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Radical Rejections and Sloppy Seconds

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Jane Austen, as both an author and a woman, was *quite* ahead of her time. She is witty, sarcastic, improper, and bold. Her heroines share these qualities, and they are radical enough to challenge gender norms; or rather, they are radical enough to claim their rights to be happy. Her heroines do not belong in their time period - they belong in ours, and perhaps that is why Austen is still read and loved by the modern reader. The greatest testament to this idea is the fact that *four* out of her *six* heroines reject marriage proposals - a radical thing in Austen's day, where marriage was the best way for a woman to guarantee economic security. Although Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* eventually accepts Captain Wentworth's proposal, three other heroines give definite, and defiant, "no's": Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice,* Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park,* and Emma Woodhouse in *Emma.* These heroines reject the advances of gentlemen who are their inferiors in terms of sensibility, morality, and intelligence. The heroines remain true to themselves, and the rejected suitors quickly settle for women who are the inferiors of, or even direct contrasts to, their first choices. Afterwards, what the heroines see (or what Austen reveals) about these gentlemen merely confirms that the heroines were correct in trusting their hearts. Austen thus uses the rejected proposal as her greatest weapon for asserting a woman's right to happiness, and also for challenging the gender norms that dominated Regency England.

Austen crafts strong heroines who are confident in both themselves and their beliefs. Elizabeth Bennet is the most beloved of Austen's heroines because she refuses to enter into a loveless marriage. She mocks the idea that a man's most attractive feature is his wealth, as she

sarcastically dates her loving Mr. Darcy to her "first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley" (J. Austen, *P&P* 286). And so when the blustering, pretentious, and awkward Mr. Collins asks for her hand in marriage, Lizzy is quick to reply that her "feelings in every respect forbid it" (J. Austen, *P&P* 83). The modern reader sees this as an obvious reason for rejecting a proposal; Austen's contemporaries, however, would immediately recognize how radical Elizabeth's refusal really is. Elizabeth has nothing to offer potential suitors. If she does not marry before Mr. Bennet's death, she will be destitute. Mr. Collins, meanwhile, has economic and social stability, and will one day possess the Bennet estate. Mr. Collins reminds Elizabeth of all this when he states that "it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made to you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications" (J. Austen, *P&P*83). Elizabeth, as intelligent and beautiful as she is, may indeed never get another chance at marriage. And yet she never wavers, showing that she is willing to risk future security for the sake of present feelings. Perhaps this is because she "knows that to refuse Collins's offer does not "risk" her happiness since the chance of any is nil" (Weinsheimer 20). And thus Elizabeth is able to address Mr. Collins not as a woman in inferior circumstances, but as "a rational creature" (J. Austen, *P&P* 83) conversing with an equal. By doing this, Lizzy emphasizes that she is not a *woman* who is unable to grasp the implications of her actions; she is a *rational creature* who understands the consequences and accepts them anyway. Elizabeth, in rejecting not only Mr. Collins' proposal but the economically-secure future that comes with it, proves that she is unwilling to compromise when it comes to matters of the heart.

Fanny Price, although the opposite of Elizabeth in many respects, can match Lizzy in stubbornness. Fanny is guided in all things by her strict morals and therefore could never love a

man of questionable ones. Fanny, like Elizabeth, lacks the superficial "beauty" that money tends to bestow upon a lady. She comes from a poor family, and she depends on the generosity of the Bertrams. A marriage to Mr. Henry Crawford would give her status and wealth, but it would also cost Fanny her moral integrity. In Volumes I and II of the novel Henry flirts with Maria Bertram even though, or perhaps because, she is engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Fanny especially remembers how Henry acts during the play rehearsals, and she cannot overlook his dubious behavior. Sir Thomas Bertram reminds Fanny, just as Mr. Collins reminds Elizabeth, that she is "throwing away...such an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled, as will, probably, never occur to you again" (J. Austen, *MP* 249). Fanny is pressured by both Henry and Sir Thomas to accept the proposal, but she nevertheless remains firm in her decision. She trusts in herself and "the purity of her intentions" (J. Austen, *MP* 253) more than she trusts in the judgment of the men. She "is forced, despite herself, to stand up for those rights which her given moral nature, not her own wish, impose upon her" (Kirkham 106). Even if she may desire to marry Henry, in her heart she knows it is the wrong thing to do. Fanny cannot find her moral equal in Henry Crawford, and this conviction enables her to resist the allure of money and consequence. Fanny's moral compass directs her on a path that cannot be deterred by the temptations of Henry or the exhortations of Sir Thomas, and she ultimately values herself too highly to be degraded by a partner of lesser moral character.

Emma is different from both Elizabeth and Fanny in that she is not in a dire economic situation. Emma is a wealthy and independent heiress, and for her, marriage is not so much a means of securing freedom as it is of restricting it. When Harriet Smith asks the question that the readers themselves are asking - namely, why Miss Woodhouse is not about to be, or indeed already, married - Emma responds:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing! but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never, could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's. (J. Austen, *Emma* 62)

Emma is, in a word, self-sufficient. She revels in her independence, and she has no desire to give it up unless she were to meet "somebody very superior to any one I have seen yet" (J. Austen, *Emma* 62). And if she never falls in love, well - all the better! Harriet once again mirrors the reader's surprise when she exclaims, "Dear me! - it is so odd to hear a woman talk so" (J. Austen, *Emma* 62)! Free from the burden of economic insecurity, Emma expresses sentiments that most women could never dream of thinking. She is so different from Austen's other protagonists that she seems more hero than heroine; in fact, her economic and emotional independence have "led scholars to equate Emma's self-love with masculinity" (Steiner 142). Unlike most women, Emma does not dread a future all alone - she looks forward to it. The only thing she relies on is her own self-reliance, saying, "mine is an active, busy mind, with a great many independent resources...If I draw less, I shall read more; if I give up music, I shall take to carpet-work" (J. Austen, *Emma* 63). The reader almost feels sorry for Mr. Elton, who is certainly not Emma's social or intellectual equal, and thus has no chance of being accepted by this haughty young lady. Emma's interior - and more importantly, exterior - resources liberate her from the pressures of marriage, allowing her to anticipate a future where satisfaction is derived from everything but marital union. Viewed collectively, Elizabeth, Fanny, and Emma

are admirable for their commitments to their own happiness, and their rejections of marriage proposals not only signify the unworthiness of the men who offer them, but also the confidence that these women have in their own selves.

After the reader assesses the strength of these women, the question is not why the men are rejected, but rather why they propose in the first place! All three of the gentlemen - Mr. Collins, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Elton - pursue the heroines to satisfy their own vanity, and so it is their vanity that is hurt when they fail in their endeavors. The men are so full of themselves that they cannot even accept the women's "no's" at first; the women, meanwhile, consider the men so far beneath them, that they are entirely blindsided by the proposals! Mr. Collins' proposal is "less an invitation than a declaration, in which he...outlines the various reasons that Elizabeth *ought* to possess for agreeing to their union" (Matthews 248-249). His reasons are as follows: it would set a good example for his parish, it would greatly contribute to his happiness, and it would oblige Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who wishes to see him married. Now these may seem like valid reasons to marry someone, but strangely enough, Elizabeth does not agree. Mr. Collins is "steeped in the assumption that each person is ultimately motivated by vulgar self-interest" (Matthews 373), and so he believes that Elizabeth *will* love him because she *should* love him, or because it is in her financial, social, and familial interest to do so. Mr. Collins cannot see why Elizabeth would not act out of "vulgar self-interest," and so when she asks to speak to him as a "rational creature" he can only see her as a silly woman. He assumes her initial rejection of him is in accordance with "the usual practice of elegant females" (J. Austen, *P&P* 83) and is "consistent with the true delicacy of the female character" (J. Austen, *P&P* 83). He means to propose a second time, or even a third if necessary, until she answers in the affirmative. At this point, Lizzy has nothing more to say; she did not love Mr. Collins before he proposed to her,

and this episode is doing nothing to help raise him in her esteem. Because Mr. Collins is vain and self-interested he thinks everyone else must be as well, and thus he is more likely to accuse Lizzy of possessing "female delicacy" than of actually rejecting his suit.

Like Mr. Collins, Henry Crawford cannot "take a hint;" he proposes to Fanny an embarrassing number of times, convinced that no girl could say "no" to *him.* Henry is perhaps the most vain of the three men, as he becomes interested in Fanny simply because she is not interested in him. Henry asks his sister, Mary Crawford, "And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt?...my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me" (J. Austen, *MP* 179). Henry is bored, and likes a challenge. That challenge is Fanny Price, a girl who has already expressed a dislike for him. Add to this the fact that she is shy and virtuous, two factors that make her "sexually exciting to men like Crawford, who wish to find in their wives such vulnerable 'virtue' as will excite both sexual passion and manly protectiveness" (Kirkham 102). Henry admits that winning Fanny's heart would be the perfect conquest for the perfect player:

> I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her. I could not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character? - Is she solemn? - Is she queer? - Is she prudish? Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life - trying to entertain her - and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, 'I will not like you, I am determined not to like you,' and I say, she shall. (J. Austen, *MP* 180)

Vanity and boredom prove to be a bad, and even malicious, combination. Henry wants to capture Fanny's heart and then break it to pieces, and he cares very little about how she might get hurt. Henry later develops true feelings for her, however, and his proposal is grounded in genuine affection. But still he does not consider the fact that Fanny might say no, and he starts planning their future lives together even before he asks her! But Fanny does say no, and so Henry proposes again, and again, and again...he even follows her to her home in Portsmouth and asks her there! He enjoys the pursuit even more than the capture, admitting that a "little difficulty to overcome, was no evil to Henry Crawford. He rather derived spirits from it" (J. Austen, *MP* 255). Henry initially pursues Fanny out of a mixture of vanity and boredom, and although he later proposes to her with pure feelings, he still retains his vanity as he is unwilling to accept both Fanny's refusal and his own defeat.

Finally, Mr. Elton likewise believes that what a woman says is the opposite of what she thinks, especially if she says something he does not wish to hear. Mr. Elton proves to be as aggressive as both Mr. Collins and Henry Crawford, a fact which Austen emphasizes by coloring the entire proposal scene with rape imagery. Mr. Elton and Emma are in a carriage together when Emma has "her hand violently seized - her attention demanded, and Mr. Elton actually making violent love to her" (J. Austen, *Emma* 92). Mr. Elton proposes to Emma because she has the "old money" status he desires, and he thinks (perhaps not unreasonably) that Emma has been encouraging him. He claims that he anxiously awaits her response, but his attitude shows that he is "very much resolved on being seriously accepted as soon as possible" (J. Austen, *Emma* 92). Emma, however, has never thought about Mr. Elton in that light, and her "astonishment is much beyond any thing [she] can express" (J. Austen, *Emma* 93). Mr. Elton believes that he will be accepted, while Emma *cannot believe* that he would even dream of asking her! Emma is very

conceited, but not entirely wrong, when she thinks that "Perhaps it was not fair to expect him to feel how very much he was her inferior in talent, and all the elegancies of mind. The very want of such equality might prevent his perception of it" (J. Austen, *Emma* 96). Mr. Elton feels that Emma's wealth and status, when coupled with his inherent, manly superiority, will make their union an "equal alliance," but Emma, with a man-like confidence herself, does not "suppose himself her equal in connection or mind" (J. Austen, *Emma* 96). He is only "new money" while Emma is "old money," and so Emma arrogantly knows she can get along fine without him, even if she did have marriage on her mind. And yet Emma is not being entirely superficial here, since "Money alone does not, for Jane Austen, define genuine social status. There must also be self-knowledge, courtesy, generosity intelligence, and honesty" (G. Austen) - all qualities in which Mr. Elton is Emma's inferior. Mr. Elton is doomed to fail when he proposes to a woman who not only has no intention of marrying, but also has no intention of marrying *beneath her*, in regard to economic and intrinsic wealth. During all three proposal scenes there is a perfect mixture of comedy and awkwardness, and vanity and surprise, which shows that the men have no chance of winning the hearts of women who, whether the men know it or not, are most certainly their superiors.

All three men, still smarting from the sting of their rejections, hastily seek to regain their pride and restore their vanity. They ultimately settle for women who, as the antitheses of the heroines, easily accept their proposals. The juxtaposition of Elizabeth Bennet and Charlotte Lucas is a juxtaposition of romanticism and realism. While Elizabeth refuses to marry without love, Charlotte is more practical. She is 27 years old, poor, and not particularly handsome; she is running out of time and options, and if she does not marry soon she will burden her family in her old age. Mr. Collins knows all of this, and so when Elizabeth rejects Mr. Collins and "did

injustice to the fire and independence of his character" (J. Austen, *P&P* 93), he does not hesitate to "escape...the next morning with admirable slyness, and hasten to Lucas Lodge to throw himself at [Charlotte's] feet" (J. Austen, *P&P* 93). Austen's use of the words, "escape," "slyness," and "throw himself," further debase Mr. Collins in the eyes of the reader - and undoubtedly in the eyes of Charlotte as well. Regardless, Charlotte accepts Mr. Collins' offer:

> Charlotte was tolerably composed. She had gained her point, and had time to consider of it. Her reflections were in general satisfactory. Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary. But still he would be her husband. - Without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want. (J. Austen, *P&P* 94)

Charlotte knows that she can never and will never love Mr. Collins - at most, she will tolerate him. Brown accuses her of engaging "in a polite form of prostitution" (74), an accusation which is not unfounded since she is essentially selling her body for money. Brown accurately sums up Charlotte's situation when she remarks that "Charlotte Lucas' life with Mr. Collins is not only a 'preservative from want' but a preservative from intelligence, gaiety, and love, an embalmed safety from possibility and the requirement of morality and hope" (76). Yes, Mr. Collins rescues Charlotte from destitution, but he also "rescues" her from the possibility of future happiness. Mr. Collins proposes to Charlotte not even a day after being rejected by Elizabeth, and Charlotte ultimately accepts his proposal for all of the reasons that Lizzy did not.

Out of the three men it is Henry Crawford who takes the most radical turn after being rejected, making the leap from the most *moral* character in Austen's world to the most *immoral* one. After Fanny rejects him at Portsmouth, Henry stops by London to see the newly-married Maria Bertram. Henry flirted with Maria when she was promised to Mr. Rushworth, and Henry's "curiosity and vanity were both engaged" (J. Austen, *MP* 367) to see how the Rushworth marriage is working out, as well as how Maria will now act around him. Maria's conduct and sense of propriety have already been questioned at Sotherton, when she was determined to venture through a gate with Henry despite Fanny's warning that "you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes - you will tear your gown - you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha" (J. Austen, *MP* 79). For Maria, just like for Lydia Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, the "danger to her dress foreshadows a threat to Maria's virtue" (Heydt-Stevenson 5). Henry had previously been roused by Maria's flirtations. Now, however, he observes that Mrs. Rushworth is cold and indifferent towards him, and this, when coupled with his recent rejection by Fanny, is too much for Henry to bear. He "must exert himself to subdue so proud a display of resentment; it was anger on Fanny's account; he must get the better of it" (J. Austen, *MP* 367) - and indeed he does! Henry seduces Mrs. Rushworth not because he cares about her, but because he is mad at Fanny. And so Maria becomes an adultress, Henry and Maria run off together, and Henry exchanges his dreams of an honest wife for the reality of an irritable mistress. Unable to reach Fanny's high moral standards, Henry chooses the most impure woman he can find in an effort to prove to Fanny, and more importantly to himself, that he is still a desirable bachelor.

The last woman who gets a heroine's "sloppy seconds" is Augusta Hawkins, whom Mr. Elton marries only shortly after being rejected by Emma. Mr. Elton departs from Highbury following the botched proposal, and in his letter to Mr. Woodhouse "Resentment could not have

been more plainly spoken than in civility to her father, from which she was so pointedly excluded" (J. Austen, *Emma* 99). He soon returns to Highbury with Mrs. Elton who, to borrow Emma's phrase, is "Very nicely dressed, indeed; a remarkably elegant gown" (J. Austen, *Emma* 186). The tension between the two ladies is one of old money and new money, and self-sufficiency and neediness. Emma and Mrs. Elton are similar in many respects: "Both are preoccupied with status; each adopts another young woman as protégé and satellite, both are self-centered and therefore blind" (Brown 104). One way they differ, however, is in terms of the *source* of their wealth. Emma comes from the old money of the country estate, while Mrs. Elton comes from the new money of city merchants, a new money which might even be a product of the slave trade. Mr. Elton, therefore, feels more confident in proposing to a woman who lacks Emma's "old money" sense of entitlement. But the contrast between the two women runs deeper than status, however, as Mrs. Elton serves as a foil to mitigate Emma's worse qualities and emphasize her best ones. Unlike Emma, Mrs. Elton continuously seeks the validation of others. At the Crown ball she fishes for compliments with remarks like, "How do you like my gown? - How do you like my trimming? - How has Wright done my hair?" (J. Austen, *Emma* 222). Emma, meanwhile, although proud of her abilities and intelligence, is never "personally vain." Emma also possesses a man-like independence, while Mrs. Elton exemplifies the stereotypical "female" dependence on both her husband and other people. Mrs. Elton fawns over her "*cara sposo,"* and she considers the Crown ball and the strawberry-picking adventure to be especial compliments to her person. She claims, however, that she is "Blessed with so many resources within myself...my resources made me quite independent. And as to smaller-sized room than I had been used to, I really could not give it a thought" (J. Austen, *Emma* 190). This slight twist on Emma's earlier speech, rounded off with a trivial remark on room size, shows that Mrs. Elton

cannot match up to Emma in terms of real self-sufficiency. In all three novels the rejected gentlemen end up with women who are not even comparable to their original choices, and by contrasting the heroines with the anti-heroines, Austen shows her commitment to the virtues of true love, morality, and independence over those of economic security, moral laxity, and neediness.

Now that these men have restored their pride and conquered their women, how do they react upon seeing their first, and superior, choices? Ultimately, Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton are as smug and cocky as ever, while Henry Crawford regrets his decision and - tellingly - does not encounter Fanny again. Elizabeth is "prepared to see [Mr. Collins] in his glory" (J. Austen, *P&P* 120) when she goes to visit the newlyweds at Hunsford Parsonage. Mr. Collins is meticulous in describing every feature of his "humble abode," and Elizabeth feels he is "wishing to make her feel what she had lost in refusing him. But...she was not able to gratify him by any sigh of repentance" (J. Austen, *P&P* 120). Indeed, he leaves no time for her to feel pangs of regret - she is too busy wondering how Charlotte can deal with such a husband! Elizabeth observes that Charlotte is able to find happiness, not in the person of Mr. Collins, but rather through "her persistence in the same pretended self-deception that characterized her courtship" (Weinsheimer 17). This is evinced by the fact that Charlotte encourages her husband to spend as much time as possible out of doors - for his health, of course. Mr. Collins is further delighted at the chance to "show off" the inhabitants of Rosings Park. He receives an invitation for them to dine with Lady Catherine and Miss De Bourgh, as the "power of displaying the grandeur of his patroness to his wondering visitors, and of letting them see her civility towards himself and his wife, was exactly what he had wished for" (J. Austen, *P&P*123). Elizabeth is warned that the grandeur of Rosings might "wholly overpower" her, but she is somehow able to retain her composure. Lady

Catherine is snobbish and rude, and Mr. Collins is slavish and ridiculous. In this presentation of both Hunsford Parsonage and Rosings Park, what is supposed to be Mr. Collins' moment of triumph only reinforces Elizabeth's belief that she made the right decision in rejecting his proposal.

Henry Crawford's ending is very different from that of Mr. Collins' and, as the next paragraph will show, Mr. Elton's. The reader is never told if Henry sees Fanny again, and even if he does, he would have little to show off. Henry knows when he goes off with Maria that it is the wrong decision, and "a very few months had taught him, by the force of the contrast, to place a yet higher value on the sweetness of [Fanny's] temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence of her principles" (J. Austen, *MP* 368). Austen here is confusing: Henry is easily the most sensible and admirable of the three anti-heroes, but he seems to get off the worst. He "rationally, as well as passionately loved" (J. Austen, *MP* 368) Fanny, and Austen admits that if Henry had not stopped to see Maria in London, Fanny could have - eventually - been persuaded to marry him. Then why is he the gentleman who ends up with the most regrets? Perhaps it is precisely *because* he is the most sensible and admirable, and still goes against his better judgment. Henry Crawford at the novel's end could have chosen one of two paths: he could have been the man who sought to earn, and therefore could have earned, Fanny's respect; or, he could have, and ultimately does, fall back on his old habits and games. Austen gives Henry a chance to redeem himself that she does not offer to the other two men, but Henry abuses this privilege and thus must suffer the consequences. And yet Austen reminds the reader to not feel too badly for Henry because, while Henry has "no small portion of vexation and regret" (J. Austen, *MP* 368), Maria is banished from her family, exiled from England, and lives a secluded existence. Maria is forever ruined while it is implied that Henry will be reintegrated into society,

and "the voice of justice regrets that the double standard of sexual behavior should make "the penalty...less equal than could be wished" (Brown 96). Henry is tested to see if he will one day be worthy of Fanny's affections, and it is because he fails this test that Austen portions him the harshest punishment of the three gentlemen.

While Henry Crawford avoids Mansfield Park out of shame for his actions, Mr. Elton returns to Highbury in full force, loudly singing his own praises. He comes back both to ignore Emma and to have Emma notice him, and he does everything in his power to convince himself that he has ended up with the better woman:

> Mr. Elton returned, a very happy man. He had gone away rejected and mortified - disappointed in a very sanguine hope, after a series of what had appeared to him strong encouragement; and not only losing the right lady, but finding himself debased to the level of a very wrong one. He had gone away deeply offended - he came back engaged to another - and to another as superior, of course, to the first, as under such circumstances what is gained always is to what is lost. (J. Austen, *Emma* 126)

While the beginning of this quote suggests Mr. Elton may have found happiness, Austen's insertion of the phrase, "of course," in the last sentence reveals that he has not so much *found* happiness as *willed himself* to find it. Mr. Elton is determined to think himself as superior to Emma, but his actions prove that he is nothing of the sort. When Mr. Elton proposed to Emma, she believed him to be in love with Harriet Smith. Mr. Elton was horrified that Emma would think him willing to stoop that low, to "so totally despair of an equal alliance, as to be addressing [himself] to Miss Smith" (J. Austen, *Emma* 94). And thus, when Harriet is later without a partner at the Crown ball, Mr. Elton publically snubs her. This proves that Mr. Elton has neither

forgiven nor forgotten Emma's remark, and it is because he thinks himself superior to Harriet that he truly becomes the inferior. It is Mr. Knightley who comes in and "saves" Harriet, showing that no matter how hard Mr. Elton tries, he can never possess the " elegancies of mind" that Emma desires in a partner. Mr. Elton endeavors to convince Emma that she did him a favor when she rejected him, but the way he goes about "convincing" her proves that Emma did *herself* a favor by not accepting *him*.

The rejected proposal becomes the means by which Austen can assert that happiness, and not marriage, should be the ultimate goal for women. She introduces three heroines who are models of beauty, intelligence, morality, and self-sufficiency, and she shows how they are unafraid to put their own happiness first. She contrasts these heroines with anti-heroes who are vain and weak-minded when compared to the women they desire. These men, after being rejected by the heroines, are quick to select women who they know will not say "no." Mr. Collins and Mr. Elton try to make Elizabeth and Emma jealous of their acquisitions, but their conduct only makes these women feel sorry for the anti-heroines who get their "sloppy seconds." Henry Crawford, meanwhile, is given the chance to redeem himself, but he fails to be virtuous and thus pays the consequences. And yet despite all of this, Austen by no means suggests that marriage is a bad thing. She "consents to conservative myths [marriage as the proper destination for heroines in order to live happily ever after], but only in order to...bring about, rather than inhibit, the expansion and fulfillment of happiness" (Dabundo 50). In other words, she consents to marriages where both people have to sacrifice themselves, where there is equality among partners, and where hero and heroine are rewarded for their virtue. The rejected marriage proposal was radical in Austen's time, but is the idea behind it still that radical? Celebrate these women, and emulate them, because they are among the few who are unafraid to be happy.

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