The Bitter Relicks of My Flame: The Embodiment of Venereal Disease and Prostitution in the Novels of Jane Austen

Melanie Erin Osborn
Rollins College, mosborn@rollins.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.rollins.edu/mls

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarship.rollins.edu/mls/29

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Rollins Scholarship Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Liberal Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of Rollins Scholarship Online. For more information, please contact rwalton@rollins.edu.
The Bitter Relicks of My Flame:
The Embodiment of Venereal Disease and Prostitution in the Novels of Jane Austen

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies

By
Melanie Erin Osborn
May, 2012

Mentor: Dr. Barry Levis
Reader: Dr. Ed Cohen

Rollins College
Hamilton Holt School
Master of Liberal Studies Program
Winter Park, Florida
Acknowledgements:

First and foremost, I am so grateful to my thesis mentor, Dr. Barry Levis who with his eminent knowledge saw me through to the very end. Though he thought me a little crazy the first time I brought my thesis idea to him, he has since been my biggest supporter. And to my second reader, Dr. Ed Cohen, who trusted in my abilities enough to become a part of this project!

A special thank you to my friends in the Masters of Liberal Studies program who, over these years, have become like family to me: Richard Boggs, the most chivalrous man I know; Tracy Koubek, my fellow femme fatale; Ilana Grimes, whose silent strength has been an inspiration; and George McGowan, my “Rollins husband.” Truly some of the best people I know.

I, of course could not have done this without the support of my family, who have always believed in me and had the utmost faith in my abilities, even when I did not.

And, a heartfelt thanks to Tyler. He had no idea what he was getting himself into, but he stayed.

I am also indebted to the amazing support and patience from Denisa in Interlibrary Loan, and my director at the Winter Park Institute, Dr. Gail Sinclair.

Yet it is for Mitchell Perry who I owe my deepest gratitude and love. Your life gave me the strength to find my own.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Chapter 1: Introduction**  
Embodying History: Pictures of Imperfection  

**Chapter 2: Venereal Disease in Jane Austen**  
*Emma*: “Kitty a Fair but Frozen Maid”  
*Persuasion* and *Emma*: The Eruption of Fashion  
*Mansfield Park*: Behind the Curtain  

**Chapter 3: Prostitution in Jane Austen**  
*Sense and Sensibility*: The Seduction of the Harlot  
*Mansfield Park*: Domestication of Prostitution  

**Conclusion**  

**Bibliography**
“The Bitter Relicks of My Flame:”

The Embodiment of Venereal Disease and Prostitution in the Works of Jane Austen

Chapter 1: Introduction: Embodying History: Pictures of Imperfection

*Pictures of perfection, as you know, make me sick and wicked.*

- Jane Austen¹

*Do not consider me now as an elegant female intending to plague you, but as a rational creature speaking the truth from her heart.*

- Elizabeth Bennett²

Upon the innocuous face of Jane Austen’s novels rests a beauty mark. This mark represents the sexual dichotomy between the reality of widespread venereal disease and prostitution and the ideal chaste femininity as rendered by the patriarchal British social structure during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Resembling the mercurial, black beauty mark used as an ornamental concealment of syphilitic sores, Austen’s comedy of manners likewise acted as a superficial cosmetic device that concealed the ubiquity of venereal disease and prostitution hidden within. Through her characters, Austen used veiled narrative to highlight the reality of venereal disease and prostitution. This thesis uncovers this narrative in Jane Austen’s novels, as a means of better understanding the impact of venereal disease and prostitution during the eighteenth century. Most important, it explores the impact of sexual issues on women and the female body during

---

the eighteenth century. Venereal disease and prostitution existed throughout eighteenth-century Britain in epidemic proportions and had erupted through the streets of London and into the rest of England. 

Austen, as a way to highlight the effect these maladies had on her own world, utilized, in her novels, the characters of the ill and weak: Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Clay, Harriet Smith, Eliza Brandon, and Fanny Price. Beginning with an almost comic reference to venereal disease in *Emma* and ending with a tragic seduction in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen successfully exposed the publicity of venereal disease and prostitution of eighteenth-century England and the severe effects it had on women in her society.

Austen was a product of a patriarchal social structure that for centuries marginalized and compromised women. Male ideas found within eighteenth-century medical treatises, satire, and literature about venereal disease and prostitution reinforced this misogyny. By the eighteenth century, gender prejudice, as we know it today was invented and embedded in prevailing mores. 

As one eighteenth-century physician stated, “Women owe their manner of being to their organs of generation, and especially to the uterus,” and sexual organs never before distinguished, such as the vagina, finally named. Thus, the female body, specifically the reproductive organs, became the focus of gender prejudice and subordination. Severed from the male, the female anatomy became the buttress of misogynistic denunciation of women for hosting and spreading syphilis.

In eighteenth-century British society, genteel people drew upon so-called medical

---

treatises and satirical representations to assert that women were innately diseased. Although medical practitioners disagreed about the transmission of the disease, one popular theory argued that the bodies of promiscuous women acted as incubating vessels in which the semen of different men putrefied into the virus. Ultimately, this theory influenced most eighteenth-century contemporaries to agree that all female internal organs harbored the contagion.

_Life can little else supply/But a few good fucks and then we die._

-John Wilkes

Prior to the eighteenth-century, mainstream Christianity in England considered earthly pleasures evil, self-defeating, and self-destructive. Christian theology demanded abstinence and self-denial; pleasure seeking was deplored. Religious writings uniformly viewed the flesh as always subordinate to the mind. During the eighteenth century, however, Christian theology reversed itself as a result of the Enlightenment. These enlightened Christians began promoting the idea of a rational, benevolent God who created a universe in which indulgence in earthly delights was desirable. This humanistic acknowledgement of carnal pleasure encouraged not just aristocratic privilege, but the routine entitlement of the entire population to seek fulfillment in the sensual realm rather

---

8 Kevin Siena, "Poverty and the Pox: Venereal Disease in London Hospitals, 1600-1800" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2001), 16.
10 Ibid., 3.
11 Karen Harvey, _Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture_ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 199.
than only in the heavenly world and to gratify the senses while seeking the purification of the soul.\textsuperscript{12}

In Enlightenment thought, sexuality, no longer dismissed as a sin or a vice, became acknowledged as a central element of Nature.\textsuperscript{13} During the eighteenth century, this pursuit of pleasure became the “natural” behavior, in part because it was decreed unnatural to deny bodily pleasures. As the Earl of Chesterfield told his son, “Pleasure is now, and ought to be, your business.”\textsuperscript{14} Enlightenment writers repeatedly stressed the radical assumption that indulging one’s sexual appetites was natural and therefore “good.”\textsuperscript{15} The eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher David Hume argued that sex was the “first and original principle of human society.”\textsuperscript{16} For his part, the English physician Erasmus Darwin insisted that “animal attraction was the purest source of human felicity; the cordial drop in the otherwise vapid cup of life.”\textsuperscript{17} As such, sexuality became a titillating topic within intellectual circles as well as casual conversation. Mary Wollstonecraft, the leading eighteenth-century advocate for women’s rights and a contemporary of Jane Austen, called for “an unreserved discussion of those topics [sexuality] which are generally avoided in conversation from a principle of false delicacy; and that it would be right to speak of the organs of generation as freely as we mention our eyes or our hands.”\textsuperscript{18}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Porter, \textit{Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{14} C. Strachey (ed.), \textit{The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to his son}, 2 vols. (London, 1932), II, 133.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Porter, \textit{Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century}, 4.
\item \textsuperscript{16} David Hume, \textit{A Treatise of Human Nature} (Oxford, 1978), 486.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Erasmus Darwin, \textit{Zoonomia}, 2 vols. (London, 1794-6), I, 147.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Porter, \textit{Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century}, 7.
\end{itemize}
Understanding Georgian sexuality requires placing it within the confines of the London streets, alleys, and brothels where dirt, noise, and pungent smells abounded. More than half of the English population experienced London life during this period. Cosmopolitan London acted as a powerful solvent to the customs and prejudices of rural England, and traditional moral values. In 1765, on his first visit to London, French essayist and travel writer Pierre Jean Grosley described a gloomy first impression of the city and its inhabitants: “the park was impregnated with a sort of black stuff, the great streets were foul with a dirty puddle to the height of three or four inches and shop fronts and coaches were caked in mud…for which the English were unafraid, its effects camouflaged by their wigs of brownish curling hair, and their black stockings.” Even in *Emma*, Mr. Woodhouse concurred with this drab view of the city: “In London it is always a sickly season. Nobody is healthy in London, nobody can be.” Amongst this scene of dirty streets Grosley also highlighted the common spectacle of prostitutes, or “women of the town who seemed more numerous in London than Paris. They arranged themselves in a file in the footpaths of all the great streets, in companies of five or six, most of them dressed very genteelly.”

Prostitution was not a distant issue to anyone who walked the streets of London during the eighteenth century. In 1796, Jane Austen’s travels took her to London, which contributed to her assurance as a commentator on her society. Covent Garden, where

---

20 Pierre Jean Grosley and Thomas Nugent. *A tour to London, or, New observations on England and its inhabitants* (London: Lockyer Davis, 1772), 24. Included in these observations is the first published mention of the English invention, the sandwich.
Jane stayed with her brother Henry in his Henrietta Street home, abounded with bawdy houses and prostitutes. This infamous part of London was known for its notorious collection of streetwalkers, known as *Harris’ List of Covent Garden Ladies*. She could hardly have avoided seeing these “women of the town” almost every time she went outdoors. In a letter to her sister Cassandra dated 23 August 1796, she reported that “I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I begin already to find my Morals corrupted.” As Austen most assuredly observed during her stay in Covent Garden, eighteenth-century England was remarkably open about the public display of sexuality. The salacious promiscuity of the population, particularly in London, encouraged sex in public. Often seen copulating with prostitutes in public spaces, James Boswell, the great libertine of the eighteenth century known for his diaries documenting the sexual promiscuity of London, recalled a rendezvous he had with a prostitute on Westminster Bridge: “At the bottom of the Haymarket I picked up a strong, jolly young damsel, and taking her under the arm I conducted her to Westminster Bridge, and then in armour complete did I engage her upon this noble edifice. The whim of doing it there with the Thames rolling below us amused me very much.” Boswell thrilled at the opportunity to

24 Gatrell, *City of Laughter*, 82-84. Covent Garden was an arcade of market stalls, coffee-houses, taverns and bagnios. Known for its artistic inhabitants, such as Thomas Rowlandson and David Garrick, the streets of Covent Garden were populated by over 30,000 families of the “middling” population. Covent Garden, also known for its small print shops, specialized in erotica and satire. According to Francis Place, a tavern keeper born on Drury Lane, “obscene Prints were sold at all the principal print shops and at most others. At Roach’s in Russell Court, where play books and school books and stationary were sold, Mrs. Roach used to open a portfolio to any boy and to any maid servant, who came to buy a penny or other book or a sheet of paper, the portfolio contained a multitude of obscene prints—some coloured, some not, and asked them if they wanted some pretty pictures, and she encouraged them to look at them. And this was done by many others.” This particular shop mentioned by Place was among the many others prosecuted in 1794 for selling *Harris’s List of Covent Garden Ladies*, 87.


26 James Boswell, and Frederick A Pottle, ed., *Boswell’s London Journal 1762-1763* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1950, 255. The word “armour” is of course slang for condom. Condoms first appeared in the late 17th century, but did not become common until the early 18th century. They were
engage in displays of public sex and often boasted of “dipping” his “machine in the Canal” before performing.  

This period of eighteenth-century Enlightenment embraced a doctrine of sexual liberty and a new way of conceiving the boundaries between permissible and impermissible behavior. What one did with one’s own body was a private matter and many eighteenth-century writers, such as William Blake who wrote, “It was better to burn sexually than to suffer in misery supreme,” advocated greater sexual freedom. Though this sexual liberty emphasized the Enlightenment ideal that this behavior was natural, it however allowed for the misogynistic public use and portrayal of the female body for pleasure. Boswell, who had always treated women as purely sexual objects notes in his journal that a man “should not indulge in women as a pleasure, but only as an evacuation.”  

This public display of male entitlement combined with the perception of women as simple objects of pleasure would contribute to the usurpation of the female body, leaving many women exposed as vessels of male evacuation and filth.

---

30 Ibid., 375.
Women's nobler parts are never in this island washed. They are left to be lathered by the men.

- John Wilkes

Some write of Angels, some of Goddess, But I of dirty human BODIES.

--Miss W--------

Historian Lawrence Stone states that “despite appearances, human sex takes place mostly in the head,” and for eighteenth-century Londoners such discretion was a necessity. The general standard of personal hygiene, even amongst the elite, was extremely low. Genteel bodies exuded filth and stench, as a description of a ball reiterates, “The balsamic effluvias from many sweet people dancing arising from putrid gums, imposhumated lungs, sour flatulencies, rank armpits, sweating feet, running sores, plasters, and ointments.” In the 1760s, Topham Beauclerk, a charming man who moved in aristocratic circles, was so “remarkably filthy in his person he generated vermin” and enough lice to “stock a parish.” English upper-class women also neglected their bodies, specifically their private parts, much to the dismay of men. John Wilmot, the Earl of Rochester, wrote a poem appealing for better feminine hygiene: “Fair nasty nymph, be clean and kind. And all my joys restore/ By using paper still behind/ The

---

31 Wilkes, Essay on Woman, 19.
33 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 303.
34 Gatrell, City of Laugher, 66. Symptoms of venereal disease exist even amongst this description of a ball, i.e., “putrid gums” and “running sores.”
35 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 304.
sponges for before.”  

Mary Wollstonecraft also lamented the lack of hygiene among her own sex. She claimed that “cleanliness…was violated in a beastly manner.” The perception of women as vectors of disease was in part because many of them were filthy.

In the poetry and fiction of the era, the female body was widely portrayed as dangerous and dirty. Illustrated in Jonathan Swift’s satirical poem, “The Lady’s Dressing Room,” is one of the greatest examples of this aesthetic battle between genders.

The various Combs for various Uses  
Fill'd up with Dirt so closely fixt,
No Brush could force a way betwixt.  
A Paste of Composition rare,  
Sweat, Dandriff, Powder, Lead and Hair;  
A Forehead Cloth with Oyl upon’t  
To smooth the Wrinkles on her Front;  
Here Allum Flower to stop the Steams,  
Exhal'd from sour unsavoury Streams,  
There Night-gloves made of Tripsy's Hide,  
Bequeath'd by Tripsy when she dy'd,  
With Puppy Water, Beauty's Help  
Distill'd from Tripsy's darling Whelp;  
Here Gallypots and Vials plac'd,  
Some fill'd with washes, some with Paste,  
Some with Pomatum, Paints and Slops  
And Ointments good for scabby Chops.  
Hard by a filthy Bason stands,  
Fowl'd with the Scouring of her Hands;  
The Bason takes whatever comes  
The Scrapings of her Teeth and Gums,  
A nasty Compound of all Hues,  
For here she spits, and here she spues.  

By listing each item and the dirt that covers it—sweat, dandruff, scabs—Swift attempted to reduce the female body to a composite of filth. The majority of satires that addressed

---

36 Ibid., 305.  
37 Ibid.  
38 Jonathan Swift, The Lady’s Dressing Room, accessed April 25, 2012,  
relations between the sexes were woman-fearing, woman-hating, and woman-patronizing. Women, usually portrayed as obliging props for the enactment of man’s fantasies, became comical subjects of undesirability and ugliness. The numerous textual jokes at the female’s expense suggest that this collective misogyny was one of several reactions to women’s increasing cultural visibility and idealization. In eighteenth-century England, a woman’s body was not her own, instead she was categorized as dirty, groped, used, and seduced. Jane Austen sought, through her writing, to reclaim the female body from a patriarchal society that both degraded and devalued women through both literary and artistic representations. By personifying themes of venereal disease and prostitution into her novels, Austen would attempt to challenge the limitations proscribed to the female body.

_The woman’s a whore, and there’s an end on’t._

-Dr. Johnson

By the end of the eighteenth century, the bodies of women thus became a battleground for redefining the ancient, intimate, and fundamental social relation of woman to man. Women’s bodies, specifically their reproductive organs, came to bear an enormous new weight of meaning. Sexual difference, or the “two sexes,” was now the new way to view the female body; as one different from the male anatomy and not

---

40 Gatrell, _City Of Laughter_, 346.
41 Ibid., 376.
42 Ibid., 347.
43 Ibid., 150.
derived from it as had been long believed in previous centuries. Not only was there a reevaluation of the female reproductive system, but the natural scientists of the eighteenth century developed new ways of looking at the two sexes that would henceforth permeate the entirety of the human body. Gradually, female genitals began to look less like a penis. Organs that used to be associated with both sexes, such as the vagina, now started to have their own names and the ovary ceased to be the “testicle feminine.” Though subtle, such changes highlighted the marked difference between male and female. Earlier anatomists also believed there was no boundary between the genders found in the blood, semen, milk and other fluids of the reproductive body, and therefore both male and female shared the same chemical fluids.

Yet, by the dawn of the eighteenth century, scientists discovered that the male ejaculate was not just liquid but “innumerable small animals in the masculine sperm, hence differentiating the sperm and egg as distinctively male and female.” The egg became only a source of nourishment for the sperm, making sperm seem far superior to the egg. For eighteenth-century physicians, the belief that women no longer shared the

---

44 Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, 39. In the one-sex theory, as explained by Thomas Laqueur, different levels of each of the fluids are what would determine gender. In terms of reproduction in the one sex model, the sex of the child produced by a couple was based on the intermixing of the fluid of a couple. Both males and females were thought to emit a sperm like substance during intercourse. If both partners produce a strong sperm, then a male will result; if both produce weak sperm, a female is born; and if in one partner the battle has gone to the weak and in the other to the strong, then the sex of the offspring is determined by the quantity of sperm produced.

45 Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women in the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 190. This permeation of difference also included the human skeleton; in 1726 Alexander Munro, a professor of anatomy in 1726 stated, in reference to the female skeleton: “The bones of the Women are frequently incomplete,” stating three identifying differences: a weak constitution made the bones of women smaller in proportion, a sedentary life makes their clavicles less crooked, and a frame proper for their procreative functions made women’s pelvic area larger and stronger.

46 Up until the eighteenth century, women’s organs resembled a version of the man’s. Berengaria, a Renaissance anatomist claimed “the neck of the uterus is like the penis, and its receptacle with testicles and vessels like a scrotum.” Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 79.

47 Ibid., 171.
same fluid composition as man, transformed the female body’s role in the spread of venereal disease. For example, the renowned Scottish surgeon, John Hunter, claimed that men were biologically incapable of unknowingly transmitting the infection, since he believed the contagion only communicated through the active and noticeable discharge of gonorrheal matter. According to Hunter, “while infected, but before the appearance of the discharge” men could “cohabit with their wives, in order to save appearances, and always with safety.”48 Never could men’s bodies be conduits of contagion nor capable of undetectably hiding venereal disease. Illness remained foreign and separable from the male body, and for the most part, medical writers claimed they could easily and completely cure male patients of the venereal distemper. Moreover, by focusing on the amputated or annihilated penis, medical writers’ disassociated sexual disease from the core of the infected man’s being since venereal infection was something that could literally be detached or removed from the male body in even the most extreme surgical cases. Only the profligate libertine, an unmanly individual infected with syphilis by a “worthless woman,” could spread the venereal contagion.49

The origin and cause of venereal disease was a hotly debated issue in the eighteenth-century. Most eighteenth-century scholars agreed that syphilis arrived in Europe in the late fifteenth century with the return of Christopher Columbus and his men who had “cohabitated with the voluptuous Indian women of America.”50 They believed that the explorers had contracted the disease on their expedition to America in 1492-93.

Spanish soldiers fighting in French king Charles VIII’s Neapolitan campaign then spread the disease throughout Europe. The prominent physician Jean Astruc adamantly endorsed this theory in his 1736 treatise on venereal disease, *De Morbis Venereis*, which would become the standard text on the subject of venereal disease for the next fifty years:

“This Sickness was brought to Europe for the first time at the end of the fifteenth century; that it has no connection with any other illness formerly known; that from the Kingdom of Naples, where first it attacked the Neapolitans and the French, it spread in all directions, by contagion, into the other countries of Europe; and, finally, that it had been brought to Naples by the Spanish soldiers who had served under Christopher Columbus in America.”

This Columbian theory, widely accepted throughout the eighteenth century, appeared in the writings of eminent scholars such as Montesquieu and Voltaire. By the nineteenth century, however, this theory would be disputed as a story invented out of spite and spread in a spirit of prejudice against Indians.

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the study of venereal disease made little progress. Though many medical treatises existed on the subject, few had new ideas. By the eighteenth century, the cause of syphilis, though still unknown, denoted a

---

53 Until recently this debate was on the forefront of the scholarly community, yet new research out of South America has argued that this theory is incorrect and the Indians of the Americas were falsely accused and instead this disease had been in Europe for a very long time. According to Plutarco Naranjo, M.D., member of the Academies of Medicine and History of Ecuador and the Minister of Health, the historical evidence for this was based on the flawed writing of Ruy Diaz de Isla, who in 1539, published his *Treatise on the Serpentine Disease, Popularly Known as Buboes in Spain*. He was 77 years old when he wrote this and the book is full of serious historical errors and lies which invalidate most of his work. His work had been forgotten until the eighteenth century when Jean Astruc came across it and made it the incontrovertible basis for the theory that syphilis came from America. Plutarco Naranjo, M.D., "On the American Indian Origin of Syphilis: Fallacies and Errors," *Columbus and the New World Medical Implications*, ed. Guy A. Settipane, M.D. (Providence: OceanSide Publications, Inc., 1995), 39.
poison which caused disease. Therefore, syphilis meant a toxic substance harbored in the female genital tract and transmitted to the male during intercourse. The origin theories during the eighteenth century were extremely varied and some ranged from ludicrous to superstitious, such as this excerpt from Daniel Turner’s *A Practical Dissertation on the Venereal Disease*, published in 1732: “…the natural Conjunction of a leprous Man with a monstrous Woman; or from the unnatural or Sodomitical, of another with a diseased Beast; from poisoned Wine; the influence of some malevolent Star; the venomous Bite of a Serpent.”

Yet ultimately there was one form of prejudice that remained the strongest: the female body. Not only linked to the spread of syphilis, women were also the origin. Once accepted that syphilis arose from coitus with a woman, there were suggestions that it resulted from the bizarre couplings of menstruating prostitutes or between women and monkeys. Female sexuality and the nature of the female reproductive organs, as linked specifically to menstruation, had long been viewed as a source of venereal poison.

According to Daniel Turner in his treatise on venereal disease, women were spontaneous generators of the disease. And one kind of Englishwoman was increasingly associated with spontaneous venereal infection, the prostitute.

By the eighteenth century, syphilis was widely used as metaphor for corruption, and prostitutes became the most frequent scapegoat for the disease. People mistakenly assumed frequent copulation spontaneously produced venereal disease. A 1771 medical treatise explained that a busy prostitute, “…whose glands within the Vagina, have been

---

58 Ibid., 36.
so inflam’d, and fretted by too frequent Coitions with Men, that most of them (having no Leisure given them to heal) exulcerate; in which Exulcerations, a most subtil, corroding, and putrid Matter might be bred, that might easily infect the next Companion.”\textsuperscript{59} An anonymous pamphlet published in England in 1769 claimed that whores, while “covering their poison with an alluring disguise,” were to blame for spreading the “venereal germ that attacks both mind and body, leaving its victims unable to father healthy children.”\textsuperscript{60}

By the mid eighteenth century, the "hystericization" of the female body encouraged the blame of prostitutes as vectors of venereal disease.\textsuperscript{61} British society deemed syphilis as the whore’s divine justice and a threat to their “moral” society. As an eighteenth-century medical dictionary insisted, “The prostitute is the sole vector of syphilis, a plague, a disgusting object, a corruption. She is bound to die of her pollution for all prostitutes are devoured by THEIR syphilis.”\textsuperscript{62} Venereal disease now became the identifying characteristic of prostitutes, the social evil, and it was only a matter of time until all women became “vectors of disease.”

Between 1769 and 1802 well over one hundred British medical texts connected the source of venereal disease with the female reproductive system.\textsuperscript{63} Prostitutes initially were the focus of a major panic centered on declining morals and public health, and doctors began to look for anomalies to distinguish prostitutes from other women.\textsuperscript{64} Yet eminent surgeons discovered that all vaginal discharge from any woman could produce disease in men and consequently reinforced the connection between venereal disease and

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 36.
\textsuperscript{60} Kathryn Norberg, “From Courtesan to Prostitute: Mercenary Sex and Venereal Disease, 1730-1802,” \textit{The Secret Malady}, ed. Linda E. Merians (Kentucky: The University of Press of Kentucky, 1996), 40.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 35.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{63} Merians, \textit{The Secret Malady}, 6.
\textsuperscript{64} Spongberg, \textit{Feminizing Venereal Disease}, 6.
femininity. In his 1810 edition of *On The Venereal Disease*, John Hunter concluded that women’s bodies were innately diseased, “It is the matter produced, whether with or without inflammation which alone contains the poison; for without the formation of matter, no venereal poison can exist.” Hunter’s assertions were instrumental in strengthening the widespread belief that women were the principle source of infection. Many men blamed women for infecting them, claiming they had given them the malady on purpose. Boswell and Andrew Douglas, his friend and surgeon, were both sure that Mrs. “Louisa” Lewis, infected with venereal disease, knowingly passed it on to Boswell. In his journal entry for 20 January 1763, he exploded:

What! Thought I, can this beautiful, this sensible, and this agreeable woman be so sadly defiled? Can corruption lodge beneath so fair a form? Can she who professed delicacy of sentiment and sincere regard for me, use me so very basely and so very cruelly? No, it is impossible…But perhaps she was ignorant of her being ill. A pretty conjecture indeed! No, she could not be ignorant. Yes, yes, she intended to make the most of me.

The growing prevalence of syphilis combined with the assumption that women were not only the sole origin of venereal disease, but knowingly passed the disease to men, clearly played a significant role in raising the level of misogyny in eighteenth-century England. Although the pathology of venereal disease remained a mystery throughout eighteenth-century medical discourse, the topic led to changes in mores about sexual activity. Most eighteenth-century guidelines on social decorum centered either on denial

---

66 Frederick A. Pottle, *Boswell’s London Journal, 1762-1763*, 155-56. In his anger towards Louisa, Boswell writes her a letter which he transcribed into his journal, asking her to pay the five guineas his surgeon charged him for curing the disease “which you have given me.” He then berates her further, “If you are not rendered callous by a long course of disguised wickedness, I should think the consideration of your deceit and baseness, your corruption both of body and mind, would be very severe punishment. Call not that a misfortune which is the consequence of your own unworthiness. I desire no mean evasions. I want no letters. Send the money sealed up. I have nothing more to say to you,” 175.
or down-playing the seriousness of venereal disease. Though literate British men and women could read about the disease and take advantage of various forms of treatment; contemporary newspaper advertisements, novels and, medical treatises all failed to highlight the fatal nature of syphilis. In James Boswell’s famous journal notes, he acknowledged it was bad form to contract the malady, but he also viewed the disease as a badge of manly potency, and seemed to only stay away not for health reasons but financial woes. Women afflicted with venereal disease saw no such benefits. Generally, by the time they discovered their infection, they would be in a more advanced stage than men, so chances of a complete cure were less certain. Seeking out treatment also meant revealing the embarrassing secret, and most women, whether wives, unmarried women, lovers or young prostitutes, were not in a position to do so. As venereal disease spread beyond the culture of prostitution into private homes, eighteenth-century England became an “infected world.”

As a historical reflection on this infected world, venereal disease and prostitution were widely referenced within eighteenth-century fiction and poetry. The explosion of print during the eighteenth century offers a valuable resource to the general conceptions of these issues by the contemporary British society. In the poem London, written in 1794, William Blake veiled the topics of venereal disease and prostitution. He balked at

---

68 Betty Rizzo, “Decorums,” The Secret Malady, ed. Linda E. Merians (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1996), 149. Though he considered it a hazard, James Boswell continued to visit prostitutes despite the consequences. “It is very curious to think that I have now been in London several weeks without ever enjoying the delightful sex, although I am surrounded with numbers of free-hearted ladies of all kinds: from the splendid Madam at fifty guineas a night, down to the civil nymph with white-thread stockings who tramps along the Strand and will resign her engaging person to your honour for a pint of wine and a shilling. Manifold are the reasons for this my present wonderful continence. I am upon a plan of economy, and therefore cannot be at the expense of first-rate dames. I have suffered severely from the loathsome distemper, and therefore shudder at the thoughts of running any risk of having it again. Besides, the surgeon’s fees in the city come very high.” Boswell, Boswell’s London Journal, 83-84.
calling the disease by name, but the harsh tone of the poem overtly addresses the moral degeneracy and social dangers of prostitution.69

But most thro’ midnights street I hear
How the youthful Harlots curse
Blasts the new-born Infants tear
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse.70

The emergence of an organized response to prostitution coincided with the emergence of a new literary interest in the subject. A novel devoted entirely to the story of a prostitute was *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, better known as *Fanny Hill*, published in 1749. Perceived as a triumvirate of spiritual confession, whore biography and romance novel, *Fanny Hill* was a story of a young girl seduced. Indebted to Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress*, the story of young, orphaned Fanny became a popular theme throughout the literary market in eighteenth-century Britain.71

The role of women in creating a new genre of novel exploded during the eighteenth century. Women writers were emerging onto a new commercial marketplace. Eager for income, middle class women wrote prose fiction, “amorous trifles” that went from being beneath the notice of the literary elite to scathing criticisms of the British

---

69 Leon Guilhamet, ”Pox and Malice: Some Representations of Venereal Disease in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Satire,” *The Secret Malady*, ed. Linda E. Merians (Kentucky: The University of Kentucky, 1996), 209; *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. Vol. 2 (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000), 56-57. Most critics read the line, “Blasts the new born Infants tear” as implying prenatal blindness, resulting from congenital syphilis, which more on these symptoms will be discussed in the chapter on venereal disease and the Lock Hospital, and the “plaques” from the next line, by earlier infection from the Harlot.


As an anonymous response to Jonathan Swift’s aforementioned description of a lady in her dressing room, Miss W fights back with an even more odious description of a gentleman in his study, clearly referencing that this gentleman suffers from venereal disease:

What one pot held she thinks this was:
Pots of pomatum, panacea,
Injections for gonorrhea;
Of empty ones there were a score,
Of newly filled as many more.
In plenty too stood box of pills,
Nor did there lack for chirurgeon’s bills.
Nor nasty rags all stiff with matter,
Nor bottle of mercurial water.
The use of which he does determine
To cure his itch, and kill his vermin:
‘Oh heaven!’ says she, ‘what creature’s man?
All stink without, and worse within!’

Until recently, Jane Austen was presumed to be a genteel novelist of manners. As a literary historian wrote in 1998, the world of lascivious and sinful London, “…has nothing to do with the gilded, safe, and privileged Georgian era of Jane Austen. She and others like her are on the inside of society looking out, and their sight does not extend as far as these dark corners.” Jane Austen, though most certainly a product of the patriarchal social structure that marginalized and compromised women, wrote novels which acknowledged and illuminated those dark corners of society and challenged social norms. Born in 1775 in Hampshire, England, she read works by Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson who depicted women not just as prostitutes but also as purveyors of

---

72 Ibid., 10.
venereal disease.\textsuperscript{75} Novels and conduct books written by women such as Hannah More reinforced prevailing notions of female subordination which clashed in a “war of ideas” with other authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft, whose feminist writings exposed and condemned the prevailing male chauvinism that trapped them in “infantine dependency.”\textsuperscript{76} Most late eighteenth-century novels written by women functioned either as domesticated or radical. Falling into one of these areas was to risk dismissal by male readers and critics. Yet Austen incorporated social criticism into her widely influential novels by using literary strategies of subversion and indirection.\textsuperscript{77} Austen practiced a subtle form of gender politics by centering her novels in the minds of “un-empowered characters”—women.\textsuperscript{78} The long traditional view of Austen’s works as only representing conservative “comedy of manners” overlooks the way they subtly exposed the connection among patriarchy, venereal disease, and prostitution. In a parody of “The Doctor and the Patient,” found in Volume IV of \textit{Elegant Extracts in Verse}, Austen fashions a dialogue between a woman and a physician and creates a humorous scene of a female patient asking her doctor for a popular eighteenth-century cure for syphilis:

‘I’ve a pain in my head’

\textsuperscript{75} Claire Tomalin, \textit{Jane Austen A Life} (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 68. Encouraged by her father she had started reading Richardson as a child and her brothers supplied her with Fielding’s novels. In Fielding’s novel \textit{Joseph Andrews}, Betty, the chambermaid, is described as one, “Who did indeed raise a Flame in her, which required the Care of a Surgeon to cool.” Henry Fielding, \textit{Joseph Andrews}, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 86. Richardson’s novel \textit{Clarissa} contains reticence of disease and prostitution insinuated by associating Mother Sinclair, described as “the sluttish one (who) is the impurest animal in nature,” and her harlots as a parody of Clarissa’s own family, the Harlowes. Samuel Richardson, \textit{Clarissa, or The History of a Young Lady}, ed. Angus Ross (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 1390. These associations were also made in the article by April London, “The Presence and Absence of Venereal Disease in the Eighteenth-Century English Novel,” \textit{The Secret Malady}, 220. I will discuss Fielding’s fascination with sexual violence in Chapter 3.


\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 19.

Said the suffering Beckford;  
To her Doctor so dread. 
‘Oh! what shall I take for’t?’

Said this Doctor so dread  
Whose name it was Newnham.  
‘For this pain in your head  
Ah! What can you do Ma’am?’

Said Miss Beckford, ‘Suppose  
If you think there’s no risk,  
I take a good Dose  
Of calomel brisk.’–

‘What a praise worthy Notion.’  
Replied Mr. Newnham. 
‘You shall have such a potion  
And so will I too Ma’am.’

Calomel, a mercurial chloride, also known as “sweet mercury,” was a brilliant white salt, commonly taken in conjunction with opium and other mercurial ointments, to promote the salivation process. Usually mixed with eight ounces of lime water and mixed in with sarsaparilla, this was a popular and fashionable oral treatment for syphilis. Austen’s poem offers quintessential evidence into how much venereal disease permeated her personal world.

Austen’s narrative is beholden to cultural and historical considerations and close attention to her small details is essential for a nuanced understanding of eighteenth-century British society. In several of her novels, Austen depicted several characters as

79 David Selwyn, editor, *The Poetry of Jane Austen and the Austen Family*. (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 14. In February 1811, Austen went into Alton with Maria Beckford, sister-in-law of Edward Austen Knight’s tenant at Chawton Great House. Miss Beckford consulted Mr. Newnham, the apothecary, about some “old complaint” and this verse is supposedly their conversation “as it took place.” No signature but the date is Feb. 1811.

The original “The Doctor and the Patient” read, “Slept you well? ‘Very well.’ My draught did good. ‘It did no harm: for yonder it hath stood.”


the embodiment of venereal disease and prostitution and though these vices seem to have little place in Austen’s literary world, her consistent investment in the literary pleasure of the body enforces the view that she utilized sexual allusion and content. Surface meanings buried by time may be latent to a modern audience yet for her contemporary readers, her characters were not metaphorical reinterpretations of disease or prostitution; instead they inhabited this British kingdom of the ill and lived there.
CHAPTER TWO: Venereal Disease and Jane Austen

*Emma*: “Kitty, a Fair but Frozen Maid”

*Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.*

- Susan Sontag\(^82\)

*I have likewise read one of Miss Austen’s works—“Emma.” …She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well…Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet.*

- Charlotte Bronte\(^83\)

Social campaigns to control venereal disease in eighteenth-century London focused on the diseased body of the prostitute. Though many physicians were more concerned about the origination of syphilis than how to treat it, most shared the assumption that venereal disease must be kept secret.\(^84\) Syphilis was labeled the “Secret Disease” because of its scandalous nature, but it became the most discussed and visible disease and of the eighteenth century.\(^85\) In *Emma*, Austen relied on *double entendres* which, combined with the secret nature of venereal disease in eighteenth-century


\(^85\) Ibid., 150, 153. In fear of his reputation, one sufferer paid quack doctor twenty five guineas for his complete treatment which was: ten for the “cure” and fifteen for the “Secrecy.” Some obtained their treatment through secret shop entrances and many patients wore masks to keep their identity secret.
domestic England, provided the subversive necessity of a riddle as double standard in the narrative of *Emma*. Laced with sexual, sub-textual innuendo, the riddle allowed Austen to address the theme of venereal disease and the patriarchal system that objectified and used the female body.

In *The Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft notes that many young females, out of boredom, indulged in jokes, hidden tricks, and riddles.

Too many females shut up together in nurseries, schools or convents. I cannot recollect without indignation, the jokes and hoiden tricks which knots of young women indulge themselves in. They were almost on a par with the double meanings, which shake the convivial table when the glass has circulated freely.\(^86\)

Puzzles and plays-on-words, widely collected in eighteenth-century England, had the capacity for reducing thought-provoking observations to an exceptionally condensed textual form.\(^87\) Riddles, often trite but occasionally profound were prized as veils for deeper meanings.\(^88\) Yet, according to the eighteenth-century publication, *Riddles, Charades, and Conundrums, the greater part of which have never been published*, the reputation of riddles was quickly becoming one of derogatory, sexual innuendo.

Enough has certainly been said to defend this species of writing from contempt, which, notwithstanding the laugh that may be raised against it, is still cherished by the lively and the young. None can dispute that riddles are at least an innocent amusement; and, when tolerably well chosen, they prove an exercise of ingenuity, and must have a tendency to teach the mind to compare and judge. It has perhaps been owing to the trash commonly disseminated under the name of enigmas that

---


\(^87\) David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 81.

\(^88\) Ibid., 82.
they have fallen into disrepute. An attempt has been made in the following selection, to rescue them from the reproach of barbarism and puerility.  

For Jane Austen’s Emma, collecting and deciphering such riddles became a form of sexual play as these riddles also symbolized an erotic narrative, functioning as a kind of "cupid," or mediator for romance. While trying to encourage a romance between her friend Harriet Smith and Mr. Elton, Emma persuades Mr. Elton “to contribute any really good enigmas, charades, or conundrums that he might recollect.” As Emma and Harriet collected riddles for their “riddle book,” there is one in particular which Mr. Woodhouse, Emma’s father, begins to mutter. He is only able to remember the first stanza, “Kitty, a fair but frozen maid, kindled a flame I yet deplore, the hoodwink’d boy I called in aid, though of his near approach afraid, so fatal to my suit before.” After he frets over forgetting the riddle, Emma consoles him, “it is written out in our second page. We copied it from the ‘Elegant Extracts.’” It was Garrick’s you know. Published in 1771 and written by David Garrick, this popular riddle filled the pages of The New Foundling Hospital for Wit, a miscellany of verse and prose that reflected the political turbulence of the time. There was nothing “elegant” about this outrageous publication that flaunted

---

89 Riddles, Charades, and Conundrums, the greater part of which have never been published. With a preface on the antiquity of riddles. London, 1822. As quoted from Jill Heydt-Stevenson, Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 163.
90 Ibid., 159.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 64&73. The footnote on both these pages states this poem, “Kitty,” according to R.W. Chapman, is a popular riddle initially published in the Fourth Part (1771) of The New Foundling Hospital for Wit and, also according to Chapman, never appeared in ‘Elegant Extracts.’ According to Claire Tomalin, in her biography on Jane Austen, Chapman is considered to be the greatest of all Austen scholars. Tomalin, Jane Austen, 108.

David Garrick, the famous eighteenth-century actor, was one of the Lock Hospital’s most faithful supporters. Garrick and his wife were particularly sympathetic to those who had venereal disease and
fellow contributors from members of the Hell-Fire Club, a notorious group of men who during the eighteenth century combined sexual libertinism with conscious anti-Christian ideology.  

Being that *Elegant Extracts* was a most conservative publication, as illustrated by the rest of the title, *Being a Copious Selection of Instructive, Moral, and Entertaining Passages, from the Most Eminent Prose Writers*, Austen’s inclusion of this riddle, clearly not published within these pages, seems an intentional jab towards the elite class, for it was the aristocracy and intellectuals who made up these clubs of libertine excess. Though Austen only transcribed one verse, her contemporary audience would have known this riddle well, as implied by the comment Emma makes to her father that she “already had the riddle fully written on their second page.”  

Emma and Harriet, like Wollstonecraft’s females “shut up together,” have amused themselves by collecting material that is less than polite. Claiming “they owed to Mr. Elton their two or three politest puzzles,” they are in the habit of perusing improper charades; therefore their possession and knowledge of the *Kitty* riddle is not unusual.  

Austen’s decision to integrate this specific riddle into the pages of *Emma* allows her to explore themes of venereal disease and expose the unrelenting way in which the patriarchal system employed the female body. The riddle in its entirety is a morbid and

---

95 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 535. Members of this group in France were none other than the infamous Marquis de Sade.
96 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 65; Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen’s Unbecoming Conjunctions*, 162.
lewd account of male promiscuity and entitlement and an embodiment of the history of venereal disease in eighteenth-century England.

Kitty, a fair, but frozen maid,
Kindled a flame I still deplore;
The hoodwink’d boy I call’d in aid,
Much of his near approach afraid,
So fatal to my suit before.
At length, propitious to my pray’r,
The little urchin came’
At once he sought the midway air,
And soon he clear’d, with dexterous care,
The bitter relicks of my flame.
To Kitty, Fanny now succeeds,
She kindles slow, but lasting fires:
With care my appetite she feeds;
Each day some willing victim bleeds,
To satisfy my strange desires.
Say, by what title, or what name,
Must I this youth address?
Cupid and her are not the same,
Tho’ both can raise, or quench a flame—
I’ll kiss you, if you guess.  

The riddle addresses both venereal disease and the sadistic methods men used to cure themselves by employing the double standard of the female body as both poison and cure. Austen weaves these themes cleverly and skillfully throughout the novel. Using Mr. Woodhouse to introduce the riddle into *Emma*, Austen has him mention it twice: the first time while fondly remembering his youth, “So many clever riddles as there used to be when he was young—he wondered he could not remember them,” and the second while fondly remembering his wife, “Your dear mother was so clever at all those things. If I had but her memory.” His association with the riddle, especially as part of his youth, suggests that Mr. Woodhouse may have been a libertine and now suffers from

---

101 Austen, *Emma*, 64, 73.
syphilis. Acting as a conduit for the riddle, Mr. Woodhouse is clearly analogous with the narrator of the riddle.

The narrator suffers from “a flame I still deplore” and searches for a way to clear up the “bitter relicks of my flame.” This suggests he suffers from a venereal disease passed by Kitty, his “fair, but frozen maid.” Mr. Woodhouse, clearly a hypochondriac, also seems to suffer from his own sort of kindled flame. He cannot bear a chill and constantly prays, as does the riddle’s narrator, for a “fire” to cure him. His favorite meal, or rather, the only meal he can stomach, since “his own stomach could bear nothing rich,” consisted of gruel, “Thin gruel as his own was all he could with self-approbation recommend.” In *Domestic Medicine: Or, A Treatise on the Prevention and Cure of Diseases by Regimen and Simple Medicine*, William Buchan includes in his section on venereal disease:

> When a person has reason to suspect that he has caught the venereal infection, he ought most strictly to observe a cooling regimen (in diet), to avoid every thing of a heating nature, as wines, spirituous liquors, rich sauces, spiced, salted, high-seasoned and smoke-dried provisions, &c. as also all aromatic and stimulating vegetables as onions, garlic, shallot, nutmeg, mustard, cinnamon, mace, ginger, and such like. His food ought chiefly to consist of mild vegetables, milk, broths, light puddings, and gruels, &c.

The reputed cure for syphilis, mercury rendered the sufferer incapable of eating anything other than gruel. Jean Astruc believed “only mercury to be effective” and preferred to

---

102 Heydt-Stevenson, “Slipping Into the Ha-Ha,” 4. Heydt-Stevenson also suggests that Mr. Woodhouse may suffer from tertiary syphilis due to his frail health and thin diet.

103 The use of the word “flame” was quite common in describing venereal disease in literature. For example, in the previously noted excerpt from Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* and the description of Betty, the chambermaid as “one who did indeed raise a flame in her,” and another example is from the *Authentic Memoirs of...Sally Salisbury* written in 1723 by Charles Walker which describes venereal disease as thus: “Now the Embers which had glow’d some time began to break out into a Flame, and I had just Reason to believe my Constitution very much impair’d by the ‘French Disease.’” These examples are given in as excerpts from April London’s article, “Avoiding the Subject,” *The Secret Malady*, 221-222.

104 Ibid., 16, 21.

apply it externally instead of the patient ingesting it. This mercurial ointment, rubbed into the patient’s lower extremities while the patient stood in front of the fire, continued until the patient vomited pints of saliva. This extreme measure limited the patient’s meals to a very light diet, consisting mostly of thin gruel.

The treatment of syphilis proved almost as dangerous as the disease. Undergoing salivation treatment was a debilitating experience and many refused to take a “Course of Salivation,” as it was not only “Torture” but also exposed the person undergoing treatment. As one patient who refused salivation complains:

Pain of Salivation, such as to be four or five Weeks without Relaxation or Sleep, without being able to swallow any thing, and by this Torture I should purchase the Cure at a very dear Rate: besides, to lost my Teeth, or have them all loosened and grown black, and the Gums worn away…with the great Scent that Salivation leaves, so as to make all the World know, that such a Person has passed through the grand Remedy, is to me of very great Consequence.

Yet given these consequences, several hundred people a year underwent this extensive and controversial treatment of syphilis. Salivation, believed to bring forth the internal venereal poisons through excessive production of saliva, was stimulated by rubbing mercurial ointment into the body. Standing before a fire, the patient began the cure by rubbing mercurial ointment into their body, first starting with the lower extremities and then, as each day passed, progressed from the calf to the buttocks, and then from the buttocks up the loins to the back of the neck. Throughout the treatment, the patient,

---

111 Ibid., 164.
wrapped in blankets, is confined to bed and kept in a room heated by a roaring fire. By
the fifth day, patients normally complained of headaches and of pain in the gums and
teeth as they frequently suffered permanent damage to their mouths, including the loss of
teeth and the uvula.\textsuperscript{112} By the end of the seventh day the tongue and mouth were
generally red and the patient began to spit a “thick, tenacious, viscid, putrid Substance”
as much as three pints within twenty-four hours. As the spitting continued, for up to six
and seven weeks, the patient lived entirely on broth and gruel.\textsuperscript{113}

The riddle also alludes to one of the more popular treatments of syphilis which
involved applying mercury to the body in such a way that the person ultimately
resembled a smoking chimney place. The patient sat upon a “perforated” seat, wrapped
tightly in a blanket, entirely enclosing the body and head, and then secured to a hook in
the ceiling. Cinnabar, a dangerous mixture of mercury and sulfur, was then sprinkled on a
hot iron placed below the seat and the fumes ascended through the chair, guided by an
inverted funnel so that they would flow “all around the Diseased Parts.”\textsuperscript{114} Turner only
used cinnabar fumigation when a patient would not salivate, his favored method of
treatment.

For chancrous Ulcerations, either on the Glans or Praputium in Men, and the
Labia as well as Sinus Pudoris in Women; and that is the Smoaking them with
Cinnabar, thrown up on a hot Iron, or a common Heater; the Fume ascending
through a Funnel, or a Seat perforated like the close Stool (which I make frequent
use of for such purpose) all round the Diseased Parts, of which Cinnabar I order to
be sprinkled on at a time, every Day, and sometimes twice a Day, for a Week; the
Iron at the same time being hot enough to raise a Flame with Smoak, but not for
burning or fiery red, as to make instantly consume away in Flame alone.”\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{112} Kevin Patrick Siena, \textit{Poverty and the Pox: Venereal Disease in the London Hospitals, 1600-1800}, (PhD.
Diss., University of Toronto, 2001),21.
\textsuperscript{113} Wilson, \textit{Surgery, Skin and Syphilis: Daniel Turner’s London (1667-1741)}, 164.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., D. Turner, \textit{Syphilis}, 1727, 173 &51.
\textsuperscript{115} D. Turner, \textit{Syphilis}, 51.
Thus, as the riddle states, in much the same language used by Turner, the youthful chimney sweep “can raise, or quench a flame” as he “fought the midway air, / And soon he clear’d, with dexterous care, /The bitter relicks of my flame.” The riddle evokes the imagery given of the scenario found in the image (Fig. 1) from Lalouette Pierre’s *New Method of Treating Venereal Diseases by Fumigation* published in 1776.\(^{116}\)

Treatments for venereal disease, prior to the eighteenth century, were limited to those who could afford them. Gender and class played a crucial role in determining the treatment options and the patients’ own experience with medical care.\(^{117}\) In 1747, as a product of the new Enlightenment philosophy, The London Lock Hospital, for which

---

\(^{116}\) As found in Sophie Vasset, “Destroying to Cure: Representation of Treatment in 18th Century Medical Treatises,” *Interfaces* 26 (2007).

\(^{117}\) Siena, *Poverty and the Pox*, ii.
David Garrick was a faithful supporter, was established specifically for the treatment of the poor who were afflicted with the “secret malady.”118 Ironically, these attempts to treat venereal disease in the eighteenth century focused increasingly on the institutionalization of the marginalized bodies of helpless women and young girls, the majority of which were raped or infected against their knowledge.119 Everywhere, there was always an irreducible gap between men’s sexual entitlement and most women’s experience of vulnerability.120 These efforts to control women’s sexuality referenced the fear that plebian female promiscuity threatened the British social order and venereal disease hospitals frequently represented the front line of defense.121

One line in the riddle, more gruesome than the rest, gives testament to those innocent victims which made up the wards of the Lock Hospital, “Each day some willing victim bleeds, to satisfy my strange desires.” Besides mercurial treatments, another widely accepted cure for men suffering from venereal disease was sex with a person considered “fresh,” specifically virgins.122 This notion more than likely began with libertines who believed “the disease was caused by the mixture of the seed of many men in the prostitute’s body.”123 Therefore, passing it on to another became a widely held cure of venereal disease.124 The reference to a bleeding victim refers to the narrator’s need to have sex with a virgin in order to cure him of the disease. The need for virgins brings out another similarity between the riddle’s narrator and Mr. Woodhouse. The

118 Merians, “The London Lock Hospital and the Lock Asylum for Women,” The Secret Malady, 128. Garrick was given honorary lifetime governorship in return for his help and support.
119 Women as “helpless victims” against seduction and rape will be discussed further in Chapter 3.
121 Kevin Siena, Venereal Disease Hospitals and the Urban Poor (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2004), 9.
122 Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution, 210.
123 Ibid., 211.
124 Ibid. “The Virgin Cure:” In South Africa this myth still exists and the rape of children has risen nearly 400% since AIDS in the 1980’s.
latter seems only to “flourish” within the presence of young, innocent, and therefore virginal girls. “His spirits required support” and the idea of matrimony “was always disagreeable” as he states to Emma, “…pray do not make any more matches; they are silly things, and break up one’s family circle grievously.”

The answer to the riddle is “chimney-sweep,” eighteenth-century slang for sexual intercourse. Yet, the subtext of the riddle refers to the shocking and sad fate of a young child, raped and infected with venereal disease. Calling on the youth, the “little urchin came,” and “soon he clear’d with dexterous care, the bitter relicks of my flame.” A look at rape trials in the Old Bailey Sessions Papers indicates an overwhelming connection between rape cases involving young girls and venereal disease. One such account from September 3rd, 1766 found Edward Brophy, guilty for “committing a rape on the body of Phillis Holmes, spinster, an infant under ten years of age.” Young Phillis’ account of her rape is as follows:

Q. How did you come by that illness you had some time ago, when the nurse found you was out of order?

---

125 Austen, Emma, 5, 11.
126 Barton, Garrick, 292; Heydt-Stevenson, “Slipping Into the Ha-Ha,” 12. During the eighteenth-century, due to lack of proper tools, chimneys had to be brush cleaned and only a child was small enough to fit inside a chimney. Master Sweeps would buy children from orphanages or take in young homeless children from the street. These were usually young boys between the ages of five and ten years. It was common practice for many of the Master Sweeps to “light a fire” under the young apprentices as “encouragement,” thus forced to clean all the way through the top of the chimney! An excerpt from the poem “Songs of Innocence” by William Blake tells the sad story of one young chimney sweep:

“When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry 'weep! 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.
There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head,
That curled like a lamb's back, was shaved: so I said,
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare,
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

127 Trumbach, Sex and the Gender Revolution, 210-218.
P. Holmes. The first time was, I went down into the cellar to draw a pint of two
penny for Mr. Griffiths; Ned, the man that stands there, followed me down; he put
his hands up my cloaths, and carried me to the farthest part of the cellar, and
stopped my mouth, and pulled out what he had, and put it into my private parts.
Q. Did he ever do so again?
P. Holmes. The next time I went into the cellar for a quart of beer for two
carpenters, and he did the same.
Q. Did he ever do so after that?
P. Holmes. Yes, he did so in the club-room.
Q. How often in the club-room?
P. Holmes. Only once.
Q. Have not you told some people he did so twice in the club-room?
P. Holmes. No, I have not.
Q. Is all that you have said true?
P. Holmes. It is.
Q. What did the prisoner say to you afterwards?
P. Holmes. He said I should be hanged if ever I spoke of it; he bid me say it was
by a kick.
Q. When did you begin to be ill?
P. Holmes. That was the second time.
Q. How long was that time after the first?
P. Holmes. That was about a fortnight after the first.
Q. Where was you cured?
P. Holmes. I was sent to the hospital to be cured.
Q. What was you sent to be cured of?
P. Holmes. To be cured of the pox. 128

Found guilty, Brophy’s sentence was death. The eighteenth century saw a greater
incidence in cases of child rape, and accusations of venereal infection occurred in more
than half of all rape trials involving children. 129 In the sermons he preached at the
opening of the Lock Chapel on March 28th, 1762, Reverend Martin Madan again raised
the case of victimized children,

What an idea must it give us of the wickedness of the human heart, to be told, that
in order to get rid of the disease, as they foolishly think on easy terms, men who
have been infected with it, have, from the most weak and groundless principles,

128 Old Bailey Proceedings Online (www.oldbaileyonline.org, version 6.0, 25 April 2012), September 1766,
trial of Edward Brophy (t17660903-38).
129 Siena, Venereal Disease, Hospitals and the Urban Poor, 194.
which have no foundation, but the most diabolical cruelty and wickedness, communicated this loathsome distemper to numbers of little innocents.\footnote{Rev. Martin Madan, “Every Man Our Neighbour,” sermon delivered on 28 March 1762, as quoted from Linda E. Merians, \textit{Lock Hospital and Asylum for Women}, 134-135.}

Year after year the Lock Hospital mounted very public campaigns in order to educate the public about this widely held fallacy, and it was commonplace for advertisements such as the following to run in public papers:

As several Children from Two to Ten years old have become Patients in the Hospital from ways little suspected by the Generality of Mankind, the Governors think it their Duty out of regard to little Innocents to publish the motives of wicked People to so vile an Act and to assure them of the Fallacy of it. It is received Opinion with many of the lower Class of Mankind, both Males and Females, that when infected themselves if they can procure a sound Person to communicate the Disease to; they certainly get rid of it.

And from this Principle the most horrid Acts of Barbarity have been frequently committed on poor little Infants, tho’ these vile Wretches have by Experience been convinced of the Absurdity of such vulgar Notions, yet this requires the utmost Publication to prevent such unheard of Cruelty and Inhumanity for the future.\footnote{Merians, “The London Lock Hospital,” 134.}

In at least one case, the Lock Hospital did more than just speak out against this practice. In November 1764, the financial supporters of the Lock, amongst them David Garrick, funded the expense of prosecuting the defendant, Edmund Thirkell, for the rape of five-year old Mary Amelia Halfpenny, who had been admitted to the hospital after being infected with venereal disease.\footnote{Ibid., 135.} Austen must have been aware of this public campaign: and Emma’s knowledge of Garrick’s riddle, clearly written in response to this abhorrent practice, bridges the gap between the respectable and the criminal. Austen uses this riddle to infiltrate her decorous world to highlight how vastly venereal disease had
saturated the private lives behind the closed doors of Georgian England.\textsuperscript{133} Doing so, the riddle itself and its sexual themes form a cohesive substructure that subtly parallels many of the events in the novel. Through these intended yet covert associations Austen raised the likelihood that Mr. Woodhouse and Emma acted as conduits for this social criticism on the invasion of venereal disease into domestic society. Using this multi-faceted approach enabled Austen not only to make \textit{Emma} an acceptable, witty, and decorous novel but also a subversive, sharp, and socially challenging one.

\textsuperscript{133} Heydt-Stevenson, “Slipping Into the Ha-Ha,” 4.
**Persuasion and Emma: The Eruption of Fashion**

*Morning visits are never fair by women at her time of life, who make themselves up so little. If she would only wear rouge, she would not be afraid of being seen; but last time I called, I observed the blinds were let down immediately.*

-Sir Walter Elliot\(^\text{134}\)

*And thou, my toilette! Where I oft have sat, while hours unheeded pass’d in deep debate, how curls should fall, or where a patch to place: If blue or scarlet best become my face.*

-Lady Mary Wortley Montagu\(^\text{135}\)

Though described as the *“secret disease,”* syphilis was a very visual malady, manifesting through pustules and eating away at the membranous parts of the body. In Daniel Turner’s observations of the disease, he found the *“demonstrative signs of syphilis,”* included crusty scabs or pustules found on the scalp and deep-seated nodules that protruded from the cranium. Much of the face became eaten away by syphilis, as the *“venereal venom ate into the nose and cheeks, making sores in the Mouth, upon the tongue and Lips…and prey[ed] upon the Bone of the Nostrils.”* Turner described one patient who only became concerned about the pox after the food he ate and the pipe smoke he inhaled came out of his nose:

*His Complaint now being not only of his Tonfils, which were much inflamed, and one of them ulcerated; but alfo of a little Sore in the Roof of his Mouth, or Os Palati; telling me farther, that when he fmoak’d, he obferv’d the Fume, fome Part of it, to come out at his Nostrils; the like of his Liquors, if he drank haftily; and that he was fure it was not by the backward Part behind the Uvula, becaufe it ferv’d him fo of late, when his Swallowing was very well, and his Throat gave him do Difturbance.*\(^\text{136}\)


The head of an eighteenth-century syphilitic prostitute, as displayed in Fig. 2, portrays the obvious disfigurement syphilis had on the face. As venereal disease continued to spread from prostitutes on the streets of London into the private drawing rooms of Austen’s Georgian society, the pustules and crusty scabs erupting onto the faces and bodies of eighteenth-century genteel women would have a direct effect on fashion. Trapped within a society that demanded “a magnificent complexion,” the artifice of eighteenth-century beauty encompassed mercury-based lotions to treat syphilis sores and dental transplantation to replace teeth rotted away from salivation treatments. Ironically, as women tried desperately to correct or conceal this damage, the patriarchal British society simultaneously attacked their efforts, accusing them of deceit and fakery.


137 Not included in this statement are black patches, or “beauty” marks, used to cover up venereal buboes on the face, skin grafts and merkins, or pubic wigs. There were at least two different kinds of plaster that could be taken for beauty spots. One was a patch of material, like black silk, which could be placed over the sore with an adhesive. The other was formed by wax, which would then contain a curing agent; normally mercury and it would be placed over the sore. The mercury was mixed with turpentine in a mortar until a black powder was obtained and then mixed with hog’s lard until the right consistency. Add wax and when applied to the sore it resembled a discreet yet fashionable beauty spot. Daniel Turner’s Syphilis: A Practical Dissertation on Venereal Disease, 4th ed. (London, 1732), 68. Joseph Addison, in 1710, printed in the Tatler a satire referencing the pioneering techniques of a Venetian sixteenth-century plastic surgeon who would restore the appearance of his aristocratic patrons who had lost their noses to syphilis, by giving them new noses cut from the buttocks of their serving men. According to the Oxford Companion to The Body, merkins, or pubic wigs, were commonly used to cover up syphilitic pustules and gonorrheal warts. Also, as many eighteenth-century patrons suffered from a litany of lice, many were forced to shave their nether regions, and would use merkins as a pubic wig!
Not only had venereal disease crossed into the private drawing rooms of Austen’s Georgian England society through the use of riddles in *Emma*, but the disease also erupted through the pages of *Persuasion* as a fashionable mercurial lotion ointment known as Gowland’s Lotion. Anne Elliot, Austen’s heroine in the novel, is encouraged by her father, the vain and pompous Sir Walter Elliot to improve upon her looks:

In the course of the same morning, Anne and her father chancing to be alone together, he began to compliment her on her improved looks—he thought her ‘less thin in her person, in her cheeks; her skin, her complexion, greatly improved—clearer, fresher. Had she been using anything in particular?’ ‘No, nothing.’ ‘Merely Gowland,’ he supposed. ‘No, nothing at all.’ ‘Ha! He was surprised at that’; and added, ‘Certainly you cannot do better than continue as you are; you cannot be better than well; or I should recommend Gowland, the constant use of Gowland, during the spring months. Mrs. Clay has been using it at my recommendation, and you see what it has done for her. You see how it has carried away her freckles.’

During the eighteenth century, Gowland’s lotion was one of the most popular remedies used by ladies of fashion. Developed by apothecary John Gowland, this lotion first attained fame in 1743 when Elizabeth Chudleigh, Duchess of Kingston, began to suffer eruptions on her face after acquiring syphilis from her unfaithful husband. She therefore commissioned Gowland for a remedy. When applied to the face, the lotion produced a form of crust on the top layer of the skin, which when rubbed away, removed all the blemishes. As a result, the skin’s “bloom” recovered, and unsightly blemishes like freckles, or pox scars, diminished. After “healing” the Duchess of her facial eruptions, the ladies of fashion and high society demanded Gowland’s lotion. In an advertisement

---

139 Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, 103. A footnote included in this edition notes that Gowland’s lotion was the only mention of a brand name in Austen’s fiction. It was a skin tonic containing mercury, an element in treating venereal disease at the time, 190.

appearing in *La Belle Assemblee* dated June 1st, 1816, the effects of this remedy were highly praised, “Ladies of the first fashion, from their own experience, recommend Gowland’s Lotion as the most pleasant and effectual remedy for all complaints to which the Face and Skin are liable, by removing every kind of coarseness, eruption and unpleasant appearance.”

The main ingredient in Gowland’s Lotion was mercury, the common eighteenth-century treatment for syphilis and therefore repaired lesions and marks of venereal disease on the complexion. *The Modern Practice of Physic* by eminent British physician Robert Thomas however, exposed the dangers of this remedy: "A remedy much employed by women who are troubled with eruptions in the face is Gowland's lotion, the basis of which is the oxymuriate of mercury or superacetate of lead; but it is a hazardous application when continued for any length of time."

Using Gowland’s lotion, Austen has characterized Mrs. Clay as superficial, yet her obsession with beauty was common for most women in the eighteenth century. Sir Henry Beaumont’s *Crito: A Dialogue on Beauty* written in 1752 described the ideal beautiful face:

> The forehead should be white, smooth and open. The skin in general should be white, properly tinged with red with apparent softness and a look of thriving health in it. The cheeks should not be wide; should have a degree of plumpness, with the red and white finely blended together. The eyebrows, well divided, rather full than thin, semi-circular broader in the middle than at the ends. The mouth should be small, and the lips not of equal thickness. A truly pretty mouth is like a Rose-bud that is beginning to grow.

---

Male writers, poets and artists, regarded this as the perfect Englishwoman and enforced this demand for perfection. Philosophical treatises, such as Edmund Burkes’ eloquent *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, decreed beauty in the fair sex was “an appearance of delicacy, and even fragility.” English painters dwelt on the beauty of the face and within most eighteenth-century portraiture art, women, painted with “fine white skin, light complexion, rather oval face and sparkling large eyes” embodied this perfection.

In *Persuasion*, Mrs. Clay’s physical appearance is highly criticized. She is described as having “freckles, and a projecting tooth, and a clumsy wrist,” and her blemished skin is especially found most undesirable: “But poor Mrs. Clay who, with all her merits, can never have been reckoned tolerably pretty…That tooth of her’s and those freckles. Freckles do not disgust me so very much as they do him. I have known a face not materially disfigured by a few, but he abominates them. You must have heard him notice Mrs. Clay’s freckles.” This description of her goes beyond any physical characterization and instead reflects the image of morality for which appearance so vehemently upheld. Therefore, in her desperation to become “beautiful” for Sir Elliot, Mrs. Clay, at his suggestion, includes Gowland’s lotion into her daily toilette. Austen’s contemporary audience, well aware of the lotion’s use for treating syphilitic eruptions on the face, and not just to diminish “freckles,” identified Mrs. Clay’s use of Gowland’s Lotion as a signifier for her inner corruption, and portrayal as shallow and corrupt. This

---

143 Ribeiro, *Facing Beauty*, 152.
indicated to all but the oblivious Sir Walter Elliot that Mrs. Clay will sell herself to the highest bidder, indicating her status as a kept woman.147

Often judged for symptoms of disease, faces offered the most obvious symptoms of syphilis. “Loose teeth equal loose morals” was a very popular eighteenth-century saying, as missing or loose teeth would easily decay or rot away due to mercury and salivation treatments.148 The detail of character revealed through Mrs. Clay’s “projecting tooth” in Persuasion and Harriet Smith’s “tooth amiss,” in Emma, highlights Austen’s acuity as a satirist of contemporary fashion.149 Annotating these often overlooked descriptive details provides valuable insight into eighteenth-century dentistry and its association with social politics and venereal disease. Austen’s reference to teeth invokes ideas about social class and the uneasy movement between social circles, as is seen in both the stories of Mrs. Clay and Harriet Smith. Mrs. Clay, as a poor and unattractive widow, is desperately trying to rise above her rank by forcing herself to “appear” more attractive. Yet, as indicated by the “projecting tooth,” Mrs. Clay’s true nature is projected through her attempted concealment by her use of Gowland's Lotion. Harriet Smith, who’s “tooth amiss” stimulates her desire to consult a dentist in London, represents the social disorder Emma has created by transplanting Harriet from her “natural” place in the hierarchy of Highbury to a position of privilege, a symbolism for

the dental practice of transplantation.\textsuperscript{150} The role of teeth as indicators of social standing in eighteenth-century British society as inextricably tied to the importance of good teeth signified not only one’s moral and social standing but one’s beauty and physical health.\textsuperscript{151}

Strongly associated with trendy London tastes and social aspirations, dentistry became a medical phenomenon in Georgian England. There was a strong link between seeking dental treatment and fashion.\textsuperscript{152} Counted amongst the requirements of the eighteenth-century idea of perfect beauty, “the teeth, which may be called the index of health,” established the role of dentistry as a cosmetic necessity. In *An Appendage to the Toilet: or an Essay on the Management of the Teeth, Dedicated to the Ladies*, written in 1798, the author complains that women are “daily robbed of an essential part of their beauty by imprudence or neglect in the management of their teeth.”\textsuperscript{153} Not only were the results of syphilis so disfiguring, but the mercurial and salivation treatments used to combat syphilis left most sufferers with putrid gums and rotted, missing teeth. Thus, as genteel British women strived to improve their looks through dentistry, they once again utilized extremely dangerous treatments, which compromised both their health and their beauty.

Represented by Harriet’s “tooth amiss,” and her own transplantation in the social circle of Highbury, the extremely costly and controversial practice of dental

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 477. Emma orchestrates Harriet’s trip to London in order to remove her from the society which she enabled her to be a part of. She uses the tooth as an excuse, “There was a tooth amiss. Harriet really wished, and had wished some time, to consult a dentist. Austen, *Emma*, 414.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 479.


transplantation practiced in the late eighteenth century by wealthy patients, entailed the extraction of teeth from poor donors willing to trade healthy teeth for cash and then the transplantation of those teeth into the putrid gums of the wealthy patient.\textsuperscript{154} This operation became a symbol of the excessive, dangerous, and abusive fashion trends from the eighteenth century as it not only highlights the obsession for perfection and beauty but promoted the abuse of the underprivileged. Perhaps most shocking is the discovery of a virulent strain of syphilis which was being communicated via this promiscuous contact between the social classes. John Hunter, in his \textit{Treatise on the Venereal Disease}, records a number of instances of the communication of secondary syphilis through tooth transplantation, confirming “the edge of the gums began to ulcerate, and the ulceration when on until the tooth dropped out.”\textsuperscript{155}

English essayist and minister, Vicesimus Knox, wrote in his edition of \textit{Winter Evenings: or lucubrations on life and letters} a section entitled “On Injuring the Health in attempts to Improve Beauty,” the horrific details of one woman’s attempt at tooth transplantation upon discovering she has a cavity.

Any thing on earth was tolerable in comparison with a cavity. Nay, I know not whether…I should not have submitted cheerfully to death, rather than have lived with a black speck on a front tooth…The remedy was \textit{transplantation}. I submitted to extraction with a stoical heroism. A chimney sweeper, who attended at my side, parted with his best tooth for a shilling, and it was planted reeking with blood and warm with life, in the socket whence my odious tooth with the black speck had just been drawn. I was now in a state of exultation. I thought my


\textsuperscript{155} John Hunter, \textit{A Treatise on the Venereal Disease} (London, 1786), 391. Although not the first person to conduct tooth transplants between living people, he did advance the state of knowledge in this area by realizing that the chances of a successful tooth transplant would be improved if the donor tooth was as fresh as possible and was matched for size with the recipient.
gums might defy old age and decay, and gloried in the idea of having almost found out the art of rejuvenescence. My triumph was but transient...as an inflammation ensued. Upon inquiry, that the person whose tooth had been placed in my gums, was laboring under a complication of the filthiest of diseases, and that the tooth inoculated them all on me. I have heard I am not the only victim to such follies and unnatural practices. I understand the transplanting of teeth is dangerous, even when the person from whom it is taken is healthy; but is it likely that a healthy and temperate person would part with his teeth for money? He who can submit to this, must be an abject wretch.\footnote{Vicesimus Knox, D. D., Master of Tunbridge School, and Late Fellow of St. John’s College, Oxford, \textit{Winter Evenings; or Lucubration’s on Life and Letters} (New York: Evert Duyckinck, 1805), 266-268.}

In (Fig. 3), Thomas Rowlandson’s engraving; \textit{Transplanting Teeth} offers a more visually impacting satirical comment upon the practice of transplantation and British social hierarchy.\footnote{Thomas Rowlandson, “Transplanting Teeth (c.1790) [Engraving],” in Children and Youth in History, Item #164, http://chnm.gmu.edu/cych/primary-sources/164 (accessed April 25, 2012). This print is by Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) and is dated 1787. It is a satirical comment upon the real practice of rich gentlemen and ladies of the 18th century paying for teeth to be pulled from poor children and transplanted in their gums. The dentist present is portrayed as a quack. There are even two quacking ducks on the placard advertising his fake credentials. He is busy pulling teeth from the mouth of a poor young chimney sweep. Covered in soot and exhausted, he slumps in a chair. Meanwhile the dentist’s assistant transplants a tooth into a fashionably dressed young lady's mouth. Two children can be seen leaving the room clutching their faces and obviously in pain from having their teeth extracted.} The young chimney sweep, covered in soot, and slumped in his chair, exhausted from the ordeal, makes another appearance in this research.
associated with venereal disease and the oppression on the poor and weak. The young children leaving the room to the left, having just had teeth pulled, hold their hands against their mouths in pain. According to Hunter, young, impoverished and orphaned children, were much sought after for their teeth as smaller teeth fit better and did not oppose the opposite teeth.\footnote{John Hunter, \textit{The Natural History of The Human Teeth. Explaining Their Structure, Use, Formation, Growth and Diseases In Two Parts} (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1865 edition), 238.} This connection of syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease, and the young children and chimney sweep, offers an ironic turn of events as they, through tooth transplantation, become the “infector” of those that oppress them. Tooth transplantation as depicted here, is almost considered a sexual act, because of its relation to “the filthiest of diseases,” syphilis.

With all these accoutrements to treat, enhance and disguise a woman’s appearance, the notion of deceit was a general concern during the eighteenth century. One writer in the \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} complained, “Nothing is left for real Beauty to distinguish itself to Advantage.”\footnote{Ribeiro, \textit{Facing Beauty}, 190.} The poet William Cowper claimed Englishwomen tried to mislead by using more make-up, for they wanted “to be thought beautiful and much more beautiful than nature has made them” and so they were “guilty of a design to deceive.”\footnote{Ibid., 190.} Jonathan Swift in \textit{Gulliver’s Travels} describes the female flesh as treacherous and reiterates in grossest detail all the odious layers exposed before the “real” woman appears with all her “shankers, issues, and running sores.”

\begin{poem}
Now, picking out a crystal eye,
She wipes it clean, and lays it by.
Her eyebrows from a mouse’s hide,
Stuck on with art on either side,
Pulls off with care, and first displays ‘em,
\end{poem}
Then in a play-book smoothly lays ‘em.  
Now dexterously her plumpers draws,  
That serves to fill her hollow jaws.  
Untwists a wire; and from her gums  
A set of teeth completely comes.  
Pulls out the rags contrived to prop  
Her flabby dugs, and down they drop.  
Proceeding on, the lovely goddess  
Unlaces next her steel-ribbed bodice;  
Which by the operator’s skill,  
Press down the lumps, the hollows fills.  
Up goes her hand and off she slips  
The bolsters that supply her hips.  
With gentlest touch, she next explores  
Her shankers, issues, running sores.\footnote{161}

Eighteenth-century men so feared the terrible dangers of an outwardly beautiful woman and the possibility of being deceived by Gowland’s lotion and false teeth, that in 1770 the following legislation was proposed:

An Act to protect men from being beguiled into marriage by false adornments.  
All Women, of whatever rank, age, profession or degree, whether virgins, maids or widows, that shall, from and after such Act, impose upon, seduce or betray into matrimony, any of His Majesty’s subjects, by the scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes and bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the law in force against witchcraft and like misdemeanors and that the marriage upon conviction shall stand null and void.

Once again, Thomas Rowlandson’s satirical interpretation portrayed in his *Six Stages of Mending a Face*, (Fig. 4) offers a patronizing display of the eighteenth-century patriarchal society and how their ideal of female beauty encouraged women to re-adorn their bodies with dangerous mercurial ointments and tooth transplantation. As portrayed by the “Kitty” riddle in *Emma* this attempt to cure the body from venereal disease, prompted the consumption of others less fortunate, and ultimately led to the disintegration of the body. Austen’s introduction of Gowland’s Lotion and a tooth amiss invoked the effect venereal disease had on fashion and the practice of tooth transplantation as powerful indicators of how much syphilis had crept into the private lives of Georgian England.

---

162 Thomas Rowlandson, *Six Stages of Mending a Face*, 1791. Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.
Mansfield Park: “Behind the curtain”

The Theatre….is sort of an enchanted island, where nothing appears as it really is, 
nor what it should be.

-Jane Rendell\(^{163}\)

In a novel that focuses on the erection and improvement of structures, the most problematic construction in Mansfield Park is that of the makeshift theatre. This theatrical episode becomes the core of the novel; and like the actual theatrical structure itself, which spreads from the billiard-room to Sir Thomas’s study, the theme of theatricality also perplexingly spreads throughout the novel. Despite Sir Thomas’ attempts to destroy the traces of the play and the destruction of the theatre as a place, theatricality pervades the novel as a metaphorical, instead of literal, malady.\(^{164}\)

The metaphor for the theatre, “the infected world,” was commonplace and this invasion of “the infected world” into the private life metaphorically resembles that of venereal disease overstepping its institutional limits of prostitution and becoming an irreversible contamination in private homes.\(^{165}\) Thomas Gisborne’s Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex, published in 1797, describes the theatre’s refusal to stay within the bounds of a less decorous society as an infection,

He knows little of human nature, who thinks that the youthful mind will be secured from the infecting influence of a vicious character, adorned with polished

\(^{163}\) Jane Rendell, The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space and Architecture in Regency London
manners, wit, fortitude, and generosity, by a frigid moral, delivered at the conclusion, or to be deduced from the events of the drama.\textsuperscript{166} According to Gisborne, in theatrical discourse the polish that would serve as an antidote to the disease can sometimes become interchangeable with the infection itself.\textsuperscript{167} Gisborne’s metaphor of the theatre as an infection occurs throughout Austen’s \textit{Mansfield Park}.

Tom Bertram, the eldest son of Sir Thomas claimed “My friend Yates brought the infection from Ecclesford, and it spread as those things always spread, you know, sir,” brings this metaphorical infection of theatricality to Mansfield Park.\textsuperscript{168} Throughout the novel, the language surrounding discussion of the theatre proliferates with the theme of venereal disease. Each character that succumbs to the “infection” must eventually be cured and Sir Thomas attempts to disinfect Mansfield Park by removing all signs of the theatre, burning every copy of the play he can find.

Sir Thomas was in hopes that another day or two would suffice to wipe away every outward memento of what had been, even to the destruction of every unbound copy of ‘Lovers’ Vows’ in the house, for he was burning all that met his eye.\textsuperscript{169}

Fanny Price observes the preparations for the theatre in a confused state of “longing and dreading.”\textsuperscript{170} Her uncomfortable awareness toward the theatre highlights the subversive role of venereal disease that the theatre represents, the inescapable setting

\textsuperscript{167} Litvak, \textit{Caught in the Act}, 4. Gisborne’s statement is similar to that of John Hunter’s, previously stated, in that all women became interchangeable with venereal disease. In references to the Lock Hospital, this statement also reverberates among the hundreds of innocent children raped to cure venereal disease only to become dangerous carriers themselves.
\textsuperscript{168} Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park}, 200.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid., 206.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 186.
of social existence and social ignorance and the fluctuating space they inhabit. Like the society for which it represents, Henry Crawford, resident libertine, may thrive within it, but Fanny Price, moral evangelist, cannot function without it.\footnote{Litvak, \textit{Caught in the Act}, 3.} Resembling Henry Crawford, and his dislike of “any thing like a permanence of abode,” the theatre eventually makes its way where one would least expect it, the inclusive thoughts of Fanny Price, who represents the domesticity of Mansfield Park. After Fanny rejects Henry Crawford’s advancements, Sir Thomas believes her disposition corrupted.\footnote{Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park}, 74.}

\begin{quote}
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. You have shewn yourself very, very different from any thing that I had imagined.\footnote{Ibid., 318.}
\end{quote}

First he tries to “cure” her by placing a fire in her room, something that she never had before. “The first thing which caught her eye was a fire lighted and burning. A fire! Sir Thomas had given orders for it.”\footnote{Ibid., 322.} Like the roaring fires used for patients treated with mercury, he uses the medicinal effects of fire to cure Fanny of her theatrically induced willfulness.

\begin{quote}
Acting, according to Gisborne, is also corrupt. Young women were more susceptible to this corruption than young men because of their strong propensity to imitate, a form of seduction.\footnote{Litvak, \textit{Caught in the Act}, 4.} The theatre was an often suggested source for prostitutes and in 1773, \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} published a frequent complaint, “Playhouses…”
\end{quote}
be of pernicious Consequence, when set up in the City…and are a great Resort of Lewd Women to those Places.” The general prejudice against the theatre as a bad moral influence was a reflection on the status to which women graduated or operated after some earlier success in prostitution. For example, Rangers Magazine’s “List of Covent Garden Cyprians,” listed a Miss Leic-ster as a prostitute with experience on the stage. Contemporaries viewed the players in the theatre as highly immoral. Acting blurs the line between the respected, domestic class and the menacing public displays of seduction. These metaphors of infection lead to metaphors of seduction. Gisborne’s ideas on the spread of theatre as an “infection” agree with Tom Bertram’s suggestion that “those things always spread,” because the poison may entice men into mistaking it for the cure. This statement represents the dual perspective of women’s roles in the spread of venereal disease. Once associated with prostitutes, the poison seduced men with “polished manner” and “generosity,” yet, as seen eventually by the oppressive, patriarchal class all women deceived men, allowing them to mistake their bodies as harmless. Therefore, in order to repel the disease they labeled all women as innately infected. Gisborne himself could not decide whether this predisposition for women to imitate was native or acquired. Fanny’s statement, “No, indeed, I cannot act,” reflects the invasion of patriarchal restrictions upon the private lives of women and is symbolized by the infectious spread of theatricality of everyday life that women adopted in order to

---

176 Gentleman’s Magazine, (December, 1733), III, 640.
177 Stanley Dana Nash, Social attitudes towards prostitution in London from 1752 to 1829 (New York University, University Microfilms International, 1980), 453.
179 Litvak, Caught in the Act, 4.
180 Ibid., 4. This statement by Gisborne leads back to women being innately diseased.
adapt. Theatrical performances fetishized the actress positioning her beheld as a spectacle and theatre became the exchange of looks and the exchange of bodies. Fanny, whether she realizes it or not, is trapped within her performance. By banishing her to Portsmouth, Sir Thomas hopes to cure her.

Theatricality within *Mansfield Park* is present everywhere though visible nowhere, incorporating an invisibleness inducing the patriarchal paranoia of Sir Thomas and therefore making acceptable his severe policing of certain social practices. He has seemingly removed all traces of the theatrical “infection,” through Fanny’s removal and finally, with Mr. Yates’ departure representing the last lingering remnants of the infection, “Sir Thomas hoped, in seeing him out of it, to be rid of the worst object with the scheme, and the last that must be inevitably reminding him of its existence.”

Yet there is still one reminder, one lingering pustule of infection that escapes Sir Thomas’ scourge of Mansfield Park and that is the curtain which Mrs. Norris had sewn for the production. From the beginning it represented the flourishing of theatrical disease, “You had better stay till the curtain is hung,” interposed Mrs. Norris—‘the curtain will be hung in a day or two, -there is very little sense in a play without a curtain.” The use of curtains within eighteenth-century satire represented the mystery of a woman’s vagina. Here too we can find that same representation. The curtain not only resembles a vagina yet also, according to eighteenth-and nineteenth-century medical

---

184 Ibid., 3. This theme of “theatricality present everywhere yet visible nowhere,” parallels the restrictive social paradigm of women as carriers of venereal disease, as carriers the disease was internally present yet externally invisible.
186 Ibid., 187.
discourse, veils the origin of venereal disease. The English referred to the extended inner lips of the vagina, or labia minora, as the “drape of decency” or “curtain of shame.”

Little does Sir Thomas realize how very mistaken he was, that it was not Mr. Yates or Fanny but instead Mrs. Norris’ curtain, “the curtain over which she had presided with such talent and such success,” and which she had surreptitiously removed to her cottage that would allow the theatrical infection to survive and flourish, though in less conspicuous form, reaching into the subversive recesses of the text. Austen’s use of the theatre to represent the theme of venereal disease explores the patriarchy’s responsibility over the spread of the disease and their ignorant paranoia concerning women’s role as carriers of disease.

Concern over venereal disease was ever present in the eighteenth century, and this concern, ever connected to the female body, focused specifically on prostitutes. The Earl of Chesterfield admonished his son that “running after women” would result in “the loss of one’s nose…” and “total destruction of health.” Surrounded by “freehearted ladies of all kinds: from the splendid Madam at fifty guineas a night, down to the civil nymph with white-thread stockings who tramps along the Strand and will resign her engaging person to your honour or a pint of wine and a shilling,” James Boswell’s journal is full of complaints about venereal disease resulting from liaisons with prostitutes and his

---

187 The use of curtains, specifically in the work of William Hogarth, symbolized the vagina, as suggested by David Dabydeen in Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 77. In reference to Plate II in The Rake’s Progress, Dabydeen refers to “The lady listening to Senesino swoons in ecstasy, the spread of her arms echoed in the parting of the curtain of the bed behind her, an obvious vaginal symbol….”

188 Litvak, Caught in the Act, 1.

189 The Earl of Chesterfield to his son, February 24. O.S. 1747. Letters Written by the Earl of Chesterfield to His Son (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1858), 116.
desperate attempts to avoid syphilis.\textsuperscript{190} Asking every prostitute he paid if she was free from venereal disease, Boswell would cast aside his “armour…as the sport was much pleasanter without it,” but would inevitably blame the prostitute for her deceitfulness when he recurrently contracted the disease.\textsuperscript{191}

Eighteenth-century English society saw venereal disease as a detrimental product of prostitution.\textsuperscript{192} Some 3,000 Londoners died from venereal disease each year.\textsuperscript{193} During the third quarter of the eighteenth century, concern over venereal disease and prostitution was seen for its total effect on the nation as much as on the individual. Depopulation was becoming a vital concern and venereal disease contributed to the high rate of mortality. The most direct and malicious attack on prostitutes was through their capacity to transmit venereal disease, making the army useless and the gentry weak.

Eighteenth-century political economist, Joseph Massie, noted in his \textit{Plan for the Establishment of Charity Houses} in 1758 that “innocent Women and Children” became ill in this way.\textsuperscript{194} Prostitutes were being blamed for hurting not just the innocent but also, and perhaps most significantly, the British nation as a whole. In \textit{The Complete Modern London Spy}, Richard King wrote that because sailors were prone to this disease that prostitution saps not just the health of the individual but the “strength of the nation.”\textsuperscript{195} Prostitution as a cause or concomitant to crime and social disorder in general was the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[190] Boswell, 84.
\item[191] Ibid., 262.
\item[192] Nash, 460.
\item[193] Dorothy Marshall \textit{Dr. Johnson’s London}, 236.
\item[195] Richard King, \textit{The Complete Modern London Spy} (1781), 53-54. As quoted from Nash, 462.
\end{footnotes}
preponderant consequence that increasingly concerned English society throughout the eighteenth century.\footnote{Stanley Nash, Social Attitudes Towards Prostitution in London from 1752 to 1829 (New York University, 1980), 10.}
CHAPTER THREE: Prostitution in Jane Austen

Sense and Sensibility: The Seduction of the Harlot

The man is always the tempter and seducer.

--Sir Charles Grandison\textsuperscript{197}

Tho forced to act the harlot’s wretched part, Virtue ne’er quite forsook my wounded heart.

-Anonymous\textsuperscript{198}

It is the very hard fate of the fair sex, that when they fall they are never permitted to rise again.

-John Noorthouck\textsuperscript{199}

In the middle of the eighteenth century, it was a much voiced and commonly held opinion that prostitutes were an extreme nuisance in London, spreading immorality and disease.\textsuperscript{200}  British poet, William Cowper, known for capturing the essence of everyday eighteenth-century life, complained of the intrusion of prostitution into the daily ramblings through London in his poem \textit{The Task}, “What shipwreck have we made/ Of honour, dignity, and fair renown,/Till prostitution elbows us aside/In all our crowded streets.”\textsuperscript{201}  London had more prostitutes, over a greater proportion of the city, than anywhere else in Europe.  Patrick Colquhoun, founder of the first preventative police force in England, estimated in his 1797 \textit{Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis}, that there were 50,000 prostitutes in London, approximately ten percent of the female

\textsuperscript{197} Critical Remarks on Sir Charles Grandison (1754), 31.  As quoted from Dabhoiwala, \textit{The Origins of Sex}, 152.
\textsuperscript{198} The Times, 6 November, 1786.
\textsuperscript{199} John Noorthouck, \textit{A New History of London} (1773), 392.
\textsuperscript{200} Markman Ellis, \textit{The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel}, 161.
population.\textsuperscript{202} In a letter to \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} in 1795, it reported that this increase in prostitution was not only occurring in the center of London but also among the neighboring parishes as well.\textsuperscript{203} The publication \textit{Pretty Doings in a Protestant Nation}, first published in 1734 by a French Dominican named Father Poussin, offers a sordid view of the “present state of Fornication, Whorecraft and Adulteration in Great Britain.” His description highlights both the opposition towards the practice of prostitution and the mounting resentment towards the girls themselves:

When a person unacquainted with the Town passes at night thro’ any of our Principal Streets, he is apt to wonder whence the vast body of Courtezans, which stand ready, on small Purchase, to obey the Laws of Nature, and gratify the Lust of every drunken Rake-hell, can take its Rise. \textit{Where the Devil do all those B---ches come from?} Being a common Fleet Street phrase…when each revolving Evening sends them up from White-Chapel to Charing-Cross.\textsuperscript{204}

As stated anonymously in \textit{The Account of the Institution of the Lock Asylum} in 1792, the prostitute, seen as an agent of destruction, and a predator who fouled society and spread physical ruin and moral disintegration, “is, in a community, an evil, not dissimilar to a person infected with the plague; who, miserable himself, is daily communicating the contagion to those, which will propagate still wider the fatal malady.”\textsuperscript{205} The eighteenth-century British perception of prostitution was also one of dualistic irony, steeped in a desire to feel both revulsion and pity towards the prostitute herself. Though still viewed as agents of disease and corruption, this presumption slowly began to rival the perception that prostitutes were the innocent victims of seduction by libertines and bawds, who

\textsuperscript{203} Gentleman’s Magazine, April 1795 LXV, part 1, 293-294. As quoted from Nash, \textit{Social Attitudes Towards Prostitution}, 404.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{205} Ibid. Anon., \textit{An Account of the Institution of the Lock Asylum for the Reception of Penitent Females when Discharged Cured from the Lock Hospital,} (1792), 3.
forced them to continue their way of life out of economic need and social ostracism.

Thus it became male rapacity, not female lust that lay at the root of the problem and the prostitute developed into the fashionable role of the “helpless victim.” Seduction played such a large part in the fate of many young girls in eighteenth-century England that it became an innumerable theme of eighteenth-century fiction and non-fiction.

Thomas Holcroft’s “The Dying Prostitute,” written in 1785, addressed both the compassionate reader and the treacherous libertine who destroyed her.

Weep o’er the mis’ries of a wretched maid,
Who sacrificed to man her health and fame;
Whose love, and truth, and trust were all repaid
By want and woe, disease and endless shame.
Curse not the poor lost wretch, who ev’ry ill
That proud unfeeling man can heap sustains;
Sure she enough is cursed o’er whom his will
Enflamed by brutal passion, boundless reigns.
That I was virtuous once, and beauteous too,
And free from envious tongues my spotless fame:
These but torment, these but my tears renew,
These aggravate my present guilt and shame.
Ah! Say, insidious Damon! Monster! Where?
What glory hast thou gained by my defeat?
Art thou more happy for that I’m less fair?
Or bloom thy laurels o’er my winding-sheet?

Out of this new mindset was to emerge a new modern fictional archetype of the prostitute as a beautiful and innocent “fallen angel.” The melodramatic story of Eliza Brandon, the sad, adulterous wife of Colonel Brandon’s less honorable brother, in Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* is a reflection of this archetype. After leaving a marriage filled with unhappiness with a husband who “had no regard for her,” and treated her

---

208 Dabhoiwala, *The Origins of Sex*, 158.
unkindly, Eliza disappears. After Colonel Brandon returns to England from his station in the East Indies, he discovers the sad truth of Eliza’s demise:

I could not trace her beyond her first seducer, and there was every reason to fear that she had removed from him only to sink deeper in a life of sin... At last, however, and after I had been six months in England, I did find her... there, in a sponging-house... confined for debt... Hardly could I believe the melancholy and sickly figure before me to be the remains of the lovely, blooming, healthful girl on whom I had once doted... 209

Before revealing this story of Eliza Brandon to both the reader and Elinor Dashwood, John Willoughby, the resident libertine, has cruelly jilted the young and naïve Marianne Dashwood. Before meeting Marianne, Willoughby had seduced, impregnated, and abandoned the young ward of Colonel Brandon, Beth, the daughter of Eliza Brandon. “He had left the girl whose youth and innocence he had seduced, in a situation of the utmost distress, with no creditable home, no help, and no friends, ignorant of his address! He had left her promising to return; he neither returned, nor wrote, nor relieved her.” 210

Colonel Brandon relays this tragic story in a desperate attempt to reveal the true nature of Willoughby and keep Marianne from becoming his next victim of seduction, as he sees too much of Eliza and Beth’s keensness and naivety in her, “I am not deceived by the uncertainty, the partiality of tender recollection, there is a very strong resemblance between them, as well in mind as person—the same warmth of hearth, the same eagerness of fancy and spirits.” 211

Though fleeting, the story of Eliza provides a complex reflection of the many young girls within eighteenth-century England who became victims of seduction. Having

210 Ibid., 181.
211 Ibid., 177.
their innocence taken from them by seductive libertines, most young girls lost their family and lives to the treacherous world of prostitution. In the eighteenth century, the definition of seduction was to induce a woman to have illicit but consensual sex.\textsuperscript{212} The seduction itself was not a crime, even if it came about through deception. This is a culture in which rape was a joke, on the grounds that all women secretly desired to be ravished. Therefore, it was conceived that women could not be taken against their will.\textsuperscript{213} One of the results of eighteenth-century medical treatises about the “new” female gender was the “passionless female”. In 1785, Samuel Farr, in the first legal-medicine text written in English, argued “that without an excitation of lust, or enjoyment in the venereal act, no conception can probably take place.”\textsuperscript{214} Whatever a woman might claim to have felt or whatever resistance she put up, conception in itself would betray her desire to enjoy the venereal act.\textsuperscript{215} Henry Fielding, disturbingly fascinated by sexual violence, instructed his male readers on what women want.

Perhaps she will scratch, and say you are rude: notwithstanding her scratches, she will be pleased with your getting the better. The girls may call this perhaps violence, but it is a violence agreeable to them. For they are often desirous of being pleased against their will. For a woman taken, without her consent, notwithstanding her frowns, is often well satisfied in her heart.\textsuperscript{216}

These misogynistic views of sex ultimately forced young girls into prostitution. Many young girls, once seduced, lose their chastity and, rejected by both her family and friends became forced into prostitution due to economic necessity. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft, agreed that a woman, once seduced, often had no other recourse than

\textsuperscript{212} Dabhoiwala, \textit{The Origins of Sex}, 148.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 148.
\textsuperscript{214} Samuel Farr, \textit{The Elements of Medical Jurisprudence”} (London, 1785), 42-43
\textsuperscript{215} Laqueur, \textit{The Making of Sex}, 161.
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid., 148-149.
engage in prostitution to support herself: “No exertion can wash this stain, i.e., loss of chastity…away.”

Untraceable past her “first seducer,” her life steeped in sin, Eliza’s fate reflected those girls, who once rejected, stumbled into the arms of bawds and procurers who trapped naïve and desperate young women into prostitution. The life of Eliza Brandon becomes synonymous with the story of “The Harlot,” from William Hogarth’s artistic series, “The Harlot’s Progress.” Jane Austen was very familiar with this series, and in a letter dated 18th September 1796, written to her sister Cassandra, Jane Austen makes this remark, referring to her plans to visit the Pearson’s, the family of Henry Austen’s then fiancée, unaccompanied:

I had once determined to go with Frank tomorrow and take my chance etc.; but they dissuaded me from so rash a step—as I really think on consideration it would have been: for if the Pearson’s were not at home I should inevitably fall sacrifice to the arts of some fat Woman who would make me drunk with small beer…

She is clearly referring to Plate I (Fig.5) of Hogarth’s “The Harlots Progress” which portrayed the arrival in London of an innocent country girl, who is befriended by, in Jane

---

217 Wollstonecraft, A Vindication of the Rights of Women with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects, 84-85.
Austen’s own words, “a fat Woman.” This was none other than one of the most notorious procuresses of the Georgian era, Elizabeth “Mother” Needham and the source for Jane Austen’s remark. In 1750, Saunders Welch wrote of these “agents” who worked for bawds and waited at the depot for young girls coming into London from the countryside.

The agent, often a woman, appeared helpful and would approach the victim and pass herself off as a protector in a wicked town. They would offer lodging, which of course would end up being a brothel, and once there, the unhappy wretch is a prisoner, and either by persuasion, or force, soon becomes part of the family.

The essayist and playwright, Richard Steele, writing in the Spectator in the early part of the eighteenth century, claims most of these girls, “are what they call newly come upon the Town, but who, I suppose, falling into cruel Hands, was left in the first Month from her Dishonour, and exposed to pass through the Hands and Discipline of one of those

---


220 Elizabeth Needham was the most famous brothel keeper of the eighteenth century. She was said to be of bad temper and foul tongue and treated her girls as slaves. The Daily Journal reported on 14 March 1723, that Mother Needham “very eminent of her profession had been arrested and great quantities of foreign implements made use of in the affairs of love were found upon the Ladies, and were produced before the Justices at the Westminster Sessions on Monday by the Constables.” Arrested several times, Mother Needham, in 1731, was convicted for keeping a disorderly house in Park Place, for which she was fined one shilling and sentenced to stand twice in the pillory. She stood in the pillory in Park Place on Friday, the 30th of April, and was severely pelted by the populace. According to newspaper reports, she was screened by a party of hired fellows, and lay on her face on the pillory platform, but she was nevertheless very badly injured by brickbats. She was scheduled to stand in the pillory again on 5th of May, but she died of her wounds on 3rd of May. She declared in her last words, that what most affected her was the terror of standing in the pillory tomorrow in New Palace Yard, having been so ungratefully used by the populace on Wednesday. The editor of the Grub Street Journal, commented that the public “acted very ungratefully, considering how much she had done to oblige them.” Rictor Norton, The Georgian Underworld: A Study of Criminal Subcultures in Eighteenth-Century England, accessed April 30, 2012, http://rictornorton.co.uk/.

Hags of Hell whom we call Bawds."

Austen, aware of this label given to these ill-fated young girls, used this language to elucidate upon the seduction of the impetuous Lydia Bennett by Mr. Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*:

The good news quickly spread through the house, and with proportionate speed through the neighbourhood. It was borne in the latter with decent philosophy. To be sure, it would have been more for the advantage of conversation had Miss Lydia Bennett *come upon the town*; or, as the happiest alternative, been secluded from the world, in some distant farm house.

By revealing the story of Eliza Brandon, Austen utilized the character to embody the sad reality of the Harlot’s ironic progression into seduction, betrayal, dishonor, abandonment and eventually death by venereal disease. "Prostitution," complained Henry Fielding “was the misery and ruin of great numbers of young, thoughtless, helpless poor girls, who are often betrayed, and even forced into guilt, as they are bribed and allured into it.” The story of the harlot in the “Harlot’s Progress” is a morality tale, or as Hogarth referred to her, “his modern moral subject.” The Harlot’s story, much like Eliza’s seems a simple story of betrayal, sin, crime, punishment, and death. The punishment, in both cases each end up destitute and suffering from venereal disease, could be interpreted as exceeding the crime, especially in light of the eighteenth-century

---


223 Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 272. The phrase “to come upon the town” was of course referring to a woman involved in prostitution, a fate to which many fallen women, without the support of the Bennet family and the perseverance and long purse of Darcy, were subject.

224 Marie E. McCallister, “Only to Sink Deeper:’ Venereal Disease in Sense and Sensibility,” *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2003. This article explores the theme that Eliza Brandon’s death by consumption was actually eluding to venereal disease. The connotation of consumption in literature and medical treatises is researched and concludes that to use “consumption” was a metaphor for venereal disease. Given the life Eliza Brandon led, the conclusion that she had venereal disease comes very easily.

225 Dabhoiwalla, 157.
opinions against seduction.\textsuperscript{226} Though the innocence of both the Harlot and Eliza is implicit, their stories carry a heavy theological warning against young girls tempted by false men and thus wander off the righteous path. Hogarth referred to his heroine as a harlot—not a whore or prostitute. Prostitute and whore appear in the Bible only as a verb or a noun, but harlot has heavy connotations. In the Old Testament, the term harlot referred to someone who had forsaken the true God and followed idols and false gods.\textsuperscript{227} Yet this stern warning, tempered by the New Testament inclination when Christ states, “harlots will go into the kingdom of heaven before you,” reflected the eighteenth-century attitude towards seduction and prostitution and the duality of the harlot as both guilty and victim.\textsuperscript{228} Like Hogarth’s story of the harlot, Austen’s brief story of Eliza Brandon served as a morality tale to both Marianne and her readers, warning them of pursuing the fleeting pleasure of false seducers.

Relatively new and significant to eighteenth-century England was the concept of the reformation and rehabilitation of the objects of charity, and prostitutes became one of the most visual objects of charity in eighteenth century England.\textsuperscript{229} Prior to the founding of the Magdalen Hospital in 1758, no refuges for women who wished to cease being a prostitute existed. This was unacceptable for a charitable nation such as England. According to a letter published in 1751 in \textit{The Rambler},

![Image of a letter from 1751]

\begin{verbatim}
The prostitute is covered with Rags, shivering with Cold, and Pining with Hunger; yet the opportunities…of relieving the most wretched of human beings are overlooked and neglected. It cannot be doubted that numbers follow this dreadful course of life, with shame, horror, and regret; but, where can they hope for
\end{verbatim}

\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 28.
\textsuperscript{228} Ibid., 28-29.
\textsuperscript{229} Nash, 190.
refuge? To stop the increase of this deplorable multitude is undoubtedly the first and most pressing consideration.\textsuperscript{230}

Without any assistance, a prostitute’s life was one of hardship and misery and as Colonel Brandon laments, Eliza’s death was a relief from her pain, “That she was, to all appearance in the last stage of consumption, was—yes, in such a situation it was my greatest comfort. Life could do nothing for her beyond giving time for a better preparation for death; and that was given.”\textsuperscript{231} Colonel Brandon’s lamentation eerily echoes the words from a sermon given by George Henry Glasse at the Magdalen Hospital in 1788, where he too expresses prostitutes being saved from misery by an early death, “…the life of prostitution was penury, disease, and remorse, if suicide did not come first…Whose fortunate debility of body has yielded to the first shock of misery and found the best remedy in early death.”\textsuperscript{232} Prostitutes rarely lived into their thirties and an 1802 report from The Lock Asylum reported the “melancholy fact, but well established by careful inquiry and observation…that very few prostitutes lived past the age of twenty-five. Once a female started a life of prostitution, she had at most ten years to live.”\textsuperscript{233} The need for a charitable movement would culminate in an institution developed not only for the reformation and care of these wayward girls, but a rigorous brainwashing of their individuality, and these charities were far from centers for mental rehabilitation, but instead pious nurseries for godly discipline.\textsuperscript{234}

\textsuperscript{230} Gentleman’s Magazine (March 17, 1751), XXI, 128-129.
\textsuperscript{231} Austen, Sense and Sensibility, 179.
\textsuperscript{232} Nash, Social Attitudes Towards Prostitution in London from 1752-1829, 456.
\textsuperscript{233} Account of the Lock Asylum, 1802, 3. As quoted from Nash, Social Attitudes Towards Prostitution.
On August 10th, 1758, the doors of the Magdalen Hospital opened to reform and rehabilitate the prostitutes of England.\textsuperscript{235} As an example of the change in the eighteenth-century attitudes towards prostitution, the Magdalen gave the following justification for the founding of the institution:

…if there can be greater Objects of Compassion, than poor, young, thoughtless Females, plunged into ruin by those temptations to which their very youth and personal advantages expose them, no less than those passions implanted by nature…Surrounded by snares…laid by those endowed with superior faculties, and all the advantages of Education and fortune, what virtue can be proof against such formidable Seducers, who offer too commonly, and too profusely promise to transport the thoughtless Girls from Want, Confinement, and Restraint of Passions; to Luxury, Liberty, Gaiety, Joy.\textsuperscript{236}

Very revealing was that by the late eighteenth century, the majority of the girls admitted into the Magdalen were not prostitutes at all, but rather “seduced” women. According to a report issued in 1786, these women sought refuge in order to prevent them from becoming prostitutes: “the Magdalen Charity assists young women, who have been seduced under the Promise of Marriage, and afterwards have been deserted by their Seducers.”\textsuperscript{237} The Magdalen Hospital, determined to defend and redeem prostitutes or those who had been seduced, also stressed the necessity of contrition and penitence for all of their inmates. The women exchanged their street clothes for “brown shalloon gowns to ensure their attire was plain and neat, and exactly alike.”\textsuperscript{238} They were encouraged to forget their past actions and their past identities and advised to abandon their real names

\textsuperscript{236} Robert Dingley, Proposals for Establishing a Public Place of Reception for Penitent Prostitutes (London, 1758), 3-4. As quoted from Nash, “Prostitution and Charity,” 617-618.
\textsuperscript{237} Nash, A Case Study, 619.
\textsuperscript{238} Cruikshank, London’s Sinful Secret, 288.
for a more appropriate “Christian” one. The penitents were required to ask daily for forgiveness from God. In printed letters ascribed to several prostitutes housed at the Magdalen Hospital, one word appears repeatedly, “unworthy.” With a stringent regularity, penitents wrote how “unworthy I am to receive this kindness,” and humbly asked for pardon from their sins. Daily, these girls listened to reminders that they were there to beg forgiveness for their sins. Hence, even those men of charity and charitable institutions attached blame on the prostitute herself for sinning against religion and society.

The Magdalen quickly attracted the attention of upper class society and the Magdalen chapel became the fashionable place to be on Sundays to hear the sermons of the popular preacher, William Dodd. Yet the main reason the upper class flocked here was to gawk at the screened figures of the penitents themselves. During Dodd’s sermons, the inmates, who were behind a lattice but in view of the visitors, became the elusive yet stimulating instruments of pathos, “Lost to Virtue, you were lost to yourselves. Whither could you have fled from anguish, and from woe unutterable, cut off in the very blossom of your sins?” The result of these sermons, delivered to the erotically elusive shadows of young penitents, encouraged visits to the Magdalen Hospital and turned into a spectator sport in a theatrical fashion. The inmates, displayed in such a way as to induce male titillation, and the setting of the East End enhanced this thrill. Horace Walpole,

---

239 The Rules, Orders and Regulations of the Magdalen House, 2nd ed, 1759, British Library shelf mark 1388.K.i.4, as quoted from Ibid.
240 William Dodd, “The Original Letters.” An Account of the Rise, Progress, and Present State of the Magdalen, 1761, xvii-xxviii. William Dodd was executed following his trial for forgery in 1777.
242 William Dodd, “The Original Letters,”
upon attending a sermon with Prince Edward, immediately found his experience to be highly entertaining.

The chapel was dressed with orange and myrtle, and there wanted nothing but a little incense to drive away the devil—or to invite him...The ‘Magdalens’—addressed as lot sheep now found—sobbed and cried from their souls, as did my Lady Hertford and Fanny Palham—so much so that I feared the respectable City dames present in the congregation took them both to be guilt-stricken high courtesans.\(^{243}\)

This patriarchal voyeurism is reflective of those prostitutes who, instead of entering the Magdalen, found themselves arrested and taken to Bridewell prison. Bridewell was infamous for stripping and flogging prostitutes while crowds of men gazed, smirking lasciviously with a mixture of lust and justice.\(^{244}\) In the 1709 edition of the \textit{London Spy}, Edward Ward protested that the flogging of “the tender Back and tempting Bubbles of prostitutes was design’d rather to Feast the Eyes of Spectators, or Stir up the Beastly Appetites of Lascivious Persons, than to Correct Vice or Reform Manners.”\(^{245}\) Thus, the body of the prostitute, or penitent, became utilized as a conduit for both the attractions and dangers of prostitution and her body, whether penitent or whore, became the focus of the male gaze.

Mary Wollstonecraft scorned charities such as the Magdalen as not being “proper remedies” for prostitution stating, “It is justice, not charity, which is wanting in this


The Magdalen became a device for social control based on disciplining and reshaping the minds of young women. Wollstonecraft, like Austen, removed the moral and social blame from the prostitute, and placed nearly all the blame on the precarious patriarchal society of eighteenth-century Britain. Austen’s inclusion of the morality tale of Eliza Brandon in Sense and Sensibility signified a fundamental change in society’s conceptions of prostitution. Her story of seduction, destitution, and death echoed the new and fashionable compassions of the late eighteenth century towards the “helpless victim.” By incorporating this tale into the narrative, Austen’s novel highlights the remarkable history of the misfortunate and seduced harlot and the importance of this cultural influence as a reflection of the reign of the misogynistic libertine during the eighteenth-century.

---

246 Wollstonecraft, A Vindication, 84-85.
247 Nash, A Case Study of the Magdalen, 625.
248 Ibid., 416.
**Mansfield Park**: Domestication of Prostitution

*For a whore is a deep ditch...she lieth in wait as for a prey and increaseth the transgressors among men.*

--Proverbs Ch. 23, verse 27, 28

*You will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes; you will tear your gown; you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha.*

--Fanny Price\textsuperscript{249}

In *Mansfield Park*, Austen represents the more domesticated form of prostitution. Though these sub-textual references may be indiscreet to the unobservant eye their connotation represents a powerful social commentary. In Austen’s *Mansfield Park*, Maria Bertram makes a reference to Laurence Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey*, “I cannot get out, as the starling said.”\textsuperscript{250} The ensuing euphoric recitation sets the tone for the theme of prostitution found within *Mansfield Park*, “Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! Said I—still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.”\textsuperscript{251} The textual function of the starling, in Sterne and Austen, is a kind of blocking device; it harmonizes

\textsuperscript{249}Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 104. Ha-ha is a term in garden design used to describe a trench, one side which is concealed from view, designed to allow an unobstructed view from a garden, while still maintaining a barrier usually to keep out livestock. They became popular in eighteenth-century Britain in response to the changing attitudes. As the land became increasingly tamed and methodically exploited, rigid ornamental gardens fell out of fashion and were replaced with carefully designed “wild” landscapes. A ha-ha would keep animals away from the house but not spoil the view, giving the allusion that the landscape was all blended. The name is thought to stem from the expression of surprise of someone unexpectedly coming across one of the “invisible” barriers. *A Natural History of the British Isles* [http://iberianature.com/britainnature/the-ha-ha/#more-1065](http://iberianature.com/britainnature/the-ha-ha/#more-1065).

\textsuperscript{250}Ibid., 127.

\textsuperscript{251}Laurence Stern, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorrick*, ed. Gardner D. Stout (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 199
the two incongruous strands of painful and pleasant and in the case of *Mansfield Park*,
prostitution and courtship.\textsuperscript{252}

The marriage laws of England supported and influenced the acquiescent and
subordinate nature of courtship and marriage. Sir William Blackstone’s “Commentaries
on the Laws of England” in 1756 codified the status of married women, “the husband and
wife are one person in law. The very being or legal existence of women is suspended
during the marriage and consolidated into that of the husband, under whose…cover she
performs everything.”\textsuperscript{253} The very nature of the marriage contract consisted of the
woman giving up estate, authority and, most importantly, independence. The woman
after marriage became synonymous with a slave. By marriage, man and wife became one
person, that person being the husband.\textsuperscript{254} The principle of “coverture” functioned in
actual practice not only for married women but also throughout the lives of all women.

Some women agreed with these restrictive laws, and writers like Hannah More, in
her *Strictures On the Modern System of Female Education*, encouraged women to
embrace their subordination as patriotic.

Public policy now requires women’s submission to men more than ever.
Napoleon—or some wild and unprincipled foreigner—was bound to interpret
women’s insubordination as signifying men’s lack of masculine resolve and he
would be much more likely to attack England than he would be if Englishmen
were seen to be controlling them and defending any other property, including
England itself.\textsuperscript{255}

\textsuperscript{252} Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*
\textsuperscript{253} Alison G. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia: University of
\textsuperscript{254} Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, 195.
\textsuperscript{255} Sulloway, *The Province of Womanhood*, 34.
Austen’s contemporaneous female authors felt differently and described the feminine terror of courtship and marriage and its connection with prostitution as men’s primitive rights over the minds and bodies of women. Mary Astell, writing in the eighteenth century, reflects upon some of the requirements for which fashionable men seek in wives, “What will she bring in Acres or Coin? The next Quality a man looks for is beauty, yet he doesn’t act according to Reason in either case, but is govern’d by irregular appetites.”

Austen wrote *Mansfield Park* in response to “evangelical” writers like More and as a parody of those instructive novels of the day, which used fiction to sermonize and spread the word of moral righteousness, grooming women for marriage. Rather than defending her social institutions, Austen used *Mansfield Park* to condemn courtship as a form of prostitution through a model of female virtue who is betrayed by the same patriarchal society she so dutifully embraced. Sterne’s starling, as metaphor, represents an allegorical treatment of Fanny Price, who, sold and exchanged without reference to her interests and opinions, characterized the theme of courtship and prostitution.

---

256 Ibid., 155.
259 Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, 77. Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park* and the main character of the novel *Fanny Hill* by James Cleland not only share the same name, but also share much of the same story. The novel, *Fanny Hill*, is also concerned with boundaries, and somewhat like Fanny Price, also orphaned and leaves the countryside for London. Fanny Hill will engage in many “fallen” activities, yet in the end she emerged virtuous because she has proven that a state of the heart is separate from sexual behavior. Fanny Price also maintains that a pure state of the heart will persevere in her virtuous quest to win Edmund Bertram’s heart and she wins Edmund over the overtly sexual behavior of Mary Crawford. As Fanny Hill fights back against the aptly named Mr. H____, the man who has seduced her, Fanny Price has also become reliant upon the false pretensions of her own Mr. H____, Mr. Henry Crawford. Yet though
When Fanny Price first arrives at Mansfield Park she is only ten years old and is “not disgusting but yet now captivating. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty.” Fanny Price is “ugly” and Austen incorporates this physical flaw as a way to unite Fanny’s physical appearance in relation to her social, as well as, sexual identity. Ugliness maintains Fanny’s honesty and reduces her to a kind of non-existence and it is in this “non-existence” where Fanny finds comfort and solitude. Her rooms are in the attic, located far from the rest of the family and “even without a fire” she found “she could go there after any thing unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand. ---Her plants, her books.” Yet once Sir Thomas Bertram returns from Antigua, where he has lost a fortune, his re-evaluation of Fanny’s worth to the family reconstitutes her position within the household:

Sir Thomas was at that moment looking round him, and saying, ‘But where is Fanny?—Why do I see my little Fanny?; and on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how much she was grown! 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. His manner seemed changed…He led her nearer the light and looked at her again—inquired particularly after her health, and then correcting himself, observed, that he need not inquire, for her appearance spoke sufficiently on that point. A fine blush

both women at first despise their mutual Mr. H____, they both soon give in to a fondness, only to be humiliated and crushed when they each find out that Mr. H____ has not been true. In Fanny Hill, Mr. H____is found with the maid and in Mansfield Park, Mr. Henry Crawford runs off with Maria Bertram, Fanny’s cousin. Fanny Hill, depicted as the “everywoman” even though she is a whore, “normalizes” prostitution as a natural choice for any woman who is without options and perpetuates the concept of the female body utilized for economic gain. Fanny Hill and Fanny Price become the most unlikely of heroines where the whore and the homely servant become the matriarchs and wives of their own story.

Austen, Mansfield Park, 173.
262 Austen, Mansfield Park, 173.
263 Johnson, Jane Austen, 107.
having succeeded the previous paleness of her face, he was justified in his belief of her equal improvement in health and beauty.\textsuperscript{264} 

Sir Thomas Bertram, as implied in the novel, was involved in the slave trade in the West Indies where he also owned plantations.\textsuperscript{265} As a man who believes that both Fanny and slaves would not be happy if free, he saw his act of guardianship as an act of kindness and on behalf of those who could not care for themselves he extracted their obedience and devotion by developing their capacity to feel grateful towards his kindness.\textsuperscript{266} After losing much in Antigua he saw Fanny as a new commodity and another way for which the Bertram family could profit and recuperate monetary losses.

The rhetoric of landscape improvements sub-textually highlights Sir Thomas’ rising interest in his niece’s potential value. Mr. Rushworth, the fiancé of Sir Thomas’ daughter Maria, decided to make improvements upon his estate at Sotherton. “He had been visiting a friend in a neighboring county, and that friend having recently had his grounds laid out by and improver, Mr. Rushworth was returned with his head full of the subject, and very eager to be improving his own place in the same way.”\textsuperscript{267} He employed the help of his friend, landscape designer Humphrey Repton whose philosophy of renovation was based on the prime importance of making one’s “property seem larger, more valuable” than it actually was.\textsuperscript{268} As Repton states in his book:

\textsuperscript{264} Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park}, 194.
\textsuperscript{265} Tomalin, \textit{Jane Austen: A Life}, 316. After the 1807 Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in Britain no ship could legally sail from any port in the British Empire with slaves and from March 1808, no slaves could be landed. This does not mean the slave trade stopped, it did continue illegally and remained a divisive issue until slavery itself was abolished in the British Empire in 1834.
\textsuperscript{266} Ibid., 250.
\textsuperscript{267} Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park}, 84.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 85. The footnote on this page states that Repton was one of the leading improvers of the time and was the author of \textit{Observations on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening}, published in
The pleasure of appropriation is gratified in viewing a landscape which cannot be injured by the malice or bad taste of a neighboring intruder…an ugly barn, a ploughed field, or any obtrusive object which disgraces the scenery of a park, looks as if it belonged to another, and therefore robs the mind of pleasure derived from appropriation, or the unity and continuity of unmixed property.\(^\text{269}\)

The improvement upon Fanny’s character also undergoes a very similar landscaping project carried out by Sir Thomas. Fanny is the “ugly barn” that “belonged to another,” and Sir Thomas must renovate her to create the impression of “unmixed property.” He must increase the value of her body as property in order to create a potential economic gain.\(^\text{270}\) First he must diminish the “ugly” social stigma for which Fanny has become accustomed. Placing her under the admiration of other men, socially and visually, will reconstitute her position in society and propel her towards the identity of a beautiful woman.\(^\text{271}\)

In contrast to Repton and Sir Thomas’ project of “improvement” which consists of removing “obtrusive objects,” Fanny’s desire to remain behind the scenes of the family threatens the very act of “breaking an avenue.”\(^\text{272}\) Fanny ironically cites Cowper as she voices her displeasure with Repton’s seemingly destructive renovations, “Cut down a n avenue!  What a pity!  Does not it make you think of Cowper? ‘Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited.’”\(^\text{273}\) Yet when Sir Thomas’ daughters leave town

---

\(^{269}\) Repton, The Landscape Gardening. As quoted from Cleere, “Reinvesting Nieces,” 7.

\(^{270}\) Cleere, “Reinvesting Nieces,” 8.

\(^{271}\) Jones, Gender and the Formation of Taste, 170.

\(^{272}\) Austen, Mansfield Park, 87, 458. To “break an avenue” was to thin a curtain of trees in order to reveal a more interesting scenery behind it.

\(^{273}\) Ibid., 87. The rest of Cowper’s poem is as follows, “Your fate unmerited, once more rejoice/ That yet a remnant of your race survives.” Cowper was a writer famous for his abolitionist sympathies. Claudia L. Johnson, Jane Austen, 107.
after Maria’s marriage to Mr. Rushworth, Fanny’s “curtain of trees” reveals her as the center of attention:

Fanny’s consequence increased on the departure of her cousins. Becoming as she then did, the only young woman in the drawing room, the only occupier of that interesting division of a family in which she had hitherto held so humble a third, it was impossible for her not to be more looked at, more thought of and attended to, than she had ever been before; and ‘where is Fanny?’ became no uncommon question, even without her being wanted for anyone’s convenience.274

Before long, Fanny attracts the attention of Henry Crawford, who has become too aware of Fanny’s improvements:

…She is quite a different creature from what she was in the autumn. She was then merely a quiet, modest, not plain looking girl, but she is now absolutely pretty. I used to think she had neither complexion nor countenance; but in that soft skin of her’s, so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided beauty: and from what I observed of her eyes and mouth, I do not despair of their being capable of expression enough when she has any thing to express. And then—her air, her manner, her tout ensemble is so indescribably improved!275

This corroboration of Fanny’s “improvements” as shared by both Sir Thomas and Henry Crawford gives value to Fanny’s marketability. In order for a product or in Fanny’s case a woman, to have real market value; at least two men must express interest in the property, or woman.276 This increased male attention in Fanny raises her sexual value, and Sir Thomas soon decides to “convert Fanny into an exchangeable commodity by circulating her throughout the social economy of a ballroom.”277

274 Austen, Mansfield Park, 219.
275 Ibid., 239-240.
277 Cleere, “Reinvesting Nieces,” 8. “Country dances” were often the best way to arouse sensualities and peak sexual interests. In William Hogarth’s Analysis of Beauty, he states, “It gives rise to a kind of sensation which I have since felt at seeing a country-dance, tho’ perhaps the latter might be somewhat
dances” were the perfect opportunity where both beauty and society became equally realized and marketable. Sir Thomas’ idea to hold a ball for Fanny was to “gratify anybody else who might wish to see Fanny dance.”278 By making her debut at the ball, Sir Thomas allows an opportunity to display Fanny as an obedient young woman and he prepares for Henry Crawford the benefit of previewing Fanny in her role as a dutiful and subservient wife.

Sir Thomas was again interfering a little with her inclination, by advising her to go immediately to bed. ‘Advise’ was his word, but it was the advise of absolute power… In thus sending her away, Sir Thomas perhaps might not be thinking merely of her health. It might occur to him, that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by shewing her persuadableness.279

Fanny then became a sexual commodity, circulated and demonstrated among a room of potential clients. As Fanny exclaims, “To be placed above so many elegant women! The distinction was too great. It was treating her like her cousins!”280 A letter in Lloyd’s Evening Post in 1778, pointed out the initial stages of prostitution as a kept mistress, “Fine clothes, equipage, and servants, banish those little sparks of virtue and remorse…for soon she turns mercenary,” and as the author also mentioned, the impetuous and frivolous nature due to the improper education afforded by her parents led to vanity and ultimately her downfall into prostitution.281

more engaging; particularly when my eye eagerly pursued a favorite dancer, through all the windings of the figure, who then was bewitched to the sight.” As quoted from Robert Jones, Gender and the Formation of Taste, 54.
278 Austen, Mansfield Park, 260.
279 Ibid., 285-286.
280 Ibid., 275.
281 Lloyd’s Evening Post, 27 July to 29 July, 1778. As quoted from
Fanny, described by Austen as frail, debilitated and enfeebled, acted as a visual obstacle to the appreciation of *Mansfield Park*; therefore, Sir Thomas successfully improved the viewing pleasure of his own landscaping renovation and increased the value of his property two-fold by reinventing her.\textsuperscript{282} Austen, by highlighting the common eighteenth-and nineteenth-century practice of “improving estates,” exposed the more widespread practice of courtship as prostitution and commodity.

\textsuperscript{282} Jones, *Gender and the Formation of Taste*, 176.
Conclusion:

“Seldom, very seldom,” Austen wrote in *Emma*, “does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken.”

Austen’s comedy of manners acted as a superficial cosmetic device which concealed the rupture and spread of venereal disease and prostitution hidden within. Yet, as suggested by Austen herself, if the reader chooses to look further than the surface, the truth is always there, waiting to be revealed. Throughout the novels examined within this thesis—*Emma, Persuasion, Mansfield Park,* and *Sense and Sensibility*—Austen, on her “little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory” desk, maximized the limitations of her medium by successfully incorporating the parallel themes of venereal disease and prostitution into the narration.

The embodiment of venereal disease and prostitution through the characters of the ill and weak—Mr. Woodhouse, Mrs. Clay, Harriet Smith, Eliza Brandon, and Fanny Price—brought to the surface the historical revelation of the devastating effects venereal disease and prostitution had on Austen’s eighteenth-century domain.

Austen’s characters embodied the very real issues of venereal disease and prostitution and her novels portrayed the genuine, everyday lives of actual men and women, rather than fictional characters. Surface meanings buried by time may be latent to a modern audience yet for her contemporary readers, these characters were not metaphorical reinterpretations of disease or prostitution; instead they inhabited the British kingdom of the ill and lived there. As Susan Sontag emotionally stated, “Illness is not a

---

metaphor, and the most truthful way to regard illness is of a purified state.” The richness of Austen’s smallest details resonates as a powerful resource to her own conscious interest and awareness of her society. The interrogation of this specific evidence enriches our grasp of the cultural representation of venereal disease and prostitution, not as just a window to history, but as an embodiment of a woman’s perspective on these social vices.

Austen’s conjunctions between these characters and tiny, often trivial details, such as riddles, beauty products, crooked teeth, a play, a forgotten character, and landscape renovation revealed her social criticism and provided an outlet for her hostility towards ideologies that dominated women. By exploring these aforementioned details, this thesis, demonstrated how such small minutiae such as the mention of a riddle or protruding teeth, opened up Austen’s novels as a primary resource revealing the historical impact venereal disease and prostitution had on genteel eighteenth-century England and most importantly how these issues affected women and the female body. Described as a “writer who belonged to the Society whose manners she so ably delineates,” Austen’s work captured the reality of her patriarchal society that marginalized and compromised women and challenged the limitations of her own sex.

Austen attacked patriarchal promiscuity and privilege by subversively integrating a riddle into the narrative of *Emma*. The bawdy allusions to frozen maids, “chimney sweeps,” and, mercury treatments, though outrageous, are deeply embedded as a protest against patriarchal privilege, raising awareness to the abhorrent practice of raping young

---

286 Heydt-Stevenson, *Unbecoming Conjunctions*, 207.
children in order to cure their own diseased bodies. The riddle not only noted the historical contemporary notion of male entitlement but also exposed the patriarchy’s control over the female body. As numerous medical treatises written on syphilis inundated the market and treatments bordered on dangerous and disfiguring, the female body became synonymous with the disease. Austen utilized the riddle as a sub-textual reference to heighten socio-political awareness within her contemporary audience of the ruthless, patriarchal principles of her society.

Nowhere was the effect of the secret malady more apparent but in the fashion of the period. In *Persuasion* and *Emma*, Austen offered a looking glass into eighteenth-century women’s desperate and dangerous attempts to uphold the persona of beauty while inwardly battling the destructive symptoms of syphilis. The use of Gowland’s lotion and the physical flaw of a “tooth amiss,” offered an intimate insight into the exploration of venereal disease and the devastating impact on eighteenth-century female lives. Austen could confidently assert that, despite being a woman, she in fact “afforded more extensive and unaffected insight than those of any other literary corporation in the world.”

When Jane Austen asked her contemporaries their opinion of her novel *Mansfield Park*, Lady Gordon was quite convinced of the reality of Austen’s characters.

In most novels you are amused for the time with a set of Ideal People whom you never think of afterwards or whom you the least expect to meet in common life, whereas Miss A---s works, & especially in M.P. you actually live with them, you fancy yourself one of the family…there is scarcely an Incident or conversation, or a person that you are not inclined to imagine you have at one time or other in your Life been a witness to, born a part in, & been acquainted with.

Austen’s unaffected insight into the reality of her society provided her with the opportunity to examine the performance and construction of her surroundings, most importantly, the body, and its relation to landscape, identity, courtship, and love.\textsuperscript{290}

\textit{Mansfield Park} encompassed all these themes and in a novel that focused on the erection and improvement of structures, i.e. makeshift theatres and landscape renovation, allowed Austen the opportunity to elaborate upon the domestication of both venereal disease and prostitution. Austen exploited the theme of the theatre, or the “infected world” as venereal disease overstepped its institutional boundaries of prostitution and syphilis erupted into the private drawing rooms of genteel society. The theatre, a suggested source for both venereal disease and prostitutes, brought full circle these urban vices. As Tom Bertram candidly stated in reference to the theatre, “Those things always spread, you know,”\textsuperscript{291} and as the reader now understands the theatre’s lewd connections, Austen’s intentions are candidly clear.

Fanny Price’s character embodied the dangers venereal disease brought into the homes of Georgian England, but it also represented the restricted role women had over their homes and their bodies. Much like the prostitutes who walked the streets of London, genteel women’s bodies acted as a commodity for the patriarchal household. Austen “normalizes” prostitution as a natural choice for any woman who is without options and perpetuates the concept of the female body utilized for economic gain. While Austen exploited the theme of prostitution as practiced within proper society through Fanny, she used the character of Eliza Brandon to tell a darker story of the

\textsuperscript{290} Heydt-Stevenson, \textit{Unbecoming Conjunctions}, 208.
\textsuperscript{291} Austen, \textit{Mansfield Park}, 200.
history of prostitution in eighteenth-century England. Prostitution was the ruin of many young, naïve girls seduced by libertines and brothel keepers. Eliza’s story, for Austen’s contemporary readers, was nothing new, as stories of seduced young girls inundated the market. Yet for the contemporary reader, this character reintroduces the shocking reality of eighteenth-century patriarchal, male entitlement as young girls were raped, deserted, and abandoned to pass through the cruel hands of bawds, such as Mother Needham.

Though dismissed as blind to the dark corners of her society, Austen’s novels have instead illuminated our journey into the dirty streets of eighteenth-century England, made up of syphilitic libertines, brothels, and seduced harlots. The use of literary interpretation is crucial to our understanding of how eighteenth-century British society delineated their experiences with disease and prostitution. More importantly Austen’s novels leave behind a definitive source to how these issues affected the culture of the eighteenth century and what her society really thought about venereal disease and prostitution, and in this case, how a genteel woman, Jane Austen, felt about the disease. Venereal disease and prostitution existed, and even flourished behind closed doors and these issues became highly flaunted and inextricably woven into all areas of eighteenth-century British life. Though limited by her medium and social restraints, Austen, by using symbolism and subtext, embodied the history of venereal disease and prostitution through her characters. Beginning with an almost comic reference to venereal disease in *Emma* and ending with a tragic seduction in *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen successfully exposed the publicity of venereal disease and prostitution of eighteenth-century England and the severe effects it had on women in her society. Like a “bitter relick of my flame,”
venereal disease and prostitution kindled lasting fires, not only within the boundaries of “polite” society but also amongst the novels of Jane Austen.
Bibliography


