UNMASKING AUSTEN: AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPOSTER CHARACTER TYPE

by

KRISTINA SHERRY

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of English
and the Robert D. Clark Honors College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

June 2017

An Abstract of the Thesis of

Kristina Sherry for the degree of Bachelor of Arts
in the Department of English to be taken June 2017

Title: Unmasking Austen: An Examination of the Imposter Character Type

Approved: _____

Dr. Kathleen O'Fallon

My essay explores a selection of novels written by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century author Jane Austen. These include *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and finally *Pride and Prejudice*. Acknowledged in popular culture as a writer of romance and scholarly culture as a writer drawing from multiple literary forms and traditions, my essay focuses explicitly on Austen's identity as a writer of comedy. This is specifically shown through her usage of comic structure, which is exemplified through her usage of the Imposter character type, the blocking figure character function, and the comic norm plot. By comparing these three novels, I identify and define these comic features, particularly looking into patterns across the novels. Finally, I illustrate how this knowledge of comic structure within Austen's work reinforces the message(s) she conveys across her novels.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. O'Fallon for helping me to fully examine the Imposter character throughout Jane Austen's works and consider the various perspectives and contexts related to this subject matter. This project would not have been possible without her immense patience and support. Also, I would like to give my sincerest gratitude to the members of the committee, Professors Heidi Kaufman and Ocean Howell, as well as my prospectus advisor, Dr. Barbara Mossberg, for helping guide me through this intense process. I would also like to acknowledge Professor Henry Alley for inspiring me and supporting my decision to delve further into this subject. This project also would not have been possible without the unwavering support of my family members and friends, or the Robert D. Clark Honors College's dedication to excellence. Finally, I would like to give a big thanks to my editor in chief and partner, Samuel Wells. He has been incredibly supportive and committed to seeing me through this project. I can only hope that he is proud of the outcome.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Part I: An Anecdote

"It's all just a bunch of drama." – My father after I suggested he read an Austen novel.

In my sophomore year of college, I was looking through my course options and happened upon an honors college course entitled "The Comedy of Jane Austen" taught by Professor Henry Alley. Having never read Austen's works or watched anything based off of them, but having heard of them as romantic dramas, I was intrigued at the idea of Austen offering something more than just romance and drama. The argument of the course was very compelling, so I decided to dig deeper into the concept of Austen as comedy within my term paper. However, after I proposed my topic to Professor Alley, he informed me that it would be a challenging paper to write as there was little scholarly work regarding Austen's usage of comic structure, particularly not the Imposter character type. As Rachel Trickett comments in her 1968 essay "Jane Austen's Comedy and the Nineteenth Century:"

> [The principles of comic art] are often overlooked in Jane Austen because she is writing in the realistic medium of prose fiction. Her earlier critics were deceived into ignoring them even while they admired her skill; they had not related them to the mode of comedy. (170)

Later critics and scholars did come to discuss her works in terms of comedy, but were largely historicist in nature. Laura M. White, in her 1999 article "*Emma* and New Comedy," attempted to change this course by "investigating Austen's formal and aesthetic achievement more closely [through] the realm of structure, form, and genre" (129). Her discussion was limited, however, to only one of Austen's novels: *Emma*.

Additionally, this revived focus on the structural elements of Austen's works never took hold as authors discussed other aspects of Austen's life and works. Modern criticism, such as Judith Levi's 2014 article "Austen's *Persuasion* and the Comedy of Remarriage" and Audrey Bilger's 1998 book *Laughing Feminism*, focus on feminist interpretations, maintaining the focus on Austen as comedy, but ignoring the comic structure.

Given my new knowledge of the conversation surrounding Austen's works, I was not satisfied. Even after the course was finished, this scholarly gap continued to intrigue me. Thus, as can be seen here, I decided to expand upon my term paper as part of my thesis requirement for the Robert D. Clark Honors College.

Part II: Claim

Jane Austen was a master of the comic form. This is best illustrated in her bountiful usage of comic structure throughout her works. Author John Lauber in his article "Jane Austen's Fools" begins to acknowledge and explore this element of her work by focusing on one comic character type: the Fool. He only recognizes it, however, as a "literary concept" and a source of comedy rather than a key structural aspect of Austen's works that defines her works as inherently comedic (511). This essay will expand upon this discussion, looking at how the Imposter character, as a structural element of comedy, illustrates Jane Austen's mastery of the comic form.

Part III: Methodology

My focus will be on three of Austen's novels: *Pride and Prejudice*, *Persuasion*, and *Northanger Abbey*. I have picked these texts specifically because they represent the course of Austen's writing career. Written between 1797 and 1811, *Pride and Prejudice*

serves as a representative of roughly the middle of her writing career. It was ultimately published in 1813 after rejection in 1797 as *First Impressions*. Within the next few years, Austen wrote *Persuasion*, which was ultimately completed in 1816 before her death July 18, 1817. This, therefore, serves as a representative of the last years of her writing career. Finally, I have chosen *Northanger Abbey* because it was first drafted and sent in for publication as *Lady Susan*. Never published during her lifetime, the novel was then rewritten as *Catherine* before its final revision as *Northanger Abbey*. It was finally published posthumously, along with *Persuasion*, by her brother in 1817, not long after her death. Because *Northanger Abbey* was written over the course of Austen's writing career, it is especially useful as a general comparative text.[1]

After providing background information, I will analyze each of these texts individually for Imposter characters, specifically noting how they function in the novel, their motive(s), and characteristics. Within this process, I will illustrate how the Imposter character type is important within the comic plot of Austen's works. From there I will compare and contrast the novels, looking for patterns and trends in my analysis of the Imposter characters, observing how she depicts and uses the Imposter characters similarly or differently across the works. This will be useful to understanding how Austen does or does not reaffirm the comic form through her usage of the Imposter figure.

[1] All dates in this section are verified by Joan Ray's Dictionary of Literary Biography.

Part IV: Background

Character Types and Character Functions

Before delving into the Imposter, it is important to distinguish between character type and character function. While one describes the human nature of the character, the other describes the role of the character in moving the plot. For example, a character may be a Miser, defined by its extreme frugality. That same character, however, becomes a blocking figure when it obstructs the protagonist's path to his or her goal. The label "Miser" therefore describes the human nature the character embodies—that is the character's "type." Although this defining characteristic can be connected to why the character functions as a blocking figure, its function or role within the plot is not as a "Miser," but as a figure that prevents the hero or heroine from achieving his or her goal. *An Anatomy of Literature* states, "The distinction between 'function' and 'types' is particularly important in comedy because types…can perform different functions within comic action" (Foulke 599). These descriptions, therefore, are not mutually exclusive, but rather two ways in which one can describe the multiple facets of a single character. Notably, these labels are also not rigid or exclusive, but rather widely varied and broad concepts that are subject to modification and transformation.

The Imposter Character Type

Ignoring function for a moment, the Imposter is a comedic character type. It is broadly defined as a character that "pretends or tries to be something more than he is" or otherwise lays claim to qualities or characteristics that are not his own (Frye 39). That is, he assumes a false character in order to deceive others. It is important, however, to distinguish between a Deceiver and an Imposter. While both character types aim to

deceive other characters out of self-interest, a Deceiver does not necessarily assume a new persona to do so. This is a key attribute, however, of the Imposter. In this way, the Deceiver is a broad concept in contrast to the specificity of the Imposter's character type.

For instance, in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Isabella is an Imposter. While she pretends to be Catherine's loving and caring friend, this is false to her character. She is ultimately shown to be manipulative and selfish. Austen best shows this through Isabella's failure to send a letter to Catherine as she promised. Instead, Isabella waits to write Catherine until she needs her friend to patch things up with James, Catherine's brother. Contrasted with Isabella, Captain Tilney is simply a Deceiver. He deceives Isabella into believing that he loves her to the point that Isabella cuts off her engagement with James. Captain Tilney does this without showing any change in character to do so, at least according to his brother Henry. Henry implies that Captain Tilney likely never intended to marry Isabella because of her financial status. He instead deceived Isabella simply to enjoy her affections. Isabella, on the other hand, assumes a completely false persona in her pursuit of what Catherine's friendship provides. She purposefully attempts to manipulate Catherine by posing as a genuine friend in order to get what she wants: marriage to Catherine's brother James. While both Isabella and Captain Tilney deceive others for personal gain, the Deceiver does so by simply misleading other characters, whereas an Imposter takes on a new character that does not fit with their natural persona.

The Imposter Plot

Since the Imposter's character is often reliant on the illustration of both its true and false characteristics, this often leads the character to a uniform plot. The Imposter character typically starts out as successful in its deceptions, giving little to no indication of its true nature to either the readers or the other characters within the novel. As the story progresses, the Imposter begins to loose its grip, giving more away in terms of the falsity of its character. This is, however, sometimes only to the readers. During the climax of the plot, the Imposter's deceptions are revealed to both the other characters and the readers, which then leads to its ultimate failure at the end of the novel.

This is illustrated in Austen's novel *Persuasion* wherein Mr. Elliot is the Imposter. Although Anne Elliot, the main character, initially questions Mr. Elliot's sudden appearance after years of being distant from the family, she accepts him as a pleasing gentleman, especially given how amiably the other characters perceive him. It quickly becomes apparent that Mr. Elliot pays particular attention to Anne and intends to make her his wife. However, upon a visit with an old school friend, Mrs. Smith, Anne not only discovers how Mr. Elliot mistreated Mrs. Smith, but also realizes that his motivations for marrying her are simply to become the sole heir of the Kellynch baronetcy. While Anne never had intentions of marrying Mr. Elliot, this new information solidifies her intentions and prevents her from being persuaded by others to change her mind. Anne does not discuss this discovery with the other characters, but the information does change her behavior towards Mr. Elliot, which allows Captain Wentworth the chance to confess his love to her. Shocked at the change in Anne's affections and her sudden engagement to Captain Wentworth, Mr. Elliot gives up his

pursuit and is rumored to have run off with another woman instead. Mr. Elliot's deceptions are therefore initially successful, but he is revealed as an Imposter to Anne and the readers upon the appearance of Mrs. Smith. This is before his final reveal to the other characters, which occurs through his flight at the end of the novel.

That being said, the Imposter's plot can differ slightly from this formula, particularly with regards to when the Imposter in revealed. An example of this can be seen in Austen's work *Pride and Prejudice*. Similar to most of the other Imposters, Mr. Wickham is introduced a few chapters into the novel. The majority of the other characters largely accept him, including the heroine, Elizabeth. Mr. Wickham, however, is revealed as an Imposter to the main character, and the reader, close to halfway through the novel. This thereby gives him the longest overall reveal and the longest awaited resolution of the Imposter characters that will be addressed in this essay.

The Imposter plot can also differ in how significant or insignificant the Imposter is to the overall plot, thereby changing the impact of the Imposter's reveal and the importance of its plot to the action of the story. This has more to do, however, with the Imposter's function.

The Imposter Character Function

As discussed before, the Imposter character type does not strictly speak to the way in which the Imposter character functions or influences the plot within a text. Nevertheless, to maintain focus and avoid discussing too many different Imposters, this essay will focus strictly on Imposters significant to the plot. This will better support direct comparison and allow for greater understanding of how Austen is using the Imposter within her greater works.

While comedic plots are not uniform or rigid in structure and there are certainly different kinds of comedy to be considered when discussing form, there is one plot in particular that *An Anatomy of Literature* calls the "comic norm" (Foulke 602). Within this plot,

> members of the new society – the hero, the heroine, and their helpers – are subject to restrictions that frustrate their aims, but they ultimately succeed in defeating, transforming, or at least neutralizing blocking forces in a movement toward greater freedom. (Foulke 602)

Again, there are variations, but the love-triangle is the most common variant of the comic norm. It begins as "a simple boy-girl triangle, with the third role filled by false lover, obstinate parent, or deceiving villain" (Foulke 596). Within this particular plot, the Imposter character fills the third role, either as the false lover or the deceiving villain that blocks the boy and the girl from being together. Consequently, the Imposter character's function becomes that of a blocking figure, who is only usurped "by some discovery of origin or status that makes the marriage of the girl and young man socially acceptable" (Foulke 596). Given this, Austen's novels fit into this love-triangle comic norm and all the major Imposters presented operate as blocking figures within her novels. These specific Imposters will be the focus of this essay.

Northanger Abbey: Isabella

Illustrating the Imposter

In the beginning of *Northanger Abbey*, Austen's description of Isabella and Catherine's friendship illustrates a picture of mutual feelings of intimacy. This is clearly demonstrated through their actions, which are epitomized in the following passage:

> The progress of the friendship between Catherine and Isabella was quick as its beginning had been warm, and they passed so rapidly through every gradation of increasing tenderness, that there was shortly no fresh proof of it, to be given to their friends or themselves. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, pinned up each other's train for the dance, and were not to be divided in the set; and if a rainy morning deprived them of other enjoyments, they were still resolute in meeting in defiance of wet and dirt, and shut themselves up, to read novels together. (35-6)

While emphasizing the quick nature of their bond, Austen gives her readers every reason to believe their connection to be genuine. Not only do they show "increasing tenderness" through social means, such as calling "each other by their Christian name," but they also demonstrate physical intimacy in the way that they pin "up each other's train" and always walk "arm in arm." Additionally, Catherine and Isabella display intellectual intimacy in this passage through their shared interest in novels. This is not the only instance, however, where Austen points to the intimacy of their quick connection. Austen opens Chapter Six with this passage:

> The following conversation, which took place between the two friends in the Pump-room one morning, after an acquaintance of eight or nine days, is given as a specimen of their very warm attachment, and of the delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste which marked the reasonableness of that attachment. (38)

Again, while Austen highlights the brevity of their acquaintance, pointing out that they have only known each other for "eight or nine days," she reasserts their connection as

"warm" and one of "delicacy, discretion" and "reasonableness." All of these qualities point to a genuine tenderness and intimacy of a close friendship between the two young women.

Notably, while these passages specifically address the dynamic of Catherine and Isabella's relationship through the illustration of a strong intellectual, physical, and social intimacy, these passages also greatly reflect on the audience's perception and interpretation of the young women as individuals. In this way, Austen's illustration of their intimate friendship advocates Isabella's character as an honest, caring friend. Additionally, Austen's emphasis on the immediacy of their intimate connection furthers the idea of Isabella being a genuine friend based on a natural connection between the young women, especially in the context of how desperately Catherine needs acquaintances in Bath. By identifying Catherine's need and filling that role for her, Isabella seems to genuinely care for the welfare of her new friend and subsequently sympathizes with her.

Austen begins to break this illusion just before the introduction of Catherine and Isabella's brothers, James and John. In a conversation concerning their preferences in men, Isabella says to Catherine, "You must not betray me, if you should ever meet someone of your acquaintance answering that description" (41). By saying this, Isabella illustrates her lack of understanding of Catherine's character and perhaps an unsettling tendency to assume the worst in others. Rather than trusting that Catherine would never stand between Isabella and a man she liked, Isabella verbalizes her unnecessary suspicion and ill-placed concern. Naturally, she is met with a very confused Catherine who is too innocent to understand the implications of what Isabella is saying. In other

words, Isabella shows a lack of confidence in their bond and loyalty towards each other. This interaction also hints at Isabella's prioritization of men over women friends, suggesting that she might choose to stand between Catherine and a man she liked if it were to her benefit.

Isabella's falseness is illustrated further in her subsequent pursuit of "two odious young men" (41). While she insists on being "quite out of countenance" (41) because of the young men, she hastily contradicts herself by saying that, "One was a very good-looking young man" (42). However, rather than continuing as they had before and simply declaring herself "amazingly glad [to] have got rid of them," Isabella suggests that she and Catherine go to the Edgar's Buildings to look at her new hat, ignoring the likelihood that they "may overtake the two men" as Catherine points out (42). Ignoring Catherine's advice to "wait a few minutes" to avoid all "danger of…seeing them at all," Isabella declares that she "shall not pay them any such compliment" and insists that they will in fact "pass by them presently" if they "make haste" (42). Isabella seemingly uses her new hat as a cover for chasing after the two men, although it is unclear if it is because of her desire to flirt with the "good-looking" (41) one or "her resolution of humbling the sex" (42). In either case, Austen makes it clear that the young girls are "in pursuit of the two young men" because of Isabella's desire to do so, although Isabella is exceedingly conflicted in verbalizing why she wishes to do so. That being said, it seems clear that Isabella's attempts to appear uninterested in or even insulted by the young men are only for Catherine's benefit. Either that or Isabella assumes that Catherine is aware of her true intentions like she did when discussing their preferences in men, thereby failing again to know her friend's character. Regardless, Isabella is not being

honest and upfront with Catherine in this scene, which further illustrates her deceptive nature.

While these earlier examples of Isabella's falsehood have been more subtle in nature and have the potential to be easily overlooked by readers, Austen begins to strongly assert Isabella's false nature after the arrival of Catherine's brother James. Two particular instances clearly illustrate this point: when Catherine is abandoned by Isabella at the dance and then later when Isabella reproaches Catherine for not going on a trip with James, John, and herself. At the dance, Isabella initially declares to James that she "would not stand up without your dear sister for all the world; for if I did we should certainly be separated the whole evening" (51). No more than three minutes pass before Isabella whispers to Catherine:

> My dear creature, I am afraid I must leave you, your brother is so amazingly impatient to begin; I know you will not mind my going away, and I dare say John will be back in a moment, and then you may easily find me out. (51)

Based on her actions, it is evident that Isabella would indeed leave her companion for the world or, more specifically, for Catherine's brother James. In this way, Isabella's words do not agree with her actions; while her words are kind, Isabella's actions are neglectful and selfish.

This trend continues to progress in the aftermath of Catherine's first outing with James, John, and Isabella, when she is saddened by having missed her engagement with Mr. and Miss Tilney. Catherine says herself that she "could almost have accused Isabella of being wanting in tenderness towards herself and her sorrows; so very little did they appear to dwell on her mind, and so very inadequate was the comfort she offered" (86). In this scene, Isabella seems ignorant of why Catherine is saddened,

attempting to comfort her by saying that "the Tilneys were entirely to blame" for their lack of punctuality (86). Perhaps in an attempt to cheer Catherine up, Isabella then exclaims, "What a delightful hand you have got! Kings, I vow! I never was so happy in my life! I would fifty times rather you should have them than myself" (86). Isabella fails, however, to cheer Catherine up. It is clear that, while she understands that Catherine is upset over having missed her engagement with the Tilneys, Isabella fails to understand the blame that Catherine takes upon herself. Thus, Isabella is wanting in compassion and understanding towards her friend, even to the point of Catherine's questioning Isabella's tenderness. Thus, this scene continues to illustrate Isabella's failure to understand or empathize with Catherine, while it further hints at the falseness of Isabella's previous affections towards Catherine. Furthermore, this scene illustrates Isabella's self-justifying nature. Rather than taking some blame for Catherine's missed engagement, she pushes the blame completely onto the Tilneys, thereby leaving herself blameless and perfectly justified in having coerced Catherine to go on the trip.

It is in Catherine's rejection of the second trip, however, when Isabella reproaches her for not wanting to go, that Isabella more clearly illustrates her neglect, falseness, and selfishness. After Catherine tells Isabella not to urge her because "I am engaged to Miss Tilney," Isabella responds, "It would be so easy to tell Miss Tilney that you had just been reminded of a prior engagement" (94). This statement already reveals how comfortable Isabella is with the idea of lying to others out of personal convenience, with little to no consideration of others. Additionally, this statement shows a clear disrespect for Catherine's interests. Isabella continues, becoming:

> only more and more urgent; calling on [Catherine] in the most affectionate manner; addressing her by the most endearing names. She

> was sure her dearest, sweetest Catherine would not seriously refuse such a trifling request to a friend who loved her so dearly. (94)

When flattery fails, Isabella "tried another method. She reproached [Catherine] with having more affection for Miss Tilney" (94). It is in this moment that Catherine thinks Isabella's "reproach equally strange and unkind" and finds Isabella to be "ungenerous and selfish, regardless of every thing but her own gratification" (94). Isabella's purposeful change in tactic not only illustrates her as having a distinctively manipulative nature, but also begins to illuminate her selfish nature. As she pursues her own desires to go on the trip, Isabella shows a complete disregard for Catherine's interests as well as her feelings. Isabella chooses to play with Catherine's emotions in an attempt to get what she wants, even going so far as to question Catherine's tenderness towards herself and claiming jealousy. What is worse, after John lies to Miss Tilney about Catherine's engagement, "Isabella's countenance was once more all smiles and good-humour [sic]" (96). Isabella fails to see how this solution upsets Catherine and even attempts to physically keep her from running to Miss Tilney to set things straight. This scene, therefore, reveals Isabella's manipulative and selfish nature to the point that Catherine is able to see it, although she continues to disbelieve and deny it.

Later, we are able to clearly see this disbelief when Catherine attempts to defend Isabella's conviction. Having told Henry that Isabella would most certainly reject Captain Tilney's offer to dance on the account of her engagement to James, Catherine is amazed to see Isabella "with Captain Tilney preparing to give them hands across" (127). Catherine "cannot think how it could happen! Isabella was so determined not to dance" (127). Attributing Catherine's mistake to her inherent "good-nature" (126), Henry does not believe "Isabella is very firm in general" as Catherine claims (127). He

asks if Isabella did “never change her mind before” to which Catherine could only stumble over her words: “Oh! but, because – and your brother! – After what you told him from me, how could he think of going to ask her?” (127). Because of her stumbling, it is clear Catherine acknowledges that Isabella has changed her mind before, yet she still insists on Isabella’s firmness. In this way, Catherine continues to deny Isabella’s fickle and dishonest nature, insisting instead on Isabella’s image as a kind, honest, and caring person.

While still trying to deny Isabella’s true dishonest nature, Catherine sees more instances of Isabella lying or hinting at immoral actions. For example, Isabella’s interactions with and dishonesty surrounding Captain Tilney do not end with their dancing. One morning in the Pump-room, Catherine observes that “Isabella’s eyes were continually bent towards one door or the other, as in eager expectation” (135). Thinking that Isabella was looking for James, Catherine assures her “James will soon be here” (135). Seemingly insulted, Isabella rebukes Catherine’s assurances, saying, “Do not think me such a simpleton as to be always wanting to confine him to my elbow. It would be hideous to be always together; we should be the jest of the place” (135). For Isabella this is out of character considering how inseparable she and James were up until this point in the novel. However, Isabella continues on to talk about Catherine’s impending trip to Northanger Abbey while also continuing to deny that she is looking for anyone: “One’s eyes must be somewhere, and you know what a foolish trick I have of fixing mine, when my thoughts are an hundred miles off” (136). This shortly proves not to be truthful, however, as Isabella recalls that “I am the most absent creature in the world. Tilney says it is always the case with minds of a certain stamp” (136). While this

comment is glossed over by Catherine, it indicates to the reader that Isabella's thoughts are not far off, but rather fixed on Captain Tilney, the person she is therefore presumably looking for. This is confirmed when Captain Tilney walks in. While Isabella initially says, "Ah! here he comes; never mind, he will not see us, I am sure," she "earnestly fix[es] her eye on him as she spoke [and] soon caught his notice. He approached immediately, and took the seat to which her movements invited him" (138). It is not only evident that Isabella was waiting for Captain Tilney to arrive, but she was also clearly wanting him to come over in spite of what she says to Catherine. In the following scene, Isabella also makes no attempts to discourage Captain Tilney's flirtations, to which Catherine "could listen no longer" out of jealousy for her brother, and she was "amazed that Isabella could endure it" (139). Rising to go join Mrs. Allen and get away from Captain Tilney, Catherine "proposed their walking," but Isabella claims to be

> so amazingly tired, and it was so odious to parade about the Pump-room; and if she moved from her seat she should miss her sisters, she was expecting her sisters every moment; so that her dearest Catherine must excuse her, and must sit quietly down again. (139)

This is not only an evident departure from her earlier claim of "not looking for any body," but also an illustration of Isabella's encouragement of Captain Tilney's attention (135). She does everything to foster his flirtations and responds in kind, blatantly ignoring her friend's feelings on the matter. Catherine continues, however, to ignorantly believe that Isabella was "unconsciously encouraging [Captain Tilney]," but Catherine's only grounds for this assertion is of course that "Isabella's attachment to James was as certain and well acknowledged as her engagement" (139). Evidence, however, shows otherwise. When discussing Catherine's inability to return John's love, although

Isabella believes Catherine did in fact return his affections at one juncture, Isabella expresses herself to be content with how “circumstances change, opinions alter” (138) in the context of love and relationships. She goes so far as to tell Catherine to “not be in a hurry” to be engaged, saying “that if you are in too great a hurry, you will certainly live to repent it” (138). These statements illustrate a deep sense of regret surrounding her engagement with James, subsequently proving Catherine’s assumptions about their relationship to be false. Additionally, Isabella says “there are more ways than one of our being sisters” (137). Her comment suggests that Isabella and Catherine could not only be sisters if they each marry each others’ brothers, but also if Isabella and Catherine each marry a Tilney brother, thereby hinting again at Isabella’s unfaithful thoughts.

Isabella’s flirtations with Captain Tilney not only illustrate a lack of honesty regarding her romantic intentions towards James, but also a clear disregard for Catherine, who becomes the third wheel and is made to listen to their whispered flirtations, which hurt Catherine out of concern for her brother. Isabella displays a lacking interest in and awareness of Catherine’s comfort. Additionally, upon arrival, Captain Tilney says to Isabella, “What! always to be watched, in person or by proxy!” (139). Here Captain Tilney insinuates that Catherine is only there to keep Isabella faithful to James and completely disregards her as a friend. Isabella, rather than defending the genuine nature of their friendship, chooses to defend her own independence, from both Catherine and James, subsequently disregarding her friendship with Catherine. This does, however, begin to open Catherine’s eyes to Isabella’s true nature. After leaving Isabella and Captain Tilney in the Pump-room, Catherine notices that “during the whole of their conversation [Isabella’s] manner had been odd” and even

wishes that Isabella had not "looked so well pleased at the sight of Captain Tilney. How strange that she should not perceive his admiration!" (139-40). Continuing her denial, Catherine concludes, "Isabella had said many things which she hoped had been spoken in haste, and would never be said again; and upon this she was glad to rest altogether for present ease and comfort" (140). Catherine's comfort is short lived, however; not wishing to suspect her friends, Catherine still "could not help watching [Isabella] closely" and "the result of her observations was not agreeable. Isabella seemed an altered creature" (141). According to Catherine, "had it gone no further, it might have passed unnoticed," but there was:

> something of languid indifference, or of that boasted absence of mind which Catherine had never heard of before…but had nothing worse appeared, *that* might only have spread a new grace and inspired a warmer interest. But when Catherine saw [Isabella] in public, admitting Captain Tilney's attentions… almost an equal share with James in her notice and smiles, the alteration became too positive to be past over. (141)

In this way, Isabella's flirtations with Captain Tilney begin to reveal her deceptive nature to not just Austen's readers, but to Catherine as well, even if Catherine continues to struggle with acknowledging and accepting plain evidence of Isabella's duplicity.

During Catherine's stay at Northanger Abbey, Isabella's true nature is finally fully revealed to Catherine. In spite of having "promised faithfully to write" (184), Isabella fails to send a letter to Catherine during her stay with the Tilneys. Instead, Catherine receives a single letter from her brother James informing her that "every thing is at an end between Miss Thorpe [Isabella] and [himself]" (180-90). Without going into particulars, he makes it clear that he now understands Isabella to be more attached to Captain Tilney than to himself, saying he has finally been "undeceived" about Isabella's "duplicity" despite her continued efforts to "declare herself as much attached to [him]

as ever" (190). A few days later Catherine finally receives a letter from Isabella. Not only does Isabella attempt to excuse her failure to write sooner, citing a "silly trifler or other" as always preventing her from sending even a short letter to Catherine, but Isabella also asks Catherine to reach out to James to convince him that "he is the only man she ever did or could love" (202). Isabella prefaces this request by saying that she is "fearful of some misunderstanding" thereby ignoring the heated circumstances under which James left (202). Additionally, she continues on to other subjects before ultimately criticizing Captain Tilney as the "greatest coxcomb [she] ever saw" (203). Based on Isabella's sudden change of heart towards Captain Tilney, one assumes something has happened between them which presumably prompts her to attempt to reconnect and rekindle her relationship with James. However, she requires Catherine's assistance to do so. It is evident, therefore, that Isabella had no intentions of reaching out to Catherine and only does so in this letter because she requires Catherine's assistance to get her out of the mess she has gotten herself into. Isabella has been too neglectful of her friend, however, because Catherine finally sees in Isabella's letter all of the

> inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood…she was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent. (203-4)

It is in this moment that Catherine realizes she can no longer deny what a dishonest person and neglectful friend Isabella has been, even going so far as to feel ashamed for turning a blind eye to Isabella's misgivings. This is also the moment in which Isabella's manipulations, contradictions, and lies come forth in their most clear and obvious form

for Austen's audience. If her readers had missed the earlier hints of Isabella's true nature, this moment in the novel is the ultimate reveal of Isabella as an Imposter.

Isabella: Characteristics, Function, and Motive

Based on the evidence presented above, it is clear that Isabella's character is selfish, self-justifying, dishonest, flirtatious, manipulative, and has a distinct lack of empathy. This ultimate illustration of Isabella's character is in complete opposition to her introduction as an honest and caring friend. As the novel progresses, Austen illustrates the falsity of her initial appearance, hinting at how Isabella deceives those around her, especially Catherine, by assuming a persona. This establishes Isabella as an Imposter character, a fact that is confirmed at the climax of the novel. From this information, it is evident that this novel follows the Imposter plot, particularly in how Austen reveals the character type first to the readers and then the other characters.

The subsequent action shows the fallout of Isabella's failure, exemplified in her loss of James, Captain Tilney, and Catherine. Isabella's loss of James and Captain Tilney is particularly ironic given her motivations for taking on a false appearance: money and marriage. Keen on becoming rich through marriage, Isabella attempts to use Catherine, her newfound friend, to gain better connection with James. Given how quickly Isabella attaches herself to James and the speed of their engagement, Isabella intended to marry James from the beginning. Her final letter is the best evidence of this intention, in addition to her usage of Catherine to achieve this end. Isabella's attempt to attach herself to Captain Tilney, however, confirms her greater desire for wealth, not just marriage. It is apparent that the Tilneys are from far greater fortune than Catherine's family, so her quick change in affections from James to Captain Tilney

leaves no doubt that she was after Captain Tilney's wealth. Additionally, given the initial assumption that Catherine and James' family was well off financially, Isabella's desire for Captain Tilney's wealth also reflects on her motivations for initially pursuing James. This would be especially true given how she shifts her attentions to Captain Tilney after realizing how little money she would gain from marrying James. Therefore, it is an ironic justice that Isabella's manipulations and deceptions ultimately prevent her from marrying either Captain Tilney or James, when the characteristics she adopts are discovered to be false. Thus, *Northanger Abbey* follows the Imposter plot, not only through the process of the Imposter's reveal, but also the execution of ironic justice at the end of the novel.

Finally, Isabella follows the traditional role of the Imposter character type as a blocking figure. By attempting to ruin Catherine's opinion of the Tilneys through her self-justifying and manipulative nature, Isabella consequently nearly prevents Catherine's acquaintance with the Tilneys. This was of course during the process of Isabella using Catherine's friendship as an excuse to spend time with James, which, as mentioned before, was in direct relation to Isabella's desire for money and marriage. Thus, due to her personal motivations, Isabella nearly prevents Catherine's eventual marriage to Mr. Henry Tilney and, therefore, fills the role of the deceiving villain that stands between Catherine and Mr. Tilney. Through these features of comic structure, Austen demonstrates a keen awareness and mastery of the traditional comic form in *Northanger Abbey*.

Persuasion: Mr. Elliot

Illustrating the Imposter

Early in her novel *Persuasion,* Austen illustrates the Elliot family history, which includes Mr. Elliot as the heir of the Kellynch baronetcy. Upon the death of his wife, Sir Walter Elliot "sought the acquaintance" of a young Mr. Elliot in the hopes that his eldest daughter, Elizabeth, would marry the young man (9). While the initial reception was lacking in warmth, Sir Walter "persevered in seeking it, making allowance for the modest drawing back of youth" (9). An introduction was eventually forced during an excursion to London, wherein "Elizabeth found him extremely agreeable, and every plan in his favour [sic] was confirmed" (9). Mr. Elliot, however, never visited Kellynch, even after a second invitation, "and the next tidings were that he was married. Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth" (9). He "had attempted no apology, and shewn [sic] himself as unsolicitous of being longer noticed by the family, as Sir Walter considered him unworthy of it: all acquaintance between them had ceased" (10). Though concluded, "this very awkward history of Mr. Elliot, was still… felt with anger by Elizabeth," especially since "there was not a baronet from A to Z, whom her feelings could have as willingly acknowledged as an equal" (10). From common friends, however, it was learned that Mr. Elliot had "spoken most disrespectfully of them all, most slightingly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours [sic] which were hereafter to be his own" (10). Through this background, Austen gives every reason for why the Elliot family would dislike Mr. Elliot, particularly for his actions as a youth, but also as an adult who

continues to speak poorly of his own family. Not only was he blatantly disrespectful and dismissive of Sir Walter's wishes, but Mr. Elliot establishes himself as an individual driven by wealth.

Much later in the novel, Mr. Elliot reappears widowed. Between these two appearances of Mr. Elliot, Austen allows readers to distance themselves from their initial knowledge of Mr. Elliot and even begin to forget his disrespectful and greedy character. This is assisted by the fact that, while Mr. Elliot is initially introduced during the family history, the Elliot family's pressing financial woes overshadow his introduction. The manner in which he reappears is also out of context of the Elliot family problems. This encounter occurs when Anne and company are visiting relatives in Lyme and decide to take a walk along the beach:

> When they came to the steps, leading upwards from the beach, a gentleman at the same moment preparing to come down, politely drew back, and stopped to give them way. They ascended and passed him; and as they passed, Anne's face caught his eye, and he looked at her with a degree of earnest admiration, which she could not be insensible of…It was evident that the gentleman, (completely a gentleman in manner) admired her exceedingly. (97)

After discovering that this gentleman was staying at the same inn as Anne and company, they were informed by a waiter that the gentleman was in fact Mr. Elliot. With this knowledge, the other characters believe that his manners have improved. While Austen initially introduced him as "unsolicitous" (10), she now presents Mr. Elliot as "polite" and "a gentleman in manner," particularly evidenced by the "propriety of his apologies" (10). This great contrast is little recognized by Anne, however, as she is more concerned with the tension of the family history than the great contrast in his character. In fact, Anne holds "a secret gratification to herself to have seen her cousin, and to know that the future owner of Kellynch was undoubtedly a gentleman, and had

an air of good sense" (99). This secret gratification seems to suggest that Mr. Elliot has matured into a gentleman since his youth. It should be recalled, however, that this statement forgets how, upon meeting Mr. Elliot, Anne's sister "found him extremely agreeable," even after his first failure to visit Kellynch (9). Thus, his appearance as a gentleman is not reflective of his true character. At this point in the novel readers have been distanced from this information and, more likely than not, have only remembered how Mr. Elliot slighted Sir Walter and Elizabeth in his youth. Therefore, the readers likely do not recall the impropriety of his manners prior to his disgraceful marriage. Because of this, Austen leads her readers to accept Anne's assessment of Mr. Elliot as a gentleman, while maintaining her concerns regarding the reintroduction of Mr. Elliot to Sir Walter given the family history. At this point, Mr. Elliot begins to deceive both Anne and the readers.

From this point in the novel, Mr. Elliot begins to deceive Anne's sister and father. Evidently, when Anne encountered him at the inn, he was making his way to Bath where he had heard the Elliots were staying:

> He had called in Camden-place; had called a second time, a third; had been pointedly attentive: if Elizabeth and her father did not deceive themselves, had been taking as much pains to seek the acquaintance, and proclaim the value of the connection, as he had formerly taken pains to shew [sic] neglect. (127)

Again, Austen pointedly contrasts Mr. Elliot's new attentiveness to his former inattentiveness. She also exaggerates this point by illustrating how many times Mr. Elliot has visited in contrast to his multiple previous failures. As with Anne's earlier statement, however, there is an overarching assumption that Mr. Elliot has learned from his past and grown wiser. To her surprise, Anne finds that, because of this assumption, her sister and father have completely changed their views of Mr. Elliot:

> [He] was not only pardoned, [Elizabeth and Sir Walter] were delighted with him… his first objective, on arriving, had been to leave his card in Camden-place, following it up by such assiduous endeavours [sic] to meet, and, when they did meet, by such great openness of conduct, such readiness to apologize for the past, such solicitude to be received as a relation again, that their former good understanding was completely re-established. They had not a fault to find in him. (129)

Thus, due to his persistent attentions and ability to "[explain] away all the appearance of neglect on his own side," all was forgiven by Elizabeth and Sir Walter (129). Additionally, they could not question his newfound flawlessness, although Anne does question this as too good to be true.

When questioned by Elizabeth and Sir Walter about his failure to reach out before, as well as the rumors of his speaking disrespectfully of the Elliot family, Mr. Elliot uses his "character and general conduct" in addition to "the pains he had been taking on this, the first opportunity of reconciliation…[as] strong proof of his opinions on the subject" (130). Notably, his opinions are not clearly stated and he fails to explain exactly what kept him at bay, which hints at his falseness. Also, there is no explanation as to why this was, in fact, his "first opportunity of reconciliation" (130). Anne does point out, however, that Mr. Elliot "had nothing to gain by being on terms with Sir Walter, nothing to risk by a state of variance. In all probability he was already the richer of the two, and the Kellynch estate would as surely be his hereafter as the title" (131). She therefore cannot help but conclude that his intentions are good and possibly directed towards her sister, whom he must have formerly found attractive. Anne also discovers later in the novel that Mr. Elliot's "value for rank and connexion [sic] [is] greater than hers" (139). Therefore, "it was not merely complaisance, it must be a liking to the cause, which made [Mr. Elliot] enter warmly into her father and sister's

solicitudes" (139). Thus, Anne deceives herself into accepting Mr. Elliot's sudden arrival as lacking in deceit and manipulation.

Anne also comes to accept Elizabeth and Sir Walter's assessment of Mr. Elliot's manners being "so exactly what they ought to be, so polished, so particularly agreeable" (133-4). In its effusiveness, Austen's description makes him seem far too good to be real. She writes:

> His manners were an immediate recommendation… Every thing united in him; good understanding, correct opinions, knowledge of the world, and a warm heart. He had strong feelings of family-attachment and family-honour [sic], without pride or weakness; he lived with the liberality of a man of fortune, without display; he judged for himself in every thing essential, without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum. He was steady, observant, moderate, candid; never run away with by spirits or by selfishness, which fancied itself strong feeling; and yet, with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely, and a value for all the felicities of domestic life, which characters of fancied enthusiasm and violent agitation seldom really possess. (137-8)

It appears as though Mr. Elliot fits the ideals of what a gentleman should be according to Anne's social cirlce. However, he also seems to lack a distinct personality outside of this perfection. This is evidenced by "correct opinions" which he holds "without defying public opinion in any point of worldly decorum." He therefore judges "for himself in every thing essential," but that judgment never leads him astray from the popular opinion, which suggests a lack of personal opinion and perspective. Similarly, Mr. Elliot lacks "strong feeling," which furthers this lack of personality. Nothing strikes him with "fancied enthusiasm" or "violent agitation" because he is forever "steady, observant, moderate, [and] candid…with a sensibility to what was amiable and lovely." Thus, he is simply a reflection of society's ideals and lacks a distinct personality. Anne expresses this much later on in the novel:

> Though they had now been acquainted a month, she could not be satisfied that she really knew [Mr. Elliot's] character. That he was a sensible man, an agreeable man,—that he talked well, professed good opinions, seemed to judge properly and as a man of principle,—this was all clear enough. He certainly knew what was right, nor could she fix on any one article of moral duty evidently transgressed… but he was not open. There was never any burst of feeling, any warmth of indignation or delight, at the evil or good of others. This, to Anne, was a decided imperfection…She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. Mr. Elliot was too generally agreeable… He endured too well,—stood too well with everybody. (151)

To Anne, therefore, this perfection stands as a flaw in his character. Though, while she appreciates Mr. Elliot's amiability, Anne dislikes that she does not know anything of the man himself. Not only does this deter her from considering his advances, but causes her to generally distrust him. This is especially true given the immense contrast of his current and past characteristics, which everyone else seems happy to ignore.

Upon re-acquaintance with an old friend, Mrs. Smith, Anne discovers that her uneasy, distrustful feelings towards Mr. Elliot are not ill founded. Mrs. Smith describes him as follows:

> [He is] a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the smallest compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. (187)

She reveals to Anne that Mr. Elliot used to be good friends with her husband and herself when he had not yet made his fortune: "My poor Charles, who had the finest, most generous spirit in the world, would have divided his last farthing with [Mr. Elliot]; and I know that his purse was open to him" (188). Mrs. Smith goes on to explain how Mr. Elliot wanted "to make his fortune, and by a rather quicker process than the law. He was

determined to make it by marriage" (188-9). As to Sir Walter and Elizabeth's plans, however, "it was impossible that such a match should have answered his ideas of wealth and independence. That was his motive for drawing back" (189). Mrs. Smith thus reveals Mr. Elliot's obsession with money, which "was all he wanted," as well as his complete disregard for "the honour [sic] of the family" (190). She proves all this with a letter from Mr. Elliot illustrating his clear distaste for Sir Walter and Elizabeth, as well as the Elliot family name. Continuing on in her story, Mrs. Smith claims that after having all the wealth he wanted, "Mr. Elliot's opinions as to the value of a baronetcy [changed]. Upon all points of blood and connexion [sic], he is a completely altered man" (194). Through her connections, Mrs. Smith has been lead to believe that Mr. Elliot is executing a scheme to prevent Sir Walter's re-marriage and instead marry himself to Anne. From this information, Anne concludes that Mrs. Smith had "proved him to have been very unfeeling in his conduct towards her, very deficient both in justice and compassion" (195). Mrs. Smith does not end here, however. She continues to describe how "Mr. Elliot had led his friend into expenses much beyond his fortune," which ultimately landed the Smiths into ruins (196). After her husband's death, Mrs. Smith mistakenly

> appointed [Mr. Elliot] the executor of [Mr. Smith's] will; but Mr. Elliot would not act, and the difficulties and distresses which this refusal had heaped on her, in addition to the inevitable sufferings on her situation, had been such as could not be related without anguish of spirit, or listened to without corresponding indignation. (196)

Furthermore, Mrs. Smith "had good reason to believe that some property of her husband in the West Indies… might be recoverable by proper measures; and this property, though not large, would be enough to make her comparatively rich" (197). Without connections aside from Mr. Elliot, however, and given her own disabled state, Mrs.

Smith “could not afford to purchase the assistance of the law” (197). From this, she reveals to Anne (and the readers) Mr. Elliot’s true deceitful and selfish nature.

Armed with this new information, Anne was “more guarded, and more cool, than she had been the night before” to Mr. Elliot, who quickly observed that “the charm was broken” and he no longer held Anne’s attention (201). After “unexpectedly” hearing of Anne’s engagement to Captain Wentworth, Mr. Elliot realized that this news

> deranged his best plan of domestic happiness, his best hope of keeping Sir Walter single by the watchfulness which a son-in-law’s rights would have given… He soon quitted Bath; and on Mrs. Clay’s quitting it likewise, soon afterwards, and being next heard of as established under his protection in London, it was evident how double a game he had been playing, and how determined he was to save himself from being cut out by one artful woman, at least. (235)

Therefore, Mr. Elliot’s plan to prevent Sir Walter’s re-marriage (presumably to Mrs. Clay) through his marriage to Anne was revealed to all of the characters and Mr. Elliot was ultimately exposed as an Imposter.

Mr. Elliot: Characteristics, Function, and Motive

From the evidence presented above on Mr. Elliot’s character, in spite of his amiable and gentlemanlike appearance, he is ultimately shown to be greedy, calculating, selfish, presumptuous, and manipulative. While his duplicity is initially hinted at in the family history, Austen makes her readers forget this by, first of all, failing to introduce him until the midpoint the novel and then presenting him as nothing but gentile perfection. It is in Mrs. Smith’s story, just before the climax of the novel, that Mr. Elliot’s selfish and greedy nature is fully unveiled to the main character, Anne.

This knowledge of Mr. Elliot reveals all of his calculations and manipulations, particularly in his pursuit of exclusive rights to the Kellynch baronetcy and the Elliot family wealth. His calculations do not, however, account for Anne's lack of interest in marrying him or Mrs. Smith's unexpected appearance. Therefore, his plans to marry Anne are ruined by his presumptions; however, this is not made known to him until the climax of the novel when Captain Wentworth confesses his love to Anne out of jealousy towards Mr. Elliot.

During the denouement of the novel, the false nature of Mr. Elliot's character is revealed to the other characters not through the spreading Mrs. Smith's story, but rather through his and Mrs. Clay's flight after the announcement of Anne's engagement. Mr. Elliot is ultimately successful in preventing Sir Walter Elliot's remarriage, at least to Mrs. Clay, but ironically ruins his chances at marrying into the family and becoming the sole inheritor of the family wealth. Austen's novel *Persuasion* therefore follows the Imposter plot with minimal modification to the reveal of the Imposter character. Additionally, ironic justice is served at the end of the novel as Mr. Elliot's reason for adopting a false persona becomes invalid due to changed circumstances caused by his manipulations and past transgressions.

Mr. Elliot also fills the traditional Imposter role as a blocking figure. In pursuing his goal of the family wealth in addition to the baronetcy, he comes between Anne and Captain Wentworth as a false lover. Thus, Mr. Elliot's desire for wealth nearly prevents Anne's ultimate marriage to Captain Wentworth. Though, Captain Wentworth's jealousy towards Mr. Elliot causes him to hurriedly express his love for Anne before he lost his second chance at marrying her. In Mr. Elliot's failure, he reaffirms the comic

norm of the novel, which is exemplified by both the successful marriage and the resolution of the love-triangle. Thus, Austen illustrates a keen understanding and mastery of the comic norm in addition to the Imposter character type and plot, all of which are key structural elements of *Persuasion*.

Pride and Prejudice: Mr. Wickham

Illustrating the Imposter

Austen introduces Mr. Wickham several chapters into *Pride and Prejudice* as an incredibly handsome and charming young man. According to the Bennet ladies:

> the young man wanted only regimentals to make him completely charming. His appearance was greatly in his favour [sic]; he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and very pleasing address. The introduction was followed up on his side by a happy readiness of conversation – a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming. (71)

Mr. Wickham initially appears to be an amiable and handsome young man who quickly enchants the young women with his eagerness to converse, while still maintaining propriety. The only part of his introduction that might mar his appearance is Mr. Wickham's poor interaction with Mr. Darcy: "Both changed colour [sic], one looked white, the other red" (72). This is largely overlooked, however, as Mr. Darcy has not created a positive image of himself within the town, unlike Mr. Wickham who has created nothing but an amiable and enchanting appearance. Thus, the young women do not automatically assume Mr. Wickham is at fault; rather they generally wonder about the cause of the tense exchange.

In spite of the exchange with Mr. Darcy, however, Mr. Wickham maintains his ideal image. Among the group of officers, who were:

> in general a very creditable, gentlemanlike set… Mr. Wickham was as far beyond them all in person, countenance, air, and walk, as they were superior to the broad-faced stuffy uncle Philips, breathing port wine, who followed them into the room. (75)

Austen reinforces this sentiment by showing how "Mr. Wickham was the happy man towards whom almost every female eye was turned" (75). To Elizabeth's satisfaction,

Mr. Wickham is “universally liked” among the officers and their company (89). Mr. Wickham proves to be uniformly desirable company. In particular, Elizabeth enjoys “the agreeable manner in which he immediately fell into conversation…[he] made her feel that the commonest, dullest, most threadbare topic might be rendered interesting by the skill of the speaker” (75). In this way, Austen identifies Mr. Wickham’s mastery of language and conversation as one of his main charms.

Mr. Wickham also appears to be very open. While Elizabeth is hesitant to ask about his past with Mr. Darcy, “her curiosity… was unexpectedly relieved. Mr. Wickham began the subject himself” (76). Understanding that Elizabeth does not have a good opinion of Mr. Darcy as it is, Mr. Wickham decides to delve into their “scandalous” (77) history, claiming that Mr. Darcy denied him the gifts that were to be “bequeathed” (78) to him after the death of the late Mr. Darcy. Mr. Wickham cites jealousy and pride as Mr. Darcy’s reasons for failing to comply with the late Mr. Darcy’s wishes. While Elizabeth is convinced of Mr. Wickham’s innocence, after she relays his story, her sister Jane is not so convinced:

> Laugh as much as you chuse [sic], but you will not laugh me out of my opinion… consider in what a disgraceful light it places Mr. Darcy… it is impossible. No man of common humanity, no man who had any value for his character, could be capable of it. Can his most intimate friends be so excessively deceived in him? oh! no. (84)

Elizabeth ignores her sister, however, and cannot believe that both men could have been deceived or under some kind of “accident or mistake, whatever could not be otherwise explained” (84). Instead, she happily accepts Mr. Darcy as being at fault and fantasizes about the “pleasure of dancing a great deal with Mr. Wickham” (85). As they are inherently connected in her mind, Elizabeth later attributes Mr. Wickham’s absence from a dance to Mr. Darcy, thereby believing that any “attention, forbearance, patience

with Darcy, was injury to Wickham. She was resolved against any sort of conversation with him" (88). This is in spite of Mr. Wickham having earlier stated, "It is not for *me* to be driven away by Mr. Darcy. If *he* wishes to avoid seeing *me*, he must go" (77). Thus, Mr. Wickham successfully builds on Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy to place himself in a positive light.

Despite some possible transgressions, Mr. Wickham manages to keep this amiable reputation with Elizabeth and the other characters. This is best evidenced by his sudden attentions to Miss King, a young woman who had suddenly acquired "ten thousand pounds" (147). While it is evident he intends to marry Miss King for her newfound fortune, Elizabeth easily excuses this, citing "his wish of independence" as perfectly "natural" (147). This is an interesting contrast with her earlier objection to her friend's marriage for money in which she expresses disbelief that someone would have "sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (123). Elizabeth shows a blatant bias in favor of Mr. Wickham's action. This is evidenced in her explanation that Mr. Wickham's change in affections had "cost him a few struggles to relinquish her [Elizabeth]" (147). Additionally, she does not object to how "his present pursuit could not make him forget that Elizabeth had been the first to excite and to deserve his attention, the first to listen and to pity, the first to be admired" (150). While it is evident that his intentions towards Miss King are anything but love, Elizabeth does not identify this fact as immoral, instead stating, "Whether married or single, he must always be her model of the amiable and pleasing" (150). Even when confronted about the "indelicacy in directing his attentions towards [Miss King], so soon after" her grandfather's death (which made Miss King the "mistress of this fortune"), Elizabeth defends Wickham,

saying, “A man in distressed circumstances has not time for all those elegant decorums which other people may observe. If *she* does not object to it, why should *we*?” (151). Elizabeth is completely blinded by the attentions Mr. Wickham pays to her, so she ignores or accepts his transgressions.

After having to finally confront Mr. Darcy, at which point he confesses his love for her, Elizabeth realizes how wrong she was to judge Mr. Darcy from the account of a stranger. A letter from Mr. Darcy details the true history between himself and Mr. Wickham, which forces Elizabeth to realize:

> the impropriety of such communications to a stranger. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the inconsistency of his professions with his conduct… His attentions to Miss King were now the consequence of views solely and hatefully mercenary; and the mediocrity of her fortune proved no longer the moderation of his wishes, but his eagerness to grasp at any thing. His behavior to herself could now have had no tolerable motive; he had either been deceived with regard to her fortune, or had been gratifying his vanity by encouraging the preference which she believed she had most incautiously shewn [sic]. (200-1)

Within the letter, Mr. Darcy details how Mr. Wickham was supported through school and then Cambridge by the late Mr. Darcy. Having the highest opinion of him, the late Mr. Darcy had hoped “the church would be his profession [and] intended to provide for him in it” (194). Upon his death, the late Mr. Darcy desired that his son

> promote [Mr. Wickham’s] advancement in the best manner that his profession might allow, and if he took orders, desired that a valuable family living might be his as soon as it became vacant. There was also a legacy of one thousand pounds. (195)

After Mr. Darcy’s father’s death, he accepts Mr. Wickham’s request for alternative assistance on the basis that he was not fit to be a clergyman. Mr. Darcy, therefore, settled to provide “three thousand pounds” for Wickham’s study of law (195). Three years later, Mr. Darcy heard from Mr. Wickham, finding that Mr. Wickham found “the

law a most unprofitable study, and was now absolutely resolved on being ordained, if I would present him to the living in question" (195). Not wishing to go any further against his late father's wishes, Mr. Darcy refused, thus earning Mr. Wickham's resentment. He discovered later, however, that Mr. Wickham had persuaded the young Miss Darcy (Mr. Darcy's sister who is ten years his junior) "to believe herself in love, and to consent to an elopement. She was then but fifteen, which must be her excuse" (196). Mr. Darcy discovered the design two days before the planned elopement and put an end to the scheme as "Mr. Wickham's chief objective was unquestionably my sister's fortune, which is thirty thousand pounds; but I cannot help supposing that the hope of revenging himself on me, was a strong inducement" (196). While initially wanting to "discredit [the letter] entirely" (198), Elizabeth finds that:

> it was impossible not to feel that there was gross duplicity on one side or the other… when she read, and re-read with the closest attention, the particulars immediately following of Wickham's resigning all pretensions to the living, of his receiving in lieu, so considerable a sum as three thousand pounds, again was she forced to hesitate… every line proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any contrivance could so represent, as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was capable of a turn which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole. (199)

Additionally, the stories are so close except for the details of the will; Elizabeth therefore cannot ignore the immense probability of Mr. Darcy's story being true. Thus, Mr. Darcy's letter reveals Mr. Wickham's true character as an Imposter to both Elizabeth and the readers. Despite Elizabeth's prejudices in favor of Mr. Wickham, she accepts Mr. Darcy's story.

Elizabeth decides to keep this information to herself, however, not even challenging Mr. Wickham in their next interaction. Instead she teases him with the

knowledge that she spent three weeks in close contact with Mr. Darcy – information to which Mr. Wickham:

> looked surprised, displeased, alarmed; but with a moment's recollection and a returning smile, replied, that he had formerly seen [Mr. Darcy] often; and after observing that he was a very gentlemanlike man, asked her how she had liked him. (225)

Mr. Wickham also cries "Indeed!... with a look which did not escape [Elizabeth]" after she says that she believes "Mr. Darcy improves on acquaintance" (225). Clearly shaken, he continues to "listen with an apprehensive and anxious attention" as Elizabeth makes her changed opinion of Mr. Darcy more clearly understood. By the end:

> Wickham's alarm… appeared in a heightened complexion and agitated look…. The rest of the evening passed with the *appearance*, on his side of usual cheerfulness, but with no farther attempt to distinguish Elizabeth; and they parted at last with mutual civility, and possibly a mutual desire of never meeting again. (226)

Thus Mr. Wickham's loss of control over Elizabeth is made clear and she breaks free from his influence completely.

This is not the end, however, because Elizabeth keeps this knowledge of Mr. Wickham to herself, a choice which ultimately has dire consequences for her family. While on a visit with her uncle and Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth receives a letter of most "dreadful news" (263). Her sister, Lydia, while visiting with the officers on leave, decided to suddenly elope with Mr. Wickham. The letter details how the couple has not been found yet and their marriage status is unknown to anyone, although it is suspected that "W. never intended to go [to Gretna Green], or to marry Lydia at all" (261). Knowing his motivations if he were to marry Lydia, Elizabeth speculates that Mr. Wickham would marry her as a means to procure the family home. This is much like he had done previously with Mr. Darcy's sister in an attempt to gain access to her wealth.

Regardless of his motivations, Mr. Wickham's sudden leave from the militia and improper elopement with Lydia does not reflect well on the reputation he has created for himself. While looking for the couple, Mr. Wickham's trail of debts is uncovered, thus worsening his reputation even further:

> He was declared to be in debt to every tradesman in the place, and his intrigues, all honoured [sic] with the title of seduction, had been extended into every tradesman's family. Every body declared that he was the wickedest young man in the world; and every body began to find out, that they had always distrusted the appearance of his goodness. (279-80)

If his elopement with Lydia were not enough to reveal his deceptions, this trail of debts confirms Mr. Wickham's constant manipulations, deceptions, and "gamester" habits (282). This information also explains his desperate financial situation and his attempts to marry into money, thereby supporting Mr. Darcy's account of Mr. Wickham's past.

After finally finding the couple, Elizabeth's uncle writes to her father detailing the situation:

> They are not married, nor can I find there was any intention of being so' but if you are willing to perform the engagements which I have ventured to make on your side, I hope it will not be long before they are. All that is required of you is, to assure to your daughter, by settlement, her equal share of the five thousand pounds, secured among your children after the decease of yourself and my sister; and, moreover, to enter into an engagement of allowing her, during your life, one hundred pounds per annum. (287)

Elizabeth's uncle confirms their suspicions about Mr. Wickham's lack of intention to marry Lydia. Given that this would reflect poorly on the family, Mr. Wickham has offered to marry her in exchange for a financial settlement and Elizabeth's family is happy to comply. Noticeably, however, Mr. Wickham seemingly does not request much money. This is detailed in a letter to Elizabeth from her uncle:

> You will easily comprehend, from these, particulars, that Mr. Wickham's circumstances are not so hopeless as they are generally believed to be… I am happy to say, there will be some little money, even when all his debts are discharged, to settle on my niece, in addition to her own fortune. (287)

Elizabeth attributes this to her uncle's meddling, but later discovers that it was Mr. Darcy who had to "frequently meet, reason with, persuade, and finally bribe" Mr. Wickham into marrying Lydia (308). Even within this exchange, however, Mr. Wickham denied that marriage to Lydia was "*his* design" (305). Instead, "he confessed himself obligated to leave the regiment, on account of some debts of honour [sic], which were very pressing" (305). Regardless, Mr. Darcy was able to convince Mr. Wickham of the marriage and negotiated with him for appropriate terms. This allows Elizabeth's family to keep their good family image and for Mr. Wickham to continue his deceptive appearances outside of the family, particularly in their town. He does, however, attempt to continue his deceptions in the hope of regaining a good image within the family: "Mr. Wickham's adieus were much more affectionate than his wife's. He smiled, looked handsome, and said many pretty things" (312). All, except for the continually deceived family members, see right through his false appearance, identifying and remembering him as an Imposter.

Mr. Wickham: Characteristics, Function, and Motive

It is apparent, based on the evidence above, that Mr. Wickham is selfish, manipulative, flirtatious, dishonest, and desperate for money. While appearing to be open, gentlemanly, and overall charming, Mr. Wickham manages to convince many of the young girls, including Elizabeth, of his honesty and innocence. Mr. Darcy, however, dispels this illusion for Elizabeth by revealing to her how Mr. Wickham's claims to the

Darcy inheritance are false. This allows Elizabeth to see Mr. Wickham as the dangerous liar and Imposter he is. This places Mr. Wickham's reveal at the climax of the novel. It is in the subsequent action, however, after both Miss King and Elizabeth are out of his reach, that he is revealed to the other characters. This occurs when he runs off with Elizabeth's younger sister, Lydia, with no intentions of marrying her and thereby threatening to dishonor the Bennet family name. His and Lydia's transgression is resolved by Mr. Darcy, but this means giving Mr. Wickham what he wants: money to repay his debts from gambling. The sum of the money granted to him is not nearly what he would want because it does not extricate him from his debt while simultaneously making him wealthy. Instead, he is left without debt and with a passible amount of money to live on and support his new wife, Lydia. Given that Lydia is an ignorant child, this is a fitting and ironic end for the narrative's antagonist. Therefore, *Pride and Prejudice* follows the Imposter plot with a lengthy, but resolved love-triangle and concluding ironic justice.

Mr. Wickham also appears to fill the role of the blocking figure. Acting as a false lover, he nearly deceives Elizabeth into ignoring and completely rejecting Mr. Darcy's affections. He even goes so far as to make Elizabeth hate Mr. Darcy. This is only remedied after Elizabeth spends time with Mr. Darcy and ultimately confronts him, realizing her folly in trusting Mr. Wickham. While she does not confront Mr. Wickham, Elizabeth maintains her understanding of Mr. Wickham as an Imposter, thereby removing him as a blocking figure while also allowing her to proactively prevent Mr. Wickham from dishonoring her family later on. Her new understanding of Mr. Darcy also allows for him to assist in the negotiations with Mr. Wickham. Ultimately, the

neutralization of Mr. Wickham's character maintains the comic norm, and resolves the love-triangle plot. Austen's use and presentation of Mr. Wickham's character therefore illustrates how her novel *Pride and Prejudice* conforms to the structure of traditional comedy. This is particularly evidenced through her usage of the Imposter plot and character type, in addition to the comic norm.

Comparison of Works

Northanger Abbey, *Persuasion*, and *Pride and Prejudice* each contain an example of the Imposter character type: Isabella, Mr. Elliot, and Mr. Wickham, respectively. Each of these characters falls into the Imposter character type because he or she adopts a false appearance by laying claims to characteristics or qualities that he or she does not naturally have. In addition to this, each of these Imposters manipulate at least one or more characters, typically including the protagonist, by donning his or her fake persona. They all do this in the interest of personal gain. Although not specific to the character type, each of these characters is also motivated by the same thing: money. Isabella's pursuit of James and then Captain Tilney is unquestionably a pursuit of money and maintenance of status. Similarly, Mr. Wickham's pursuit of Miss Darcy, Elizabeth, Miss King, and finally Lydia is not a romantic pursuit, but rather a pursuit of money to fix his debts and to maintain the social status he has lived under. Mr. Elliot, while he already has wealth from his former marriage, greedily wants access to more of the Elliot family wealth in addition to the baronetcy he is subject to inherit. He therefore pursues Anne as a way to procure the family wealth. Thus, they are all in pursuit of the same thing, and have the same method of adopting a false personality to get what they want. Due to the adherence to the Imposter plot, however, they each are revealed and therefore fail by the end of the novel.

From the analysis above, it is very clear that Austen follows the standard Imposter plot with minimal deviation. Each Imposter goes through a process of being revealed first to the readers and then the characters. There are some deviations, however, that deserve to be acknowledged. For example, while Mr. Elliot's deceptive

nature is shown within the family history at the beginning of the novel, it is largely overlooked under the assumption that he has matured since his youth. Austen assists this by not only presenting Mr. Elliot's deceptive nature in a context in which her readers are otherwise focused on the family financial concerns, but also by allowing so much time between the family history and Mr. Elliot's first appearance. Under the assumption that her readers are intended to overlook or forget this initial information, his reveal as an Imposter is therefore still left for the climax of the novel, just like the others. Similarly, as noted in the introduction, Mr. Wickham is revealed to the main character and the readers close to halfway through the novel, yet it still takes the remainder of the novel for him to be identified as an Imposter by the rest of the characters. Mr. Wickham therefore has an unusually long reveal, but still follows the structure of the Imposter plot. This is because he is first revealed to the readers (in addition to Elizabeth) by the climax of the novel before being revealed to the rest of the characters. Isabella's deviation is in the fact that her reveal to the protagonist (and subsequently the reader) is simultaneous to her reveal to the other characters of the novel. It is placed near the climax of the novel; however, the simultaneous reveal leads to a shortened denouement, however, it is still very much present. Therefore, while each novel differs slightly, particularly with regards to the timing of the reveal, they each follow the Imposter plot by revealing the Imposter at the climax of the novel.

Within these novels, Austen also follows the Imposter plot by ensuring that the Imposters are defeated or neutralized by the end of the novel and are thereby denied of their desires while being given comedic justice. Mr. Wickham, for example, is neutralized because his pursuit of Elizabeth for her money and status is halted before

the end of the novel. Instead, he ultimately marries Lydia, only being relieved of his financial debt. Given what we know of Lydia's character, this marriage is an ironic, yet fitting end for the antagonist of the novel. In this way, Austen deals in a sort of ironic justice by giving Mr. Wickham a marriage that does not fully satisfy what he wanted financially and does not give him happiness either. In *Persuasion*, Mr. Elliot ruins his newfound reputation with his family, thus losing access to the family wealth in addition to the baronetcy, while also being stuck with the woman he flirted with only to prevent Sir Walter's remarriage. This is an ironic justice because Mr. Elliot not only fails to gain what he desired, but also loses what he had through his pursuit of Anne. Finally, Isabella loses all the potential marriages open to her because of her deceptions, while also ruining her friendship with Catherine. Subsequently, her duplicity prevents her acquisition of wealth through marriage, simultaneously ruining her reputation. Therefore, Austen also upholds the Imposter plot by dealing comic justice to each of the Imposter characters, thereby punishing them for their transgressions.

As illustrated in the analysis above, Austen's Imposters also all function as blocking figures within her novels. Isabella nearly prevents Catherine's marriage to Mr. Tilney; Mr. Elliot nearly prevents Captain Wentworth from proposing to Anne; Mr. Wickham nearly prevents Elizabeth from even liking Mr. Darcy – let alone marrying him. This is not to say, however, that Austen's Imposters all block in the same way. Isabella acts as a deceiving villain whereas Mr. Darcy and Mr. Elliot each act as both deceiving villains and false lovers. Given that the goal is marriage, however, viewing Mr. Darcy and Mr. Elliot's characters as false lovers better illustrates their centrality in blocking the ultimate marriage of the protagonists. Regardless, while Austen's

Imposters are not uniformly deceiving villains or false lovers, they all still fill the third role of the comic norm as a figure that stands between the boy and the girl, preventing the ultimate goal of marriage. Therefore, each of Austen's Imposters uphold the comic norm illustrated in *An Anatomy of Literature* – that is the Imposters are defeated or at least neutralized by the protagonist(s), subsequently resolving the love-triangle plot. In this way, Austen's Imposter characters are key to the movement of the plot. Without the defeat or neutralization of the Imposter character, there would be no marriage at the end of the novel and no resolution of the love-triangle plot. Subsequently, her novels would not uphold the comic norm, thereby making the Imposter key to her works as comedies in their structure.

Conclusion

In the analysis provided above, we see that Austen consistently uses the Imposter character type. While these Imposters can vary slightly, they are all defined by how they don a false appearance in order to pursue their ultimate goal, as well as by their selfishness, greed, manipulation, and pursuit of wealth. Austen also follows the Imposter plot, ensuring the punishment of each character through ironic justice. Finally, Austen uses the Imposters as blocking figures, which are always overcome by the end of the narrative as evidenced by the protagonist's successful marriage. This demonstrates Austen's adherence to the comic norm of the love-triangle plot, because she uses the Imposter character type as the deceiving villain or the false lover that nearly prevents the successful marriage. Thus, the investigation of the Imposter character illustrates Austen's mastery of traditional comic structure within her works.

This is important to recognize because it allows for greater understanding of how she fundamentally uses the comic structure to amplify her message. The Imposter, as an example of comic structure, is primarily based in the concept of illusion versus reality – that is, the Imposter masks reality by presenting an illusion through its false appearance. Consequently, the reveal and subsequent defeat of the Imposter indicates the return of reality, or the reassertion of the social standard. The social standard in this case is genuine connection, which is represented most commonly through marriage. Therefore, a marriage that is attempted (or successfully completed) on the basis of a disingenuous connection, that is a relationship based on personal gain rather than unity, is unacceptable and immoral. Conversely, a marriage based on genuine connection is socially acceptable and maintains the moral standard. Therefore, the marriages (or lack

thereof) of both the protagonists and the Imposters condemn the transgressions of the Imposters through the enactment of comic justice. Austen's usage of the Imposter through the comic form becomes an argument about the maintenance of morality as the social norm, particularly with regards to social relations. Conversely, Austen punishes those who pursue wealth and social status through dishonest means and, ironically, bestows wealth and social status on those who do not actively seek those rewards. This is because they marry on the basis of genuine connection, again, reinforcing her moral message.

Paralleled with this, the Imposter character's role in Austen's works as a blocking figure reinforces her moral message by asserting the triumph of true love over wealth. Given that each of the Imposter characters are motivated by wealth and become blocking figures because of their selfish pursuit of wealth, their role in the love-triangle comic norm places wealth in opposition to true love. That is, the pursuit of wealth becomes the antithesis to the acquisition of true love. Through the defeat or neutralization of these blocking figures, Austen illustrates how marriage for money alone generally prevents the acquisition of love and subsequent happiness – a theme found throughout her novels. Thus, Austen makes the Imposter character a key amplifier for her themes and messages by maintaining its centrality to the comic structure in each of her novels.

Bibliography

Austen, Jane. *Northanger Abbey*. Edited by Marilyn Butler, Penguin Books, 2003.

Austen, Jane. *Persuasion*. Edited by Gillian Beer, Penguin Books, 1998.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. Edited by Vivien Jones, Penguin Books, 2003.

Bilger, Audrey. *Laughing Feminism*. Wayne State University Press, 1998.

Foulke, Robert. *An Anatomy of Literature*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972.

Frye, Northrup. *An Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton University Press, 1973.

Lauber, John. "Jane Austen's Fools." *Studies in English Literature*, vol. 14, no. 4, Fall 1974, pp. 511-524. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/449750.

Levi, Judith. "Austen's *Persuasion* and the Comedy of Remarriage." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, vol. 12, no. 2, June 2014, pp. 255-265. *Project Muse*, muse.jhu.edu/article/547245.

Ray, Joan K., editor. *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Jane Austen's Life and Novels: A Documentary Volume*. Vol. 363, Gale, Cengage Learning, 2012.

Trickett, Rachel. "Jane Austen's Comedy and the Nineteenth Century." *Critical Essays on Jane Austen*, edited by B.C. Southam, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, pp. 162-181.

White, Laura M. "Emma and New Comedy." *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal On-Line*, vol. 21, 1999, pp. 128-141, www.jasna.org/persuasions/printed/number21/index.html.