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The Moral Imperative in the Nineteenth Century Novel of Manners: Social Criticism in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Henry James's *Daisy Miller*

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Everyone considers religion and politics inflammatory subjects which can cause violent debates. Moral discussions also cause such disputes. In fact, the term "moral dilemma" has been coined to describe those arguments in which the opposing parties are so fiercely divided that it is almost impossible to reach reconciliation. The passion with which parties in moral debates defend their respective positions is understandable, as any discussion of morality cuts to the core of the way in which people govern their lives. Morals are the driving forces which compel human behavior. As such, the moral imperative is a serious subject which defines life.

The seriousness of the moral imperative is reflected in literature. Although different genres comment on moral issues, the novel of manners is an especially potent example, as it is chiefly concerned with the moral imperative driving human behavior. This may be surprising, as most people associate the novel of manners with etiquette. For them, the term elicits images of tea parties, outdated Victorian conventions, and meaningless rules—a Rococo portrait of superficiality. These negative stereotypes result in the rejection of novels of manners as trivial and irrelevant.

In fact, the novel of manners is not about etiquette, despite what the term may suggest. Rather it is concerned with the morals which fuel society. The various novels within the genre often take opposing views as they comment upon these principles. The resulting debate between authors is profitable for the reader, because the tension which stems from opposing pieces of social criticism provides valuable insights.

Two quintessential authors of the genre, Jane Austen and Henry James, provide such insights through the social criticism contained in *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Daisy Miller: a Study in Two Parts.* Tuttleton explains:

> Often the portrait of manners is put to the service of an ideological argument. . . . *Pride and Prejudice* is 'about' the problem of finding suitable husbands for a household of girls. . . . But enough attention is directed to the traditions of the early nineteenth-century English middle class . . . to justify our examination [of it] as novels of manners (10).

He further argues, "It is difficult to exaggerate James's preoccupation with polite manners in dramatizing and testing values in conflict" (52). Neither Austen's "ideological argument" nor James's "testing of values in conflict" is related to tea parties or rules of etiquette, but to morality. Specifically, Austen and James explore the moral issues of choice versus fate, individual happiness versus obligation to society, female independence versus submission, and appearance versus reality. Each author takes a position in the moral debate at the heart of each of these themes. Regardless of the stand adopted, however, one thing remains constant: the moral imperative at the heart of the novel of manners.

A subtle illustration is found in the titles of the works themselves. Both "pride" and "prejudice" refer to negative attitudes, or outlooks humans occasionally adopt. "Pride" is arrogant, and disdainful of others. "Prejudice" is preconception based on irrational and false premises. It fosters suspicion and results in an inaccurate view of the situation at hand. Pride and prejudice impair judgment by clouding one's perception of the issues involved. Austen thus clearly signals the moral implications of her novel from the outset.

James likewise establishes the serious nature of *Daisy Miller* through the wording of the title. Although the book's title is often abbreviated, its formal title is *Daisy Miller: a Study in Two Parts*. The word "study" is significant, for James is credited as being the "master of the psychological novel" (Bartleby.com). As such, he adopted the role of

"detached spectator and analyst of life" both in life and fiction (*ibid*). *Daisy Miller* is thus a study in which James analyzes life, in which he probes far beyond the etiquette and trivial matters which popular opinion has ascribed to his works, and examines the morals at the core of the society described in the work.

Since both pieces of literature are filled with situations which illustrate this point—especially *Pride and Prejudice,* as it is longer—we will limit our discussion to a few especially relevant examples from each work to illustrate the morals at the heart of each theme.

CHOICE VERSUS FATE

Who, or what, is in control of human life? The answer to this question forms the core of morality, for it determines how humans live their lives. If fate rules life, do human choices matter? Should one try to make good choices and be compassionate towards others if the course of one's life has already been charted? Or does human choice have an impact on life? Writers from Homer, Aeschylus, and Sophocles to thinkers such as Calvin and Luther have wrestled with this question, all favoring a predestined course for human life (Mattson 1). Austen and James also take up this issue in their respective novels of manners. Both authors firmly reject any form of fate or predestination, emphasizing that it is choice which drives the characters's lives. C.C. Barfoot comments, *"Pride and Prejudice* is the Jane Austen novel that turns its back most firmly on fate, whose existence it hardly cares to acknowledge, and consequently is most militant in its assertion of its belief in the virtue of choosing" (52). Barfoot's

comment also applies to *Daisy Miller*, in which James is as emphasizes the importance of choice as "militantly" as Austen.

Thus, the situations in which characters in both novels find themselves can be directly traced to their own choices. However, freedom of choice must not be taken lightly, for "choice is inevitable and requires responsibility" (53). Responsibility and freedom—two serious moral issues—are thus the subject of the first major themes Austen and James incorporate into their novels of manners. On this theme, the authors are in agreement: each privileges human choice over fate.

For instance, in *Pride and Prejudice* Austen illustrates the moral responsibility associated with the freedom of choice through the character of Mr. Bennet. Mr. Bennet's family is experiencing a crisis: their estate is entailed away from the female line, and they have five daughters whose futures are insecure. This crisis is not brought about by fate or bad luck, but by Mr. Bennet himself. Throughout the novel, he makes a series of unwise choices, which have disastrous moral consequences.

First, there is his marriage to Mrs. Bennet. As a member of the landed gentry, Mr. Bennet's social rank is not insignificant. He does not have to make his living by trade, or working in a profession, but can enjoy the comfort of a landlord, living off the income from his property. By marrying an ill-bred, silly wife from the lower working class, Mr. Bennet has lowered his family's rank in society. His daughters must consequently suffer the negative consequences of their low familial relations on the maternal side. As Mr. Darcy puts it, "It must very materially lessen their chance of marrying men of any consideration in the world" (Austen 27). Lady Catherine's pronouncements leave no doubt as to the negative consequences of Mr. Bennet's choice

in marriage. When Elizabeth defends her social status by saying of Mr. Darcy, "He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter: so far, we are equal," Lady Catherine is indignant. "True, you *are* a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition" (257).

Unfortunately, Mr. Bennet does not respect—or even like—his wife, so the social sacrifice he has made in marriage is not merited. "My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life" (273). Why has he married her then? Is he not aware of the social disadvantages of the match? The answer lies in Mr. Bennet's philosophy of life. He does not concern himself with bettering the lives of his dependents. Instead, he neglects them, and seeks to gratify himself by laughing at others. "For what do we live, but to make sport for our neighbors and laugh at them in our turn?" (263) Mr. Bennet's choice to amuse himself at the expense of his family is clearly immoral.

Sadly, Mr. Bennet's selfish gratification it is not limited to his choice of marriage partner, for he continues to make unwise choices in other areas of his life. He is also neglectful when it comes to finances. Again, his disregard impacts the family negatively. As head of an estate which has been entailed away from the female line, Mr. Bennet must take extra care to provide for the financial security of his five daughters, for they will not inherit any part of the family estate upon their father's death. While a responsible father would have regularly saved money for his daughters, Mr. Bennet has failed to take such measures. His failure to save is not due to an inability on his own part or a financial shortage which prevented the putting aside of money, but to irresponsibility. "When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless; for, of course, they

were to have a son. This son was to join in cutting off the entail . . . and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for" (221). Again, Mr. Bennet has made an unethical choice, for when his daughters are of the age to marry, they have no dowry with which to attract potential husbands.

Thus, the Bennet girls's predicament is the fault of their father, who, as head of the family, could have prevented the problem by marrying well and providing for his daughters financially. There is no hint of predestination or fate at all. Austen strongly implies that it is Mr. Bennet's neglect of family affairs which is directly responsible for their misfortunes. However, in the event that the reader might be left with any doubt, Austen decisively emphasizes the disastrous consequences of Mr. Bennet's poor choices in his decision to allow Lydia to go to Brighton with the militia.

A silly girl, Lydia is repeatedly flirting with the officers. Although Mr. Bennet is well acquainted with Lydia's lack of self-control, he nonetheless gives her permission to go to Brighton. Mr. Bennet's defense of his poor choice is that, "we shall have no peace at Longbourn if Lydia does not go to Brighton" (168). Obviously, he is placing his own desire for peace and quiet above his obligations as head of the family. Given Lydia's temperament, his decision is unwise. Teachman, however, gives an even better reason why Mr. Bennet should not have allowed Lydia to go to Brighton:

> Brighton was one of the favorite playgrounds of the Prince Regent, whose lack of propriety, decorum, and moral behavior was legendary. Many of the militia were stationed at or near Brighton, in fact, because of the frequent presence of the Prince Regent and Mrs. Fitzherbert, his wife/mistress. . . . Thus, the fact that Wickham elopes with Lydia from Brighton, intending to enjoy her favors without the benefit of marriage . . . would . . . convey Mr. Bennet's ineffectiveness as a father (12, 13).

For Mr. Bennet to allow a flirtatious, impressionable girl to go to a place known for immoral conduct is a foolish choice indeed. As Teachman writes, "If Elizabeth can perceive the danger that Brighton poses to Lydia, her father should be able to perceive it as well" (*ibid*). Naturally, Lydia, runs off with Mr. Wickham and lives with him in London. The resulting scandal further exacerbates the Bennets' social standing. "Any scandal committed by one member of a family implicated all—and could literally destroy the chances of the unmarried women in the family to find respectable mates" (3). The scandal also leaves no doubt as to the principal role Mr. Bennet's unwise choice played in the affair.

Clearly, Mr. Bennet's failure as a father has wreaked havoc in his family. By choosing to be a bystander instead of a leader, he shirks his moral obligation to provide for his family. His bad choices repeatedly compromise the social and economic security of his daughters, as well as his family's reputation. Instead of helping his family, he is the source of its problems. Teachman adequately sums up Mr. Bennet's character:

> He behaves irresponsibly toward both his estate and his dependents. He does not lack intelligence or an understanding of human nature, but he does not have a strong belief in the need to act according to principle and moral obligation. Instead, he operates as an observer, watching what happens around him and returning to his study whenever life gets too uncomfortable for him. Without a diligent regard for principled action, Mr. Bennet, for all his intelligence and his insight into the natures of those around him, cannot and does not act ethically and effectively as the head of the family. He positions himself as a somewhat unattached observer of his family's foibles rather than as the example of ethical propriety and action to his family that his position demands of him (10).

Austen thus effectively uses Mr. Bennet's irresponsibility as an opportunity to make a moral statement. Obviously, the freedom to choose is powerful, and impacts lives. If one has this freedom, one must not waste it, for the consequences of any choice, good

and bad, are inevitable. In this respect, *Pride and Prejudice* is an indictment of irresponsibility and unwise choices.

Daisy Miller is likewise an indictment of irresponsibility and unwise choices. James portrays Daisy's desire to do whatever she pleases as selfish irresponsibility. While in Rome, Daisy continuously spends time unchaperoned with Mr. Giovanelli. This behavior is considered improper by the American expatriate community, of which Daisy is a part. Although she is repeatedly informed that she should not go out with Mr. Giovanelli unchaperoned, Daisy rejects this advice and continues to do what she pleases. Consequently, her reputation suffers, and she is considered "not a nice girl" and is eventually shunned by the other Americans (James 11). Daisy is clearly irresponsible with her reputation. Her insistence on doing whatever she pleases leads to more serious consequences, however. Daisy chooses to explore the Colosseum at night with Mr. Giovanelli, to "see it by moonlight" (28). Both Winterbourne and Giovanelli inform her that this is dangerous because she might catch yellow fever. Daisy refuses to listen, and goes anyway. She catches yellow fever, and dies.

Through Daisy's death, James clearly illustrates the same principle which Austen was more subtly addressing: when human choice, not fate, is the controlling factor in life, humans have the power to take their lives into their own hands. The responsibility which is associated with this kind of power is tremendous.

Thus far, the content of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller*, both novels of manners, is clearly moral in nature. Although attention is given to proper etiquette, as in Daisy's improper outings with Mr. Giovanelli, it is simply a superficial consideration through which the authors address the more serious issues at the core of the novel. The

authors' emphasis on choice over fate is significant, for it represents a break with the Classical and Renaissance thinking—and their belief in fate and divine predestination—which occurred decisively during the Enlightenment of the 18th century. Austen, writing at the turn of the century, reflects the effects of the Age of Reason in *Pride and Prejudice*. By the time that James wrote his novel of manners, Enlightenment thinking, with its emphasis on human choice, was firmly established. Humanity had decided the question which it had sought to answer throughout centuries: human choice, and nothing else, determined life. By treating the theme of choice versus fate in their novels of manners, Austen and James answer one of the fundamental questions of human existence, consequently showing that novels of manner are serious pieces of literature.

It is true, however, that choices are not always easy to make. Conflicting desires and obligations often muddle the issue at hand, and make logical reasoning difficult. One is often torn between the desire to fulfill oneself and the desire to fulfill the expectations of others. The characters in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller* must similarly weigh their desire for personal happiness and fulfillment with the demands of society. This is the second theme which Austen and James consider in their novels, and it is also closely connected to the issue of morality.

INDIVIDUAL HAPPINESS VERSUS OBLIGATION TO SOCIETY

Clearly, the desire to fulfill oneself is a strong one. But doing so constantly, without a consideration for the desires of others, or the various obligations one has towards society, is selfish. On the other hand, gratifying everyone else's expectations without a regard for one's own happiness is equally problematic. Sacrificing one's own

desires to make others happy creates guilt and resentment. Each individual must decide how to balance the two. Which things must be given up? Which things cannot be given up at any cost? These are moral questions, for they deal with an individual's priorities and the principles which determine these priorities, such as selfishness, honesty, and responsibility. Austen and James continue their treatment of serious moral issues by examining the tensions between individual happiness versus obligation to society. While Austen advocates finding a balance on the side of individual happiness, James seems to uphold the importance of fulfilling societal obligations, thus rejecting the individual.

Austen advocates the importance of balance through the character of Mr. Darcy, who epitomizes the contradicting desires for individual happiness and the fulfillment of societal obligations. Although Mr. Darcy understands that the requirements of his high social standing preclude his marrying Elizabeth, he nonetheless yearns to marry her. "Darcy had never been so bewitched by any woman as he was by her. He really believed, that were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some danger" (Austen 39). In danger of falling in love with Elizabeth, that is. A practical man, Darcy understands that any marriage to Elizabeth would result in uniting himself with her inferior connections, and thus lowering himself. Darcy's struggle between his love for Elizabeth and his desire to fulfill the obligations of his high social position lead to his untactful proposal. "In vain I have struggled. It will not do. My feelings will not be repressed. You must allow me to tell you how ardently I admire and love you" (Austen 138). When Elizabeth is offended, he is surprised. "Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?—to congratulate myself on the hope of relations whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?" (Austen 140)

Still, Darcy's reservations are not solely due to his dislike for Elizabeth's inferior connections and social status. Whatever his personal feelings, Darcy is required to marry well, thereby adding to the magnificent estate he has inherited from his ancestors. In fact, Darcy's mother and her sister, Lady Catherine, intended for Mr. Darcy to marry his cousin. Lady Catherine explains it to Elizabeth thus:

> From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. . . . Honor, decorum, prudence—nay, interest, forbid it [a match between Darcy and Elizabeth] . . . Do not expected to be noticed by his family or friends if you willfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised by every one connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace. . . . My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by every voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? (257)

Lady Catherine's comments are not an exaggerated outburst, but a reflection of reality. By marrying Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy would be disrespecting the wishes of his family, and the efforts his ancestors had made to build up the family estate. He would be dishonoring his family name. Marrying Elizabeth would be a breach of conduct.

These are the reasons for Darcy's struggle against his affections for Elizabeth. The first time he proposes he has not quite reconciled himself to the negative aspects of the match, and he offends Elizabeth by his manner, which contains arrogance and resignation as though to a great evil. The second time he proposes, a mature Darcy has weighed the options and decided to fulfill his own wishes of individual happiness and accept society's displeasure. Although he understands what marrying Elizabeth will entail, Darcy chooses to accept these drawbacks because of his love for her. The character of Mr. Darcy allows Austen to illustrate the importance of finding a balance between personal happiness and obligation to society that one can live with.

By contrast, James uses the character of Daisy Miller to illustrate the disastrous consequences of choosing individual fulfillment over societal obligations. He portrays the consequences as being so dire, that it seems he completely rejects individual happiness. Daisy openly flouts societal obligations and chooses only to please herself, without weighing the two carefully. She refuses to give society's expectations the least amount of consideration. When advised by Mrs. Walker that her behavior is improper, Daisy retorts, "If this is improper, Mrs. Walker, then I am all improper, and you must give me up" (James 12).

Naturally, Daisy's attitude is inappropriate. As a rich, single, American girl traveling abroad, Daisy has obligations to fulfill if she wants to fit in with the expatriate community in Rome. She must either follow their conventions and rules, however silly they may seem to her, or she must stop seeking their company. Unlike Darcy, Daisy does not weigh her personal desires and the expectations of others in order to make a wise choice. Whereas Darcy chooses to balance the two by marrying Elizabeth and trying to make peace with his aunt, Daisy makes no attempt to balance the two. Daisy is so selfish she seems to represent "that crass egotism James associates with the American character" (59). Indeed, like Roderick in James's *The American*, Daisy is "totally absorbed . . . and willing to sacrifice everyone, including himself [or herself], and every social and moral convention to achieve its realization, and embodies the destructive egotism of the Romantic temperament" (Tuttleton 51). This destructive egotism is what leads to Daisy's demise. She insists on visiting the Colosseum at night, although she knows that it is dangerous to do so, because of the possibility of catching yellow fever. Daisy does

contract the disease, and dies. James thus illustrates what happens when an individual chooses to fulfill self above all else.

Interestingly, James emphasizes the dissonance between Daisy's defiance of societal convention and the American community's embrace of convention by setting the story in Rome, a very conventional city. Tuttleton writes, "James presents Rome as 'the immemorial city of convention' and he calls the pope, in fact, 'the most impressive convention in all history . . . '" (58). Perhaps this is the reason for which Daisy meets her destruction while visiting the Colosseum, one of Rome's great landmarks and a symbol of that city, and by association, a symbol of societal convention.

Although Daisy dies from natural causes, she would not have been outdoors at night if she had followed the rules of the American expatriates, which dictated that a proper young lady be indoors in the evening. James thus upholds societal obligation at the expense of individual happiness. He seems to believe that following society's demands prevents the chaos of extreme individualism. He thus privileges societal obligation and at the expense of individual happiness.

Austen's and James's moral messages are obvious. Through Darcy, Austen shows that a balance between personal desires and societal obligations is not only possible, it is desirable because only a balance will bring happiness. By contrast, James does not consider balance but shows that societal conventions are needed to prevent disastrous consequences. It is important to note how strong the authors' opposing views are. Trivial matters of etiquette do not elicit this type of response; only serious moral matters spark such debate. Again, it is evident that these great novelists of manners are concerned not with etiquette, but with morality.

FEMALE INDEPENDENCE VERSUS FEMALE SUBMISSION

The moral disagreement between Austen and James is strongest on the issue of female independence versus female submission. Like the previous themes, this one has a moral conflict at its core. What is a woman's "sphere?" Should a woman be allowed to do what she wishes? Should she be able to say whatever she wants? Should she be able to go wherever she wants? Or should she be subject to the rules determined for her by her father or husband? For that matter, should *any* rational, adult human being be subject to the whims of another? Austen's answer is yes. James's answer is no.

Austen's position is clear:

> As many critics have noted, the heroine does figuratively get away with murder. Elizabeth notoriously acts and judges independently and thereby violates many of the norms for proper female behavior, but instead of finding herself ostracized by society, she becomes mistress of Pemberley, achieving the highest social position and greatest wealth that Austen ever bestows upon any of her heroines (Fergus 82).

Contrary to the beliefs of her day, Austen's works reflect her conviction in female independence through her common use of "images of female power" (Fergus 74). For James, writing later in the century, the answer was not quite clear. As an American, James was exposed to the more liberal values of that country. As a wealthy American, however, James traveled and lived abroad frequently, thus exposing him to conflicting values. Tuttleton writes:

> James is said to have complained . . . that "the mixture' of the Old World and the New in him 'proved disastrous' because it 'made of me a man who is neither American nor European.' James ultimately decided: 'My choice is the Old World—my choice, my need, my life (49).

Unlike Austen, who "began to write partly because she was interested in laughing at conventional notions of women" (Fergus 52). James seems to have accepted the European notion of a woman's subordinate role.

The debate over female independence is significant. As Fergus notes:

> Debates on female manners have political content in the 1790s: 'as recent research into women's conduct literature has shown, 'agreeableness' is not a politically neutral female grace but . . . one thing needful to guarantee paternal authority without unseemly confrontations.' Reaction to the French Revolution tended to link: 'political survival with the private and domestic virtue of English subjects . . . and women, accordingly, found themselves and every aspect of their behavior—their learning, their chastity, their exercise, their housewifery—at the center of arguments about national security itself' (67).

This debate persisted well into the nineteenth century, when it intensified. An increasing number of people came to question the morality of woman's subordinate role. The American Transcendentalist writer Margaret Fuller makes it clear that the debate even reached America, which lacked Europe's strict societal hierarchy and its resulting social conventions. She declares, "We would have every arbitrary barrier thrown down. We would have every path laid open to Woman as freely as to Man" (37). *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller*, both novels of manners, delve into this issue with all the intensity of philosophical tract in which Fuller made her statements.

Austen takes her place in this moral debate over female independence versus female submission by creating the character of Elizabeth, "an extremely unorthodox heroine" (Fergus 129). Elizabeth does what she wants and says what she wants. As Fergus notes above, Elizabeth "figuratively gets away with murder." Austen's heroine is so unlike contemporary women that the other characters in *Pride and Prejudice* are appropriately shocked by Elizabeth's behavior. When she arrives at Netherfield with her

hair unkempt and her petticoat "six inches deep in mud," Miss Bingley and Mrs. Hurst are quick to point out the inappropriateness of this behavior (Austen 26). Not only does Elizabeth look "wild," but she has walked about the countryside alone (*ibid*). Mr. Collins is also shocked by Elizabeth's independent frame of mind. When she refuses his offer of marriage, he does not believe her. It requires quite an effort on Elizabeth's part to convince him otherwise. Fergus writes, "So little are proper young ladies ever trained or expected to disoblige others, particularly suitors, by saying 'no', that heroines as unlike as Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price both find it impossible to refuse marriage proposals and be believed" (Fergus 57). Thus, Elizabeth's voicing of her strong opinions, combined with her insistence on doing that which she wishes is distinctly out of place. Miss Bingley sums up the matter quite succinctly. "It seems to me to show an abominable sort of conceited independence" (27).

While Austen's strong belief in the importance of female independence is evident in Elizabeth's actions, it is irrefutable in Elizabeth's own "declaration of independence" (128). When Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth promise not to enter into any engagement with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth replies:

> I will make no promise of the kind...I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. . . . How far your nephew might approve of your interference in *his* affairs I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. . . . I am only resolved to act in that manner which will, in my opinion, constitute my happiness, without reference to you, or to any person so wholly unconnected with me (Austen 259).

Elizabeth's declaration dispels any lingering doubts the reader may have had regarding Austen's position on female independence. Clearly she favors—and even endorses—

female independence, thus implying the immorality of the submissive role which society forced upon nineteenth century women.

By contrast, James's position regarding female independence is the opposite of Austen's. He does not believe that it is immoral for a woman to be submissive. In fact, he seems to believe that it is immoral for women to be independent. Although James's heroine, Daisy, is similar to Austen's unorthodox Elizabeth, James presents his heroine's independence in a negative light. James portrays her as impertinent, and headstrong, even selfish (James 27). Considering James's apparent disapproval of female independence, it is not surprising that Daisy's life ends very differently from Elizabeth's. While Austen rewards Elizabeth for her independent behavior by marrying her off to Mr. Darcy, one of the richest men in England, James punishes Daisy by killing her off (James 30). The significance is obvious: quite simply, the authors have chosen opposite sides in a controversial topic. Austen believes that female independence is moral, while James regards it as immoral, and chooses to affirm the submissive role nineteenth century society assigned to women.

APPEARANCE VERSUS REALITY

The morals which Austen and James discuss in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller* culminate in the last major theme in their works: honesty, as shown in the issue of appearance versus reality. What happens in a society where people are encouraged to act one way while thinking another? Do rituals of etiquette help civilize society or do they inculcate dishonesty? Are social conventions necessary, or are they hypocritical? Do they help society run smoothly, or do they hurt society by making it hard to discern what

a person is really like? Through their exploration of this theme, Austen and James are indeed on moral ground, for the issue of honesty is central to morality.

Austen and James repeatedly remind the reader that things are not what they seem, for social conventions often mask a person's true feelings. Austen noticeably rejects rules of etiquette which lead to hypocrisy and shallowness of character. James's perspective is the opposite. He too, acknowledges that rules of etiquette can lead to hypocrisy. However, he seems unwilling to criticize the hypocritical characters in *Daisy Miller,* and presents them in a favorable light.

Austen includes a plethora of characters in *Pride and Prejudice* who are not what they seem. It is not unlikely that their hypocrisy is at least partially due to the societal conventions of the day, which advocated civility to such an extreme degree that it often resulted in superficiality. Austen portrays these characters who are polite in public but rude in private in a negative manner. Upon meeting Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth, like the rest of the town, is charmed by his smooth manners and polite conversation. She is thus completely deceived by Wickham's appearance of goodness and amiability, only to find out that he has run off with her sister, leaving nothing but debts and scandals behind. The real Mr. Wickham is nowhere as good as his manners portray. As Elizabeth eventually realizes, "he has been profligate in every sense of the word . . . he has neither integrity nor honour . . . he is as false and deceitful as he is insinuating" (Austen 203).

Austen also disparages Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley who in private "indulged their mirth for some time at the expense of their dear friend's [Jane's] vulgar relations. With a renewal of tenderness, however, they repaired to her room on leaving the dining-parlour, and sat with her till summoned to coffee" (27). These superficial women are

treated negatively by Austen. Mrs. Hurst, she has married off to a drunken husband, and Miss Bingley she has relegated to the margins of the plot

The stark contrast between appearance and reality especially undermines relations between the sexes. Miss Lucas exemplifies contemporary attitudes of women: "If a woman conceals her affection with the same skill from the object of it, she may lose the opportunity of fixing him. . . . We can all *begin* freely—a slight preference is natural enough: but there are very few of us who have heart enough to be really in love without encouragement. In nine cases out of ten a woman had better show *more* affection than she feels" (16). Austen's disgust with this attitude is evidenced by Mr. Darcy's comment: "Undoubtedly, there is meanness in *all* the arts which ladies sometimes condescend to employ for captivation. Whatever bears affinity to cunning is despicable" (30).

By contrast, James's approach to hypocrisy seems tolerant, even favorable. While recognizing the existence of hypocrisy, James does not criticize it. Winterbourne seems to epitomize James's opinion of hypocrisy. From the beginning of the work, it is hinted that Winterbourne is having an affair with a lady in Geneva. It is also evident that he is only interested in Daisy so he can have a tryst with her (James 3). In other words, his intentions are dishonorable. When Winterbourne sees the way Daisy responds, however, he questions whether she is a "nice girl" (5). How hypocritical to question the presence of the very morals he himself lacks! After Daisy's death, Winterbourne receives a message from Daisy's mother, which shows that she was a nice girl after all. As Winterbourne stares at the daisies above her grave, he wonders if perhaps he misjudged Daisy. He even goes so far as to tell Mrs. Walker, "You and I have lived here too long,"

meaning that they have become entrenched in social rules, like the Europeans around them (23). This concession is short-lived, however, for he soon returns to his old ways of living, and by association, his old ways of thinking.

Winterbourne is representative of the American expatriate community which shuns Daisy. They are full of hypocrisy, and decide they do not like Daisy simply because her family is on friendly terms with their porter, and because Daisy associates with Mr. Giovanelli. From their behavior, it would seem the porter and Mr. Giovanelli were monstrous, terrible people. At the end of the book, James makes it clear, however, that Giovanelli is a nice man (James 30). His only crime is that he is not as rich as the other Americans. Once again, things are not what they seem. The rich Americans are the ones that are morally inferior because of their hypocrisy, while the poor Europeans they deplore are decent people.

However unsettling the hypocrisy in the novel may be, James does not add anything to the plot of *Daisy Miller* to remedy the situation. He supports the status quo, upholding both rules of etiquette and the hypocrisy in which they result. While Austen is clearly criticizing hypocrisy, James treats it as a necessary evil. As with the other themes on which they disagree, the question of appearance versus reality is moral in nature, for only moral debates have the power to cause passionate differences of opinion like the ones Austen and James display.

In conclusion, to dismiss a novel of manners as merely concerned with rules of etiquette is false, because as demonstrated, the thematic content of these two classic novels of manners are concerned with moral issues. It is unfortunate that the term "novel of manners" is so misleading. The term causes readers to shy away from works and

authors associated with the genre. Important works are thus bypassed, and as Tuttleton writes, "the reputations of a number of our writers have suffered ... because of the arbitrariness with which genres of fiction are sometimes evaluated" (*xiv*). If Austen and James, two authors which arguably define the genre, deal with issues of morality, it is clear that associating the novel of manners with trivial rules of etiquette is false.

Even worse, the term conceals the valuable moral insights the genre has to offer. All four of the themes discussed in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller* are not only relevant today, they are still debated. For example, reverberations from debates concerning human choice versus fate or predestination can still be felt in many branches of Christianity. Likewise, the idea of individual happiness versus obligation to society affects the decisions all humans in all time periods make on a daily basis. This concept affects important decisions such as whom to marry and what profession to choose as well as small decisions such as video selection on a Saturday night. Likewise, female independence versus female submission remains a prominent topic. Many women all over the world continue to be treated as second-rate individuals, and their lives are dictated by the men around them. Even in the United States, the debate rages on within the feminist movement. And the last theme, that of appearance versus reality, of honesty versus dishonesty, also affects lives on a daily basis. The idea of "small talk" at parties and in business results in the same questions as the ones Jane Austen and Henry James explored in their novels of manners.

Clearly, it is this discussion of morals which make the novel of manners an important and needed literary form. Tuttleton writes:

> A novel in which the closeness of manners and character is of itself interesting enough to justify an examination of their relationship . . . a

> novel in which the manners, social customs, folkways, conventions, traditions, and mores of a given social group at a given time and place play a dominant role in the lives of fictional characters, exert control over their thought and behavior, and constitute a determinant upon the actions in which they are engaged, and in which these manners and customs are detailed realistically—with, in fact, a premium upon the exactness of their representation (10).

Any work of literature which causes its readers to reflect upon the morals of a given society cannot be regarded as trivial. Novels of manners thus form an essential part of the literary canon.

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SOUTHERN SCHOLARS SENIOR PROJECT

Name: Berta Treitl Date: 4-19-02 Major: English / International Studies

SENIOR PROJECT

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 2-3 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above senior project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

An examination of the thematic content of two quintessential novels of manner- Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice and Henry James's Daisy Miller to ascertain whether etiquette or morals are at the core of novels of manner. This paper will essentially be a defense of the genre.

Signature of faculty advisor _____ Expected date of completion 4-19-02

Approval to be signed by faculty advisor when completed:

This project has been completed as planned: _____

This in an "A" project: _____

This project is worth (2-3) hours of credit: _____

Advisor's Final Signature _____

Chair, Honors Committee _____ Date Approved: _____

Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation on the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this "A" quality work.

This paper is in the tradition of fine scholarship inasmuch as it refutes a common misunderstanding through close, step-by-step analysis. Because the term "novel of manners" conveys an unjust impression of shallowness in the two excellent novels commonly identified as defining the genre, there is a serious need for that refutation, if for no other reason than to affirm that enthusiastic readers of *Pride and Prejudice* and *Daisy Miller* are responding to much more than fluff.

The essay itself is solidly grounded in the texts, demonstrating Berta's ability to think with analytical independence. At the same time she includes enough scholarly comment as to acknowledge standard thought among professionals.

I find the writing economical and persuasive in demonstrating step-by-step the strong moral loading of these texts.