighteenth century. In her reluctance to show her feelings even to her own family and in her tendency to set her own emotions aside in order to maintain proper etiquette, Elinor perfectly represents the "angel in the house" woman who will emerge in the Victorian period. Marianne, on the other hand, is almost a caricature of the highly emotional, verbal woman as she had traditionally been defined by the patriarchy before late-eighteenth century efforts to redefine the nature of women. Austen clearly sets up the opposition between these two extreme personality types in order to examine the strengths and weaknesses of each and to explore the societal roles played by women possessing each set of traits.

In *Elinor*, Austen gives the reader a heroine who is in many ways the glue of her society, the peacemaker who carefully preserves social relationships. She is the "proper lady," in Mary Poovey's apt phrase. She is unfailingly polite

to everyone around her; she consistently fulfills her social requirements; she properly steps aside when she discovers Edward Farrows' prior engagement to Lucy Steele; and, perhaps most importantly, she refuses everyone the opportunity to learn her true feelings. In short, Elinor fulfills all the roles conduct authors assigned to young women in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. In her role as peacemaker, she perfectly follows conduct author Hannah More's advice:

In company, young ladies would do well before they speak,
to reflect if what they are going to say may not distress some
worthy persons present, by wounding them in their persons,
families, connections, or religious opinions. ("Conversation"
23)

However, despite all of Elinor's "desirable traits," Jane Austen ensures that she is a difficult character with whom to empathize. Her responses are so trained and controlled that little of Elinor's own nature is revealed. Her shock at discovering Edward's previous engagement is carefully hidden not only from her rival, Lucy Steele, and from her mother and sisters, but in many ways even from the reader. Elinor reacts to the news of Edward's engagement with "astonishment" (111), "painful perplexity" (113), and "distress beyond any thing she had ever felt before" (117), but even these hidden feelings, which pale by comparison with those Marianne displays later, soon give way to reason and calmer emotion. Austen mollifies Elinor's true feelings even from privileged readers. Elinor approaches her problem with logical thought. She carefully evaluates the facts, determines that Lucy must be speaking the truth, and finally manages—in a triumph of calm over anger and disappointment—to feel

more pity for Edward than for herself. Choosing to reason through the problem, Elinor refuses even in her private moments to surrender completely to emotion. In effect, she takes to heart John Gregory's recommendation: "You must bear your sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied. You must often put on a face of serenity and cheerfulness, when your hearts are torn with anguish, or sinking in despair" ("Religion" 89). Although her self-control makes understandable Marianne's frequent accusations that she is unfeeling, Elinor occasionally reveals her true depth of emotion. For example, she breaks down when John Willoughby's inconstancy is revealed: she "[gives] way to a burst of tears, which at first was scarcely less violent than Marianne's" (157-158). But even this outbreak is soon followed by the reasonable advice that seems to be her maxim. She urges, "Exert yourself, dear Marianne...if you would not kill yourself and all who love you" (160).

Although Elinor steadfastly remains silent about her emotions, she is willing occasionally to share her opinions with those around her; she is not afraid to give moralistic advice. When Marianne and Willoughby ridicule Colonel Brandon for being liked by the unimpressive Lady Middleton and Mrs. Jennings, Elinor cannot tolerate their injustice and angrily lashes out, "If their praise is censure, your censure may be praise, for they are not more undiscerning, than you are prejudiced and unjust" (43). Elinor is also sometimes willing to break her code of etiquette if keeping the rules will require her to speak falsely or to give an opinion not her own. Elinor is especially willing to speak her opinion to her peers, rather than her elders, to whom she shows unfailing respect. This honesty is demonstrated well in a conversation

that takes place shortly after she and Marianne meet the Misses Steele. She refuses to meet the Steeles' level of enthusiasm in praise of their hosts, Sir John and Lady Middleton (105). She truly, though gently, expresses her opinion about their spoiled children when she confesses, "while I am at Barton Park, I never think of tame and quiet children with any abhorrence" (106). Elinor clearly remains silent about her feelings much of the time, as seen in her polite tolerance of Mrs. Jennings' and others' unrefined manners. However, when matters of principle are involved, she refuses to say what she does not believe. This behavior pattern, that of being silent about emotions and unimportant affairs but gently speaking when principles are involved, places Elinor squarely in the range of behavior allowed young women by Hannah More and other conduct authors.

Marianne, on the other hand, is in almost every respect the opposite of what late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conduct authors believed a young woman should be. She freely expresses her emotions, not caring who is in the position to observe them. As she tells Elinor immediately after discovering Willoughby's infidelity, "misery such as mine has no pride. I care not who knows that I am wretched. The triumph of seeing me so may be open to all the world" (164). She does not show only her sorrow, however. When Marianne meets Willoughby, their relationship quickly becomes a joke among the occupants of Barton Park because her affection for him is so open and because she is willing to disregard propriety in order to enjoy his company. For instance, on the day of Colonel Brandon's abrupt departure from Barton Park, Marianne and Willoughby quickly separate from the rest of the company and go to Allenham, the estate he expects to inherit. Although she is somewhat

embarrassed on being discovered by Mrs. Jennings, Marianne is so far from being ashamed of her impropriety that she is angry with Elinor for not believing Mrs. Jennings's information that Marianne went with Willoughby to Allenham (58). The absolute openness of Marianne's emotions, however, is best seen when she encounters Willoughby in London. Despite Elinor's efforts to restrain her while at a party in a room that was "splendidly lit up, quite full of company, and insufferably hot" (151), Marianne responds to Willoughby's distant greeting by crying out, "Good God! Willoughby, what is the meaning of this? Have you not received my letters? Will you not shake hands with me?" (152). Marianne is unconcerned about the huge crowd surrounding them and of the impropriety of showing her emotions where everyone can see them. She thinks only of her feelings and does not censor their expression. As in Elinor's case, Marianne must find a way to express not only her emotions but also her opinions. Although Elinor is much more frank about her opinions than her emotions, Marianne again outdoes her sister in this category. Rather than expressing her opinions primarily with her peers and showing respect for her elders as Elinor does, Marianne speaks out to anyone whom she finds offensive. When Sir John teases her about "setting her cap" for Willoughby, Marianne counters boldly: "That is an expression . . . which I particularly dislike. I abhor every commonplace phrase by which wit is intended; and 'setting one's cap at a man,' or 'making a conquest,' are the most odious of all" (38). When conversing with her peers, Marianne also lacks Elinor's tactful way of expressing her true feelings. When Lady Middleton's daughter receives a slight scratch on the neck and screams lustily about the injury for several minutes before she is taken away from the company, Marianne counters Miss Steele's observation about it being

a near catastrophe with, “Yet I hardly know how . . . unless it had been under totally different circumstances. But this is the usual way of heightening alarm, where there is nothing to be alarmed at in reality” (105). Despite all her outspokenness, Marianne occasionally agrees to remain silent when speaking the truth would lead to personal insult. Because she has not Elinor’s ability for “telling lies when politeness require[s] it” (105), she sometimes opts to remain “silent: it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion” (105). A clear example of this behavior is seen when Marianne does not respond to the Steeles’ praise of Lady Middleton’s character. She cannot honestly agree with the sisters, but it would be an inexcusable insult to her relative to speak her true opinion. Therefore, Elinor is usually left with the task of maintaining etiquette and proper relations with their neighbors for both of them. By continually speaking her mind, no matter how insulting it may be to authority figures around her, and by making a constant show of her emotions, Marianne displays behavior exactly contrary to everything advocated by turn-of-the-century conduct authors.

By contrasting the Dashwood sisters, Austen challenges her readers to make a decision regarding women’s roles. Clearly, neither sister is an ideal figure worthy of emulation. Elinor is so silent and reserved that she reveals little of her feelings and thoughts with the result that she almost loses Edward, and Marianne is so vocal and expressive that she has difficulty adhering to some contemporary rules of etiquette, thus almost losing her reputation and her health. Through her system of showing opposites, Austen seems to criticize the way late-eighteenth-century society viewed women. By both depicting women who are reserved and women who are silent, as they were defined by the

late-eighteenth-century conduct authors, and women who react passionately and vocally to life, according to the old definitions of women's nature, Austen suggests that there is no one paradigm for the natural woman. Both definitions are accurate in a sense, yet both are insufficient. Women exist who fit each of the definitions and who fill every spot on the continuum in between.

Womanhood can no more be summed up in a terse description than manhood can. In portraying extremes of character and the difficulties that accompany each, Austen urges the reader to hope for a medium level of behavior between the extremes if women can hope to maximize their positions in society.

However, with the novel's unsatisfactory ending, Austen apparently destroys this expectation by questioning whether the ideal balance can be achieved. After an illness following her solo sojourn to Allenham during a storm, Marianne reassesses her approach to life and the impact it has on herself and the people around her. That the sickness was brought on by Marianne's extreme sensibility there can be no doubt, and she realizes how harmful her violent reactions to life can be, admitting, "I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them had almost led me to the grave. My illness, I well knew had been entirely brought on by myself" (303). However, the resulting change in Marianne's demeanor does not bring about a shift toward the ideal middle. Rather, Marianne characteristically overreacts and learns to become as silent as her sister. By making this fundamental change in her personality, Marianne ceases truly to be Marianne. Her "nature" is violated and compromised. Her new plan for her life is to live with moderation: "my feelings shall be governed and by temper improved. They shall no longer worry others, nor torture myself. I shall

now live solely for my family" (304). By having Marianne surrender this vital part of herself, Austen condemns the selfless silence that is imposed on individuals for the sake of societal expectations. Interestingly, in this first published novel, Austen touches on a major issue of her later novels, especially *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*--that of how society loses as a result of enforcing silence on its women. Marianne is not the only character who loses something in her newfound silence. Colonel Brandon, who fell in love with the vivacious, sensible Marianne because of her lively, open nature, wins her hand in marriage after her transformation. However, Colonel Brandon does not marry the same woman with whom he fell in love. Marianne's acceptance of societal dictates forces Brandon to settle for a shell of the real woman. Marianne "was born to an extraordinary fate . . . to discover the falsehood of her own opinions, and to counteract, by her conduct, her most favorite maxims" (333). This change in Marianne's temperament robs Brandon of the pleasure of Marianne's natural, unguarded expression and passion when she agrees to marry him "with no sentiment superior to strong esteem and lively friendship" (333).

In demonstrating the two extremes of Elinor's and Marianne's personalities, Austen shows how people who fit too solidly into either category of behavior are ill suited to function in society. Throughout much of the novel, the author hints at a preference for Elinor's approach to those around her. She is reasonable, polite, and able to discuss contemporary issues intelligently. However, at the end of the novel, Austen makes Marianne conform to Elinor's socially approved code of behavior and raises questions about the value of that approach to life for every woman. When Marianne begins to accept the

legitimacy of these strict rules, her contribution to the company around her changes entirely, giving them a second Elinor and less variety in conversation. The formerly exuberant Marianne now speaks “calmly” (302) and reasonably resolves on a life in which she can “practice the civilities, the lesser duties of life, with gentleness, and forbearance” (304-05). In this unsatisfactory ending, Austen seems both to condemn society for imposing conversational and behavioral restrictions on women and to censure women who accept these restrictions. By showing her reader this struggle between silence and openness, Austen implicitly argues that too much of either trait can be destructive for both the individual and her society and that in order to operate with maximum effect in society a person must combine the two characteristics. In making Marianne change from one extreme to the other after her illness, however, Austen comments on the difficulty of attaining the perfect balance between the two. In a society with such strict behavioral rules as existed in the late eighteenth century, it is difficult to walk a thin line between adhering to the rules at a cost to one’s individuality and breaking the rules and risking censure. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen establishes this difficulty without providing women with a solution, suggesting that perhaps there is no way to negotiate the balancing act successfully.

Chapter III

Emma and the Search for a Female Ideal

Austen began *Emma* in 1814, three years after *Mansfield Park*. This novel rests uneasily between *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*, late novels with silent heroines. Although *Emma* contains only one central heroine, unlike *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen establishes careful and extensive contrasts between the title character and her female companions. Emma Woodhouse's personality and behavior patterns fit into the middle of the range established by her major foils, Jane Fairfax and Augusta Elton, and secondary characters such as Miss Bates. Jane is most notable for her silence through the majority of the novel, while Mrs. Elton continually calls attention to herself, remaining silent about very little, and Miss Bates chatters more frequently and without direction than any other character in an Austen novel. When seen in contrast with such extreme characters, Emma seems at first glance to have found the ideal balance Austen hints at in *Sense and Sensibility*. However, Austen provides no such easy answer to the question of how vocal women should be. In examining more closely the dynamics of these four characters, the reader discovers that while Emma is much closer to an ideal character than any of her counterparts, Austen ensures that we remain uncomfortable with her as a model for female conduct.

Jane Fairfax's role in *Emma* is unique in Austen's fiction in that she shadows Emma as a counter-heroine. In virtually any novel of the early nineteenth century except *Emma*, Jane would have been the heroine. Her story has the elements of a very pleasing fairy tale. She, after all, is the orphan; she is the accomplished young woman brought up in luxury but doomed to life as a

governess; and she is the woman who has a secret engagement to a man whose family would disapprove of the connection, and who marries her wealthy fiancé only after a period of painful trial. Jane Fairfax also has the artist's temperament, pouring forth her soul in music amidst an uncomprehending society; she has an embarrassing family; and she wanders bereft in the fields to soothe her soul (354). The John Gregorys of her age would commend her silence and patience during all her trials. With all these literary conventions on her side as well as ultimately being the impetus for the novel's resolution, Jane Fairfax certainly deserves the role of the alter-heroine in *Emma*.

Jane Fairfax's situation, which was almost a cliché for heroines of the early nineteenth century, makes Emma's unusual role more apparent and provides the reader with a norm against which to measure Emma. The silent, oppressed Jane's position sets up an immediate contrast to that of the outspoken, powerful Emma. Where Emma, as the pampered younger daughter, has the control in her household, Jane has not even a proper household of her own; after being orphaned as a baby, Jane has lived briefly with her aunt and grandmother before being given over to the care of her father's friend, Colonel Campbell. While Emma lives secure in the knowledge of her current and future importance, Jane is forced to recognize the possibility that she will never be more than a governess in someone else's home. Moreover, where Emma confidently speaks her opinion and moves comfortably among all her neighbors, Jane guards herself, careful never to let escape any stray comment. Jane's lack of conversation leads Emma to observe during her second meeting with Frank Churchill, "We shall know more about them all [the Campbells and Dixons], in half an hour from you, than Miss Fairfax would have vouchsafed in half a year"

(181). And even Mr. Knightley, a great admirer of Jane's, is forced to admit that she is generally too reserved: "her temper [is] excellent in its power of forbearance, patience, self-controul [sic]; but it wants openness" (260). Jane Fairfax is similar to Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, and Anne Elliot in that her silence results from a combination of her own nature and her position in society. Jane has natural reserve, but her dependent position in life forces her to be even more silent than she would naturally be.

In two such different characters as Emma Woodhouse and Jane Fairfax, Austen seems to have established a pairing of opposites similar to that seen in *Sense and Sensibility*. However, the contrast between the characters in *Emma* is not so strong as that between Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. Although Jane Fairfax is probably more silent even than Elinor Dashwood, Emma Woodhouse bears little resemblance to the emotional Marianne. Emma is a reasonable character, well aware of her role in society and the responsibilities inherent in filling her position in the community. In most cases, she carefully considers her responses to those around her and reacts appropriately. The roles of the extreme chatterboxes in *Emma* are reserved for two other women in the novel, Augusta Elton and Miss Bates.

Although Mrs. Elton is much less likeable than Marianne Dashwood, she sees her position in society similarly. Both women are full of self-confidence. They never hesitate to speak their opinions, each sure she possesses the natural gifts that will make others value what she has to say. However, while Marianne Dashwood can be maddeningly self-centered, she also seems innocent of the effect her behavior has on others. She never really considers how her behavior might influence others, and she does not try to affect their

opinions of her. She is artlessly, naturally Marianne, regardless of how others may see her. Mrs. Elton, on the other hand, seems consciously to work at improving her image and position in society; she uses her speech as a form of self-advertisement and self-promotion. She consistently puts herself in the role that Emma thinks should rightfully be Emma's, that of the first lady in their company. Mrs. Elton continually makes an issue of her position and overstates her importance. She takes over the job of coordinating the group's trip to Box Hill, putting Emma in what she sees as the humiliating position of being a member of Mrs. Elton's party (318); she attempts to plan Mr. Knightley's strawberry-picking party for him (320); and she places herself at the head of the Westons' dance, forcing them to apologize secretly to Emma for their inability to honor her (291-92). By continually trumpeting her own importance, Mrs. Elton establishes a point of contrast with Emma's self control.

Miss Bates is a completely different kind of talkative character than is Mrs. Elton, who is not concerned with increasing her importance like the younger woman is. Rather, Miss Bates always seems to be flattered by any recognition and constantly thanks those she considers her superiors, a group which includes virtually everyone in the novel. Her refrain of "you are so kind" greets the ears of all who favor her with a visit or dare to ask about her beloved niece, Jane Fairfax (139). Miss Bates' penchant for spreading news comes from the same motivation as her thankfulness. She good-naturedly wants to provide amusement for all those surrounding her and delights in repeating news that interests her and which she assumes will interest others as well. Even Emma, who has a considerable dislike for Miss Bates' company, admits that she commits none of the typical crimes of a poor old maid: "this [being illiberal and

cross] does not apply, however, to Miss Bates; she is only too good natured and too silly to suit me" (77-78). The old woman herself admits that she is "rather a talker; and now and then I have let a thing escape which I should not" (312). Miss Bates' volubility rests not in a need for self-aggrandizement, like Mrs. Elton's, but in a need to please and to show how much she appreciates the attentions of the residents of Highbury.

When seen in contrast with both her silent alternate heroine and the talkative members of her neighborhood, Emma seems to have achieved the balance between silence and articulation that could not be found in *Sense and Sensibility*. This claim will no doubt surprise readers who most often remember Emma as an outspoken, strong-willed heroine, recalling only her lapses in judgment. She would certainly have made many people in the early nineteenth century uncomfortable. Hannah More, John Gregory, and their fellow conduct authors would have vehemently opposed Emma's forwardness, and the women who abided by the behavioral codes and the men who relied on such compliance would have been uncomfortable with Emma's willingness to speak and upset the usual social balance. Indicative of Emma's disregard of the expected behavioral system is the fact that, at the start of the novel, Emma plans to remain unmarried and apparently in control of Hartfield when her ailing father dies (77-78). Her plan is counter to all social expectations and rules of behavior for women and would certainly make some contemporary readers dislike her independent spirit. However, the fact that some people would not have liked Emma does not make her less of a role model.

On the contrary, Austen probably meant for Emma to be a role model and combat the conservatives' advice. Austen's pattern throughout her novels

of examining and condemning the silence imposed on women continues in *Emma*. Austen, who obviously felt the conflict between the silence required by society and the expression needed to fulfill herself, intended for Emma to be a sort of realizable ideal. Austen knew when she wrote *Emma* that her heroine was atypical for the time and that she would probably upset some readers. Austen seems to have recognized that her readers would have a problem sympathizing with Emma when she made her famous statement about Emma: "I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like" (qtd. in Kinsley, "Introduction" ix). When the novel was published, most authors were concerned with portraying silent, passive characters much like Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, the novel Austen wrote immediately before *Emma*. Austen's portrayal of Emma as a powerful, outspoken woman was almost revolutionary in the early nineteenth century, and Emma is a jarring character in her world. The reader perceives Emma as much more vocal than is proper in her society and, while in the context of the novel's world, the reader reacts much as one of Emma's or Austen's contemporaries would. Emma's difference from the women around her is obvious. No one else speaks in quite the same way Emma does. Mrs. Weston and Harriet Smith, Emma's two closest female friends, join Jane Fairfax as models of officially-sanctioned female propriety. None of these women speak out of turn and all are willing to defer to the stronger minds and more powerful judgments of those surrounding them, namely, Emma and the men. Alternately, the talkative women are portrayed as either silly, somewhat pathetic old chatterboxes such as Miss Bates or as manipulative, attention-starved social climbers like Mrs. Elton. Emma is the only consistently rational, vocal female character in the novel.

Even today, Emma arouses distaste. In fact, as Claudia Johnson explains, “the criticism of Emma is freighted with alarming animosities” (122). Tony Tanner reiterates the abuse critics traditionally let loose on the novel’s heroine:

[B]ut with one or two exceptions, Emma is wrong, *does* wrong, can *speak* wrong (Box Hill), *judges* wrong, and can use her power (hers because of her permanently ailing, hypochondriac, dozing father) in a way that can be destructive of other people’s lives and happiness. (176)

However, Emma combines many qualities of the ideal. The heroine, in fact, has a very real sense of when speech is and is not appropriate, and she often avoids speaking when her thoughts could cause pain to someone else. For instance, after Mr. Elton pronounces having his charade printed in Emma’s and Harriet’s book to be the proudest moment of his life, Emma must escape to laugh in private. Not only does she refuse to laugh at the “parade in his speeches” in front of him, but she also refrains from laughter in front of Harriet, who is occupied thinking “the tender and the sublime” about her presumed beau (75). In this scene, Emma clearly shows sensitivity to others’ feelings and censors herself in order to maintain their happiness.

Emma combines this self-censoring with the ability to articulate her thoughts. Her first speech in the novel is when she disagrees with her father about “poor Miss Taylor” and her marriage. Her first words, “I cannot agree with you, papa,” demonstrate immediately Emma’s confidence in her judgment and her willingness to express her opinion (6). This expression is not limited to those with whom Emma has an intimate relationship. During only her second

meeting with Frank Churchill, Emma freely states her suspicions regarding Jane Fairfax's relationship with the Dixons and her dislike of Jane's reserve (180-83). Although Emma's speech sometimes goes beyond what propriety and prudence suggest, as in this conversation with Frank Churchill, these blunders are the results of lapses in Emma's generally sound judgment. Emma always recognizes and regrets when she has said too much. The most important and best known example of such a lapse is Emma's rudeness to Miss Bates during the Box Hill outing. These cases, however, are relatively rare throughout the novel. Emma's judgment regarding when to speak is generally infallible. She permits herself to express her opinions and show her sense when it is appropriate, but she is willing to censor herself when speech would cause pain or discomfort to a friend.

When examining the actual evidence about Emma's speech, the reader discovers that the heroine is silent much more often than first imagined. For instance, when Emma's hope for a quiet outing to Box Hill with her intimate friends is ruined by Mr. Weston's and Mrs. Elton's plan, Emma chooses not to express her disappointment. When she considers that the friendly Mr. Weston is already aware of her dislike for Mrs. Elton, she decides "it was not worth bringing forward again:--it could not be done without a reproof to him, which would be giving pain to his wife" (318). Emma censors herself in order to avoid causing a friend pain. Similar restraint is evident throughout the novel. At another point, Mr. John Knightley complains at length about the necessity of visiting Rawlings in bad weather. Emma disagrees with his assessment of the situation and is uncertain how to respond: "she could not be complying, she dreaded being quarrelsome; her heroism reached only to silence" (103). Emma

also recognizes when other characters are too willing to argue and makes attempts to stop them from speaking as well. When discord threatens twice during conversations among Isabella Knightley and her father and husband, Emma attempts to prevent arguments by interrupting their conversation with questions or comments about their neighbors (92, 94). Emma has such a gift for knowing when not to reveal the whole truth that Austen feels the need to explain her conduct: "seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised, or a little mistaken; but . . . it may not be very material" (391).

Ironically, the reader's discomfort with Emma as a role model for female behavior may be due in part to a misunderstanding of Emma's speech patterns. Emma's thoughts are always clear to the reader, although she may hide from other characters. While Emma may think smugly about how delighted the Coles should be that she is at their party, and she may rage inwardly about Mrs. Elton's attempts to supplant Emma's position, she carefully hides her thoughts from the people around her. Austen's frank presentation of Emma's thoughts makes the character seem much more outspoken than she actually is. With few exceptions, most notably her insult of Miss Bates at Box Hill, Emma shows tremendous restraint in her speech when it is compared with the busy working of her mind. Unlike the verbose Mrs. Elton, Emma does not discuss her self-importance or demonstrate her need for respect. The reader knows how insulted Emma becomes when she is slighted and how violently she dislikes Mrs. Elton, but Emma has the sense not to show her feelings to the residents of Highbury. Emma has developed a tremendous sense of what her position in the community is and how her position dictates her role. She

generally shows great presence of mind when choosing whether or not to speak. Emma's good judgment about when to speak and when to refrain from expressing her opinion is even more remarkable given the lack of guidance she has had. Her father certainly has not provided Emma with any valuable lessons about how to behave around others, and Austen establishes early in the novel that from a young age Emma has been in the habit of "doing just what she liked; highly esteeming Miss Taylor's judgment, but directed chiefly by her own" (3). This lack of firm guidance makes Emma's ability to disguise her thoughts and to react properly in most situations even more remarkable. Emma has not needed the advice of conduct authors any more than she needed Miss Taylor's counsel. Given the complete knowledge Austen provides about Emma's thoughts, it is easy for the reader to overlook Emma's restraint and to make a false connection between Emma's sometimes-faulty judgment and her speech. This mistake could lead readers to think Emma is too outspoken despite her actual self-censoring.

However, Austen's search for an ideal heroine who avoids both verbosity and silence does not end with Emma Woodhouse. She is a character with whom the reader cannot be fully comfortable as an ideal. The general soundness of Emma's speech pattern positions her for the ideal, and the reader must still determine why that label does not characterize Emma. Part of the reason Emma cannot serve as an ideal lies in the fact that as a realist, Austen will not create a perfect character. Emma's very human flaws make her at once maddening and endearing. Emma is a recognizably human character, and Austen creates an entire, believable world in which Emma lives.

Even more so than her realistically flawed character, Emma's position in society restricts her ability to function as an ideal. In the opening sentence of the novel, Austen introduces

Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, [who] seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.

(3)

This description may be the key to why Emma is not acceptable as an image of the ideal woman. Powerful, privileged women like Emma are in the minority in life, and Austen tells the reader from the beginning of the novel that Emma is extraordinary. Perhaps the reader may have the limited power and privilege of a Jane Fairfax rather than the extensive resources of an Emma Woodhouse. Such a reader recognizes that Emma's privileged position in society provides her with rights and powers that not everyone has. In addition to her family's important position in Highbury, Emma is clearly put in a position of power in her home. Mr. Woodhouse is certainly a kind old man, but he is no match for his daughter. There is no doubt who runs the household at Hartfield. Emma overrides her father's decisions about such everyday matters as what food should be served to their guests and how much pork they should send to the Bates family, and she persuades him of the occasional necessity for visiting neighboring families. Emma, not Mr. Woodhouse, decides what life will be like at Hartfield. Regardless of what her own impulses may be, Jane Fairfax could never respond to life as openly and confidently as Emma can. Jane Fairfax and most women in the early nineteenth century were not in positions of power that

would enable them to speak their opinions. Emma herself acknowledges that rank and position are determinate in women's lives. When Frank Churchill is suddenly called back to his sick aunt's side, just at the time that Jane Fairfax has determined to accept a governess position, Emma is struck by "the contrast between Mrs. Churchill's importance in the world, and Jane Fairfax's . . . one was everything, the other nothing—and she sat musing on the difference of woman's destiny" (348). It may be the knowledge, shared with Emma, that Emma is in an extraordinary position that makes the reader uncomfortable with her as a role model. Emma quite literally cannot be a role model for most women because most women do not have the wealth, position in the community, and power at home required to make the kinds of decisions Emma makes.

Chapter IV

Silence and Loss in *Persuasion*

Jane Austen clearly engages in the debate concerning women's roles. Apparently, Austen agrees with proponents of keeping intact the rights and recognition women had earlier in the century. Austen examines a range of female behavior, and she portrays female characters of many kinds, ranging from the tactless chatterboxes to the quiet, contemplative types. She uses her spirited heroines, like Emma, to challenge the new social codes being professed by conduct book authors. Even though Emma refuses to surrender to society's new rules by remaining silent, Austen gives her story the requisite happy ending, clearly arguing that women who do not live by the advice of conduct authors remain capable of having worthy and fulfilling lives. Austen obviously approves of women who have the sense, capabilities, and willingness to speak—qualities that were popular earlier in the century. She sides with earlier authors Astell, Addison and Steele in acknowledging women's intelligence and encouraging them to speak rather than to be passive as many of her contemporaries decreed.

However, in her last completed novel, *Persuasion* (1817), Austen abandons her early focus on women who refuse to be silent and explores what happens when a woman is forcibly silenced. Her interest in this issue is not surprising, given the period when she wrote this novel. Much of the debate about women's roles had given way to widespread acceptance of the strict codes championed by conduct writers of the preceding two decades. Silence was becoming the norm in women's behavior, and the silent, submissive image of the Victorian woman was shaping female lives. As a champion of the

progressive standards of an earlier period, Austen recognized that her side of the debate had lost the battle and that this loss had had serious consequences not only for the women forced into unnatural silence but also for society. As a result of its own rules, society had lost the insight of many women who might have positively influenced the people around them. In *Persuasion*, Austen examines the broad social implications of the new codes calling for women's silence. By looking beyond the realm of the individual and her reactions to the imposed silence, Austen challenges society as a whole to realize the loss it continues to suffer by denying women the right to communicate their insights. She chides society to notice the deficit it has brought on itself. The characters in *Persuasion* could avoid much of their trouble if they would permit Anne Elliot to share her observations. Unfortunately, since these characters silence her, the other characters must deal with unnecessary difficulties.

Anne is clearly the most insightful, clear-thinking member of her family, but she is not permitted to share her understanding. Her father and sister ridicule her last attempts to help manage the family concerns when she makes recommendations on how to control the budget. Sir Walter and Elizabeth react so negatively to Anne's and Lady Russell's budgetary advice that they choose to leave Kellynch-hall rather than to accept their suggestions. Elizabeth further scorns Anne's advice when she discusses her concerns regarding Sir Walter's relationship with Mrs. Clay. Anne alone discovers Mr. Elliot's true nature as well as Mrs. Clay's schemes to become the next Lady Elliot, but by the time Anne makes her discoveries, she has been so long ignored that she makes no attempt to communicate her information to Sir Walter and Elizabeth. Anne's unwillingness to break her public silence harms her family in another way. She

refuses to emulate her mother, who “had humoured, or softened, or concealed [Sir Walter’s] failings, and promoted his real respectability for seventeen years”

(6). Although Anne never completely despairs of persuading Sir Walter and Elizabeth to behave properly, as when she pleads in vain with them not to make so much over the family connection with Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret, she declines to follow behind them and to try to cover their mistakes.

Embarrassed as she may be by her family’s behavior, she allows it to stand on its own. Her silence has been so ingrained that she will not break it in order to preserve the family image. Anne is an astute observer, and the Elliots might have avoided embarrassment if they had had the benefit of Anne’s insight.

However, she is so effectively silenced by her family’s rejection of her opinions that she ceases to attempt communication. Austen provides convincing commentary on a serious loss as a result of imposing silence on women.

Anne Elliot’s forced silence has costs of a more personal nature as well. Because of her inability to communicate effectively with Captain Wentworth, Anne suffers psychological stress. Societal dictates prevent Anne from telling him her feelings and from learning directly of his continuing affection. The lovers spend months in one another’s company before either begins to suspect that the other is still in love. Their painful confusion is shown in detail at the benefit concert in Bath. Captain Wentworth begins to show his feelings for Anne, and she tries to display hers in return. However, the propriety required in the situation interferes with her intentions, and Wentworth leaves the concert early and dejected, convinced of her preference for another.

The couple finally understands each other’s feelings but only as a result of indirect speech. Anne debates the nature of women’s constancy with Captain

Harville, who is a safe, neutral conversational partner. Even this debate, which reveals her feelings to Wentworth and guarantees her happiness, is a result of indirect communication. When a noise from Captain Wentworth makes her look at him,

Anne was startled at finding him nearer than she had supposed, and half inclined to suspect that the pen had only fallen, because he had been occupied by them, striving to catch sounds, which yet she did not think he could have caught. (220)

Anne does not intend for Wentworth to overhear her conversation, and she probably could not have argued in favor of the longevity of women's love so eloquently had she known he was listening. It is only after overhearing Anne's conversation that Wentworth can address her directly. Finally, after agonizing months of keeping silent around the man she loves, Anne is joined with Wentworth through the accident of indirect speech rather than honest conversation. The above passage exemplifies Janis Stout's illustrious observation: "Austen hopes to convey the sense of [her heroes' and heroines'] avowal scenes in other ways than by reporting their speech" (63).

Through all her suffering, Anne is not meant to be portrayed as an ideal, but her conviction and steadfastness are especially admirable. After all, she willingly relinquishes some of her privilege when she marries Captain Wentworth, who is a naval officer. Nonetheless, Austen gives *Persuasion* a happy ending: Anne marries the man she loves, and, because she can travel with him, she can escape both her family and society, at least for awhile. In essence, her family and society lose a valuable member in two ways: first by imposing silence upon Anne, and second by her effective withdrawal from it.

Chapter V

Conclusion

In *Sense and Sensibility*'s unsatisfactory ending, Austen condemns society for imposing conversational and behavioral restrictions on women as well as censuring women who accept the restrictions. In *Emma*, Austen illustrates that the ideal model for female behavior cannot actually exist, as Emma, who seems to have found the balance between speech and silence, is unacceptable as the perfect model. In *Persuasion*, Austen looks beyond the realm of the individual and her reactions to the imposed silence, challenging society as a whole to realize the loss it continues to suffer by denying women the right to share their insights.

By drawing distinctions among women's fates, Austen underlines her larger point, which goes beyond creating a model of female speech. In all her novels, she creates women with very different social positions and widely varying temperaments. Each of Austen's characters maintains her own identity, and even the "types" she uses repeatedly, such as the tireless chatterbox or the silent, suppressed heroine, have different incarnations with each individual character. *Sense and Sensibility*'s Elinor Dashwood is as distinctly different from Jane Fairfax as Emma is from Marianne Dashwood. In creating such a rich diversity of female characters, Austen rejects both the old and the new definitions of female character. She confidently declares that women are not all the same, with common traits and natures. Not all women are passionate, headstrong, verbal creatures as was thought before the eighteenth century; but neither are they all naturally modest and reserved as the new definitions would have people believe. Austen gives her readers a

variety of characters who are distinctly individual, demonstrating the range of personalities women have and the different gifts and talents possessed by each. She shows her readers how much these women can contribute to the quality of life of those around them and how empty life can be without their unique contributions. By silencing women and restricting them to the narrow role of the "proper lady," society is robbing itself of a richness it does not even know exists.

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CRITICAL PRINCIPLES AND INFLUENCES

As a longtime reader of Jane Austen, I have enjoyed her novels as classic “love stories” with happy conclusions. The first novel of hers that I read many years ago was *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel with essentially two love stories. However, this novel also has an outspoken, self-assured heroine in Elizabeth Bennett, and the reader cannot help but admire her plucky, intelligent conversation. She remains a favorite character of mine in literature, but Austen’s silent heroines, especially *Persuasion*’s Anne Elliot, are equally deserving of admiration. Anne has an independent spirit beneath her reserve and displays it only when she deems it necessary, such as when she makes recommendations on managing the family’s money more wisely and when she refuses to emphasize the family connection with Lady Dalrymple. Although she once allows Lady Russell to persuade her in matters of love, she eventually overcomes this well-meaning influence and listens to her heart. Her character more than any other inspired my interest in Austen’s silent women.

My thesis is a historically-based feminist analysis of the issue of women’s speech versus silence in Jane Austen’s novels *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. In order to gauge how Austen’s attitudes towards women’s speech and silence fit into her society’s ideology of womanhood, I attempt to provide a context for the novels by discussing and citing various “conduct book” writers of the eighteenth century, especially Mary Astell (qtd. in Perry), John Gregory, and Hannah More. Gaining an accurate sense of Austen’s ideas about women’s speech and roles is possible only by examining her novels within their historical context.

Mary Poovey's *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* gives an excellent overview of the historical context from which Austen was writing her novels. According to Poovey, women who wanted to write had problems expressing themselves while remaining "proper." Clearly women were not free to express themselves because, as Poovey argues, the eighteenth-century ideology of feminine propriety drastically limits women's opportunities of self-expression.

While researching my thesis topic, I also came across Janis Stout's *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion*. I was intrigued by her assertion that "women writers have used reticence instead of statement to put forward feminist points of view" (5). According to Stout, all four writers are subversive feminists, leading the reader up to a point, then stopping abruptly and allowing the point to be made silently. Thus omissions of conversation can enhance the writing, allowing the reader to become more engaged intellectually and emotionally with the story. Stout gives abundant examples of incomplete conversations in Austen, as governed by circumstances. According to Stout: "Her heroes and heroines must hope to convey their meaning despite the inadequacies of language. Accordingly, Austen hopes to convey the sense of their avowal scenes in other ways than by reporting their speech" (63). Stout goes on to say of Austen: "She not only doubts the adequacy of language where there is strong emotion, she doubts as well the integrity of language when used in situations where there ought to be strong emotion . . . the reticence of her

good or worthy people, in contrast to the fulsomeness or glibness of the unworthy, demonstrates the value and authenticity of what they say" (63-64).

Stout's bibliography lead me to other important works such as Alison Sulloway's *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*. Sulloway asserts that Austen's fiction often appears to be closer to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft than to the conduct books by male writers whom Austen read. Another influential work is Ruth Perry's *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist*. Astell was an outspoken proponent of women's education and an important author of feminist works, whose ideas are opposed later in the century by conduct authors. Perry's biography gives excellent historical information and lead me to read for myself the essays and letters of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, John Gregory, and Hannah More.

Lastly, two critical works were very influential in my choosing to examine *Sense and Sensibility* and *Emma*. Laura G. Mooneyham's *Romance, Language, and Education in Jane Austen's Novels* was important with her insights into *Sense and Sensibility*. According to Mooneyham, Marianne's attempt to isolate herself from society ends in romantic defeat, and Mooneyham accurately notes the failure of resolution in *Sense and Sensibility*. Also, Claudia Johnson's *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* declares that Austen makes "Emma's misapprehensions seem utterly plausible when we read the novel for the first time" (133). Johnson gives good insights into the other characters of *Emma* as well.

Addison, Joseph, and Richard Steele. *Selections from The Tatler and The Spectator*. Ed. Robert J. Allen. 2nd ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970. Sir Richard Steele was the essayist and playwright who started the periodical *The Tatler*, but his friend Joseph Addison, who was an essayist, poet, and statesman, soon joined him. Together they helped to educate society for the first time about the people and politics around them, and the two affected some social issues with their writings. They wrote to all people, including women, and were sympathetic to the moral attitudes of the middle class. In a prose style marked by precision, Addison wrote on subjects ranging from Milton to hoop-petticoats. Although Steele's prose lacks the polished grace of Addison's, his writing reflects wit and imagination regarding subjects such as cosmetics and the education of women. Their advocacy of women's education and of freedom of choice in the wearing of cosmetics and clothing fashions is particularly noteworthy and relevant to my thesis. The popularity of their concepts carried on into Austen's day and their influence can be seen in her writing.

Gregory, John. "Dr. Gregory's Legacy to His Daughters: Conduct and Behaviour." *The Lady's Pocket Library*. Third American Edition. Philadelphia: 1797. 93-99. Dr. John Gregory, physician and philosopher, gives advice to all young ladies concerning their conduct and behavior. His writing in the form of a letter attempts to give a personal, familiar appeal, and his fatherly advice is aimed toward unmarried women, like his daughters, who are about to enter the social world. He undoubtedly

wants to ensure that his daughters act properly in public and do not embarrass the family. His advice concerns preventing the fall of young ladies into the snares and consequences of seduction and recovering and reclaiming the fallen. His advice includes passivity and silence: "You will more readily hear than talk yourselves into their [men's] good graces" (95). The promise of male approbation was intended to suffice as a motivation, ensuring conformity to the new codes, and the threat of male disapproval dissuaded women from unsanctioned behavior.

---. "Dr. Gregory's Legacy to His Daughters: Religion." *The Lady's Pocket Library*. Third American Edition. Philadelphia: 1797.

89-93. Dr. Gregory shares his advice to all young women on the subject of religion. He absolutely advises against religious discussion: "Do not make religion a subject of common conversation in mixed companies. When it is introduced, rather seem to decline it" (91). By denying women the right to discuss religion, especially in the presence of men, Gregory takes away an area in which women were earlier expected and even encouraged by Mary Astell and other writers to excel.

Johnson, Claudia. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 1988. Johnson insists that feminist views do not have to be "hidden." Her reading of *Emma* is particularly noteworthy. Johnson declares that Austen makes "Emma's misapprehensions seem utterly plausible when we read the novel for the first time" (133). She also discusses the work of Jane Austen in relation to other women writers of her time.

Mooneyham, Laura G. *Romance, Language, and Education in Jane*

Austen's Novels. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988. Her insights into *Sense and Sensibility* are noteworthy, and, according to Mooneyham, irony enters when security and innocence are lost, as in the disinheritance of the Dashwood sisters. The society allowed matches in which the rank and money of each partner were roughly equal, but the Dashwoods' rewards are less. Moreover, the heroes are weak, and no education takes place between hero and heroine as in the other novels. Marianne tries to isolate herself from society ends in romantic defeat. Mooneyham accurately notes the failure of resolution in *Sense and Sensibility*: "Happiness is muted; mere domestic equilibrium is the central good" (44).

More, Hannah. "On Conversation." *The Lady's Pocket Library*. Third

American Edition. Philadelphia: 1797. 19-28. An influential writer and activist of her day, More enters into the debate about how much intelligence women should show in public. She agrees with other conduct authors that women should remain silent, marginal partners while in groups and allow men to take credit for any new ideas generated.

However, she dismisses the popular contention that women should conceal their knowledge. More convinces readers that women will behave properly merely by following their own impulses. Ironically, even while she is arguing that women should keep their opinions mainly to themselves, More herself was publishing essay after essay and maintaining a place for herself in the public eye.

Perry, Ruth. *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986. Perry has written widely on eighteenth-century English literary culture and on the effects of class and gender on the production of art. Astell was an outspoken proponent of women's education and an important author of feminist works. In *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest*, Astell argues that God gave women reason and intended them to use it. Women should seek approval of God, not men, according to her. Astell also asserts that improved education for women would improve their marriages. Astell was a Christian, but she thought the Adam and Eve story was not to be taken literally. Her ideas are opposed later in the century by conduct authors.

Poovey, Mary. *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen*.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. The opening section describes the ideology of the "Proper Lady" and covers what this woman was supposed to be like. It suggests there were problems for women who wanted to write but remain "proper." Poovey argues most persuasively the point that the eighteenth-century ideology of feminine propriety drastically limits women's opportunities of self-expression. Poovey asserts that women who write must "express themselves in a code capable of being read in two ways: as acquiescence to the norm and as departure from it" (41). A woman writer who wants to express her radical ideas must couch them in suitably proper — that is, generally, self-effacing, domestic, and moral — terms.

Stout, Janis P. *Strategies of Reticence: Silence and Meaning in the Works*

of Jane Austen, Willa Cather, Katherine Anne Porter, and Joan Didion. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1990. Stout admits to not trying to show the influence of Austen on the other writers she examines, who are all American. According to Stout, all four writers are subversive feminists, leading the reader up to a point, then stopping abruptly allowing the point to be made silently. Stout contends that this unsettling of the reader is intentional, making the reader aware of "the injustice and unreasonableness of the world's patterns of relationships between men and women" (23). She gives abundant examples of incomplete conversations in Austen, as governed by circumstances. According to Stout, "Her heroes and heroines must hope to convey their meaning despite the inadequacies of language" (63).

Sulloway, Alison G. *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*.

Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989. A self-proclaimed moderate feminist, Sulloway prefaces her work with an emphasis to Jane Austen's work as satire and the grief and anger beneath it. She asserts that Austen's fiction often appears to be closer to Mary Wollstonecraft than to the male conduct-book writers whom she read. Of particular importance is the chapter entitled "Voices and Silences: The Province of the Drawing Room and the War of Debates." In Austen's fiction, debates between the sexes advance the plot and often echo "the women question." Concerning the patriarchal society in *Persuasion*, Sulloway states that "Anne turns upside down the whole conduct-book conservative argument about women's weak minds, and their weak bodies and clinging, yet innocent natures" (185).

Tanner, Tony. *Jane Austen*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Tanner admits not adding to scholarship but instead offers "a reading of Jane Austen's novels" (102). He spent twenty years writing this highly influential biography. According to Tanner, all her novels question how it is most appropriate to participate in society or family. The answer, of course, is not easy, especially for Marianne Dashwood in a book which is "about to what extent 'nature' has to be reshaped and 'pruned' to make 'society' possible" and "the resolution can only be a temporary pause in an endless dialectic" (102). In Tanner's view, the frequent silences of Austen's heroines occur "sometimes from necessity, from suffering," or from "sheer lowliness of social or familial position" (186).

VITA

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She intends to pursue a teaching career and earn certification to teach high school because she enjoys helping others with her gift of encouragement. An avid lover of the outdoors, she enjoys hiking, bicycling, and especially horseback riding, a hobby she has loved since the age of 12. She currently lives in the Nashville area with her husband, Chris, and her dog, Scooby.