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### Women Writers Moving Women:

#### A Study of Female Mobility in the Novels of Frances Burney and Jane Austen

*Abstract: Near contemporaries Frances Burney and Jane Austen established their careers as novelists in the latter half of the long-eighteenth century, a period well-known, thanks to Jürgen Habermas, for its separation of the bourgeois public and private spheres. The novel was a medium that straddled the two spheres, enabling bourgeois women writers, such as Burney and Austen, to voice private concerns in a public arena. By publishing their novels, both authors were transgressing into the public sphere, and their differing treatments of female mobility—of women moving, both literally and figuratively, between the public and private spheres—serve as their respective contributions to the still ongoing debate about women’s proper place in the world. This study begins by exploring the fictional tendency to position the realms of the “town” and “country” as public versus private, and then explores fictional representations of women travelling between and within these spaces in Burney’s and Austen’s works. Each author depicts fathers and lovers seeking to keep their heroines’ bodies and expressions of desire safely within the private realm of the home. However, both authors view this patriarchal control and their heroines’ public transgressions very differently. Although Burney treats movement away from the home as necessary for young women to gain experience before marriage, her heroines have little to no control over what happens to them within public spaces, and always ultimately return to retired lifestyles by way of marriage. Austen, although an avid reader and admirer of Burney, veers significantly from the sentimental novel tradition she puts forth by increasingly exploring the greater autonomy that a more public and mobile lifestyle offers to women. Although her novels, like Burney’s, always end in marriage, this does not always ensure a return to a static and “safe” country lifestyle.*

“The inconsiderate facility with which she had wandered about with a person so little known to her, so underbred, and so forward, appeared now to herself inexcusable; and she determined, if but spared this dreadful punishment, to pass the whole of her future life in unremitting caution.”  
—Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 637

“She now felt a great inclination to go to the outer door; she wanted to see if it rained. Why was she to suspect herself of another motive? Captain Wentworth must be out of sight. She left her seat, she would go, one half of her should not always be so much wiser than the other half, or always suspecting the other of being worse than it was. She would see if it rained.”  
—Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 193

Near contemporaries Frances Burney (1752-1840) and Jane Austen (1775-1817)

established their careers as novelists in the latter half of the long eighteenth century (roughly 1700-1815), a period well-known—thanks to Jürgen Habermas—for its separation of the bourgeois public and private spheres. Yet realistically there had to have been movement occurring between these two supposedly “distinct” spheres. Paula R. Backscheider in her essay “The Novel’s Gendered Space” claims that the eighteenth-century novel (and novelist) occupied a “liminal space” that conducted this necessary dialogue between the public and private spheres: “Habermas describes a felt need for a space that mediates ‘private’ concern and ‘public’ action, and the novel both models it and provides it” (20). Ian Watt in his seminal work, *The Rise of the Novel*, reinforces this idea when he notes that “early novelists...made an extremely significant break with tradition, and named their characters in such a way as to suggest that they were to be regarded as particular individuals in the contemporary social environment” (19). Therefore, the eighteenth-century novel is characterized by its ability to give the private concerns of the individual relevance “in the contemporary social environment.” In other words, the private sphere is made public through the medium of the novel.

For women writers in particular, who as members of the bourgeois middle class were automatically relegated to the private, domestic sphere, writing and publishing their ideas for profit was transgressing into the public sphere. Although over the course of the eighteenth

century, novel-writing became seen as a more “appropriate” pursuit for women (Spencer x), it was transgressive enough that women writers like Burney and Austen kept their own names anonymous and signed their works “By a Lady.” Many women writers (Burney included) also prefaced their novels with an apology or justification for writing. Burney’s tended to reference her father, Dr. Burney in order to show the public that she had his blessing in the pursuit of her writing career (despite that fact—and maybe because of the fact—that she had published her first novel, *Evelina*, without his knowledge). Austen, however, never prefaced her novels with this kind of apology (James-Cavan 10), and this perhaps reflects the greater self-assurance of women writers in the wake of Burney’s immense success. Nevertheless, even women writers as seemingly unapologetic as Austen still felt wary about public display because it often signified “immodest” sexual display. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “public woman” and “woman of the town” to mean “prostitute,” thus highlighting the risk women ran by “exposing” themselves (in any way) in the public sphere.

Burney and Austen were famous for their courtship novels, specifically, and these texts lend themselves especially well to the debate on women’s movement, for the plots focus on the brief period in a young woman’s life in which she ventures out of the safety of her father’s home and ultimately enters the home of her husband. This in-between space is essentially a public one. Backscheider describes this period in a young woman’s life as an incredible opening for narrative possibilities: “The time of courtship could be made into a subversive space. Women writers throughout the century remarked that it was the single moment in a woman’s life when she had power, and it was also the time in which identities were clarified and hopes for the future formulated” (21). Often called “coming out,” the courtship period was both a dangerous and powerful time for young women in which the course of their future lives was often determined.

Whereas in Burney's novels the courtship plot often functions as a means for the heroine to gain experience by way of encounters within the public realm of city life, Austen's novels feature heroines who gain experience by undergoing interior changes. When Austen's heroines travel between or move within public and private spaces, it is for the purpose of their emotional development as much as for the movement of the plot. For Burney, most—if not all—public arenas signify sexual and social danger for the heroine in which they are courting associations with “public women” or “women of the town,” while her marriage endings finally serve to bring the heroine safely within the private realm of the home and thus discourage future mobility. In contrast, Austen's heroines tend to be strong enough to withstand the supposed temptations of public life and often utilize these spaces to their own advantage. In this way, Austen's novels blur the stark distinction between public and private life and, in doing so, allow for greater room for women's movement between them.

### **The Geographic Segregation of the Public and Private Spheres**

As England became increasingly industrialized over the course of the eighteenth century and cities such as London and Bath became cultural centers of commerce and amusement, so too grew the cultural tendency to view the “town” and the “country” as diametrically opposed to one another. In this way, the two geographic spheres began to stand for public and private modes of life. In courtship narratives, although some movement between the two spheres is necessary “both for the movement of the novel and the development of the heroine” (Gonda 116), Burney and Austen tend to value this necessitous movement—as well as the spaces of the town and country themselves—very differently.

In Burney's novels, the country often symbolizes domestic life and innocence, whereas the "town"—which they must regrettably experience for a short time in order to gain "experience"—represents the World with all of its dangerous attractions that threaten to ruin the heroine's virginal character. Carolina Gonda, picking up on the sexual implications of the city "experience" in Burney's fiction, notes that, "The desire for the daughter's acquisition of knowledge and experience is always tempered by the conviction that all knowledge is potentially carnal, all experience potentially sexual—and that either will involve the daughter's departure from the true paradise of the home for the false paradise of the extrafamilial world, never to return" (126). Gonda even suggests that a novel such as *Evelina; or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*—in which Burney's title heroine repeatedly makes mistakes in the various public spaces of London—function as a "safe" medium through which a young woman reader might "experience" public life without moving outside of the private realm of the home: "Evelina's visit to London, carefully chaperoned by Mrs. Mirvan, is to serve the same function as *Evelina* does...a safe way of acquiring the right kind of knowledge and experience, of preventing desires for the wrong kind" (116). Burney's novels, in their tendency to starkly oppose town and country life, can be seen as ultimately discouraging women's movement outside of the domestic sphere of country life. Furthermore, the predetermined or intrinsic meaning she assigns to "town" and "country" lifestyles effectually robs her heroines of any agency in determining the outcome of their movements within and between these locations.

In *Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, Burney sets up her title heroine as a modern-day Eve who leaves the "Garden of Eden" that is her country home of Berry Hill—where she has lived all her life with her surrogate father Reverend Villars (no doubt meant to represent God)—for the temptations of London. When Evelina writes to beg Villars for

permission to accompany the Mirvans on their trip to London, Villars fears to let Evelina venture too far from him because of her mother's past mistakes in the city. Caroline Evelyn, like her daughter, was also raised by Reverend Villars, but eventually forced to leave Berry Hill to accompany her dissolute mother, Madame Duval, to Paris. In Paris, unguarded by Villars' watchful eye, she clandestinely marries Evelina's father in order to escape an arranged one planned by Madame Duval, and is subsequently abandoned by him and the marriage certificate burned when he learns she will not receive her inheritance. Shamed and pregnant, Caroline returns to Berry Hill, gives birth to Evelina, and immediately dies. Years later, Villars laments that he did not follow her to Paris and watch over her: "How often have I since regretted that I did not accompany her thither! protected and supported by me, the misery and disgrace which awaited her, might, perhaps, have been avoided" (16). Although Madame Duval's faulty parenting is certainly to blame, the city environment of Paris frames the incident and seems almost to have pre-determined Caroline's "fall from grace." Had Villars been there, Caroline's situation would no longer have been a "public" one; "protected and supported" by his vigilant gaze, Paris would likely have lost most of its sexual threat for Evelina's mother.

In Burney's *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth*, the slightest removal of the daughter away from the protective gaze of the father is treated as extremely dangerous, even when it is only to the nearby home of a well-meaning uncle. Mrs. Tyrold strongly advises her husband against allowing Camilla to leave: "Forgive me, my dear Mr. Tyrold; I do not mean to reflect upon your brother, but he is not you!—and with you alone, this dear inexperienced girl can be secure from all harm" (218). Without openly stating what "harm" Camilla needs protection from, the reader surely understands the sexual implications of Mrs. Tyrold's words. Although no real danger occurs to harm Camilla in the home of Sir Hugh, this small movement is the first of many that

begins Camilla's downward spiral. Although this removal from the father's immediate gaze is necessary to bring her into closer contact with her love interest, Edgar Mandlebert, it is also the complications involved in this sexual awakening that drive Camilla farther and farther from the domestic center until, finally, she is discovered delirious and alone in an Inn (i.e. a public space) after having led her father to prison for her unpaid debts in the city. The ultimate message: any removal from the paternal home (except in marriage), *especially* if it be to a city, runs the risk of catastrophe for young women.

Austen's novels, in contrast, are far more ambivalent in their portrayal of town and country life. More invested in the individual's interior development than in theatrical plot lines, Austen caters her novels' environments to suit her heroines' developing consciousness. Furthermore, in her novels, it is not always clear which locations are "town" and which are "country"; Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*, for instance, travels to the resort town of Lyme Regis during its off-season. Although something catastrophic happens to another young woman of Anne's acquaintance, Anne gets the chance to shine in this environment, removed from the stifling gaze of her family and their small acquaintance in the country. Later, in the commercial environment of Bath, Anne is able to actively rekindle her romance with Wentworth, unobserved and unhindered. Therefore, in Austen's novels, city life does not always signal "danger" to the reader, while country life does not always signify innocence and happiness. This far-less rigid depiction of geographic location actually lends Austen's heroines far greater opportunity and agency to move between these different environments. Because the meaning of each location is not pre-determined, Austen's heroines can either suffer or benefit from their environment based on their own unique personalities and individual choices within them.

Austen actually alludes to the novelistic tradition of the fallen “woman of the town” in the side-stories within her first published novels, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), but effectively resists this tradition by having her heroines avoid the same fate. In *Sense and Sensibility*, which Kathleen James-Cavan reads as a partial parody of Burney’s *Evelina*, Austen includes the histories of two fallen women, a mother and daughter—much like Evelina and her mother, Caroline Evelyn—both named Eliza—to whom Colonel Brandon is intimately connected. After Eliza Sr.’s “fall” and subsequent death, Brandon—like Reverend Villars—takes over guardianship of her daughter. Unfortunately, Eliza Jr. succumbs to the same fate as her mother when left unguarded in the streets of Bath. Brandon laments,

I allowed her, (imprudently, as it has since turned out), at her earnest desire, to go to Bath with one of her young friends, who was attending her father there for his health...He, her father, a well-meaning, but not a quick-sighted man, could really, I believe, give no information; for he had been generally confined to the house, while the girls were ranging over the town and making what acquaintance they chose. (228)

Brandon, like the parents of Burney’s novels, blames a lack of fatherly control for Eliza’s fall. Freed from the constraints of the domestic sphere by the absence of a vigilant male gaze, Eliza “rang[es] over the town” and becomes “a woman of the town.” While this brief history seems to follow in the tradition of the sentimental novel (and Burney), James-Cavan points out that it “is self-consciously excessive, driven by the clichés of the sentimental novel, because it is the pretext for the novel’s conclusion, which finally *overturns* sentimentality” (my emphasis, 26). In other words, we must keep in mind that Eliza’s fall is a back-story, and that her history is not repeated by the actual heroines. Through this excessive back-story, Austen sets up both



Marianne and Elinor Dashwood as “potential Eliza[s]” and then *consciously* “resists the cliché’s of the sentimental novel” by combatting the spatial assumptions the sentimental novel puts forth (James-Cavan 26-7). In other words, the story of Eliza functions serves to demonstrate the novelistic tradition that Austen’s own novel is reacting against. Rather than encountering their potential seducers whilst “ranging over the “town,” both Marianne and Elinor encounter Willoughby and Edward Ferrars in the country and, frequently, within their own homes. By changing the location of the possible seduction, Austen actively resists the very language which works to dissuade women from public participation—that is, she resists the underlying meaning of the phrases “public woman” and “woman of the town,” which imply that public spaces will, without fail, lead to the ruin of a woman’s character. With this trope subverted, her heroines can then experience “the town” without further risk of sexual danger, and can even benefit from their time there.

Austen again subverts the sentimental tradition of the fallen “woman of the town” in *Pride and Prejudice* by setting up Lydia Bennet as a foil to both her sister Elizabeth. Lydia—like Eliza Brandon—is “seduced” by Mr. Wickham on a visit to the fashionable resort town of Brighton. Although a lack of parental supervision is certainly to blame, Elizabeth admits that the main contributors to Lydia’s fall were her faulty education and an over-indulged sentimentality:

‘...she is very young; she has never been taught to think on serious subjects; and for the last half year, nay, for a twelvemonth, she has been given up to nothing but amusement and vanity. She has been allowed to dispose of her time in the most idle and frivolous manner, and to adopt any opinions that came in her way. Since the –shire were first quartered in Meryton, nothing but love, flirtation, and officers, have been in her head.’ (Austen 292)

While the city environment of Brighton certainly gives Lydia the *opportunity* to be seduced, her frivolous education and personality are truly to blame for her bad decision-making. Like Marianne of *Sense and Sensibility*, Elizabeth Bennet is another “potential Eliza” initially attracted to the same man (Mr. Wickham) who later elopes with her sister; but through her good sense and self-discipline she resists seduction and, through Elizabeth, Austen resists the tradition of the fallen woman. Austen lessens the impact of the “town” or public sphere in contributing to the ruin of young women by making the outcomes rather a test of her female characters’ individual wills and circumstances.

By abandoning the traditional connotations of “the town” in her first two published novels, Austen is better able to explore the benefits that a more public environment might offer to young, unmarried women. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Gardiner suggests that Jane accompany her and her husband back to London in order to relieve some of the tedium of waiting at home and dwelling on Bingley’s unexplained absence: “But do you think [Jane] would be prevailed on to go back with us? Change of scene might be of service—and perhaps a little relief from home, may be as useful as anything” (170). Elizabeth agrees and silently remarks to herself that Jane’s being in London will also put her more in Bingley’s way. Similarly, in *Sense and Sensibility*, after Marianne’s rejection by Willoughby, her mother advises her two daughters to remain in London, rather than return home to Barton Cottage:

A variety of occupations, of objects, and of company, which could not be procured at Barton, would be inevitable there, and might yet, she hoped, cheat Marianne, at times, into some interest beyond herself, and even into some amusement...From all danger of seeing Willoughby again, her mother considered her to be at least equally safe in town as in the country...chance had less in its

favour in the croud of London than ever in the retirement of Barton, where it might force him before her while paying that visit at Allenham on his marriage.

(232)

Mrs. Dashwood shows that the merit of the town or country is not intrinsic but, rather, is far more dependent on the circumstances of the individual experiencing them. Whereas, for Burney, public amusements of the city and the various people within them—however diverting—always signify sexual danger for the heroine, in *Sense and Sensibility* the “amusement[s]” and “croud” of London are treated as positive distractions for Marianne in her grief. By being far more realistic about the benefits of both private and public life for young women, rather than placing them always in stark opposition for the purpose of moralizing, Austen establishes a far more utilitarian outlook towards women moving between the spheres of town and country, public and private.

### **Women Travelling Between Spheres**

The eighteenth century marked a tremendous increase in the quality of roads as a direct result of the Industrial Revolution. Pat Rogers writes,

The Industrial Revolution could not have occurred as it did without better carriage of goods, but the take-off depended also on quicker and easier conveyance of people. British roads had not yet equaled the level they achieved under Roman occupation: indeed, they made no startling advance from the Middle Ages until around 1700. It was only two generations before Austen’s birth that a rush of turnpike acts in the second and third decades of the new century heralded a gradual opening up of major routes across the nation. (428)

The betterment of roads made travelling long distances increasingly easier and thus made travel far more common. Not only did these improvements allow for easier movement between town and country, but they also presented a greater opportunity for women to be literally mobile. In both Burney's and Austen's novels, travel away from the home environment is treated as a necessary means for the heroine to gain knowledge and experience of the "outside" world before marriage. However, the sexualized connotations of female mobility—that a woman who is "unfixed" must necessarily be sexually available—make travel a controversial activity for women.

In Burney's novels, her heroines experience some of their greatest moments of sexual danger while inside moving carriages, implying that the carriage's intrinsic privacy and mobility afford the perfect setting for a woman's "seduction." For Burney, the unfixedness of her heroines at these moments as they move between two places marks a time of incredible vulnerability; for, when travelling in a carriage, her heroines are both unsheltered by the gaze of the father and even the roof of a home. Evelina, for instance, is taken advantage of by Sir Clement Willoughby a total of three times while inside a moving carriage. In the first instance, when their carriage "broke down!" (65) on the way back from Ranelagh, Evelina recalls being "lifted suddenly...by Sir Clement Willoughby, who begged permission to assist me, though he did not wait to have it granted, but carried me in his arms back to Ranelagh" (65). His removal of Evelina by bodily force, and the subsequent time they spend alone together until the rest of their party returns, alerts readers of Evelina's very real danger at this moment. Sir Clement again tries his luck with the carriage—this time in a far more calculated way—after encountering Evelina at the opera when she has mistakenly lost her party. Against her better judgment, Sir Clement coerces Evelina into his own carriage and, having given the driver false directions, attempts to carry her off (who knows where). Evelina finally realizes the full extent of the sexual danger this carriage

ride puts her in when Willoughby “passionately kissed [her] hand” (100). She confides to Reverend Villars that, at that moment, “Never, in my whole life, have I been so terrified” (100). Sir Clement’s final attempt to get Evelina alone by way of carriage occurs during the elaborate hoax planned by Captain Mirvan who wants to prank Madame Duval, Evelina’s grandmother. Sending the women to town on a false errand, the gentlemen attack the carriage in the guise of robbers. Captain Mirvan carries off Madame Duval, while Sir Clement retains Evelina in the carriage for himself. The only method by which Evelina is able to procure her freedom is to “allow [Sir Clement] to hope, that [she] will, in future, be less averse to trusting [herself] for a few moments alone with [him]” (148). In other words, Evelina only manages to escape by assuring Sir Clement of her greater sexual availability sometime “in future.”

Although Sir Clement is unsuccessful in his pursuit of Evelina by way of carriage abductions, Eugenia Tyrold of Burney’s *Camilla; or, A Picture of Youth* is not so fortunate. When leaving the opera, the too-trusting Eugenia, having lost sight of her party, is cajoled into a carriage by the fortune-hunting Mr. Bellamy and subsequently forced to elope with him to Scotland: “to secure her fortune, by her hand” (799). The sheer speed with which the hired carriages move enables Bellamy and Eugenia to evade pursuit, and he successfully gains “her hand” before the marriage can be stopped. In each of these attempted carriage abductions, whether successful or no, Burney presents travel as incredibly dangerous activity for her heroines. Her portrayals suggest that movement between spaces threatens to trap women in between; that is, the sexual dangers presented by this movement threaten to keep women permanently outside of the domestic sphere as “public women.”

Although Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* is frequently read merely as a burlesque of the gothic novel, in it Austen also burlesques sentimental novelists whose plots revolve around

repeated instances of sexual danger to the heroine. Catherine Morland is the “anti-heroine”: she is not very intelligent, not that attractive, not that wealthy or poor, and is not abandoned by one or both of her parents. Her uneventful and cheerful first journey from her home in the country to Bath with her boring neighbors both contradicts and pokes fun at a novelistic tradition. Before Catherine leaves for Bath, Austen hilariously points out all of the dangers her mother does *not* warn her against:

Cautions against the violence of such noblemen and baronets as delight in forcing young ladies away to some remote farm-house, must, at such a moment, relieve the fullness of her heart. Who would not think so? But Mrs. Morland knew so little of lords and baronets, that she entertained no notion of their general mischievousness, and was wholly unsuspecting of danger to her daughter from their machinations. (Austen 9)

Far from fearing any sexual danger to her daughter, Mrs. Morland fears only that Catherine might catch cold when coming home from the Rooms in the evening and that she might accidentally overspend (9). Despite the narrator’s shock at Mrs. Morland’s supposed bad parenting, the trip takes place as safely as Mrs. Morland had anticipated: “It was performed with suitable quietness and uneventful safety. Neither robbers nor tempests befriended them, nor one lucky overturn to introduce them to the hero” (10). Catherine’s travels lead her to the discovery that the sexual dangers she had come to expect from reading sentimental novels are those least likely to occur, but that dangers of a different kind—such as those of prejudice and duplicity—lurk where she least expects them. The realization that her newfound friend in Bath could be insincere in her affections toward her brother, or that a man as seemingly respectable as General Tilney could be harsh to his children and throw her out of his home without a moment’s notice,

comes as an incredible blow to the naïve Catherine. Yet, despite the emotional pain both these incidents cause Catherine, they are nevertheless necessary for her to grow and mature. Rather than condemning travel itself, Austen in *Northanger* condemns the characters responsible for causing Catherine pain. The result of this more honest depiction of travel and life experiences for young women is that movement away from the home is treated far more pragmatically and positively. Austen presents movement away from the home as far less of a sexual threat and far more desirable for young women.

In Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, travel also plays an integral and acknowledged role in bringing Elizabeth and Darcy together. Elizabeth's trip to the Collins' new home first brings her back into contact with Mr. Darcy after his departure from Kent, and—"in spite of all his endeavours...to conquer" his feelings for her—spurs him to make his first proposal of marriage to her (211). Having rejected his offer, Elizabeth returns home, melancholy and lonely in the absence of her sister Jane until her Aunt Gardiner suggests she accompany her and her husband on their planned summer tour. Elizabeth rapturously accepts and Austen writes, "No scheme could have been more agreeable to Elizabeth, and her acceptance of the invitation was most ready and grateful. 'My dear, dear aunt,' she rapturously cried, 'what delight! what felicity! You give me fresh life and vigour. Adieu to disappointment and spleen. What are men to rocks and mountains? Oh! What hours of transport we shall spend!'" (181). Here, the prospect of travel, of moving away from home and the tedium of country life, actually lends Elizabeth "fresh life and vigour." Furthermore, Austen's use of the term "transport" to describe Elizabeth's envisioned future happiness highlights the way in which her emotions at this time are tied up with the prospect of *movement*; specifically, movement away from home.

In the midst of their tour, the Gardiners decide to visit Derbyshire and take a tour of Pemberley, while Mr. Darcy is supposedly away from home. This visit to his home allows Elizabeth to see, not only the home she had given up in rejecting Darcy, but it also allows her to see Darcy from a more generous point of view. When Elizabeth stands gazing at Darcy's portrait during a tour given by his housekeeper, Austen writes,

There was certainly at this moment, in Elizabeth's mind, a more gentle sensation towards the original, than she had ever felt in the height of their acquaintance. The commendation bestowed on him...was of no trifling nature...As a brother, landlord, and master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship!—How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him! Every idea that had been brought forward by the housekeeper was favourable to his character, and as she stood before the canvas, on which he was represented, and fixed his eyes upon herself, she thought of his regard with a deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth, and softened its impropriety of expression. (264)

Travelling to Darcy's home and hearing the "commendation bestowed on him" by his housekeeper enables Elizabeth to notice and admire aspects of his character that she could not see either at Netherfield Park or at Rosings. When the two finally marry, Austen openly acknowledges to the reader how important Elizabeth's trip to Derbyshire with the Gardiners was in bringing the two together: "With the Gardiners, they were always on the most intimate terms. Darcy, as well as Elizabeth, really loved them; and they were both ever sensible of the warmest gratitude towards the persons who, by bringing her into Derbyshire, had been the means of



uniting them” (385). Rather than censuring travel as a danger, or even as a necessary evil, Austen praises its role in enlarging Elizabeth’s future prospects by gaining a greater understanding of her future partner.

Although both *Northanger* and *Pride and Prejudice* explore the benefits of travel in enlarging the prospects for the heroines’ future lives, twenty-seven-year-old Anne Elliot of Austen’s last completed novel *Persuasion* benefits most from travelling away from her family home, Kellynch Hall. Austen explicitly blames Anne’s static lifestyle at Kellynch for her persistent sadness after her broken engagement to Captain Wentworth eight years before the start of the novel, and makes it clear that a movement away from home is what finally gives Anne “fresh life and vigour” and the confidence to renew her romance with Wentworth. In recalling the broken engagement, Austen writes,

[T]ime had softened down much, perhaps nearly all of peculiar attachment to him, --but [Anne] had been too dependent on time alone; not aid had been given in change of place...or in any novelty or enlargement of society.—No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear comparison with Frederick Wentworth...in the small limits of the society around them. (67)

Austen’s narrator explicitly blames a lack of movement from home and no variety of “society” for Anne’s continued sadness over her broken engagement to Wentworth, as well as her continued feelings for him. Only after her forced departure from the confines of Kellynch Hall—first to her sister’s home, then to the resort town of Lyme Regis, and finally to Bath—does Anne begin to heal; for she is finally given the opportunity, not only to be useful, but to prove her worth among people who have not been used to her presence all their lives. In her sister Mary’s house she is still fairly neglected, but considered far more useful to its inhabitants than she was at

Kellynch, especially as a nurse when their young boy breaks his collarbone. When she travels to Lyme Regis, her spirits and her looks are rejuvenated by the expansive landscape and her appearance openly appreciated by the eyes of a stranger (who turns out to be her cousin and heir to Kellynch, Mr. Elliot):

[A]s they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of. She was looking remarkably well; her very regular, very pretty features, having the bloom and freshness of youth restored by the fine wind which had been blowing on her complexion, and by the animation of eye which it had also produced. (132-3)

Most importantly, Captain Wentworth notices this appraisal, and begins to change his mind about Anne: "Captain Wentworth looked round at her instantly in a way which shewed his noticing of it. He gave her a momentary glance, --a glance of brightness, which seemed to say, 'That man is struck with you, -- and even I, at this moment, see something like Anne Elliot again'" (133). After re-appreciating her looks, Wentworth is able to re-appreciate her character. Following Louisa Musgrove's terrible fall on the steps of Lyme, Anne's quick-thinking and level-headedness save the day, and forces Wentworth to acknowledge Anne's native strength, where before he saw only weakness: "no one so proper, so capable as Anne!" (141). Anne overhearing this speech, finally knows herself to be useful and appreciated, despite her family's negligent treatment of her. This knowledge, made possible only through a removal from her family home, ultimately gives Anne the confidence necessary to pursue Wentworth in Bath and determine the future course of her life.

Although Burney's heroines must travel away from their family homes to bring about their future marriage endings, she treats this movement as a necessary evil. The dangers her

heroines encounter in the midst of traveling ultimately portray any movement away from the domestic, familial environment as a dangerous experience. Austen, on the other hand, portrays *immobility* as undesirable, and movement away from the home as far safer and more beneficial. In this way, Austen's fiction resists the gendered assumptions of mobility by showing that women moving and travelling does not always—or even often—coincide with sexual availability. Rather, her novels portray travel as both enlarging women's experiences and furthering their social advancement.

### **Consumer Spaces and “Women of the Town”**

As consumerism grew in England, a public sphere emerged in which women were able to participate almost as equally as men. Deirdre Shauna Lynch cites the 1780s as the start of a fifty-year period in which “‘public opinion’ first becomes the watchword of British print culture, and in which ‘shopping’, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (which quotes Frances Burney's journals) also makes its earliest appearance in print” (214). She explains that changes in “the architecture of retail space and changes in the protocols of buying and selling” led to a new consumer culture that specifically “began to offer itself to Englishwomen as a stage on which they could produce themselves as public beings” (215). Not only could women publicly fashion themselves through their purchases, but the new phenomenon of “window shopping” made retail spaces into venues for female sociability: “One could do something in a shop besides buy...Shops had become public sites in which a woman might be seen herself and see, and network with, other women. Shopping could now serve as a pretext for and mechanism of sociability: a license to join the crowd” (Lynch 221-2). As is the case with most cultural

phenomena aligned with women, consumer culture received a vast amount of criticism in the eighteenth century from moralists and novelists alike.

As a writer, Burney often assumed the role of both moralist and novelist, and frequently highlights the supposed dangers of consumer spaces for women in her novels. It is within these spaces that her heroines always mistakenly toe the line between a woman in public and a “public woman.” Julia Epstein writes that Burney’s heroines, internalizing this social risk, “dread what they understand as a public exposure, an exposure akin to public nakedness” (202). The negative light in which Burney portrays commercial spaces ultimately discourages women from taking part in this growing public pastime. Through this discouragement, Burney’s novels *insist* that the proper sphere for women is always the domestic sphere, despite the necessity of sometimes appearing in public.

In Burney’s third novel, *Camilla, or A Picture of Youth*, her title heroine walks through the shops of Southampton accompanied by a woman of inferior and ambiguous social standing. Their strange appearance together and the fact that they do not buy anything attracts an incredible amount of social censure from on-looking men: “Some supposed they were only seeking to attract notice; others thought they were deranged in mind; and others, again, imagined they were shoplifters, and hastened back to their counters, to examine what was missing of their goods. (608) The social mixing that takes place within this retail space, rather than lending Camilla greater control over her own public self-presentation, leads male onlookers to develop unflattering surmises about her character in the form of a public wager. The men involved in the bet, corner her in a bath house under the assumption that she is the kind of woman who merits such familiar behavior. Burney writes of this moment, “[Camilla’s] beauty, her apparently unprotected situation, and the account of the wager, seemed to render her an object to be stared

at without scruple” (613). Camilla has absolutely no control over her appearance in public; her outward character is all determined by the on-looking men.

Not only do consumer spaces threaten the ruin of Camilla’s character, but they also threaten her financial ruin as well. Through the apparent necessity of appearing fashionable in public spaces, Camilla overspends and leads her family into financial ruin. Later in the novel, her many creditors carry her father off to jail for the sums which she owes. These catastrophes resulting from her mistakes in public commercial spaces leaves Camilla determined never to venture outside of her familial home again and “to pass the whole of her future life in unremitting caution” (637). Her eventual marriage to her cousin, Edgar, confirms Camilla’s “proper” and “safe” position within the domestic, familial sphere of country life. Although these forays into public are necessary for Camilla to gain “experience,” the end result is an even greater value placed on domestic life for women.

Austen, in contrast—perhaps recognizing the inevitability of an increasingly mobile consumer society—explores in her novels the ways in which commercial spaces have the power to lend women greater autonomy through increased opportunities for exercising choice. Her portrayals of circulating libraries, through which women had access not only to books and ideas, but consumer goods as well, illustrate this expanded opportunity for exercising choice. Clara Tuite writes that, as “a building devoted to mobility, exchange, and ‘circulation,’” the circulating library, “hyperbolizes mobile property” (“Austen’s Romantic Fragment” 183). By way of the library, women were given the opportunity to participate in the ever-moving and ever-expanding public realm of commerce and ideas.

In *Mansfield Park*, it is significant that, during the period of Fanny’s banishment to Portsmouth by her tyrannical Uncle, Sir Thomas, as she longingly awaits his summons for her

return—that is, when she has the *least* amount of control over her own movement—she turns to the local circulating library to occupy her time and to help educate her younger sister:

[T]he remembrance of the said books grew so potent and stimulative, that Fanny found it impossible not to try for books again. There were none in her father's house; but wealth is luxurious and daring—and some of hers found its way to a circulating library. She became a subscriber—amazed at being anything in *propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way; to be a renter, a *chuser* of books! And to be having any one's improvement in view in her *choice*! But so it was" (my emphasis 399-400).

Here, Fanny demonstrates her amazement at the power a circulating library invests her with. It allows her to become a "chuser," and, by exercising her power of choice, she finds a outlet through which she can exercise her autonomy in "*propria persona*"—or, "as her own self" (400).

In *Sanditon*, Austen's fragment of a novel written just before her death, the young Charlotte Heywood who has left her family home in the country for the first time, tests her newfound freedom by choosing from and *refusing* a variety of goods offered in Sanditon's local circulating library. When Charlotte first enters the library, she is eager to buy all she sees, but has the prudence to "check" her enthusiasm and thus resist the temptations of consumerism:

The library of course, afforded everything; all the useless things in the world that could not be done without, and among so many pretty temptations...Charlotte began to feel that she must check herself...and that it would not do for her to spend all her money the very first evening. She took up a book; it happened to be a volume of [Burney's] *Camilla*. She had not Camilla's youth, and had no

intention of having her distress, -- so, she turned from the drawers of rings and brooches repressed further solicitation and paid for what she bought. (178)

In having her heroine pick up a volume of Burney's *Camilla* and then reject it, Austen openly rejects Burney's attitude towards consumer culture. Whereas in *Camilla*, Burney portrays her heroine as having no control over what happens to her in consumer spaces, in Austen's *Sanditon* and *Mansfield Park*, her heroines are sensible enough to exercise their power of consumer choice without being overwhelmed by it. Margaret Drabble writes that, "Charlotte Heywood, hesitating in front of a tray of trinkets and trying to prevent herself from buying things she doesn't want, is hesitating on the brink of enormous change" (30). By embracing, rather than rejecting a growing consumer society, Austen is better able to explore these "enormous change[s]" that increased "circulation" and *movement* in a larger sphere offers women

Since enjoyment and fashion had become such an integral part of the consumer experience, public amusements, such as theater-going, the opera, and the various new pleasure gardens in cities such as London and Bath, can also be considered a part of the long-eighteenth-century consumer experience. David Selwyn remarks that "Enjoyment was an important aspect of shopping, which became a popular leisure pursuit," (217). In these spaces, women needed only to pay in order to enter and "join the crowd."

Burney repeatedly uses these spaces as sites of social transgression for her heroines in which they constantly toe the thin line between a woman in public and a "public woman." Evelina gradually learns through repeated mistakes the caution that is apparently necessary for women in public spaces. During the scene in Marylebone Gardens—a popular pleasure garden in London—Evelina panics at the sound of the fireworks and runs away from her friends. Lost in the crowd, her lonely situation is interpreted to mean that she is sexually available: "Every other

moment, I was spoken to, by some bold and unfeeling man, to whom my distress, which, I think, must be very apparent, only furnished a pretence for impertinent witticisms, or free gallantry” (234). Rather than being treated positively, here Evelina’s “join[ing] the crowd” is presented as a sexual threat. Realizing her incredible danger, Evelina latches on to the first two women she sees and begs for their protection, only to learn shortly after that she is walking arm-in-arm with two prostitutes. Ruth Bernard Yeazell writes that this scene, “emblematically stages the risk that every young lady runs who ventures ‘out’ into public spaces – the risk of being seen to be one who belongs to them, a woman of the town, as the idiom has it, or one who walks the streets”” (qtd. Epstein 202). Seeming to belong to the crowd, rather than lending Evelina greater freedom of movement, threatens to trap her with women at the very bottom of the social ladder—like Camilla, Evelina has no control over public interpretation of her actions. For Burney, “a license to join the crowd” is not a freedom but a social trap.

Public commercial spaces in Austen’s novels, on the other hand, actually offer women a certain level of autonomy through which they can pursue their own desires without public censure. In *Persuasion*, Anne Elliot uses the public spaces of Bath to bring about a reconciliation with her former fiancé, Captain Wentworth. After eight long years of waiting in vain for Wentworth to return after making his fortune in the war, Anne is finally able to go to him in the public spaces of Bath: “[T]he romance of the ballroom is relocated in *Persuasion* to more explicitly commercial spaces such as Molland’s confectioner’s shop where Anne Elliot is able to use the comparative autonomy and anonymity of the sociability of consumption to stage an encounter with Wentworth” (Russell 189-90). In commercial spaces, *shielded* rather than endangered by the crowd, Anne is finally able to exercise the “independence” that Wentworth has had all along. Whereas in Burney’s *Evelina*, the heroine shies away from all public



expressions of desire for fear of being mistaken for a “public woman”—in *Persuasion*, Austen’s heroine consciously uses public spaces to successfully and discreetly pursue the object of her desire.

As soon as Anne realizes that Wentworth has arrived in Bath, she takes advantage of the autonomy offered to her by public commercial spaces and physically places herself in his way. When she first spies him across the street while inside Molland’s Confectioner’s shop, Austen writes that Anne suddenly “felt a great inclination to go to the outer door” and place herself in his line of vision (193). Again, in the Octagon Room—the central assembly room in Bath where people mingled before performances—Anne positions herself by the entrance and, when Wentworth enters, Austen writes that, “Anne was the nearest to him, and making yet a little *advance*, she instantly spoke” (my emphasis 198-99). Although Anne’s “formidable” father and sister are present during this meeting, Austen writes, “Their being in the background was a support to Anne; she knew nothing of their looks and felt equal to everything which she believed right to be done” (199). In *Persuasion*, the crowd of public spaces drowns out the presence of Anne’s controlling family, and enables her to do what *she* believes is “right to be done.”

Austen even makes a comparison to one of Burney’s own characters when describing Anne’s self-determined movements in public, but she veers from Burney’s model by treating the “scheming” of her own heroine far more positively. When Anne seats herself before the performance begins, Austen writes that she consciously strove to place herself within better “reach” of Wentworth: “...by some other removals, and a little scheming of her own, Anne was enabled to place herself much nearer the end of the bench than she had been before, much more within the reach of a passer-by” (205). Austen jokes that, in doing so, Anne “compar[ed] herself with Miss Larolles, the inimitable Miss Larolles,” the odious socialite from Burney’s *Cecilia*; or,

*Memoirs of an Heiress*. In a similar situation Miss Larolles, like Anne, schemes to place herself in the path of a particular gentleman: “I sat on the outside on purpose to speak to a person or two, that I knew would be strolling about; for if one sits on the inside, there’s no speaking to a creature, you know, so I never do it at the Opera, nor at the boxes in Ranelagh, nor any where” (Burney 286). Whereas Burney treats this self-conscious movement in a public commercial setting as incredibly undesirable in a woman (so that even Anne Elliot feels a bit squeamish about the comparison), Austen writes, “but still she did it” (206). The future with Wentworth that Anne so desperately longs for and finally feels is within her reach trumps the constraints of social convention.

The pay-off of Anne’s efforts to further her romance with Wentworth’s occurs in the public space of the White Hart Inn. Austen had originally planned a different ending for the novel, which took place within the Crofts’ home and by way of Admiral Croft’s own scheming, not Anne’s. The resolution within the White Hart Inn, on the other hand, is far more in keeping with Anne’s growing sense of agency that has been taking place throughout the novel within public spaces. In Austen’s chosen ending, as Wentworth sits near Anne writing a letter, Anne debates with another male friend over the relative constancy of men versus women. Hearing Wentworth’s pen drop close by as he strains to hear their heated conversation, Anne realizes his proximity and that he has been listening, and she deliberately utters the words that will erase all of Wentworth’s doubt about her *own* constancy: She says with feeling, “All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone” (244). Anne’s speech, made in a public location and seemingly to another man, reveals to Wentworth Anne’s enduring feelings for him and spurs a renewed proposal. Far from being taken for a “public woman,” Anne’s advances are noted by no

one but Wentworth—the crowds of public spaces actually enable her to move and choose without her movements being remarked or censured, as they surely would have been within the confines of the familial sphere.

### **Women's Desire: to "Shew" or not?**

For the movement of the courtship narrative, heroines must do more than just place their bodies in the way of their desired object; they must also reveal to him a certain level of emotional attachment. In other words, in order to attain a desirable marriage (a form of social mobility), women must make *some* part of their private feelings public. Yet, the "correct" amount of public emotional display was a hotly debated issue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, addressed by conduct book writers and novelists alike.

Conduct books for women, such as Dr. John Gregory's popular work, *A Father's Legacy to his Daughters* (1774), gave young women conflicting advice as to the proper display of "sensibility" or emotion they should show in order to obtain a marriage. Gregory maintains that young women should not initiate a romance with a man but rather wait to be sought by him and then decide whether or not to encourage his proposals: "It is a maxim laid down among you, and a very prudent one it is, That love is not to begin on your part, but is entirely to be the consequence of our attachment to you" (408). Furthermore, even after the "attachment" of the desired object is secure, women must never reveal to him the full extent of their feelings; simply agreeing to marry him is enough:

If you love him, let me advise you never to discover to him the full extent of your love, no not although you marry him. That sufficiently shews your preference; which is all he is intitled to know. If he has delicacy, he will ask for no stronger

proof of your affection, for your sake; if he has sense, he will not ask it for his own. This is an unpleasant truth; but it is my duty to let you know it. Violent love cannot subsist, at least cannot be expressed, for any time together, on both sides; otherwise the certain consequence, however concealed, is satiety and disgust.

Nature in this case has laid reserve on you. (409)

In all, according to Gregory, very little emotion should ever be made public by a woman; “reserve,” he insists, is *her* duty. However, in the self-same text, he contradictorily praises the female blush—a public indicator of internal emotion—as a woman’s greatest adornment: “When a girl ceases to blush, she has lost the most powerful charm of her beauty. That extreme sensibility which it indicates...in [your sex] is peculiarly engaging” (405). The contradiction between Gregory’s praise of emotional “reserve” on the one hand and “extreme sensibility” on the other leaves women perpetually on the brink of public impropriety. The difference for Gregory seems to be whether the emotional display is voluntary or involuntary on the part of the woman; the choice should never be hers.

Burney, in her novels, enforces Dr. Gregory’s advice to young women by portraying heroines who only ever betray their inmost feelings by way of an involuntary blush. Although the blush often signifies the heroine’s naiveté and innocence, Burney also explores the dangers that might even evolve from a misconstruction of this involuntary display. Evelina, for instance, shows her embarrassment by blushing upon being addressed by Mr. Lovell—the man who plagued her for refusing to dance with him at a ball—at the opera. Noting her embarrassment, Lovel takes advantage of her evident emotion and further embarrasses her by saying that she wears rouge, a trademark of “women of the town”: “I presumed not to infer that *rouge* was the only succedaneum for health; but, really, I have known so many different causes for a lady’s

colour, such as flushing,--anger, --*mauvaise honte*, --and so forth, that I never dare decide to which it may be owing” (81). Lovel goes on to list the other misconstructions of a woman’s blushing and thus implies that Evelina is far less innocent and inexperienced than she appears. Edward A. Bloom, editor of the Oxford edition of *Evelina*, notes that this scene, “register[s] the social difficulties blushing could involve for women. A sign of their sensibility, it could nevertheless indicate an inappropriate understanding of, usually sexual, innuendo. This is the implication of ‘mauvaise honte’, which is defined by OED as ‘false shame; painful diffidence’” (426). Thus, even this small display of emotion can involve women in a myriad of public misconstructions, which threaten to align them with “public women” whose job it is to openly display their sexuality.

Yet while Evelina’s blushing involves her in misconstruction from a man who resents her, for Lord Orville—whom she has feelings for and eventually marries—it represents all that Dr. Gregory praises. After listening to Lovel’s accusation that Evelina is wearing rouge, Orville counters by praising the “natural” female blush, which he maintains is easily distinguishable from rouge: “[T]hat of Nature, is mottled, and varying; that of art, *set*, and *too* smooth; it wants that animation, that glow, that *indescribable something* which, even now that I see it, wholly surpasses all my powers of expression” (81). Not only does Orville here champion Evelina by maintaining that her heightened color stems from natural, “innocent” causes, he also reveals himself to be incredibly struck with her beauty. Her blushing and the “extreme sensibility” that it betrays, plays an integral role in captivating Orville. For instance, in Volume III, Evelina’s succession of blushes reveals both her pleasure at the attentions of Orville as well as her embarrassment over his sister’s social sleight: “first I had blushed at the unexpected politeness of Lord Orville, and immediately afterwards, at the contemptuous failure of it in his sister” (286).

Although these blushes are necessary for Evelina to captivate Orville and, through him, establish her place in the world, they signify no agency on her own part. Unlike Anne Elliot of *Persuasion*, Evelina makes no voluntary “advance[s]” and simply waits (uncalculatingly) for Orville to pursue her; her blushes serve merely entice so that she might remain still while Orville advances.

Unlike Evelina, Elinor Joddrel of Burney’s *The Wanderer* does not wait for her love interest to come to her, and instead pursues him publicly and manically. Through Elinor, Burney supports Dr. Gregory’s advice to young women that they not ever reveal the true extent of their feelings to a man lest they wish to cultivate his “disgust.” Elinor, suspecting her love-interest Harleigh of an attachment to Ellis-Juliet, preemptively declares her love for him even though she knows he does not reciprocate her feelings. Despite his initial rejection, she continues to pursue and plague him for the rest of the novel, effectively distorting the supposed “natural order” of male-female relationships. Appropriately, Elinor also distorts the “natural” blush, is distorted and made disgusting. In one of her many fits of emotion, Elinor turns red from her inability (or unwillingness) to restrain her thwarted desire for Harleigh: “She reddened, passion took possession of every feature, and for a moment nearly choked her voice” (169). Whereas in *Evelina*, the heroine’s blush was rendered innocent and beautiful because involuntary, in *The Wanderer*, Elinor’s red face renders her an object of disgust because of her unwillingness to restrain her “passion.” Thus, Elinor has failed to abide by a woman’s duty of extreme emotional “reserve.”

Burney reiterates this advice of Dr. Gregory’s again in Augustus Tyrold’s letter to his daughter, Camilla, whom he fears has made her feelings for Edgar Mandlebert too widely known by her unguarded nature. He cautions her,

That [love] should be felt unsought may be considered as a mark of discerning sensibility; but that it should be betrayed uncalled for, is commonly, however ungenerously, imagined rather to indicate ungoverned passions, than refined selection. This is often both cruel and unjust; yet, let me ask—Is the world a proper confidant for such a secret? Can the woman who has permitted it to go abroad, reasonably demand that consideration and respect from the community, in which she has been wanting to herself?” (Burney 361)

Although Mr. Tyrold acknowledges that society’s expectations of self-restraint on the part of women are often “cruel and unjust,” he nevertheless maintains that it is “reasonable” for women to keep those feelings private and, if they fail to do so, they cannot “reasonably demand consideration and respect from the community.” In Mr. Tyrold’s speech, Burney’s character even uses the language of mobility to describe emotion restraint, stating that a woman who has revealed her emotions to a man has “permitted it to go abroad”; thus implying that a woman should never allow her emotions to *move* outside of the private sphere.

Austen also weighs in on the issue of the proper display of a woman’s desire in *Sense and Sensibility* by way of the Dashwood sisters, Marianne and Elinor, who come to represent the two opposing extremes of emotional display. Marianne resembles Elinor Joddrel of Burney’s *The Wanderer* in her complete abhorrence of emotional self-restraint, while Elinor, with her extreme prudence and self-restraint, resembles the ideal conduct book woman described by Dr. Gregory. Elinor laments Marianne’s lack of “self-command” as she watches a romance unfolding rapidly between her and Willoughby: “Elinor could not be surprised at their attachment. She only wished that it were less openly shewn; and once or twice did venture to suggest the propriety of some self-command to Marianne” (88). Although Elinor’s fears turn out to be well-founded when her

sister is abandoned by Willoughby after making all of their acquaintance suspect an engagement between them, Marianne ultimately emerges from the novel with her reputation intact. Her friends and family would rather excuse her behavior—and condemn Willoughby’s—than abandon her for transgressing the boundaries of “propriety.” In fact, far from “disgust[ing]” men with her extreme display of “extreme sensibility,” Marianne’s public display of emotion actually attracts both Willoughby *and* the level-headed Colonel Brandon, whom she eventually marries. Brandon admits to Elinor that Marianne’s love for Willoughby reminds him of the extreme attachment that his long-dead Eliza once felt for him: “[Eliza’s love], for me, was, I believe, fervent as the attachment of your sister to Mr. Willoughby” (225). Although Brandon here compares Marianne to a “fallen” woman, this resemblance actually endears her to him rather than cultivates “disgust.”

Yet, it is not only in her depiction of Marianne that Austen subverts the conduct book tradition. Her depiction of Elinor Dashwood, the supposedly “sensible” sister of *Sense and Sensibility*, also caution women against the danger of too *much* emotional restraint. Although Elinor’s public self-restraint saves her from the embarrassment of having other’s know of her thwarted love for Edward Ferrars, this restraint does not cause her any less pain than it does her sister, Marianne, and affords her far less sympathy from her family. Only when Elinor finally loses control over her emotions in front of Edward at the end of the novel, does she finally spur on his proposal. After his fiancé’s elopement with his younger brother, Edward hastens to the Dashwood’s home to finally make his proposal to Elinor, but, being incredibly shy, is still in need of some encouragement from Elinor herself. When Elinor understands that Edward’s engagement to another woman has finally been broken, Austen writes, “Elinor could sit no longer. She almost ran out of the room, and as soon as the door was closed, burst into tears of



joy, which at first she thought would never cease. Edward, who has till then looked any where, rather than at her, saw her hurry away, and perhaps saw—or even heard, her emotion” (363).

Austen’s “perhaps” is a pointed joke at Elinor’s insistence on restraint by closing the door even after running from the room, which surely already indicated to Edward the fullness of her heart at that moment. This involuntary display on Eleanor’s part assures Edward of her love and urges on his proposal, which he had heretofore hesitated to make. Kathleen James-Cavan, in her introduction to the Broadview edition, highlights the “co-ordinating conjunction, the ‘and,’ of the title,” which suggest that Austen sees the happy medium of female propriety as an equal combination of sense and sensibility; that is, the middle ground between extreme emotion and extreme reserve (17). Neither extreme reserve nor extreme emotional display is good for young women to practice. Rather, as with most things, the best way is to practice moderation.

Charlotte Lucas of Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* reiterates the idea of a “middle ground” between emotional reserve and display in her speech to Elizabeth, cautioning her sister Jane against extreme emotional reserve towards Bingley: “‘It may perhaps be pleasant...to be able to impose on the public in such a case; but it is sometimes a disadvantage to be so very guarded. If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him; and it will then be but poor consolation to believe the world equally in the dark’” (59). Charlotte urges a deliberate display of desire on the part of the woman attempting to secure or “fix” a man and thereby establish her place in the world. Charlotte’s advice combats Dr. Gregory’s own advice to his own daughters, but Elizabeth, skeptical at first, is forced to admit Charlotte’s accuracy after discover Mr. Darcy’s belief in Jane’s indifference towards his friend, Bingley: “[Mr. Darcy] declared himself to have been totally unsuspecting of her sister’s attachment;—and she could not help remembering what Charlotte’s opinion had

always been.—Neither could she deny that Jane’s feelings, though fervent, were little displayed, and that there was a constant complacency in her air and manner, not often united with great sensibility” (227). In pointing out the dangers inherent in too little reserve—too little public “display”—Austen urges greater agency on the part of women in attaining their desired marriages. Women must not always remain stationary, waiting for the man to come to them; rather, like Anne Elliot, they may have to “advance” in order to achieve their desired end.

### **Wandering Wombs and Women: “Hysteria” as Punishment for Public Transgression**

“Many ancient writers believed that the womb or uterus had a life of its own, and a *hystera* (the Greek term) wanted and needed to be filled (i.e., pregnant). In fact, if a woman was not regularly pregnant, she would suffer from *hysteria*...a catch-all category for somatic symptoms stimulating almost any kind of physical disease or mental condition. Hysteria was therefore something that only females suffered from.”

--Verne L. Bullough in Thompson, 12

The cultural fear of women’s emotional display is reflected in the contemporary medical discourses on “hysteria,” or ideas of female madness. The eighteenth-century marked a transitional period in the history of women’s health and “hysteria,” during which the illness went from being perceived as a purely physical malady, resulting from a faulty uterus—or a “wandering womb”—to a more pathological disorder, resulting from outside causes. Despite this shift, the term “wandering” becomes essential in considering the relationship between diagnoses of “hysteria” and women’s mobility; for as the name “wandering womb” suggests, *movement* is the essential danger for women, movement outside of the domestic sphere, both physically and emotionally. As Heather Meek points out, women who transgressed beyond the bounds of domestic life, or merely women who were unmarried, were believed to be the most susceptible to hysteria, the cure for which was commonly believed to be marriage:

Theorists of eighteenth-century hysteria, whether physicians or female sufferers, frequently look to the institution of marriage in their elaborations of symptoms, causes, and treatments. Medicinal practices into the eighteenth century saw widows, virgins, and nuns as most prone to hysteria, and there was a lingering belief that male semen somehow kept the womb in order. (117)

Because unmarried “virgins” were often seen as more susceptible to hysteria, the courtship novel itself can be seen to enact the eighteenth-century medical discourse on hysteria in that it focuses on events in the lives of young unmarried women experiencing life in public for the first time, the ultimate resolution or “cure” for which is always the marriage ending. When they transgress—that is, make mistakes in the public eye—by way of emotional overflow, they often experience a range of symptoms which resemble “hysteria” in all its unfixed but ever-present meaning. Thus, “hysteria” or this loss of emotional control when in public, can be viewed as a woman’s ultimate punishment for transgressing in the public sphere.

Burney’s heroines often experience fits of madness or “hysteria” during their lowest points in the novel, and in this way, hysteria functions as punishment for their public transgressions, often bringing them near to death; ultimately, the heroines are rescued by their family and/or the hero and firmly reestablished within the private sphere. These moments of complete break-down and loss of control in Burney’s novels always occur in public spaces in order to illustrate the extreme risk that women run of being forever trapped within the public realm as a “public woman.” Although it is the heroine who transgresses, Burney’s heroines are always excused by the very fact that they have no control over their own movements in public spaces; society is to blame for not affording women the protection and the stability they require.

In *Camilla*, when shop-owners and on-lookers spot Camilla wandering around the shops in Southampton with a woman far below her station, one of the conclusions that the onlookers draw is that the women are “deranged in mind” (608). As this quotation proves, a young, unmarried woman who “wanders” in public automatically runs the risk of being taken for—or becoming—“deranged.” Although both this assumption and the result of it are outside of Camilla’s control, she tries to combat it anyway by resisting all movement outside the domestic sphere: “The inconsiderate facility with which she had wandered about with a person so little known to her, so underbred, and so forward, appeared now to herself inexcusable; and she determined, if but spared this dreadful punishment, to pass the whole of her future life in unremitting caution” (637). Despite this assurance of immobile and “cautious” future conduct, circumstances outside of Camilla’s control eventually lead her, unaccompanied, to an inn where she eventually falls “feverish nearly to delirium” (874). Sick and unable to move on the bed of an inn, Camilla is unable to leave the public sphere until her cousin and future husband, Edgar finally finds her and fetches her parents who restore her to health and home. Although Camilla is ultimately rescued, her helplessness and imprisonment in this public space illustrates the threat that Camilla may never be able to return home and be forever trapped as a “public woman.” Although Camilla’s mistakes in public cause incredible hardships for herself and her family, these transgressions are ultimately dismissed as “but A PICTURE OF YOUTH” (913). Burney blames the society that forces young women to “wander” in public and not Camilla herself, thus removing all agency and control from the heroine’s actions.

In a similar manner to Camilla, the title heroine of Burney’s *Cecilia* loses her sanity in the streets of London as she attempts to race after her (unacknowledged) husband, Mortimer Delvile. Restrained by the crowd of people that seems fascinated by her lonely public

appearance, Cecilia is sent over the edge when a man “freely” touches her, thus aligning her with a “public woman”:

[A] mob was collecting; Cecilia, breathless with vehemence and terror, was encircled, yet struggled in vain to break away; and the stranger gentleman, protesting, with sundry compliments, he would himself take care of her, very freely seized her hand. *This moment*, for the unhappy Cecilia, teemed with calamity; she was wholly overpowered; terror for Delvile, horror for herself, hurry, confusion, heat and fatigue, all assailing her at once, while all means of repelling them were denied her, the attack was too strong for her fears, feelings and faculties, and her reason suddenly, yet totally failing her, she madly called out, ‘He will be gone! he will be gone! and I must follow him to Nice!’ (my emphasis, 895-96)

It is at “this moment,” when Cecilia mistakenly crosses the fine line between a woman in public and a “public woman,” that she becomes hysterical. Burney makes this transgression even clearer when Cecilia attempts to enter a pawn shop and is, at first glance, mistaken for a prostitute: “The people of the house, concluding at first she was a woman of the town, were going roughly to turn her out” (897). Unlucky for her, however, the owners do take Cecilia in when they notice her expensive clothing, and, when no one comes for her, they proceed to lock her in an upstairs room where she remains for days. Like Camilla, Cecilia is trapped and unable to move within a public space until the hero finds her days later. Her descent into madness further illuminates her loss of control over her own movements: Cecilia cannot escape the public sphere without the interference of her husband. By literally imprisoning her heroines within public spaces, Burney highlights the need for women to remain safely within the private sphere

lest they be “trapped” there for good, forever seen as “public women,” powerless to change their lot.

Although Cecilia crosses the boundaries of propriety and becomes literally imprisoned in the public sphere, Burney makes clear that she does not deserve this treatment. Rather, it is the patriarchal society—embodied in all three of Cecilia’s legal guardians, as well as her new husband—that deserves censure, for it has failed to keep Cecilia safely within the domestic sphere:

In *Cecilia* Burney certainly could not show a good daddy turning up at last—there are no good daddies anymore. The daddies who shadow *Evelina*—the good if impotent Mr. Villars, the rejecting but repentant Sir John—have disappeared. Cecilia has no father surrogates in whom she can confide or to whom she can look for rescue. Father-figures in this novel are not part of a solution, but part of the problem. (Doody *Cecilia* xxi)

When Henrietta Belfield first sees Cecilia delirious in the pawn shop, she cries, “‘Is this the so happy Miss Beverly, that I thought every body born to give joy to? the Miss Beverly that seemed queen of the whole world!...what have *they* done to you, my beloved Miss Beverley? how have *they* altered and disfigured you in this wicked and barbarous manner?’” (my emphasis, 913-14). Burney does not make clear exactly who Henrietta means by “they,” and effectively holds the entire society accountable. As Doody points out in her introduction to the novel, “There is nobody in Cecilia’s world capable of correcting her; what needs correcting is the society in which she lives” (*Cecilia* xxxiii). Yet, despite Burney’s frequent criticism of society’s failure to shelter women, her heroines never succeed in changing the system but instead are appropriated into it through marriage. Rather than pursuing independence by keeping her name and her

fortune, Cecilia clandestinely marries Mortimer Delvile, the one man whose family pride will not allow him to give up his name, even for a large sum of money. Unlike Elizabeth's marriage to Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, Cecilia's marriage to Delvile does not offer "improvement" to the estate by way of new relations and a different world view (Duckworth 116), but rather ensures that all will remain the same. Cecilia follows the eighteenth-century "doctor's orders" in that, rather than remain "hysterical"—outside the boundaries of married life—she marries into the family that most ensures her loss of agency. Furthermore, Cecilia's imprisonment reveals that she never had much agency to begin with; as Henrietta says, she "*seemed* queen of the whole world!" (my emphasis, 913). Rather than challenge her powerlessness, however, Burney reaffirms it through the marriage ending; thus supporting the prescribed belief that domestic life is the proper sphere for women, despite a patriarchal society's frequent failure to keep them there.

In *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties*, Burney further explores society's failure to keep women stationary by contrasting the necessitated "wanderings" of her heroine, Ellis-Juliet with the voluntary movement of Elinor Joddrel. Ellis-Juliet moves only because she must in order to escape the pursuit of her tyrannical French husband (whom she never actually consented to marry). Although her movements constantly threaten her virtuous public persona, she tries extremely hard to avoid all impropriety in spite of her inability to remain safely within the domestic sphere. Elinor, in contrast, has wealth, independence, and a fiancé, but publicly proclaims her desire for Albert Harleigh and proceeds to pursue him with a vengeance that verges on madness, which leads Harleigh to lament, "'Unhappy Elinor!...this is yet more wild than I had believed you! this flight, where you can expect no pursuit!...But her intellects are under the controul of her feelings,--and judgment has no guide so dangerous'" (203). Just like

hysteria, here, Elinor's overflowing "feelings" and movement although uncalled for, presents the greatest danger to her role as a woman. Drawing this distinction between Elinor's voluntary movement and display and Ellis-Juliet's necessitated movement effectively denies any positive aspect of mobility for women. This conservative theme is echoed in Harleigh's final speech to Ellis-Juliet:

'When Elinor...sees the fallacy of her new system; when she finds how vainly she would tread down the barriers of custom and experience, raised by the wisdom of foresight, and established, after trial, for public utility; she will return to the habits of society and common life, as one awakening from a dream in which she has acted some strange and improbable part.' (Burney 863)

Although this same "society and common life" have forced Ellis-Juliet to wander vainly in search of safety and financial independence for five volumes, Burney's ultimate message is that "the barriers of custom and experience" should not be "tread" by women. While Burney's novels often seem to challenge proscribed social roles for women through her heroines' inability to follow them, "At the same time, the novels work finally to reintegrate their heroines into the conventional social structures of the upper-class institution of marriage" (Epstein 209). In a society that, in Burney's view, denies virtuous women the opportunity for financial independence without male support, marriage to the right man—and *immobility*—are presented as the only cure: "Here, and thus felicitously, ended, with the acknowledgment of her *name*, and her *family*, the DIFFICULTIES of the WANDERER" (my emphasis, 873). Although Ellis-Juliet, like Cecilia, supposedly longs for independence, the ending of the novel asserts that a woman's true happiness comes from belonging within a patriarchal system.



Marianne Dashwood of Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* resembles Elinor Joddrel of *The Wanderer* in her blatant refusal to restrain herself both physically and emotionally, but whereas Elinor served as the heroine's foil in *The Wanderer*, Marianne is as fully-fleshed a heroine as her sister and her sufferings (although partially self-imposed) are treated far more sympathetically by the narrator. Like Burney's character, Marianne mistakenly believes that suffering—and even self-annihilation—are what thwarted love demands of a woman. After Willoughby spurns her advances at a London ball, she falls into hysterics without attempting to restrain herself physically or emotionally: “Elinor advised her to lie down again, and for a moment she did so; but no attitude could give her ease; and in restless pain of mind and body she moved from one posture to another, till growing more and more hysterical, her sister could with difficulty keep her on the bed at all” (212). Through self-punishment, Marianne mimics the behavior of Elinor Joddrel, ultimately bringing on an illness that almost kills her. After Marianne recovers from her delirious fever she grows repentant and assures her sister that henceforth

‘[M]y feelings shall be governed and my temper improved. They shall no longer worry others, nor torture myself. I shall now live solely for my family. You, my mother, and Margaret, must henceforth be all the world to me; you will share my affections entirely between you. From you, from my home, I shall never again have the smallest incitement to move.’ (351)

Although Marianne expresses a wish for a life of complete immobility as the “cure” for her past behavior, even her sister Elinor “smil[es] to the see the same eager fancy which had been leading her to the extreme of languid indolence and selfish-repining, now at work in introducing excess into a scheme of such rational employment and self-controul” (348). Marianne *seems* to echo Camilla's repentant speech after the marketplace incident—“[S]he determined...to pass the

whole of her future life in unremitting caution” (Burney 637)—but even Elinor can tell that, although more aware and repentant of her past errors, Marianne’s temperament has not really changed. Even her marriage to Colonel Brandon does not “cure” her of the “extreme sensibility” that caused her to so much pain before. Austen writes that she grows to love Brandon as much as she loved Willoughby: “Marianne could never love by halves; and her whole heart became, in time, as much devoted to her husband, as it had once been to Willoughby” (380). Whereas Burney ends *The Wanderer* with Elinor Joddrel coming to the realization that she must conform to the “beaten road” because “all others are pathless” (873), Austen’s heroine marries without ever effectively “curing” herself. Marianne’s emotional displays are an integral part of her personality, which ultimately bring her as much good as they do harm. Rather than implying that a woman with so little control over her own mind and body is not fit for marriage or proper society (and thus needs to be “contained”), Marianne needs only to find the man suited to her temperament without necessarily conforming to “the beaten road.” Austen’s novels, rather than conforming only to one “path” for her female characters, reveal many paths; each suited to her heroines’ unique personalities and desires.

### **Controlling Fathers to Controlling Lovers**

The marriage ending of the courtship novel often ensures continued control over the heroine’s body and mind by a husband whose authority is often treated as an extension of the father’s. Yet, while Burney repeatedly marries her heroines to father-like lovers, Austen’s marriage endings vary and are far more circumstantial. Whereas Austen’s *Emma*—similar to Burney’s novels—appears to cater to the father’s need for control, *Northanger Abbey* and

*Mansfield Park* resist the patriarchal authority of tyrannical fathers, even going so far as to equate it with slavery and oppression.

In *Evelina*, Burney's first novel—and her own instance of disobedience toward her father—her heroine tries incredibly hard to conform to the wishes of all three father figures in her life: her “more than father,” Reverend Villars, her actual but unacknowledged father, Sir John Belmont, and her father-like lover, Lord Orville. Reverend Villars attempts to maintain control over Evelina's movements despite her physical separation from him while in London by providing lengthy “sermons” to her by way of letter. Lord Orville, on the other hand, serves as a fatherly stand-in for Villars while Evelina is away, and is always (fortunately) at hand to mortify Evelina by his disapproving gaze each time she makes a public blunder. By filling the father's shoes, Orville becomes the barometer of propriety for Evelina by which she can check her too-hasty public movements. Far from being treated as an unwelcome presence, Orville's gaze keeps Evelina from “falling” like her mother. By standing in for her father, Orville enables Evelina to gain “knowledge and experience” without straying too far outside of the domestic sphere: “The desire for the daughter's acquisition of knowledge and experience is always here tempered by the conviction that all knowledge is potentially carnal, all experience potentially sexual—and that either will involve the daughter's departure from the true paradise of the home for the false paradise of the extrafamilial world, never to return” (Gonda 126). Orville's purpose as father stand-in ensures that Evelina never truly “depart[s] from the true paradise of the home” to become a “woman of the town.” Evelina's and Orville's ultimate marriage and their subsequent “honeymoon” to Berry Hill, to the home of Reverend Villars, is a signal to readers that Evelina will be forever “safe” and static, guarded by not one but two fathers for the remainder of her adult life.

Burney's *Camilla* adds yet another father figure to the equation by way of an uncle and adds another layer of control to the daughter's public movements. Whereas in *Evelina*, paternal control was essentially a welcome intervention, *Camilla* has father-figures who frequently fail to protect her and her sisters. Doody even reads the name of Camilla's father, Augustus Tyrold, "as a name indicating tyranny" (Gonda 139). Indeed, his harsh lesson to his youngest daughter Eugenia on the worthlessness of vanity actually causes her cry for mercy: "'Take, Take me away, my father!' cried Eugenia, I see, I feel your awful lesson! but impress it no further, lest I die in receiving it!" (310). Nevertheless, both daughters later thank their father for this lesson and feel it to have been necessary, no matter how harsh; thus, Burney effectively dissolves any lurking criticism of his level of control over his daughters.

Sir Hugh, the doting uncle and brother of Mr. Tyrold, tries (and fails) to control of all his nieces and nephews by marrying them off to one another. Although his plans for their futures are often misguided and unwise, he is adamant in crushing all opposition: "No arguments, however, relative to disposing of the young ladies, had any weight with him; he had long planned to give Eugenia to Clermont Lynmere, and he depended upon Edgar Mandlebert for Indiana, while with regard to Camilla, to keep her unmarried, that he might detain her under his own roof, was the favourite wish of his heart" (54). Each of these matches goes completely against the wishes of the young people involved, which would seem to mock this type of control through marriage. However, the sympathetic way that Burney treats Sir Hugh, as well as Camilla's eventual marriage to her cousin, Edgar, ensures that Camilla will remain under the watchful eyes of all three father-figures (Mr. Tyrold, Sir Hugh, and Edgar).

The out-spoken and somewhat dissolute Mrs. Arlbery even describes Edgar as a constant, almost neurotic "watcher" of Camilla's actions:

He is a watcher; and a watcher, restless and perturbed himself, infests all he pursues with uneasiness. He is without trust, and therefore without either courage or consistency. To-day he may be persuaded you will make all his happiness; to-morrow, he may fear you will give him nothing but misery. Yet it is not that he is jealous of any other; 'tis of the object of his choice he is jealous, lest she should not prove good enough to merit it. (482)

Although this speech would seem to resist the kind of control that Edgar seeks to exercise over Camilla, her eventual—and desired—marriage to him effectively nullifies all former criticism of this type of patriarchal control. Vivien Jones notes that “Camilla’s difficulties—like those of Cecilia and Evelina before her—are always susceptible to being ‘disentangled’ through the comic resolution of the courtship plot which shapes Burney’s broad social canvas, confirming rather than disrupting paternalistic structures of authority” (125). Burney’s devotion to the traditional course of the courtship narrative eventually obscures the often jarring themes she explores during the course of her narratives. No matter how much she appears to criticize male control—or the failure of it—over the young women they are responsible for, her marriage endings always ensure that the “beaten road,” no matter how perilous, is the *only* “path” available for her women to travel; they, and the plots they belong to, can move in no other direction.

Austen’s *Emma* follows the tradition of the father-lover relationship, while the marriage ending ultimately confirms the future immobility of the heroine’s lifestyle. The humorous depiction of Emma’s father, who rarely ever leaves the house and guilts Emma into following a similar hermit-like lifestyle, undermines the serious implications of their confining relationship. When Emma does venture outside of the home during the day-trip to the nearby Box Hill, Mr.

Knightley, her father-like lover, keeps a watchful eye and scolds her when she publicly embarrasses herself and one of their close friends. “[B]adly done, indeed!” he chides her after she humiliates the unfortunate Miss Bates “before her niece” and “others” (326). After the incident, Emma atones for this indiscretion by “giving up the sweetest hours of the twenty-four to [her father’s] comfort” and lamenting that she had ever “schemed” to visit Box Hill (327), thereby equating the brief movement outside of the home with the shame of her public indiscretion. Emma’s constant attempts to determine the future lives of her close friends can be read as an attempt to compensate for her inability to determine the course of her own life. Although her father begs her to make no more “matches” that will take more women away from their homes and away from their own society at Hartfield, Emma replies, “I promise you to make none for myself, papa; but I must, indeed, for other people. It is the greatest amusement in the world!” (60). However, even this small illusion of agency is crushed by the end of the novel when Emma realizes how ineffectual and unhelpful her interferences in other’s personal affairs have been. When Emma finally realizes how she feels about Mr. Knightley after being led to think he has fallen for her friend, Harriet, Emma longs for nothing in her life to ever change again:

Let him but continue the same Mr. Knightley to her and her father, the same Mr. Knightley to all the world; let Donwell and Hartfield lose none of their precious intercourse of friendship and confidence, and her peace would be fully secured.— Marriage, in fact, would not do for her. It would be incompatible with what she owed to her father. She would not marry, even if she were asked by Mr. Knightley. (356)

She has internalized her father's fear of mobility and change, and only does marry Mr. Knightly after his assurances that nothing *will* change in their relationship; he will simply move into her father's home and things will be as they always were. Much like the ending of *Evelina*, the ending of *Emma* reinforces the father's control by ensuring that the heroine will not leave the family home and be forever watched over by her two "fathers."

Although, *Emma* follows in the novelistic tradition of affirming patriarchal control over women's movement, both *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey* openly criticize the father's tyrannical attempts to control the lives of his children—especially his daughters—by allusions to slavery and oppression. When Sir Thomas Bertram returns to Mansfield from his slave plantations in Antigua, Austen writes that Fanny feels "oppressed" by his close scrutiny and increased interest in her: "Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed. He had never been so kind, so very kind to her in his life" (195). Sir Thomas' sudden interest in Fanny feelings (and body) leaves her with no room for privacy, no room for escape. Not only does he own a slave plantation in Antigua, he also treats his family members as his own property by trying to exact control over their every movement. To Austen's contemporary readers, the reference to the slave trade, although not dwelt on in detail, would have been highly significant:

In *Mansfield Park*, the statements about the West Indies are indeed not elaborated...but nevertheless for Austen and her contemporaries it had strong and definite connotations that associate Sir Thomas with the worst large-scale act of cruelty and injustice of its period. Sir Thomas, the slave-owner, seeks absolute power over the women of his family. He regards them as his property, subject to his will and disposable for his profit, like his slaves. (Sturrock 23)

Sir Thomas has no qualms about moving the women under his roof wherever he sees fit. He takes Fanny away from her impoverished parents in Portsmouth as a young child as a “kindness” to her parents, without any reference to Fanny’s own wishes or any attempt to make her feel less of an outsider in his household. After she has spent the majority of her life at Mansfield Park, he decides to send her back to Portsmouth when she displeases him by refusing to marry Henry Crawford. He tells her angrily,

‘I had thought you peculiarly free from willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shewn me that you can be willful and perverse; that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to guide you—without even asking their advice.’ (323)

What angers Sir Thomas is that Fanny would think it right to be guided by her *own* judgment, as opposed to his; he finds it both “offensive and disgusting” that any young woman would show “an independence of spirit” in determining the course of her own life. As dependent as she is on Sir Thomas for financial support, refusing or accepting a proposal of marriage is virtually the only control Fanny can exert over her own movement. Unlike Emma, Fanny does not try to ease the lot of Sir Thomas at the expense of her own happiness in marriage. Rather, her refusal of Crawford—and the subsequent blunders of Maria and Julia Bertram, which ultimately show Sir Thomas Fanny’s superiority over his own daughters—eventually allows her to gain all that she had originally wanted: “She was returned to Mansfield Park, she was useful, she was beloved; she was safe from Mr Crawford, and when Sir Thomas came back she had every proof that could



be given in his then melancholy state of spirits, of his perfect approbation and increased regard” (457). Her eventual marriage to her cousin Edmund ensures that Fanny will finally hold a permanent place at Mansfield Park, which not even Sir Thomas will be able to move her from.

General Tilney of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* also seeks to complete control the movements of those under his roof, but—like Sir Thomas—his authority is thwarted. Even before Catherine Morland suspects the General of any crimes, she describes his presence as oppressing his children’s natural emotions during their journey from Bath to the abbey: “[W]ith Miss Tilney [Catherine] felt no restraint...Had their party been perfectly agreeable, the delay would have been nothing; but General Tilney, though so charming a man, seemed always a check upon his children’s spirits...At last, however, the order of release was given” (113). Like Sir Thomas’ children, General Tilney’s feel oppressed by their father’s presence and only “release[d]” when he leaves them alone. Catherine’s uneasiness in his presence, fueled by her love of gothic novels, leads her to suspect the General of murdering his wife. Although she is at first mortified when her suspicions are discovered by the General’s son, Henry, Catherine comes to realize that “in suspecting General Tinley of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character” (183). Although Catherine was wrong in her estimation of the General’s actual crimes, she was not wrong in her general understanding of General Tilney’s tyrannical need to control the people under his roof. He invites Catherine to Northanger with the intent of marrying her to his youngest son, Henry, but when he discovers that she has less wealth than he had been led to believe, he immediately and without warning “hurr[ies] her away without any reference to her own convenience, or allowing her even the appearance of choice as to the time or mode of her travelling” (167). He even orders his daughter Eleanor to break the news to Catherine and spare him the inconvenience. Eleanor does as she is bid, telling Catherine, “[Y]ou

must have been long enough in this house to see that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing”” (166). Although both Eleanor and Catherine must move where the General orders them, they do have a choice in their future marital partners. General Tilney’s banishment of Catherine actually spurs Henry’s proposal of marriage, while Eleanor, soon after Catherine’s departure, elects to marry a man who was once a visitor at Northanger. Austen’s narrator expresses her delight over Eleanor Tilney’s escape from the tyrannical control of her father:

The marriage of Eleanor Tilney, her removal from all the evils of such a home as Northanger...to the home of her choice and the man of her choice, is an event which I expect to give general satisfaction among all her acquaintance. My own joy on the occasion is very sincere. I know no one more entitled, by unpretending merit, or better prepared by habitual suffering, to receive and enjoy felicity. (185)

Through her marriage, Eleanor not only exercises her autonomy by choosing her husband, but she also by choosing her future home. Marriage gives Austen’s heroines the chance to escape from the father’s household and determine their own place in the world independent of that control.

### **The Marriage Ending: The End of Female Mobility?**

Although the heroines of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* determine their future lives by way of marriage choice, within both of these novels the heroines’ chosen marriages mark their *final* choices in determining their place in the world. As the wives of country clergymen, both Fanny and Catherine will likely spend the remainder of their lives in the same homes in the country. However, in *Persuasion*, Austen veers from this traditionally

“stable” marriage ending. By rejecting marriage to her cousin, Mr. Elliot, Anne rejects a continued life as a country gentry-woman and mistress of her family’s Kellynch Hall. Instead, she marries a man wholly disconnected from her family who does not even belong to the same social class. Furthermore, their future life together is far from certain or “stable.” For the first time, not only within Austen’s own novels but in the history of the courtship novel, marriage does not signify an end to female mobility.

If “Land, as Coleridge and Burke asserted, represented permanence,” then Anne’s rejection of the landed estate in *Persuasion* represents impermanence and change (Jones 269). Linda Bree, in her beautiful introduction to *Persuasion*, writes,

Without espousing the kind of radical principles Burke abhorred...Austen in *Persuasion* was addressing a new set of challenges and choices for which the old solutions of security on a landed estate no longer applied. *Persuasion* explores questions of loss, change and decay, of impermanence and uncertainty, of risk and chance—all questions that we recognize as endemic in an insecure modern world. (36-7)

In *Persuasion*, the “old solutions” to the courtship narrative do not apply; Anne makes no public blunders that cry out for the traditional resolution of “security on a landed estate.” Rather, Kellynch Hall and its inhabitants have never appreciated Anne’s true value, and only in leaving its confines does she finally thrive and find happiness. Although Anne laments leaving behind Kellynch when her father’s expensive lifestyle forces them all to “retrench,” leaving behind the estate’s confines widens her social circle and opens her eyes to different possible lifestyles. As a result of this enlarged world view, Kellynch and its former inhabitants grow increasingly less important to Anne. When she finally sees her father and sister again in Bath after living with

friends for many months, Austen writes, “Anne would have been ashamed to have it known, how much more she was thinking of Lyme, and Louisa Musgrove, and all her acquaintance there; how much more interesting to her was the home and the friendship of the Harvilles and Captain Benwick, than her own father’s house in Camden-place, or her own sister’s intimacy with Mrs. Clay” (148). Anne begins to value those who actually merit her interest, rather than merely those connected to her by blood. Her removal from Kellynch, both physically and emotionally, lessens her ties to the familial and immobile lifestyle it represents.

Anne’s marriage to Captain Wentworth, and Austen’s refusal to specify where and in what manner they will spend their future lives together, highlights just how “uncertain” the marriage ending of *Persuasion* really is. In beginning the events of her narrative during the single year of peace in 1814 during the Napoleonic Wars, Austen knew when writing *Persuasion* in August of 1815 “what her characters do not—that Napoleon had escaped from exile in Elba in March 1815 only to be defeated again in June 1815” (Bree 57). The novel ends right before the resumption of war in 1815 and thus adds another level of uncertainty to the marriage ending. As a captain in the Navy, Wentworth will undoubtedly return to sea, but Austen leaves readers uncertain as to whether or not Anne will follow her husband, like Wentworth’s sister Mrs. Croft, or remain behind. Before the resumption of his romance with Anne, Wentworth states outright that he “‘hate[s] to hear of women on board, or to see them on board, and no ship, under my command, shall ever convey a family of ladies any where if I can help it’” (102). Outraged by this remark, Admiral and Mrs. Croft maintain that “When he is married, if we have the good luck to live to another war, we shall see him do as you and I, and a great many others have done. We shall have him very thankful to any body that will bring him his wife,” to which Wentworth responds, “Now I have done...When once married people begin to attack me with, ‘Oh! you will

think very differently, when you are married.’ I can only say, ‘No, I shall not;’ and then they say again, ‘Yes, you will,’ and there is an end of it” (103). By refusing to acknowledge precisely whether or not Wentworth will allow his future wife aboard a ship, Austen deliberately adds to the uncertainty of the marriage ending and keeps the possibilities for Anne’s future decidedly open. Independent of the confines of a landed, gentry lifestyle, Anne and Wentworth have the freedom to move wherever they choose to go. Unlike Burney’s final novel in which Elinor Joddrel comes to the realization that the “beaten road” is the only path available for women to take, Austen in her last completed novel rejects this well-trod narrative conclusion in favor of a myriad of positive, though uncertain, paths for her heroine’s future. Noting the radical narrative change taking place within *Persuasion*’s marital conclusion, Bree writes, “[I]t is astonishing that Austen...should not only have perceived many of the implications of these changes, but have prepared the heroine she described as ‘almost too good for me’ to embrace them with such joy” (37). Anne’s future life of unlanded possibilities, although uncertain and unstable, is nonetheless a decidedly positive change.

### **Conclusion: Moving Forward**

Placing Austen’s novels in conversation with those of her near-contemporary, Frances Burney, brings into focus the dialogue that already exists between their works. Austen frequently references Burney’s works in her novels; naming both *Cecilia* and *Camilla* as two of the “works in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour are conveyed to the world in the best chosen language” in her famous defense of the novel in *Northanger Abbey* (24), having Charlotte Heywood pick up a copy of *Camilla* inside Sanditon’s

circulating library (178), and taking the title of *Pride and Prejudice* from a quote at the end of Burney's *Cecilia* (930). These overt references to Burney's work highlight Austen's underlying awareness of the novelistic tradition Burney helped to establish, and Austen's works both build on and react against this tradition.

Through fictional representation, both Burney and Austen bring the private concerns of women into public notice. But, whereas Burney's plots always seem to compensate for her own public transgressions by *insisting* that the private sphere is where women truly belong, Austen's plots both question and disprove this assumption. More than just being necessary during the courtship period, public participation and movement away from the home, for Austen's heroines, are essential in establishing their future happiness; a happiness that *they* choose. Furthermore, the inevitability of the marriage ending does not, for Austen, necessarily connote the end of a woman's movement. In this way, her novels blur the distinctions between private and public modes of life, which have served—throughout history—to repeatedly bar women from public participation. By opening up room for female mobility within the space of her novels, Austen combats the “inevitability” of any given mode of life for women and effectively conveys this message to her readers.

Within my analysis of female mobility—that is of women moving, both literally and figuratively, between the public and private spheres—I demonstrate how Burney's and Austen's differing representations of these trends function as their respective contributions to the *still* ongoing debate about women's proper place in the world. My analysis not only complicates the way in which we think about and define women's mobility in relation to women's participation in the public sphere, but also reveals how these manifestations of and restrictions on women's

movement by a patriarchal society are always tied up with issues of women's private and political autonomy.

In a society where a woman's appearance in public, although certainly more acceptable in the present day, is still a controversial phenomenon, studies of women's mobility are incredibly relevant and important. In order to break down the barriers of gender discrimination, we must never cease to explore the various forms in which these barriers exist. They may appear in forms as obvious as the underrepresentation of men and women in certain professions, or a woman's fear of sexual assault when walking the streets alone, but they also arise in less obvious ways, such as in the origins of a well-used word, or the continuation of a practice with roots in the assumption that one group is somehow "lesser." When we cease to explore, when we close off our minds and assume that things are perfect because we may be personally happy, is when these boundaries solidify and begin to appear "natural." In looking to the past, we can begin to see how our present differs, as well as what persists—only through this process of comparison can we keep moving forward.

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