CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FATHER IN

THE NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

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By

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signature Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Absent Fathers”</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Deficient Fathers”</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Despotic Fathers”</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL IMAGES OF THE FATHER IN THE

NOVELS OF JANE AUSTEN

By

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Master of Arts in English

Jane Austen’s refusal to create normative father figures in her novels propagates a complex study into the image of the father historically and culturally. She renounces the historical image of the father as authoritative and powerful by her creation of the absent, deficient, and despotic father. The weak characterizations of the father figure in Austen’s novels subvert the patriarchal ideals of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain, thus confirming her refusal to endorse the paternal ideals in her time. Austen destabilizes the patriarchy by her representations of the substandard father and the commanding daughter; she flips cultural and historical norms by creating weak father figures and strong daughter characters. This thesis is one of the only to thoroughly investigate the father figures in Austen’s texts apart from the mother figures, and is important to Jane Austen scholarship because it solidifies Austen’s engagement in the social and cultural ideologies of her time.
Introduction

Jane Austen’s treatment of deviant paternity in *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion* necessitates a complex study of the archetypal father figure in literary history. I will seek to uncover the paternal role reversals that guide all six of Austen’s novels, and to unveil the subversive characterization of Austen’s fathers by a historical analysis of the father image through mythology, Judeo-Christian tradition, and social ideologies. A cultural and historical context will assist in cultivating the literary representations of the father-daughter dyad; thus, first, I will thoroughly examine these traditions of the archetypal father image. I plan to investigate the problematic role of the father in Austen’s novels by examining the various discourses of fatherhood in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The weak characterizations of the father figure comprise a dialogue in Austen’s novels, which subverts the power dynamics of the family in Georgian and Regency Britain. I am concerned solely with the fathers in the novels, and how their dysfunctions affect the psychology of the daughter’s self-centeredness, self-completion, and self-possession. I will analyze Austen’s texts according to the time, place, and circumstance of their composition; furthermore, I seek to delineate the psychological consequences of the negative patterns of the father’s behavior, and how the daughter’s functioning is impaired by the father’s conduct in the novels. There are three categories of paternal behavior represented in Austen’s novels: the absent father, the deficient father, and the despotic father. Each novel will be analyzed in conjunction to the category it represents; thus, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility*, and *Mansfield Park*
will be examined under the “Absent Father”, *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Persuasion* will be examined under the “Deficient Father”, and *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* will again be analyzed under the “Despotic Father.” Austen’s literature challenges the status quo with her portrayal of the absent, deficient, and despotic father, and inculcates a literary iconoclastic figure, which undermines the dominant patriarchal ideal of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The image of the father has been a source of power and stability for centuries. The archetypes of fatherhood, developed through mythology and theology, became the exemplars of the familial unit. Societal ideologies reinforced these dominant representations of the father through a male-based hierarchical structure and male-centered property laws. Historians claim the hierarchical order of the church, and then of society, propagated the male-centered hierarchy in the family (Briggs 53). The father is the head of the family, just as the King is head of his people, and the Lord is head of His creation (Lamb 2). The daughter was typically powerless against the father and aphasic, due to an inability to command herself or achieve any autonomy outside the familial unit (Porter 23). Fathers were not ruthless dictators, however, as they provided and fulfilled crucial developmental roles in their children’s lives (Benson 49). The father took active part in the discipline and education of his children. Developing and fully understanding the archetypal father figure is then necessary and important in terms of contextual intelligibility, and in understanding the literary development of the fathers portrayed through Austen’s novels. Austen’s irony in creating weak father characters and strong daughter characters destabilizes this Western formulation of patriarchy and male-centeredness, and thus reconfigures the traditional nuclear family model.
Throughout history the father has been identified with power, authority, and importance. In ancient history, the father was feared by his wife and offspring for his absolute power: “According to historians, a father’s authority in Roman society astonished the Greeks. In Roman law, not only could a father privately sentence a child to death, but a male child and an unmarried female child remained under the complete authority of the father until the father’s death” (Tripp 1-2.) The word ‘father’ historically signifies a “fixed male status of structural authority within the nuclear group” (Boose 19). Fathers ruled the family in every way: controlling the land, marriage rites, and social status for the family (Porter 144). Thus, late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain operated as a wholly patriarchal society. Male authority materialized in social and familial realms, and power through land was passed to sons, not daughters. Men provided the family with social responsibility and relational stimulus from the outside world (Giveans, Robins 1). Fathers were the “moral teachers”, ultimately responsible for the set of values incurred from their teaching (Lamb 2). The father’s power appeared absolute. Not until post-industrialization did the father begin to forfeit his active role in the child rearing process, and fulfill the “breadwinning” role that would inevitably mute his presence in the home almost entirely (Lamb 2-3). Nevertheless, Austen wrote in a time very much affected by the patriarchy, and her novels dissipate the established ideologies of fatherhood in her time.

Mythological tradition exposes a harsh, tyrannical, murderous image of the father. Kronos, god of the Olympians, murders his father, Uranus, and swallows his children in an incestuous rage for power (Evslin 3). A more recognizable version of the infamous patricide is Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex. The Oedipus complex, made popular by Freudian
psychoanalysis, externalizes male dominance and rage, due to jealousy of the mother’s affection, in the form of patricide (Abramovitch 19). The Oedipal father acts as the “major force in the development of personality” (Abramovitch 19). This image of the father established sovereignty through his role in the home, and achieved his desires through manipulation. The idea of absolute authority comes from this representation of the vengeful father and murderous son, who would do anything to sustain the omnipotent position in the home. The only child to survive his father’s rage, Zeus remained protected by his mother, and sought revenge on his father for his unjustness by expelling him to a forsaken island (Evslin 4). Zeus becomes insecure and jealous of his children, as a consequence of his father’s actions, thus repressing their will in the form of dictatorship (Abramovitch 25). From Zeus, the sky god, derives the severe, authoritarian image of the father:

He is moral but authoritarian, one who must have the last word and who sees his children as subordinates whose obligation is to be obedient and carry out his will...He expects loyalty in return, and feels betrayed when a subordinate or child ‘grows up’ and then differs from him (Abramovitch 54).

This harsh, but realistic, model of fatherhood likely passed into social realms and paternal ideologies. These perceptions of authority and power cultivated the domestic image of the father as the highest being in the home. Zeus’s brother, Poseidon, god of the sea, symbolizes another image of paternal disruption, as he signifies the “mythological archetype of the abusing father” (Abramovitch 29). He is volatile and easily angered, impulsively “destructive when enraged” (Abramovitch 29). These mythological images
of the father parallel the all-powerful Patriarch and establish a history of the dictating, abusive, controlling father. The father represents power and authority, and had the right to demand his will towards his children. This formulation of paternal dominance over the familial unit is seen continuously in history, and is still a present ideal amongst some cultures.

The Judeo-Christian tradition of fatherhood becomes another huge influence in formulating the paternal image in the social order. The archetypes of fatherhood in Christianity are at times equally severe to the mythological counterparts; yet, the Judeo-Christian tradition allows more alternatives. Abraham symbolizes the first father in the Jewish and Christian religions:

Abraham, in Jewish and Christian tradition (though apparently not in Islam), is often considered the archetypal patriarch, The First Father. His name illustrates this identity and is said to mean “the father of many nations”...He is the one who will teach his sons to do what is right and just so that God may bring about all that has been promised. Abraham is a father intimately concerned with his son’s lives and their spiritual progress. Not surprisingly, then, he is known to Jewish tradition as “Our Father Abraham” and to Christians as “Father Abraham,” declared to be the ideal exemplar of fatherhood (Abramovitch 24).

Though Abraham represents the “first father” in Judeo-Christian tradition and remains the prototype for paternity, he is not unflawed. He fathers an illegitimate son, Ishmael, who he casts away into the desert, never acting as a father or provider for him. When given the ultimate test of obedience to his Father, the Lord, he obeys by willingly
sacrificing his son, Isaac (Genesis 22). Abraham’s obedience to his Father in Heaven and Isaac’s obedience to his earthly father become excellent paradigms of respect and submission to paternal authority. Those who are unfamiliar with the story of Abraham and Isaac, or the ‘akeda’, are unaware that Isaac is fully matured and well into his forties in the Scriptures – he is not an unknowing child walking to his grave. Isaac appears conscious of his father’s intentions to sacrifice him, and he gives himself freely to his father, illustrating his faith, devotion, and subservience to Abraham. God the Father mercifully saves Isaac and frees Abraham from having to sacrifice his son, a far cry from Kronos, Zeus, and Poseidon. This Biblical narrative demonstrates several patterns of paternity that transmute into social and cultural realms. The father is omniscient, and has the authority to give and take as he sees fit; the father has unrestricted right to test his children; most importantly, a good child is an obedient, submissive child, willing to defer his own wants for that of his father. Authority and obedience become the primordial archetype between father and child, and still remains an existent paradigm in paternal dyads.

The murderous father archetype is portrayed through the vengeful God of the Old Testament, who eradicates entire societies, including women and children. This God, also called Adonai – or “Master,” symbolizes a jealous father, unwilling to allow even the slightest deviation from his plan. He inspires fear and dread in his people, and elicits tyranny in his relationship to his children. He acts as “judge and absolute authority, whose word is final” (Abramovitch 28). This paternal image parallels the mythological representations of the father. The obedience he demands evokes absolute deference to his will; he requires more severity in the home than Father Abraham, as he is wholly
totalitarian and aggressive. Adonai' position as Head and Master advocates hierarchal order. He is the Father of Roman times, who kills at will and restricts autonomy. There is a definite hierarchical relationship between this image of the Father and his children; he is the head and every living organism must bow down to him.

"In contrast to the terrors of a murderous or abandoning father is the tender security of a loving father, characterized by the God of the New Testament" (Abramovitch 28). Indeed, God the Father illustrates the ultimate price of love for his earthly children, by sacrificing his only true son, Jesus Christ. God the Father exudes love; in fact, He is love. In his book *The Four Loves*, C. S. Lewis notes that the Judeo-Christian God is the origin of love:

God is love. Again, "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us" (I John IV, 10). We must not begin with mysticism, with the creature's love for God, or with the wonderful foretastes of the fruition of God vouchsafed to some in their earthly life. We begin at the real beginning, with love as the Divine energy. This primal love is Gift-love. In God there is no hunger that needs to be filled, only plenteousness that desires to give. The doctrine that God was under no necessity to create is not a piece of dry scholastic speculation. It is essential. Without it we can hardly avoid the conception of what I can only call a "managerial" God; a Being whose function is to "run" the universe, who stands to it as headmaster to a school or a hotelier to a hotel. But to be sovereign of the universe is no great matter to God. In Himself, at home in "the land of the Trinity," he is sovereign of a far greater realm...God, who needs nothing,
loves into existence wholly superfluous creatures in order that He may
love and perfect them...This is the diagram of Love Himself, the inventor
of all loves” (127).

This God embodies the agape love that the selfless father has for his child. He requires
nothing, only desiring an intimate relationship with himself. Lewis notes the significance
of the Father’s self-sustenance, as without it, the Father becomes reliant on his position as
Head. This representation of the Father is not hierarchical, and is unaffected by
stimulation of power through authority. God the Father does not force his children to
accept him and reciprocate his love; rather, he gives free will to his creatures and loves
first. This image of the Father signifies the cultural desire to protect the child. The
Father is the moral educator, the protector and defender of his child’s faith; as such, his
own judgment needs to be flawless. This archetype is less historically potent than the
authoritative and murderous father, and does not have as great an influence on the
collective image of the Father. Nevertheless, God the Father remains the most familiar
paternal model of fatherhood in the Judeo-Christian tradition, and the most ubiquitous.

Characteristics of the historical image of fatherhood are developed from these
mythological and religious traditions. The word ‘Logos’ is central to these images of the
dominant and commanding father: “Logos refers to ‘the Word’, but more specifically to
rationality, logic, intellect, language, and law” (28); all of which exemplify the father,
and characterize the dominant paternal traits in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth
centuries. Attributes of the ideal father filter down from these prototypes of fatherhood:

In myth, legend, and dreams, the father archetype personifies as the Elder,
the King, the Father in Heaven. As Lawgiver he speaks with the voice of
collective authority and is the living embodiment of the Logos principle: his word is law. As Defender of the Faith and of the Realm he is guardian of the status quo and bastion against all enemies. His attributes are activity and penetration, differentiation and judgment, fecundity and destruction. His symbols are Heaven and the Sun, Lightening and the Wind, the Phallus and the Weapon. Heaven symbolizes the spiritual aspirations of the masculine principle, of which the father is the prime carrier, but in nearly all religions and mythologies heaven is by no means the realm of universal Good: it is also the origin of natural disasters and human catastrophes, the seat from which the godhead passes judgment...it is the throne of the primordial patriarch, where he freely exercises his powers of life and death over his wives and children...he possesses the dual aspect of Jehovah and of the fecundating and destructive Hindu god, Shiva (Stevens 16)

These qualities of fatherhood: activity, penetration, differentiation, judgment, fecundity, and destruction, mark the masculine ideals of ancient to pre-industrial Britain. The father is the elder, the king, the lawgiver, the authority, the defender, and the guardian. All of these attributes and societal roles form a unified cultural image of the father, and is the image referred to when one says ‘father’ as an encompassing whole, as opposed to an individual character. The father is loving and murderous, jealous and autonomous, authoritative and protective. He is Kronos, Zeus, Poseidon, Abraham, Adonai, and Father God.
As the church became more and more developed and integrated into society, the hierarchy of the church infiltrated into the arrangement of social order. Church and State became a cohesive unit; they were one and the same due to the King's newly found position as "Supreme Head of the Church of England" (Briggs 119). The hierarchical structure of the church permeated into the social structure and then into the familial unit. Britain was a nation of hierarchies. Moreover, the Church had an intense hold on social order:

This was a society where the rites of the Church, a universal Church, encompassed all the main events in the local life of the family. Birth, marriage, and death all had their rituals. Whatever messages the villager or townsman might receive...came through the church and at a local level: the parish priest was the intermediary between the villages and their Maker. And the boundaries between the religious and the secular were always blurred (Briggs 90).

The church enforced a spiritual authority into the lives of every individual. Models of subservience and obedience to the Lord transmitted down to the King, and then again to the father. The husband and father became absolute ruler; the house was a kingship not a democracy:

The laws of society therefore required that every part do obey one head or governor and that order, moderation, and reason should bridle the affections. These laws were reinforced by paternal authority within the family and the preaching of the Church. Each household, like society as a whole, had its 'head' who, in theory at least, expected obedience in his
small realm. Wives, by law as well as by custom, were held to be subordinate to their husbands. So, also, were children...the definition of a husband was “he that hath authority over the wife” and of parents “they which hath power and authority over children.” The Bible, which was held to justify this “natural order,” was preached every Sunday from the pulpit (Briggs 106).

Women and children were men’s shadows; they had no voice and no presence in society outside of the home. The patriarchy of the Church inspired the patriarchy of the familial unit, where father is head and children, particularly daughters, are last:

Pre-modern Western society was firmly patriarchal; indeed, various historians have argued that the patriarchal qualities increased in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Christianity held up a model of a stern, judgmental God, the Father, and while this view had been qualified during the Middle Ages by increasing emphasis on Christ and Mary as interceder, the linkage between authority and fatherhood was never shaken. The linkage may have actually grown firmer, at least in Northern Europe, as a function of the religious changes that led to and were furthered by the Reformation. Certainly, Protestants heavily emphasized the themes of control and judgment as part of God’s paternity (Stearns 32-33).

The Church infiltrated into family life, and the harsh, judgmental father archetypes, established through theological belief, permeated the home. Religion in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain “indoctrinated people for life” (Porter 168).
Through the Church came distinctive social responsibilities, giving “divine reasons for social relations” (Porter 168). The Church defined the father: “rod in one hand, Bible in the other” (Pleck 33); thus interlacing the authority and potency of the Church with the father’s role in the Home. Nobody questioned the authority of the Church, or the authority of the father. The King stabilized these notions of paternal dominance through his support and dependence on the Church.

Just as Church is applied to the family, so is the concept of culture. Pre-industrial Britain was a patrilineal society:

That the father and son are structurally homologous needs little illustration. It is the central presumption upon which the Greek, Hebrew, and Christian foundation myths depend and the central metaphor in which psychoanalytic theory is grounded. Furthermore, in most of the Western world it constitutes the basis for nomenclature from which kinship through patriliny is derived, the legal foundation upon which economic inheritance and all that is generally subsumed by the term “history has been constructed” (Boose 22).

The laws of society disallowed daughters to inherit land. In patrilineal Britain there were severe consequences for daughters who were product of a sonless marriage; their future became indefinite and subject to devastation. As property signified power, no property established the ultimate symbol of powerlessness. Men sustained their dominant position in the family through economic inheritance. Austen is specifically interested in this process of inheritance through kinship, as she creates several heroines who are adversely affected by these patrilineal laws: Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, Jane, Elizabeth,
Mary, Kitty, and Lydia Bennet, and even Elizabeth and Anne Elliot. These daughters are made vulnerable to social and class reduction because of the discriminatory property laws of Britain. They must somehow gain power through ulterior means, and reverse their substandard position in the family unit. Each of these daughters struggles with either the possibility or the reality of losing their home, and witness firsthand the unjustness of a patrilineal society. This patrilineality dominated Western culture and remained the standard in Britain until the end of the nineteenth century: “In marriage, the dominating position of the husband was buttressed by the law, and it was not until 1870 and 1882 that the Married Women’s Property Acts were passed, granting for women rights to property, whether secured before marriage or after (Briggs 243). With these new inheritance laws and with the growth of industry, the father’s hierarchal position was severely weakened and the patrilineal society was eradicated. Prohibiting women from inheriting land was the major impetus in sustaining a traditional Patriarchal order.

The family is merely a subset of the larger social order, and so the responsibilities of the culture’s expectations fall on the father (Seward 218). He becomes the primary source of stabilization and social education; hence, his role to maintain the status quo:

Interactions between humans across generations produce a social order, that is, a society with an attached culture. This social order or ongoing structure shapes human behavior. In all societies when humans are born they are primarily conditioned by one subgroup within the larger system — the family. The social position (e.g. the father) held by each person are dictated by the culture. The culture’s norms not only identify the paternal and kinship positions but spell out how they should be performed. Like
the larger society, the family social structure is in place when the child arrives (Seward 219).

The child is conditioned by the father, as the father is conditioned by the larger social order. Culture then determines the father’s scale of authority in the home. Historically, cultural norms mandate the father be the Head and Patriarch of the family:

The significance of father for social solidity is found primarily in his role as the overseer of family integrity, equanimity, and endurance, and is predicated on the assumption, virtually unchallenged, that a stable family system is essential to the well being of society. The family is the social unit to which the majority of people orient most of their behavior...child training within the family provides the foundation upon which the entire process of social learning is based. Hence, it is necessary to have a stable family system in order to provide unity and strength in the community at large (Benson 16-17).

Without securing patriarchal stability in the home, the hierarchal social order will deteriorate. The father is merely a limb of the cultural whole; he functions as the societal body tells him to, and performs as social order ordains. The father is an ‘agent of social stability’; thus fathers, traditionally, protect the invariability of society: “To maintain public order, the English ruling class had to bank heavily upon inertia and the straining forces of traditional society: scarcity, paternal discipline, community opinion, dependency, hostility…” (Porter289). The father’s authority within the familial unit stabilizes society’s authority on individual members. The two act as a team; one gives power, the other sustains it:
For father to be effective in maintaining family stability, he must have some authority; he must be able to control certain kinds of actions of members of his family. In a sense, he is society’s man in the household, since he represents the larger social order to a greater extant than his wife does. Authority is granted to a father partly because of the age factor, since he is usually the oldest member of the family, but his authority is also delegated by the laws and ideals of society and reinforced by a web of venerable social habits. The pattern is vital in the life of virtually every human being as is acted out principally by close kinsmen and immediate friends of the family. Father’s power is thereby made authentic in terms of daily social usage; it is legitimate. He is never used simply to police the family and settle disputes, however, nor is it often used in this way; father’s existence symbolizes legitimate authority and this provides the leverage by which he can exercise control before the fact, anticipatory social control (Benson 17-18).

The father’s authority is legitimized by social control and is a necessary function in sustaining social order. For social order to remain the same, pyramids of societal subgroups must stay intact, and the father must remain head of the familial pyramid.

The social inequality of powerlessness becomes ascertained in the mother and child. Women were typecast as the weaker sex; mothers and daughters were called to be submissive, obedient, and docile (Porter 23). It was still common for fathers to choose their daughter’s husband in eighteenth century Britain, especially those of upper to middle class status (Porter 24). Marriage was primarily affectionless and was a
bargaining chip for both sides (Shorter 55), as it provided women with the “strength, protection, status, and earning power” of their husbands, and, in return, men received the “domestic management and labor” of their wives (Porter 31). On the cusp of the nineteenth century, when Austen was writing the majority of her novels, a slight change began to take place in the home, as daughters were granted more freedom in choosing their lovers (Porter 28). Edward Shorter notes this marital alteration as a sort of rebellion against the dominant culture:

The transformation of courtship from an instrumental to an expressive mode of behavior was to embody two features. One was that the decision of young people themselves to replace a value system that emphasized allegiance to the chain of generations and responsibility to the community with a value system that exalted personal happiness and self development. The other feature was the cutting of the strings by which the larger society had formerly made the couples do their little courtship dances, the ending of community controls upon young men and women trying to find each other (120-121).

This sentiment of marrying for love rather than obligation is a major motif in Austen’s novels: “Anything is to be preferred or endured,’ advised Jane Austen early in the next century, ‘rather than marrying without affection...Nothing can be compared to the misery of being bound without love’” (Porter 29). Nevertheless, the daughter was still left in a precarious position. Patriarchal order disallowed her self-sufficiency and left her reliant solely on the good judgment of her father. Daughters were not at liberty to make significant decisions affecting the family, or themselves: “But ultimately the cult of the
family merely created dolls’ houses for women to live in within a man’s world, reaffirming men’s grip on the rest of society. And ladies grew doll-like: ornamental, flirtatious, delicate, and helpless” (Porter 30). Furthermore, the daughter’s voice became suppressed and she was forced into interdependency, having little, if any, presence in the home:

In the far cornered nuclear enclosure that is at once the source for and product of Western ideologies about the family, the father weighs most and the daughter least. To consider the daughter and father relationship means juxtaposing the two figures most asymmetrically proportioned in terms of gender, age, authority, and cultural privilege. Each of these asymmetries is controlled by the idiom of presence, which defines the father, or absence, which identifies the daughter...Daughterhood is, in fact, inseparable from absence in the psychoanalytic definition of social development, for it is the daughter’s recognition of her ‘castration’, her renunciation of the active, phallic state, and her acquiescence to passivity that, in Freud’s assessment, constitutes the prerequisite step backward that sets her on the pathway to “normal femininity” (Boose 20-21).

Austen dismisses this notion of the ‘absent daughter’ and, instead, creates dynamic, functioning, astute heroines, whose presence in the home eclipses the father. The daughter’s power in conjunction with the father in Austen’s texts elicits strength. Austen’s daughters are not weak or passive; rather, they embody the masculine ideals of energy and activity in the home. The historical and psychoanalytical perception of
'normal femininity' is destabilized by Austen's inverted representation of the father/daughter dyad.

The father's principal responsibility is to socialize and equip his child. He acts as the moral guide and "domestic spiritual leader" of the home (Pleck 36). His foremost function is to transmit his status and social role to the child (Abramovitch 25). As such, he is the 'most significant contributor' to family functioning, and in cultivating his child's well being and normative development (Cummings, Reilly 49). The father passed on values embedded in social ideologies to his child (Abramovitch 25). Historically, the father was more essential to the child rearing process than the mother:

Fathers, not mothers, provided the best examples of proper moral character for girls as well as boys. Women, it was held, were excessively found of their children and governed by their passions, rather than by reason. Maternal love was not regarded as an essential ingredient in child rearing (Pleck 36).

Fathers operated as the primary exemplars of child rearing; thus, the father's active involvement in the child's life is necessary for growth and security. Fathers fulfilled a crucial role in "socializing the child in qualitatively different ways than the mother" (Tripp 15-16). The father and mother have distinctive functions within the familial unit; the father's primary duty is to execute the instrumental and pedagogical facilities of the family and larger social order, while the mother performs the smaller, more miniscule redundancies of family life (Benson 16). Ultimately, the child's development is reliant on the father:
The invention of paternity, that is, the creation of a set of rules obligating men to assist mothers and to provide for infants and children – is required for a human type of family system. The biological father, the male progenitor, is not as important as the social or nurturant father precisely because the latter has a family role to play after conception (Benson 44).

Social order mandates the father to instruct and raise his child, while ingraining the social system and cultural substructure into his child’s mind. The father is then not always the ‘biological progenitor’, as evidenced in Austen’s novels, but he who fulfills the paternal functions in the child rearing process. The father promotes a “desire in children to live by society’s rules”, thus maintaining social stability and status quo (Benson 49). The father teaches compliance to social and cultural norms, establishing an impenetrable link between the home and social order: “The intimacy, frequency, and continuity of family interactions provides the major means by which culture gets transmitted and social order maintained” (Seward 223).

Children are severely influenced by the father’s indoctrination of societal conventions and regulations. The child receives values through the pedagogy of the father, as socialization occurs in the home. The role of teaching and training the child is then fundamental to the child’s self-centeredness and completion; if the child was never socialized in the family, any chance of socialization into the larger culture is lost: “Since children are socialized first into a particular subculture and never the whole culture, the subculture norms are crucial” (Seward 221). The father’s fulfillment of his pedagogical duties is crucial to the development of the child; if he fails, the child will likely be a social pariah, not able to function in polite society. Thus, the importance of the father in
late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain becomes astronomical. Without a competent, functioning father, daughters either fell victim to the unjustness of patriliny, or suffered severe social consequences for their father’s deficiencies. The father commanded his family, protected his children, socialized the familial unit, and provided security for the future. If a father failed to perform these functions in the home, chaos and disruption ensued. Austen does not have one normative (by the above standards) father character in her novels. They are either completely absent, wholly incapable, or emphatically tyrannical. Austen’s refusal to develop conventional paternal figures is characteristic of her contumacy of dominant social ideologies; she abnegates the historical and cultural representation of the father through her creation of paternal dysfunction; thus subverting dominant ideals of fatherhood and patriarchy in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain.
This chapter focuses primarily on the social, economical, and psychological consequences of the absent father, and on how Austen undermines social order through her characterization of the present daughter and absent father. Austen's first two novels, *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*, demonstrate an overwhelming lack of paternal representations. Mr. Dashwood's death initiates the development of *Sense and Sensibility*, as Austen portrays the unjustness of Patriarchal Britain through his demise; moreover, his death and absence from the home prevents him from protecting and commanding Marianne, thus leaving her with no paternal guidance, and causing her near death. Though Catherine Moorland's father is not deceased, he nevertheless remains absent from every major peak in the novel. Mr. Moorland's absence causes Catherine to stumble into the autocracy of General Tilney's home, her safety never considered or even guaranteed. Mr. Price, another absent father, neglects Fanny and willingly sends her away from home, depriving his own daughter of the stability he should have ensured. Once Fanny establishes some constancy at Mansfield Park, she immediately plummets into the tyranny of Sir Thomas Bertram. Both Catherine and Fanny experience the yin and yang of fatherhood: they have psychologically and physically absent fathers, who impel them away from the home and into the overtly tyrannical and despotic homes of General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram. The contrast of the absent and totalitarian dichotomizes the novels, and the dysfunction on each side serves as a detriment to the daughters' development. Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* will be analyzed in the "Despotic Fathers" chapter, as each contain the absent and the autocratic. Though Sir
Thomas will be thoroughly analyzed as a despot, he also represents the absent father, as he leaves Fanny and his other children for a substantial period of time, causing disorder and unruliness in the home. All of the daughter characters in these novels experience the negative social and economical consequences of the father’s absence, and must come to terms with a predominantly male-biased society, which mutes the daughter’s presence.

Historically, the presence of the father is indispensable in family functioning and child conditioning; thus, the lack of paternal authority is disruptive to the child’s developmental process (Lamb 2). The father, as previously acknowledged, functions as a major component of Georgian Britain; his absence is then formidable:

Certainly many cultures including the Biblical put enormous importance on becoming a father... The dominant image of the absent father in both psychology and religion is perhaps best reflected in the central image of Christianity, Jesus on the Cross. Just before his death, the Son cries out in a loud voice, “Eli Eli lama sabachthani?” – that is, “My God, My God, why have you deserted me?” (Matthew 27:46-47). Jesus, the Son who never became a father, dies in a heartbreak of feeling abandoned by the most important of fathers. The image of a son suffering the torments of an absent father has lost none of its potency (Abramovitch 22).

The father’s absence has an even more profound effect on daughters, because in a patrilineal world the absence of a father can make one lose her existence. Not only does the daughter have to suffer the psychological disadvantages of not having a father, but she also has no social status or position without a present paternal figure. Austen is concerned with the state of such fatherless daughters in all of her novels: Jane Fairfax,
Harriet, Isabella Thorpe, Mrs. Brandon, Miss Williams and her fatherless child, Mary Crawford, Marianne and Elinor Dashwood, even Georgina Darcy, Fanny Price and Catherine Moorland – though these three do retain some sort of status, are all victim to paternal absence; moreover, though Jane, Elizabeth, Kitty, Mary, and Lydia Bennet have a present father, they too are victim to the patrilineal laws which disallow them from securing any kind of economic inheritance. Austen remains particularly attracted to the social and cultural implications of an absent father, and how the daughter’s functioning is impaired by this absence. The father served as more than head-of-the-household, he acted as moral guide, the economic security, the source of correction and socialization:

In sum, the evidence suggests that father absence may be harmful, not necessarily because a sex role model is absent, but because many aspects of the father’s role – economic, social, emotional – go unfilled or inappropriately filled in these families. Once again, recognition of the father’s multiple roles appears to be essential for understanding how fathers influence children’s development (Lamb 11).

The father provided crucial ‘economic, social, and emotional’ roles, thus establishing an imperative function in the child’s growth and development.

Marianne and Elinor Dashwood are victims to a disadvantageous paternal absence. Their father dies within the first few pages of the novel, and their only hope for social and economic sustenance is their pathetic step-brother, John Dashwood, who fails horribly at protecting them. As they are powerless to inherit their father’s land, due to property inheritance laws, they are forced to move from their home and social circles, uncertain of their future: “A brief collection of many of Jane Austen’s late eighteenth
century female characters should serve to remind us of just how ‘genteel’ women must have been burdened due to the fact that their families’ property had been entailed to or was otherwise inherited by their male relatives” (Okin 127). Marriage becomes a necessity for the girls, as without the institution of marriage they can have no respectable future. Without the protection of a father Marianne stumbles into trouble with Willoughby, and then nearly kills herself upon the disintegration of their relationship. Elinor tries desperately to fill the void her father has left in her sister’s life, but is ultimately ineffective. The novel operates as a continual succession of fatherless daughters, and paternal absence signifies, without question, the major theme in the text: Marianne and Elinor’s father dies sending them away from their home and previous security; Mrs. Brandon’s father is absent in her life and causes her low self esteem and eventual degradation of bearing an illegitimate child – Miss Williams, who also never develops a healthy sense of self and bears another illegitimate child with Willoughby, who abandons her and her child, creating a vicious cycle of fatherlessness and illegitimacy. Edward Ferras’s, another victim of the absent father, suffers his domineering mother, who encumbers his own self fulfillment and desires. Nearly every major character in the novel is without a father, something which surely cannot be happenstance. Austen challenges the status quo by creating present daughter characters and absent father figures. Though the father’s absence hinders the daughters development, they still manage to survive and function in a patrilineal, male-centered world.

The Dashwood’s had a stable residence, good society, and a loving family prior to Mr. Dashwood’s death. Austen deliberately sets the texts premise on Mr. Dashwood’s unforeseen demise. The girls’ lives change drastically with the absence of their father:
they lose their estate and social relations, and are forced to move hundreds of miles away into a small cottage in need of much repair. Austen, who was subject herself to a patrilineal society, is interested in the daughter’s management of this catastrophic alteration in their lives:

Those first chapters are not to be hurried over while we try to get to the love-story. Elinor and Marianne are equally constricted and abused by an unjust property system. Both Elinor and Marianne (and their younger sister Margaret too) are taught by society the importance of a man to the comfort of a woman, not because men are good or loveable in themselves, but because they are the means to money and houses (Doody xii).

Elinor and Marianne experience the prejudice of the social order; nevertheless, they both refuse to marry for the wealth and stability that was lost to them, something characteristic of all of Austen’s heroines. The consequences would surely be harsh, if they did not marry: “Young ladies were groomed for matrimony, and with reason. If a daughter failed to trap a husband, she might become an ‘old maid’, a burden on her family, forced into a frustrating post as lady’s companion or governess, with no independence and existing in an impoverished no-man’s land between family and servants” (Porter 26); yet, their attraction to the young men in the novel seems genuine, not forced or selfishly developed. Though their life style has changed drastically, they are not so low in character to secure a husband of social importance, solely because of the security he would provide them. Austen satirizes this antiquated ideal of marriage by mocking superficial relationships in her novels; there is not one major daughter figure who marries for wealth or encourages the other characters to do so: “Jane Austen condemns the
treatment of marriage as a money bargain” (Harding 36). Elinor and Marianne become reconciled to their reduced social position, and though they suffer the loss of their father, they make the most of their present situation.

Mr. Dashwood is surprisingly functional as a father before his death. Austen’s refusal to create normative fathers becomes amplified in this text, as she allows a father to competently command his family, only then to kill him and leave the girls fatherless and homeless. Nevertheless, the opening pages describe Mr. Dashwood as a loving father concerned for his children’s well being: “His temper was cheerful and sanguine, and he might reasonably hope to live many years, and by living economically, lay by a considerable sum from the produce of an estate already large” (SS 2). Mr. Dashwood is active in his family and genuinely concerned for their future interests. He remains concerned for the future of his girls, knowing what lies ahead without a father to protect them, and on his deathbed he pleads with his son to take responsibility for them: “His son was sent for, as soon as his danger was known, and to him Mr. Dashwood recommended, with all the strength and urgency which illness could command, the interest of his mother-in-law and sisters” (SS 3). Mr. Dashwood’s fear for his girls substantiates the cruelty of patrilineal Britain, and he seeks to do everything within his power to protect them, even after his death. This scene of paternal anguish over the future stability of his girls marks the only image the reader has of paternal normalcy in Austen’s novels; his activism in the house only lasts a mere three pages in the novel, however. Mr. Dashwood realizes the implications of his death and the damaging consequences that will ensue because of patrilineal Britain, and so he tries desperately to
shield his girls from future devastation. His power is limited, however, as the laws of society outweigh his desire to ensure protection for his daughters:

The family pattern he (Frederic Le Play) stressed was called the ‘stem’ family, in which property is passed from one generation to the next, thus supplying the link between generations. A prominent feature of this system is the authority of the father, the essence of which his power to bequeath family possessions in one piece to a successor, his son (Benson 16).

In this case, the father does not wish to pass his property down to his son; rather, he desires to leave his wife and children with an inheritance, something which Patriarchal Britain does not allow:

Mr. Dashwood had wished the estate more for the sake of his wife and daughters than for himself or his son: but to his son, and his son’s son, a child of four years old, it was secured in such a way, as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision, by any charge on the estate (SS 2).

Essentially, the figure of power in the home is left powerless by society to protect his daughters after his death. Mr. Dashwood’s circumstances illustrate a strange paradox, to have the father, a source of dominance and authority, become powerless. This inconsistency indicates another example of how intricately society and culture was involved in the child rearing; though the father remains omnipotent in the home, his power is merely a social convention, and is ultimately overshadowed by social order. Patriarchal society depends on patriliny, so despite the intentions or desires of Mr.
Dashwood, he must bequeath his property to his son: “Stress on nuclear family units were built around the economic prowess of the husband-father and on the property controlled by this father. This established a material base for the reliance on patriarchal firmness in the direction of children” (Stearns 33). Though on the surface it may appear that the husband/father holds all the power, it is really societal control over the father that gives the illusion of omnipotence. Social order sanctions patriliney and regulates its fruition. This patrilineality is the driving stimulus of the novel, and the unjustness of Patriarchal society is evidenced continuously in the text.

Mr. John Dashwood and Sir John Middelton are the only father figures present in the text. One is weak, the other ridiculous; both are deficient. Mr. John Dashwood has no moral fiber; his weakness of character enables his wife to easily manipulate him. He makes an empty promise to his father to protect the girls, than abandons his promise as soon as his father dies; once that paternal constancy disappears, nothing can effectively stabilize the family. His inadequacies allow his wife to control him and to redefine his arrangement with his father. Mrs. John Dashwood represents the strong, commanding character in the relationship; she is the patriarchal leader, as she controls her family and her husband:

This argument was irresistible. It gave to his intentions whatever of decision was wanting before; and he finally resolved, that it would be absolutely unnecessary, if not highly indecorous, to do more for the widow and children of his father, than such kind of neighborly acts as his own wife pointed out (SS 10).
John Dashwood’s negligence towards his father’s wife and children is unforgivable. He should have interceded and helped the Dashwoods, but his powerlessness in the family prevents him. Mr. John Dashwood and Mrs. John Dashwood reverse roles in the familial unit. She rules over him, if not outwardly evident, apparent through her power over him and his decisions. Austen challenges forced social roles on the wife and husband through her characterization of Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood:

The husband in every sense “ruled the roost.” His wife had authority over nothing...The rituals of daily life sanctified the wife’s subordination to her husband...For the traditional couple the sex roles were absolute, and the community punished with ridicule those who attempted to break them down. As Dr. Perran tells us of the Franche-Comte: “Public opinion forbids the husband to milk the cows, to fetch the water, to wash the dishes...He would be scoffed at and ever made a laughing stock among the women themselves” (Shorter 66).

Austen destabilizes these embedded rules of society by creating powerless men and powerful women. Though the Dashwoods do transcend gender role norms, they are, nevertheless, despised in the text for their unwillingness to help the Dashwood girls.

Mr. Dashwood’s absence from the family has a perilous effect on Marianne. She has an incomplete image of self, and has not yet acquired self realization. Marianne is still young, and has not been adequately socialized at the time of her father’s death. The absence of her father impedes her growth. Her life, prior to her father’s death, was idyllic; however, when she is thrust into this new paternally absent world she suffers exceedingly. She does not adjust as quickly as Elinor, and she abhors the social system
that requires her to abandon her home and society. Life without a father in eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain was problematic, and Marianne is too young and romantic to fully realize the damaging societal consequences of her father’s death. The absence of her father delays the process of maturation, as there is no authority figure in her life to guide her. Moreover, Marianne has little to no authority over herself: “She was without any power because she was without any command over herself” (SS 71). Marianne and Elinor illustrate polar opposites in the text, Marianne sensibility and Elinor sense. Marianne’s psychological disposition becomes more and more unstable, as she allows her passions and romanticisms to guide her, rather than reason. She desperately needs the good judgment and direction of a father. Marianne seems to embody all of those historically gendered “feminine attributes”, while Elinor embodies the “masculine attributes.” Furthermore, Marianne consistently acts childish throughout the text; while Elinor acts paternal, and attempts to fulfill the role of Patriarch in the family, though never wholly successful.

Elinor flourishes without the constant authority of a father, and exhibits the steadiness and self command lacking in her mother and sister. Her mother’s indulgence misguides her direction and discipline of the girls (50); thus, Elinor attempts to reinstate authority back into the home via her ascension into the role of Patriarch:

As for Elinor, good soul, she is bent for reason and moderation in all things. Prefiguring the levelheaded alertness of Mr. Knightley in *Emma*, she tries to steer her quixotic mother and Marianne in the right direction. Attuned to indiscretion, any deviance from correctness, she is strict, stubborn, and a powerhouse of “self-command,” the phrase she uses and
that is most often ascribed to her. Prim and prudent, she manages the family’s limited finances, nurses Marianne through the entire course of her sickness, physical and spiritual, and monitors a variety of unsought difficulties... (Gross 64).

She has all of the psychological and physical elements of a paternal figure: reason, protection, action, constancy, and prudence. Furthermore, she has a complete view of self, and effectively controls her actions and words: “even now her self command is invariable” (SS 33). Not only does she command herself, but she commands the house; she even is allowed some command over her mother, as she gently guides her: “Mrs. Dashwood, who already had a cold, was persuaded by Elinor to stay at home” (SS 53). Elinor continuously rebuffs her father’s absence through her own good discernment and authority over the home. She censures Marianne, and expresses disappointment in her impropriety at visiting Allenham with Willoughby: “But, my dear Marianne, as it has already exposed you to some very impertinent remarks, do you not now begin to doubt the discretion of your own conduct... If they were one day to be your own, Marianne, you would not be justified in what you have done” (SS 59). In the historical context of the novel, Willoughby and Marianne behave widely inappropriate; a lady did not frolic around in open carriages with potential suitors, and certainly she did not fraternize in public settings – or private. Elinor hopes to instill wisdom and discernment in Marianne, as her father was never given ample opportunity. Her own good sense is witnessed continuously in the novel; she does not play games, as do Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne, but seeks communication to settle any discrepancy:
She tried to find a motive sufficient for their silence. But there was one method so direct, so simple, and in her opinion so eligible of knowing the real state of the affair, and of instantly removing all mystery, that she could not help suggesting it to her mother, “Why do you not ask Marianne at once” said she, ‘whether she is or is not engaged to Willoughby?” (SS 72).

Elinor does not understand the insensibility of her mother’s silence, and the imprudence of not knowing for sure whether Marianne and Willoughby are undeniably engaged. Her mother behaves poorly, and shows her inadequacy to succeed her husband’s power and authority in the home. Elinor pleads with her again, stating the impertinence of such a relationship if indeed they were not engaged, to openly communicate with Marianne: “Elinor thought this generosity overstrained, considering her sister’s youth, and urged the matter farther, but in vain; common sense, common care, common prudence, were all sunk in Mrs. Dashwood’s romantic delicacy” (SS 73). Mrs. Dashwood is foolish and ultimately endangers her daughter by not protecting her or guiding her in her relationship to Willoughby.

Elinor, sensible of her ineffectual position as elder daughter, still endeavors to direct Marianne and protect her from her own insensibility; though most attempts are futile: “for Marianne’s mind could not be controlled, and Elinor, satisfied with gaining one point, would not then attempt more” (SS 74). Elinor has an arduous position in the novel, because she knows what is best for Marianne, but she ultimately does not have the authority to enforce it. She sees how poorly her mother behaves, yet is powerless to intervene. Social order does not allow her to ascend into her father’s position, and so she
must obediently witness Marianne’s deterioration. Elinor concedes to go along with Mrs. Jennings solely to protect Marianne: “and she resolved within herself, that if her sister persisted in going, she would go likewise, as she did not think it proper that Marianne should be left to the sole guidance of her own judgment” (SS 135). She determines to seek out the true character of Willoughby, even if her mother and sister refuse to acknowledge it:

Elinor was resolved not only upon gaining every new light as to his character, which her own observation or the intelligence of others could give her, but likewise upon watching his behavior to her sister with such zealous attention, as to ascertain what he was and what he meant, before many meetings had taken place (SS 137).

Elinor’s desire to expose Willoughby’s authenticity is confirmation of her love for her sister. She is pained by Marianne’s blindness and by her own inability to protect her, so she seeks verifiable proof of Willoughby’s falseness, so that her mother might finally intervene and save Marianne from any more heartache. Elinor grieves at her sister’s impropriety and her mother’s inertia:

That such letters, so full of affection and confidence could have been so answered, Elinor, for Willoughby’s sake, would have been unwilling to believe. But her condemnation of him did not blind her to the impropriety of their having been written at all; and she was silently grieved over the imprudence which had hazarded such unsolicited proofs of tenderness, not warranted by anything preceding (SS 163).
Elinor disconsolately remains silent, even though her heart breaks when she discovers the true nature of Marianne and Willoughby’s relationship; she is socially aphasic. Social order did not allow daughter figures to govern the home, thus she witnesses Marianne’s imprudence helplessly. Austen continually creates these sensible, discerning daughter characters, that often times exude more wisdom and good judgment than the paternal figure in their life. Since the father is absent in this novel, the mother becomes the ultimate authority in the house; once again, Austen destabilizes these notions of parental control by creating incompetent, foolish authority figures. Elinor loses respect for her mother and covets the role she encompasses: “I long to enquire; but how will my interference be borne” (SS 143). Despite how capable she may be, she cannot fully access the role of the Patriarch. She can advise her mother and Marianne, she can even follow Marianne in an attempt to protect her, but she cannot demand her mother and sister listen to her good counsel.

The absence of a father nearly destroys Marianne, as she has no direction, and succumbs to her insensible romantic whims; thus causing her ill health when Willoughby fails her. The loss of Willoughby’s integrity affects her almost more than she can bear:

She felt the loss of Willoughby’s character yet more heavily than she felt the loss of his heart; his seduction and desertion of Miss Williams, the misery of that poor girl, and the doubt of what his designs might once have been on herself, preyed altogether so much on her spirits, that she could not bring herself to speak of what she felt even to Elinor (SS 185).
His cruelty disheartens her, and she pities not only herself, but the other characters affected by his falseness as well. Marianne later reflects back on how imprudent her and Willooughby’s relationship had been all along:

I considered the past; I saw in my own behavior since the beginning of our acquaintance with him last autumn, nothing but a series of imprudence towards myself, and want of kindness to others. I saw that my own feelings had prepared my sufferings, and that my want of fortitude under them nearly led me to the grave. My illness, I well knew, had been entirely brought on by myself, by such negligence of my own health, as I had felt even at the time to be wrong. Had I died, - it would have been self destruction (SS 303).

Marianne’s sudden consciousness of her and Willoughby’s indecorum is near identical to Elizabeth Bennet’s awakening of her inappropriate relationship with Wickham. Both daughters lack a father to guide them and shield them from exterior harm. Mr. Dashwood would have protected Marianne. The consequences of paternal neglect are far more severe in this novel than the others, as Marianne nearly dies; her illness is a direct result of paternal absence. Her mother’s ill behavior sets her on the path of destruction, as she is left with no paternal or maternal guidance. Marianne foolishly believes she can command herself, though her actions and poor judgments prove otherwise. Mr. Dashwood would have prevented Marianne’s irresponsible conduct; he could have recognized Willoughby’s true character, as Elinor tried, and detected his falseness. Mrs. Dashwood’s refusal to demand an actual spoken engagement is detrimental to the well being of her child; she encourages Willoughby’s actions and Marianne’s reciprocation.
A formal engagement would have been required if the father was not absent, thus ending the uncertainty of Willoughby’s intentions from the beginning. Willoughby would have had to adhere to social convention and seek the hand of Marianne from Mr. Dashwood; furthermore, the engagement would have been public, preventing all scandalous behavior between the two. The absence of Mr. Dashwood denotes not only Marianne’s inevitable agony over lost love and disappointed expectations, but also the grief and pain of the whole family. Marianne survives, however, and becomes a stronger character through her hardships. She eventually reconciles her father’s absence and the unjustness of patriarchal Britain through her recovery and newfound love.

As the death of one father causes detriment to the economic, social, and psychological welfare of his daughters, another father’s negligence produces his daughter’s excessive puerility and near peril. Mr. Moorland’s absence creates just as much harm as Mr. Dashwood’s, despite his existence in the novel. His inactivity defines his relationship to Catherine, as he remains absent from every major pinnacle in the text; furthermore, he fails at even the most fundamental level of fatherhood by not educating Catherine, and then sending her into the world entirely unsophisticated and childish. Catherine desperately needs paternal guidance, just as Marianne did, yet Catherine seeks out paternal authority in the figures around her, while Marianne shut out her sister’s guidance. Catherine’s impressionable character instigates her constant social blunders, as she is not able to stand on her own good judgment, and is left reliant on the other foolish characters. The Allens fail to provide her with the social instruction she requires; thus her lack of paternal authority once again defines her while at Bath. Her naivety often causes her to misapprehend the moral fiber of the other characters, and so she makes a
critical error in judging the Thorpes. She does not begin to develop any self autonomy until the end of the text, which, in the interim, desperately hinders her moral and psychological development.

Catherine’s immaturity instigates her reliance on the discernment of others, since her father never instilled good judgment in herself. Her naivety is painful to the reader, and substantiates her father’s abandonment of her mental and emotional development. While the child needs the father, the father does not require sustenance from the child (except in Mr. Woodhouse and Emma’s case):

He is socialized as his children are not, and they need him more than he needs them. For this reason, and because of his superior size and knowledge, plus the fact that he is the adult male they see most often, the children almost inevitably organize a major part of their personal energies in response to his life style; they identify with him (Benson 59).

Catherine desperately needs her father, yet he does not reciprocate her desire for an intimate relationship. He does not socialize Catherine adequately while she is still in the home, and he gladly casts her off to the Allens, never participating in the rearing and education of his child. Throughout the text Catherine repeatedly exhibits a longing for paternal identification and understanding. She is disappointed by the paternal figures in her life, as they are neither “teacher, censor, or promoter” (Benson 49), and she eventually learns to guide herself, though the absent and negative paternal patterns do have a severe effect on her throughout most of the novel.

Northanger Abbey parodies the gothic novel, and even becomes recognized as sort of an “antigothic” text. Austen relies on certain gothic elements, such as the naïve
girl with a lack of paternal guidance, but many of the elements change, such as the grotesque and horror of the gothic, which is transmuted into the ordinariness of the realistic: “Jane Austen is commonly and rightly credited with perfecting, if not inventing, the novel of ordinary life, the kind of novel in which the smallest and most commonplace incidents are made significant in the consciousness of the heroine” (Bush 57). Austen takes the horrors of the Gothic and transmutes them into the realities of Catherine’s life. Catherine’s childishness is, nevertheless, the groundwork for the novel:

That her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affection of any kind – her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and, when in good looks, pretty – and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is (NA 5).

Her superficiality and childishness cause her to error, as she always pleases everyone because she does not know anything else. Catherine’s incapacity to think on her own produces mimesis within her life, and she takes on the thoughts of whomever she is around or subject to. Without her father to guide her, she engages several surrogate paternal figures, most of whom prove deficient. She trusts the judgment of nearly every other character before herself, because she has never been taught to think: “Austen repeatedly connects Catherine Moorland’s failure to think with the fact that she has never been taught to think. The problem is not individual capacity but lack of education: Catherine has been made stupid” (Doody xix). Her father neglects his primary responsibility, to instruct and train his children, proving his failure as a father to Catherine. Mr. Moorland, seemingly too distracted to instill a proper education in his
daughter, causes her to become immature and brainless. Her psychological disposition is
delicate before leaving for Bath, and once she steps out into society, her puerility and
foolishness are made all the more evident. Though her father was present at one time, he
never instilled in her the ability to reason and to survive autonomously from a constant
paternal presence.

Without the presence of a father, Catherine is left to direct herself, and secure her
own judgments on the propriety of her actions. She never stops seeking out paternal
guidance, but she does inevitably make her own decisions, as her guardians, the Allen’s,
are far too disinterested to really invest any discernment in her:

Catherine, whose desire of seeing Mrs. Tilney again could at that moment
bear a short delay in favor of a drive, and who thought there could be no
impropriety in her going with Mrs. Thorpe, as Isabella was going at the
same time with James, was therefore obliged to speak plainer. ‘Well,
ma’am, what do you say to it? Can you spare me for an hour or two?
Shall I go?’ ‘Do just as you please, my dear,’ replied Mrs. Allen, with the
most placid indifference. Catherine took the advice, and ran off to get
ready (NA 43).

Catherine waits for the approval of Mrs. Allen, though her approval is unresponsive and
apathetic. Mrs. Allen does not truly care for the welfare of Catherine, and Catherine’s
blind credulity is proven by her willful acceptance of Mrs. Allen’s approval. Catherine
wants guidance; she seeks out paternal figures to fill the absence of her father. Mr.
Moorland has psychologically stunted the development of his daughter by his refusal to
educate her; her mindlessness cripples her, and she relies heavily on the opinions of
others in the novel. Catherine goes to the Allen’s once again for advice: “To ease her mind, and ascertain by the opinion of an unprejudiced person what her own conduct had really been, she took occasion to mention before Mr. Allen the half-settled scheme of her brother and the Thorpes for the following day” (NA 80). For once Mr. Allen does not brush her off, but sincerely advises her not to go along with the others: “No you should certainly not; and I am glad you do not think of it. These schemes are not at all the thing. Young men and women driving about the country in open carriages!” (NA 80).

Catherine is immediately repulsed by having participated in something so improper, and questions the Allens as to why they would allow her to err in judgment without correcting her: “Then why did you not tell me so before? I am sure if I had known it to be improper, I would not have gone with Mr. Thorpe at all; but I had always hoped you would tell me, if you thought I was doing wrong” (NA 81). Catherine has yet to learn the ‘ways of the world’ and is mortified by her misconduct. She relies so heavily on the judgments of others, that she inevitably becomes disappointed with the Allens lack of intervention in her life. Her shock at their detachment is not wholly unfounded, as they are her ‘guardians’, and therefore should act as parental substitutes, correcting her when necessary. They too, however, are absent in their function as paternal figures in her life, and express indifference to her throughout the rest of the text. Consequently, she must ultimately command herself. Catherine is left underdeveloped and impressionable, but still must forge her own way and become self-sufficient.

Catherine’s immaturity causes her to error in her judgment of Mr. Thorpe. She instantly dislikes him, but is swayed by everyone else’s approbation of him: “Little was Catherine in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of
what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt, while she bore with the confusions of his endless conceit, of his being altogether completely reasonable” (NA 48). The malleability of her character causes the instant forfeit of her own convictions for those of her brother and Isabella. Her naivety blinds her to Thorpe’s selfish intentions, and she is unable to discern his snide allusions to her wealth. Moreover, his deceit confuses her, rather than affirms her first impressions of him:

Her own family were plain matter-of-fact people, who seldom aimed at wit of any kind, her father, at the utmost, being contented with a pun, and her mother with a proverb; they were not in the habit therefore of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next (NA 47).

Instead of authenticating her immediate impression of his falseness, she doubts herself, and tries to find meaning in his contradictory statements. She never recognizes the bad in people, only believing the good; the lack of paternal guidance in her life is evidenced most blatantly by her blindness towards the Thorpes.

Paternal absence guides the lives of the other characters as well, as the Thorpes suffer without a father in their lives. Mr. Thorpe’s death leaves his children with no paternal guidance. Their father’s absence gives them liberty to do as they wish, and John and Isabella live without censure. Their mother’s indulgence prevents her from correcting them or providing much needed direction for them, common of Austen’s mothers. The lack of censure and discipline in their lives causes their eventual downfall. Conversely, Eleanor Tilney thrives with her father’s absence from the home. Eleanor is continually juxtaposed with Catherine in the text. The polarity of their characters
evidences itself by their conduct in the absence of the father. While Catherine always seeks out paternal figures, Eleanor adjusts well to paternal absence; Eleanor is self-complete, and demonstrates her autonomy several times in the text. It appears that her father, General Tilney, is regularly absent in her life: “in the frequent absence of her father, was sometimes without any companion at all” (NA 123). His absence, however, comes as a delight: “His unlooked for return was enough in itself to make the heart sink” (NA 180). The difference in the consequence of each father’s absence is substantial. Catherine is adversely influenced by the absence of her father; whereas, Eleanor prospers. Keeping in mind that Eleanor’s father is a tyrant, something which will be explored in the third chapter, her indifference to his presence is, nevertheless, starkly contrasted by Catherine’s absolute dependence on her father’s guidance.

Catherine’s father is absent, once again, when she is ordered home by General Tilney: “but Mr. Moorland was from home” (NA 197). His absence at the apex of the novel solidifies, once again, Austen’s refusal to create normative father figures. Austen excludes him from every major development in the story and progress in Catherine’s character. The naïve, puerile girl that left the home returns with self education, possession, and awareness. Her stay at the General’s house initiates her maturation, and Henry Tilney’s constant advice and support lends her to gain autonomy apart from paternal figures. Though her father’s instruction would have saved her from awkwardness and some naïve indecorum, in the end she becomes more self complete through her own volition. Catherine is finally a rounded character; had she not left the home and been absent from the father, she may have missed the opportunity to develop her mind and acquire self completion. Austen redefines the family unit, and the
importance of the Patriarch, by allowing Catherine to thrive and prosper, gaining ultimate self realization outside of the nuclear family context.

Mr. Moorland’s readiness to be rid of his daughter is analogous to Mr. Price’s compliance in sending Fanny away from his home. Mr. Price’s absolute negligence to his children parallels Mr. Moorland’s, both fathers act shamefully. Fanny must overcome not only her biological father’s abandonment of her, but also her brother’s, Sir Thomas Bertram’s, and Edmund’s. Every potential paternal figure in the novel forsakes her, leaving her with little self confidence and esteem. Fanny’s development is psychologically hindered by the paternal abandonment she experiences, as her timidity and frailty permeate her life. At many times in the novel Fanny is in limbo, not sure what home she will be thrust into next. She seeks validation for her selfhood from the only two male characters who do not outwardly terrorize her, and though she is often referred to as the “weakest Austen heroine,” she is nevertheless unwavering in her principles.

Fanny is the child of an incongruous match, and she ultimately suffers the consequences of her mother’s poor decision making. Her mother chooses a man so unbecoming to her family that contact between families eventually dissipates:

But Miss Frances married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a Lieutenant of the Marines without education, fortune, or connections, did it very thoroughly. She could hardly have a more untoward choice...her husband’s profession was such as no interest could reach...an absolute breach between the sisters had taken place. It was the natural result of the conduct of each party, and such as a very imprudent marriage almost always produces (MP 2).
Mrs. Price’s rebellious behavior toward her family via her marriage ultimately proves a poor decision for her and her children. The reader witnesses the negative consequences of marrying an unequal partner, as in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the severe effects such a marriage has on the children:

Poor marital quality has a more negative impact on father-child relationships than on mother-child relationships... The marital quality, parental psychological functioning, and the children’s adjustment are also affected. Positive marital relations foster emotional well being in the parents. On the other hand, marital distress is the most common reason why people seek psychological help... The parents psychological functioning influences children’s development (Cummings, O’Reilly 59).

The distress in the Price marriage causes the children’s psychological impairment. Mr. Price embodies a lowly drunkard: “an husband disabled for active service, but not less equal to company and good liquor” (MP 3), and remains perpetually absent from his daughters’ lives. A reconciliation is soon sought between Mrs. Price and her sisters, and an arrangement is made for her eldest daughter, Fanny, to relocate to Mansfield Park. Mr. Price, glad to have one less mouth to feed, sends Fanny off with no expectation for her return. Fanny gets passed off from one family to another, without any consideration given for how it might affect her stability. The paternal figures in the novel are concerned solely for their own wellbeing, not their children’s. Once Fanny finally becomes accustomed to Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas desires to uproot her again, and send her to the evil Mrs. Norris: “The time was now come when Sir Thomas expected his sister-in-law to claim her share of the niece...'So Fanny, you are going to leave us, and
live with my sister. How shall you like it?’’ (MP 20-21). Sir Thomas enquires whether she will like the situation after it has already been settled in his mind. Ultimately it does not matter what Fanny wants, she must do what the paternal figures in her life determine best: ‘‘I shall be very sorry to go away,’’ said she, with a faltering voice. ‘Yes, I dare say you will; that’s natural enough. I suppose you have had as little to vex you, since you came into this house, as any creature in the world’’ (MP 21). Her security at Mansfield suffers constant uncertainty, never sure of where she might go next. Her sense of stability becomes obliterated by this threat of constant relocation. Mrs. Norris’s refusal to accept Fanny in her home is a huge relief, and though Fanny may have to suffer the uncertainty of her future, she can at least rest assured that she will never be forced to live with her malicious aunt. Fanny’s transfer from one home to the next is a major motif in the text: she is first positioned at the Price home, then she moves to Mansfield, then the question of her removal to her Aunt Norris’s comes and passes, then she is forced back into her original home with the Prices, then, at last, she ends the novel happily at Mansfield.

Fanny’s lack of stability deeply affects her psychology. She has no self-centeredness and feels unloved because of the lack of a stable fatherly figure in her life. Her lack of self-confidence causes her to become introverted: “Hiding, moreover, becomes Fanny’s chief defense against an admittedly inhospitable world” (Gross 117). She does not partake in society, like the Bertram daughters, but inhabits the position of companion to Lady Bertram: “Fanny had no share in the festivities of the season; but she enjoyed being avowedly useful as her aunt’s companion, when they called away the rest of the family; she naturally became everything to Lady Bertram during the night of a ball
or party. She talked to her, listened to her, read to her...” (MP 28). The Bertram family consistently isolates Fanny; she acts almost as more of a servant, than a viable part of the family unit. She is not given the opportunity to partake in the frivolities and society of the other young girls, but is continuously left behind, never thought of or acknowledged. Fanny does take some comfort in these moments alone with Lady Bertram because they provide her with security and stability unfamiliar to her. She enjoys being useful and feeling needed, and equates this with value. Her fear of permanent isolation causes her to seek the attention of others whenever possible:

Young adults emerging from the adolescent search for a sense of identity can be eager and willing to fuse their identities in mutual intimacy and to share them with individuals who, in work, sexuality, and friendship promise to prove complementary... The psychosocial antithesis to intimacy, however, is isolation, a fear of remaining separate and “unrecognized” – which provides a deep motivation for the entranced ritualization of a, now genitally mature, “I” – “you” experience such as marked the beginning of one’s existence. A sense of isolation, then, is the potential core pathology of early adulthood... But the greatest danger of isolation is a regressive and hostile reliving of the identity conflict and, in the case of a readiness for regression, a fixation on the earliest conflict with the primal Other (Erikson 70-71).

The Bertrams neglect Fanny continuously, evoking her sense of lost identification. Her fear of isolation acts as a stimulus for her eager deference to all members of the family unit. She would rather be last than non-existent, and so she caters to the whims of each
Bertram, hoping to find validation through companionship. Fanny’s needs are unfailingly forgotten, however, and even her health is disregarded: “For some time she was in danger of feeling the loss in health as well as in her affections, for in spite of the acknowledged importance of her riding on horseback no measures were taken for mounting her again” (MP 31). Her vulnerability materializes from the constant familial abandonment she experiences, and her lack of autonomy prevents her from forming an identity outside of the familial unit.

Sir Thomas abandons Fanny just as she was becoming accustomed to life at Mansfield. His motives for his departure are mostly selfish, and he disregards the well being of his family in lieu of potential economic gain:

The necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light, and the hope of its utility to his son, reconciled Sir Thomas to the effort of quitting the rest of his family, and of leaving his daughters to the direction of others at their most present interesting time of life. He could not think Lady Bertram quite equal to supply his place with them, or rather to perform what should have been her own; but in Mrs. Norris’s watchful attention and in Edmund’s good judgment, he had sufficient confidence to go without fears for their conduct (MP 28).

Sir Thomas becomes another absent father to his family; neglecting the welfare of his children for his own economic profit. His trust in Mrs. Norris is unfounded, and even his confidence in Edmund’s good judgment is slightly misplaced. Fanny and the Bertram girls are in a precarious position, and many times during his absence are in need of guidance and censure. Even Edmund, another paternal figure, abandons Fanny; he loses
interest in her. Edmund is pleased when Fanny sacrifices her horse for Miss Crawford, and allows Fanny to go without exercise for four days (MP 63). Once again, at Sotherton, he abandons Fanny, forgetting about her while he walked with Miss Crawford. Fanny is secluded, once again, from participating in the family and in the society of the others: “The pain of having been left a whole hour, when he had talked of only a few minutes, nor to banish the sort of curiosity she felt, to know what they had been conversing about all that time; and the result of the whole was much to her disappointment and depression” (MP 93). Every potential paternal figure in the novel abandons her: her father abandons her by gleefully sending her out of his house, her brother William abandons her for the navy, Sir Thomas Bertram abandons her for Antigua, and Edmund abandons her for Miss Crawford.

Fanny has been deprived of familial intimacy her whole life. She craves a close relationship with a paternal figure, and expresses joy at the suggestion of a family gathering collectively for prayer: “A whole house assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!” (MP 77). Fanny’s desire for a connected family, where each has a function for the better of the whole, is indicative of her anguish over her paternal instability. Fanny’s self-confidence becomes so destroyed, that when she does receive attention, she feels it unwarranted. William and Edmund are the only two male characters who invest any time in Fanny (with exception of Mr. Crawford later on), and she devotes herself to them entirely. They seem to help fill the role of the loving paternal presence that is missing from her life: “In return for such services, she loved him (Edmund) better than anyone in the world except William; her heart was divided between the two” (MP 13). She seeks validation for her self through these two male characters,
and longs for approval and affection from them. William is an idyllic figure to her because of his continual absence, and so she idealizes him and his relationship to her. Edmund, on the other hand, is present in her life, and attempts to father her throughout the novel by instructing and teaching her his own system of values: “But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right? ’Oh! Yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did…’ ‘I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong – very indecorous’” (MP 56-57). Edmund attempts to instill in Fanny the decorum lacking in Mary. He delights when she and him are of the same mind: “Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject, there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration for Miss Crawford” (MP 58). Edmund fulfills the missing role of moral teacher in Fanny’s life.

The absence of Sir Thomas produces disorder at Mansfield Park. His children are given allowance to engage in impropriety and wrongful behavior, because there is no father figure there to guide or reproach them. They determine to act out a play “Lovers Vows”, which is highly inappropriate subject matter, particularly for Maria, as she is engaged to Mr. Rushworth. Maria’s agreement to take part in the play has potentially serious consequences. Her desire to capture Mr. Crawford’s attentions inspires her to take the part of Agatha, despite Edmund’s strong warnings against it. Her mother could possibly intercede, but she fails to intervene: “Do not act anything improper, my dear, said Lady Bertram. Sir Thomas would not like it” (MP 127). She does nothing further to stop Maria’s imprudence; Maria recognizes her mother’s words as empty, and so takes the part. Edmund tries to stop the whole affair by pleading his father’s disapproval:
It would be very wrong. In a private light, private theatrics are open to some objections, but as we are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt anything of the kind. It would show great want of feeling on my father’s account, absent as he is, and in some degree of constant danger (MP 113).

His pleas are disregarded, however, reinforcing Austen’s refusal to allow certain characters full access to the paternal role. Tom, in fact, takes advantage of the paternal absence and of Edmund’s lack of authority over the household by pleading with the others to proceed in spite of their paternal obligation: “And as to my father’s being absent, it is so far from an objection, that I consider it rather as a motive…” (MP 113) Edmund is not convinced, however, and again strongly discourages the play: “My father wished us as school boys to speak well, but he would never wish his grown up daughters to be acting plays. His sense of decorum is strict… It would be taking liberties with my father’s house in his absence which could not be justified” (MP 115). Edmund is right; he is the only one emboldened enough to say the play is inappropriate. He desperately tries to guide the others in the absence of his father, and still they ignore him. His absolute sternness lessens and he soon concedes to acting in the play. Fanny is appalled by his inconsistency: “After all his objections – objections so just and public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent” (MP 141). Fanny urges him to stay strong in his principles, but he is defeated. Edmund acknowledges the powerlessness to act as father when given no authority: “As I am now, I have no influence, I can do nothing” (MP 139). His authority is limited to suggestion, not action.
Nobody could lead the family and prevent chaos and imprudence other than Sir Thomas. He is the Patriarch and his presence glues the family together. In his absence the familial unit fell apart:

Sir Thomas saw all the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party, and at such a time...he felt it too much indeed for many words; and having shaken hands with Edmund, meant to try and lose the disagreeable impression, and forget how much he had been forgotten himself as soon as he could, after the house had been cleared of every object enforcing the remembrance, and restored to its proper state (MP 169).

Sir Thomas returns, disappointed in his family, and regretful of his children’s misconduct during his absence. His presence in the house quickly restores order, and he resumes his position as Head. Weak, little Fanny is ironically the only character to resist what she knows to be wrong in the absence of paternal authority. She is set apart from the others: “she was beyond their reach” (MP 141), and in the end she proves herself to be more loyal and constant than all of the Bertram children. Though her psychological disposition is severely altered by paternal instability, she develops and maintains self sufficiency and integrity unmatched by the other characters.

Fanny is again forced to uproot to the Prices, but this time she comes more self aware and composed. She seeks a counter to Sir Thomas’s tyranny in Mr. Price, only to discover her own father’s flawed character and insufficient paternal command of the family. Her father is absent from her even when she returns home; he is entirely disinterested in her: “There were soon only her father and herself remaining; and he taking out a newspaper – the loan of a neighbor, applied himself to studying it, without
seeming to recollect her existence" (MP 348). There is no relationship formed upon her return home, nor any evidence of one having ever existed. If Fanny ever thought, while at Mansfield, that the Price home was a better option, she is now awakened to the sad reality. Though Sir Thomas treated her with harshness, and dictated her thoughts, his home is far superior to the slums of the Price household. Her father’s constant drunkenness, incivility, and inattention to herself and her sisters is substandard, even according to her low paternal expectations. Fanny Price is not as horribly weak and fragile as some have accused; she is the first and only Austen heroine to openly state her disrespect for her father. She is genuinely disgusted at the state of her home:

And the home he had left her in was – Fanny could not conceal it from herself – in almost every respect, the very reverse of what she could have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be. She could not respect her parents, as she had hoped. On her father, her confidence had not been sanguine, but he was more negligent to his family, his habits were worse, and his manners coarser, than she had been prepared for. He did not want abilities; but he had no curiosity, and no information beyond his profession...he swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross. She had never been able to recall anything approaching tenderness in his former treatment of herself. There had remained only a general impression of roughness and loudness; and now he scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke (MP 354)
Her home is in dreadful conditions, and she cannot but help despair it. Her father is not only negligent but displays all the attributes untoward in a paternal figure. His entire person is revolting and Fanny cannot respect him and even feels shame because of him: "She was ashamed, and she would have been more ashamed of her father, than of all the rest" (MP 365). Though her entire family embarrasses her, she holds her father responsible for the family's misconduct. He is the head-of-the-house, and as such is responsible for the moral education of his children and the stability of the home. He fails as a father and disappoints all her hopes for him.

Fanny, like Marianne and Catherine, overcomes the paternal absence in her life, and is self sufficient by the end of the text. Her constant paternal instability formulates her self timidity, which is not entirely lost, but it also forces her to become autonomous from paternal figures. Fanny experiences paternal disappointment continuously in the text, but in the end she returns to Mansfield, and is happily received and even respected by the Bertrams. The absence of the father has severe effects on the daughters' psychological, economical, and social well being, and though each heroine is adversely affected by her father’s absence, they all surmount the patrilineal and patriarchal deterrents of eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain. Austen’s contumacy to submit to paternal norms is evidenced in all three of the novels, as she allows her heroines autonomy from a father presence. She subverts societal conventions by defining absence as father, and presence as daughter.
This chapter will entail a discussion of the psychological effects of the deficient father/daughter dyad in the novels of Jane Austen, and on the potential for catastrophe within the dyadic relationship. *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Persuasion* all illustrate father figures who are deficient in their role as the Patriarch. Mr. Bennet may be the most capable father of the three, but he is certainly equal or owing in his deficiencies as father to the Bennet girls. His quick wit and sarcasm make him a likeable character, and his desire to laugh at the ridiculous, including his family, is at first endearing. His apathy to his wife and girls, however, soon compromises his family into nearly irredeemable shame, forever staining his paternal position within the home. Conversely, Mr. Woodhouse is entirely devoted to his daughter, Emma; nevertheless, Austen demonstrates early in the text that he is not his daughter’s equal in mind and thought. Though he cares for his daughter immensely, Mr. Woodhouse’s inability to protect and command Emma impedes her maturation for a long period of time. Lastly, Sir Walter Elliot is conceivably the most ridiculous father figure in all of Austen’s novels; he is seen more as a caricature than a viable character. His vanity and self-absorption consume him and leave no room for paternal guidance to his daughter Anne Elliot. Anne is possibly the least affected by her father’s deficiencies, but his lack of judgment and propriety is certainly not left unnoticed or unfelt. All three of these fathers are weaker in character and ability than their daughters, and often times the daughter must reverse roles and transcend into the Patriarch position. Austen’s creation of these present but insufficient father figures strengthens the daughters’ capacity for self-entitlement, and grants each of
them an authority unheard of in early nineteenth century Britain. These representations of the deficient father, essentially, assist in laying the groundwork for Austen’s re-definition of the nuclear family in and through her novels.

Mr. Bennet remains the most complex father figure in all of Austen’s novels. At many times, he is absent in mind though present in body. His indifference and inattentiveness to his family is the origin of his younger daughters’ immaturity and foolishness. Not only does he display negligence to his family, but he withdraws from his role as a father perhaps more so than any other of Austen’s fathers. He behaves as though Elizabeth were a companion to him, rather than a daughter, and cares for her only as she provides him with sensible conversation and witticisms that his other daughters are incapable of. His foolish wife causes him to withdraw from his family and to look on the world with mockery and amusement, thus prohibiting any chance of real engagement with his family.

Austen wastes little time in demonstrating the absurdity of the Bennet marriage. Mrs. Bennet is dissimilar to her husband in nearly every possible way; she cannot comprehend her husband’s mockery toward herself and her children because her mind is so underdeveloped: “Mr. Bennet was so odd a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humor, reserve, and caprice, that the experience of three and twenty years had been insufficient to make his wife understand his character. Her mind was less difficult to develop” (PP 202). Mr. Bennet must live with the fact that he married a ridiculous woman, and so he chooses to seek amusement from her, rather than resentment or anger for having so poorly chosen a mate in his youth and indiscretion. Not only does Mr. Bennet not give Mrs. Bennet respect as his wife and partner, but he disrespects her wholly as his
daughters’ mother. He encourages her nonsensical fits – such as when Mr. Bingley first moved to Netherfield – by maintaining disinterest. Her obliviousness to his cynicism only causes him to ridicule her more. The Bennet’s unequally matched marriage stunts their relationship, thus stunting Mr. Bennet’s relationship with his children:

The father’s influence on children cannot be adequately conceptualized only in terms of father-child interactions, but must be understood in terms of a broader family context. Fathers affect multiple dimensions of family functioning and are, in turn, themselves influenced by multiple factors outside of their relationship with their children. Adequate conceptualization of the effects of fathers requires recognition of this interplay of multiple family systems. In particular, marital quality at the same time is a product of the father’s influence and affects the father’s functioning in the family (Cummings and O’Reilly 49).

Mr. Bennet’s negative relationship with his wife adversely affects his daughters functioning. His poor marital quality impairs any chance of a normative, healthy relationship with his daughters. He rejects his status in the hierarchal family unit, and instead accedes to the position of the detached bystander: “Mr. Bennet is a reluctant patriarch who does not explicitly vaunt or even want his patriarchal authority. He has taken refuge in mockery just as he takes refuge in his library – both are gestures of disengagement from the necessary rituals of family and society” (Park 110). He speaks and interacts with his wife only when he must, and infantilizes her with his sarcasm and caprice. He indulges Mrs.Bennet and encourages her hysterics: “Mr. Bennet was among the earliest of those who waited on Mr. Bingley. He had always intended to visit him,
though to the last ensuring his wife that he shall not go; and till the evening after the visit was paid, she had no knowledge of it” (PP 202-203). Mr. Bennet knows the implications and the importance of visiting Mr. Bingley; the preparations of the intended visit have already been made, yet he still allows his wife to throw a fit, never including her in his plans. His conduct towards his wife reinforces his apathy for her and his family, and his absolute lack of regard for the betterment of the family unit.

There is a game being played inadvertently by one and most purposefully by the other throughout the novel. Mr. Bennet’s only way to remain sane is to play this game with his wife and children. He wishes his wife’s expectations of Mr. Bingley to be frustrated: “He had rather hoped that all his wife’s views on the stranger would be disappointed” (PP 206). His esteem of himself and his want of amusement overshadows his regard for his daughters. He is a wholly selfish character and wishes only for that which will amuse and entertain himself. His words and actions are atypical of a father in early nineteenth century Britain:

When a gentleman was casting round for a husband for his daughter in the early Georgian matrimonial market, his first considerations were security, family, title, and land. Matrimony was not narrowly about love and bliss, but involved wider matters of family policy, securing honor, lineage, and fortune – and families were patrilineal (Porter 26).

Even in the most mercenary sense, Mr. Bingley’s attachment to one of his daughters would mean security for not only her future but possibly the future of his other daughters as well. Mr. Bennet would rather play the game, however, and see his wife throw another fit: if not for his own amusement, for ill-fated revenge on the wife that has caused him to
isolate himself from his peers. His careless resistance to becoming an integral part of the family unit causes family ignominy.

Mr. Bennet gains a sense of superiority by being far more intellectually capable than his wife. He disparages his wife and children perpetually throughout the text, something that Elizabeth later reflects on with shame. His disdain for his children is a direct outpouring of his disdain for his wife: “After listening one morning to their effusions on this subject Mr. Bennet coolly observed: ‘From all that I can collect by you manner of talking, you must be two of the silliest girls in the country. I have suspected it some time but now I am convinced’” (PP 215). Mrs. Bennet’s juvenileness prevents her from seeing the veracity of her husband’s claims, and of seeing her children in any negative light:

“All I am astonished, my dear, that you should be so willing to think your children silly. If I wished to think slightingly of anyone’s children it should not be my own, however.”

“If my children are silly I must hope to always be sensible of it.”

“Yes, but as it happens, they are all of them very clever.”

“This is the only point, I flatter myself, on which we do not agree. I had hoped that our sentiments coincided in every particular, but I must so far differ from you as to think our two youngest daughters uncommonly foolish” (PP 215).

Mr. Bennet’s speech reflects, once again, his desire to withdraw from his designated position as the alpha male, head-of-the-house. His indolence in commanding his family deficiency represents the archetypal father figure established through history:
Patriarchy meant, in practice, an abundant willingness to intervene in children’s lives. Fathers played a great role in arranging or forbidding marriages, guiding choices of training, and in cases of dispute, they assumed control over children from their wives. Patriarchy, Western-style, also meant firm discipline. Fathers administered frequent physical punishment (Stearns 33).

Mr. Bennet does not intervene in, nor discipline his children’s lives. He indulges in his wife’s foolishness and laughs at his daughters’ ridiculousness. There is not one attempt made to correct their paths and train them to be the ideal daughters he envisions, the ‘Elizabths’ whom he would proudly introduce into society. He does not desire involvement in the child rearing process by correction and discipline; rather, he is contented with mocking them. He lacks character and integrity by telling his wife that this may be their only disagreement, when the entire text is unclear if they have ever in the history of their relationship agreed upon anything. His actions, or inaction, function as an impetus, which slowly deters his daughters from developing a healthy sense of self completion.

Mr. Bennet’s superiority complex affects more than just his relationship with his daughters; rather, he seems to ridicule nearly every character within the text. His contempt and disdain for his fellow companions is a way of life. He regards most of the other characters as nonsensical, and he takes real enjoyment in pointedly observing their silliness: “Mr. Bennet’s expectations were fully answered. His cousin was as absurd as he had hoped, and he listened to him with the keenest enjoyment…” (PP 231). He delights in Mr. Collins absurdity and takes equal pleasure when Charlotte Lucas
determines to accept his proposal to her: “For it gratified him, to discover Charlotte Lucas, whom he had been used to think tolerably sensible, was as foolish as his wife, and more foolish than his daughter” (PP 268). Mr. Bennet becomes more and more narcissistic throughout the text, everything must relate back to himself, and he always must retain his superior position in conjunction with the other characters. His intellectual supremacy fuels his pride and his egotism; his self-importance is ultimately a huge factor in his failure as a father.

Mr. Bennet is worse than an absent father, because, though he is present, he allows his family to deteriorate right in front of him. He recognizes his wife’s foolishness, even ridicules it, but still allows her to have primary influence over his children’s lives. He becomes so isolated in the text from his daughters that he cannot act as a father to them. He seeks solace in his library: “In his library he had been always sure of leisure and tranquility, and though prepared to meet with folly and conceit in every other room in the house…” (PP 238). While every other room in the house is subject to some sort of ridiculousness, his library will always remain his serene, quiet place. He lives in another world a part from his wife and daughters through his books, and his only purpose in engaging in some sort of conversation with his family is per his own amusement. He willfully loses himself in books and into realities that are not his own: “They found Mr. Bennet still up. With a book he was regardless of time” (PP 206). His absorption in his thoughts and books prevents him from facing the realities which are right before him, thus inhibiting any chance of his active participation in the home.

One exception to Mr. Bennet’s aversion to the other characters is his daughter Elizabeth. He openly states his favor of her in the text: “They have none of them much
to recommend them; they are all silly and ignorant like other girls; but Lizzy has something more of quickness than her sisters” (PP 202). While Mr. Bennet casts his other daughters away, he looks on Elizabeth with preference and esteem. Elizabeth happens to encompass many qualities of her father’s personality; she has sense and wit that the other girls, particularly Mary, Kitty, and Lydia, lack. She has her father’s stubbornness, sense of humor, admiration of reading, and even his prejudice. Elizabeth is superior to her younger sisters because of her sense of self; she need not the approval that Mary seeks or the male attention that Lydia and Kitty crave. Elizabeth is one of the few characters who are completely rounded; she is fully capable of commanding herself, and she attempts to command her sisters as well. Mr. Bennet’s relationship to Elizabeth resembles more of a companionship than a typical father/daughter dyad of the early nineteenth century. Her absence from the home is felt deeply:

But their father, though very laconic in his expressions of pleasure, was really glad to see them; he had felt their importance in the family circle. The evening conversation, when they were all assembled, had much lost its animation, and almost all of its sense, by the absence of Jane and Elizabeth (PP 232).

If there was ever doubt before, this statement confirms Mr. Bennet’s definite regard for the eldest daughters; he greatly feels their absence and expresses genuine pleasure at their return. Whether his intent is pure remains questionable. His regret at their absence is probably more for selfish pleasure than legitimate sorrow at not being actively involved in their lives. Their presence in the house makes his own time less sufferable because they are the only two logical enough for him to converse and joke with. Although
Elizabeth is eager to leave home again with her aunt and uncle, she does grieve over leaving her father: "The only pain was in leaving her father, who would certainly miss her, and who, when it came to the point, so little liked her going, that he told her to write him, and almost promised to answer the letter" (PP 280). There is an attachment between Elizabeth and her father that is atypical of his other relationships in the text. There seems to be more distress over a loss of companionship, than fatherly love in Elizabeth’s departure. Elizabeth acknowledges her father’s isolation from the others and is disheartened by the negative effect her absence will likely have on him. She protests Lady Catherine when appealed to stay longer, sure of her father’s need of her. Lady Catherine notes the lunacy in such a statement: “Oh! Your father of course may spare you, if your mother can. Daughters are never of so much consequence to a father” (PP 311). Mr. Bennet and Elizabeth’s relationship is uncharacteristic of an archetypal father/daughter dyad in Georgian England.

Elizabeth respects her father, a distinctive characteristic in Austen’s heroines, and delights in his companionship, just as he does in hers. She references her high regard for her own father in point with Mr. Darcy’s character: “Neither could anything be urged against my father, who, though with some peculiarities, has abilities which Mr. Darcy himself need not disdain, and respectability which he will probably never reach” (PP 299). Elizabeth’s love for her father and respect for him as highly intelligible is evident throughout the text; however, she does show some disdain for his treatment of his wife and daughters. It is Elizabeth who feels the discomfort at the Netherfield Ball over Mary’s performance, not her father. She is fearful of Mary embarrassing not only herself but the entire Bennet family. Mr. Bennet only moves to stop Mary from singing again
when prompted by Elizabeth, and his help only makes the scene worse. He is incapable of offering real assistance, choosing instead to patronize Mary in front of the others:

She looked at her father to entreat his interference, lest Mary should be singing all night. He took the hint, and when Mary had finished her second song, said aloud: “That will do extremely well child. You have delighted us long enough. Let the other young ladies have time to exhibit.” Mary, though pretending not to hear, was somewhat disconcerted; and Elizabeth sorry for her, and sorry for her father’s speech, was afraid her anxiety had done no good (PP 254).

Elizabeth looks to her father, as a daughter would to the Patriarch of the family, to interject and right the situation. Mr. Bennet’s behavior is problematic; he either does not know how to correct the scene, or he is simply unwilling to humble himself and make a real effort at fathering Mary. His interference heightens the awkwardness of the scene, and Elizabeth regrets ever pleading for his intervention. His inability to correct and guide the girls forever reduces him in Elizabeth’s eyes.

Elizabeth’s recognition of her father’s neglect to command his children is felt deeply, and she believes the responsibility to protect her younger sisters falls back on herself. If Mr. Bennet refuses to partake in his fatherly duties, than she must fulfill the role of the father in her sisters’ lives:

Her father, contended with laughing at them, would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters; and her mother, with manners so far from right herself, was entirely insensible of the evil. Elizabeth had frequently united with Jane in an endeavor to check the
imprudence of Catherine and Lydia; but while they were supported by their mother's indulgence, what chance could there be for improvement? Catherine, weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia's guidance, had always been affronted by their advice; and Lydia, self-willed and careless, would scarcely give them a hearing. They were ignorant, idle, and vain (PP 312).

Austen inverts the father/daughter roles, as Elizabeth attempts to fulfill the role her father has left lacking. Elizabeth's endeavor to command the girls is not fruitful, however, because she lacks the male presence, the paternal authority necessary in rectifying their behavior. Consequently, she is left to advise the girls as best as she can within her role as the elder sister. Though Austen borders on a complete role reversal between Elizabeth and Mr. Bennet, she does not allow her characters to transcend roles entirely. She sets limits. Austen creates strengths in Elizabeth to compensate for her father's deficiencies; nevertheless, she does not grant her heroines the authority to ascend the hierarchical order. Hence, Elizabeth can never be fully influential as a Patriarchal figure; her subordinate position in the family does not allow it.

Although Elizabeth can never completely exceed beyond her role as the elder sister, she continually guides her father in regard to her younger sisters. She is the only character who actively recognizes the folly of their behavior and the potential consequences of not repairing their character. She urges her father to prohibit Lydia from taking leave with Mrs. Forester:

She could not help secretly advising her father not to let her go. She represented to him all the improprieties of Lydia's general behavior, the
little advantages she could derive from the friendship of such a woman as Mrs. Forester, and the probability of her being yet more imprudent with such a companion at Brighton, where the temptations must be greater than at home (PP 321).

Elizabeth embodies those traits of paternity that Mr. Bennet is deficient in; she has discernment and wisdom and the capability of seeing the error of her sister’s ways. Elizabeth is logical and presents a strong, sensible case to her father of why her sister should not be permitted to leave her home. Nevertheless, Mr. Bennet ignores her pleas and either does not fully listen or does not agree with her claims. Elizabeth desperately begs him to father his child, as she lacks the authority:

If you, my dear father, will not take the trouble of checking her exuberant spirits, and of teaching her that her present pursuits are not to be the business of her life, she will soon be beyond the reach of amendment. Her character will be fixed, and she will, at sixteen, be the most determined flirt that ever made her family ridiculous...Oh! My dear father, can you suppose it be possible that they will not be censured and despised wherever they are known, and that their sisters will not often be involved in the disgrace? (PP 321-322).

After all these compelling arguments that Elizabeth earnestly pleads, Mr. Bennet is still immobile in his role as father. His character is so absolutely stagnant that it is impossible for him to now take action. His inertia is testament to the fact that he does not truly care for Elizabeth, he cannot possibly. She beseeches him again and again to perform his function as a father and the Patriarch of their family, and still he refuses. His life has
centered around his inattentiveness to his family, and so it will continue: “At any rate, she cannot grow many degrees worse without authorizing us to lock her up for the rest of her life” (PP 322). Mr. Bennet’s sarcasm carries him through to the end. Nothing can be done to convince him of the necessity of his intervention back into the family unit. It appears as though he was semi-involved at one point, which explains the drastic change in character of his eldest daughters, as opposed to his youngest daughters. His inaction as a father and as a husband drastically alters his daughters’ (Kitty, Lydia, and possibly Mary’s) character. It is not unintentional, that his involvement in one daughter’s life, who happens to be sensible and possess many of those characteristics that a young woman should in the early nineteenth century, and detachment in the younger children’s lives, who happen to be the silliest and most foolish girls in all the country, portrays what a father’s influence can and will do in the lives of his children. The daughters who lack a father presence are adversely altered and made complete silly.

Elizabeth acknowledges that her father has many weaknesses as the Patriarchal figure in the household, and she marks his weakness of character as a direct result of his inability to control his family:

Elizabeth, however, had never been blind to the impropriety of her father’s behavior as a husband. She had always seen it with pain; but respecting his abilities, and grateful of his affectionate treatment of herself, she endeavored to forget what she could not overlook, and to banish from her thoughts that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible. But she had never felt so strongly as now, the
disadvantages which must attend the children of so unsuitable a marriage, nor ever been so fully aware of the evils arising from ill-judged a direction of talents; talents which rightly used, might at least have preserved the respectability of his daughters, even if incapable of enlarging the mind of his wife (PP 324).

Ultimately, Elizabeth blames her father for Lydia and Kitty's behavior. Though she does respect him and has formed an unusually close relationship with him, she, nevertheless, cannot close her eyes to the folly of his behavior toward his wife and children. Although his intentions were never malicious, his indifference impedes the developmental nature of his three daughters, causing them to become immature, spoiled, and foolish girls. The severe damage caused by his inertia as father of the house creates dysfunction within the familial unit, and is the eventual cause of Lydia's shameful conduct.

Austen employs Elizabeth as the soundboard for future devastation if the Bennet's do not manage their children. She warns her father twice to the delicacy of the situation, yet he refuses to listen. When the consequences of Mr. Bennet's non-involvement finally come to fruition, Elizabeth is angered:

Lydia has no brothers to step forward; and he might imagine, from my father's behavior, from his indolence and the little attention he has ever seemed to give to what was going forward in his family, that he would do as little, and think as little about it, as any father could do, in such a matter (PP 348).

Lydia is an example of what a young girl might fall into if given every indulgence and no direction or discipline. Rules or an outline of proper conduct was never established
between Lydia and her father, and she was never made to spend her time on anything worthwhile. Her character is adversely affected by Mr. Bennet’s negligence and mockery: “There is little doubt that fathers do influence in significant degree the manner in which their daughters experience their femininity vis-à-vis the man. His loving affirmation can greatly assist her to happy acceptance of her female role, while his rejection or mockery can cause deep injury which may never heal” (Stevens 18). Lydia rejects her role, much like Maria Bertram, by rebelling against social decorum and family obligation. She redefines the passive, docile daughter by foolishly and actively seeking that which was forbidden and ridiculed in late eighteenth century Britain in the form of elopement. She has none of the moral principle that was wanting in a young girl of her time, and all of the vulgarity and audacity that was despised. Her crime was incomprehensible in the historical context:

A daughter’s elopement, in the eighteenth-century cultural imagination, is the most flagrant offence to patriarchy in general and the most humiliating insult to a patriarch himself – due mainly to an economic reason, that of endangering the value of the female body and sexuality, but also in the cultural myths concerning female chastity and male ownership of their bodies (Park 210).

She was never taught respectability and prudence, and so her conduct should not be surprising to the reader. Mr. Bennet’s shock over the news shows how disillusioned he really is. Though he shrugged her off as “silly”, he never fully realized the evils that could result from so little guidance. His discernment is deficient, as so many of his character qualities are, especially as the exemplar of the familial unit. When Mr. Bennet
does finally attempt to take some course of action it is too late, the damage has already been secured (PP 353).

Mr. Bennet’s discernment is not just faulty in seeing through his daughter’s real character, but also in judging Wickham’s character. He encourages Elizabeth to take an interest in Wickham, proving once again that even Elizabeth too must suffer as victim to his poor parenting. He passes complimentary judgment on Wickham too suddenly to really know the true character of the man he is suggesting to his daughter: “Let Wickham be your man. He is a pleasant fellow, and would jilt you creditably” (PP 273). Once again, while reflecting on her father’s opinion, Elizabeth notes his admiration of Wickham: “My father’s opinion of me does me the greatest honor; and I should be miserable to forfeit it. My father, however, is partial to Mr. Wickham” (PP 277). Had Mr. Bennet known or made any real attempt to know the true character of Wickham, he would have been appalled at his suggesting him to her. He could have very possibly saved the family from embarrassment and indignity by ending Wickham’s visits then and there. He, however, is just a passerby in the affairs of his family, and so never truly takes interest in knowing the motivations behind Wickham’s rapid sensation with his family. Mr. Bennet does not know one substantiating quality in Wickham, yet he encourages him anyhow. This is just another illustration of his inadequacies as a father and as the Patriarch of the family. Even Mrs. Gardiner can see through Wickham’s falseness and suspects deceit: “Your father would depend on your resolution and good conduct, I am sure. You must not disappoint your father” (PP 277). Ironically, her father’s judgment is severely lacking, and thus Elizabeth must rely on her own discernment in judging Wickham’s character. She later acknowledges that her misconceptions of Wickham were
severe, and she had been foolish in her acceptance of him: “She was now struck with the
impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her
before. She saw the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done, and the
inconsistency of his professions with his conduct” (PP 307). Elizabeth had no father
figure to guide her when she was making those first crucial discernments on Wickham’s
color. More a companion than a father, Mr. Bennet failed in his paternal obligation
to Elizabeth when it was most pertinent by his misjudgment of Wickham’s authenticity.
It is not until Mr. Darcy corrects her of Wickham’s true nature that she looks back in awe
of having been so deceived, as his decorum was so misplaced.

The first real hint of emotion from Mr. Bennet occurs after Lydia’s poor judgment
in running off with Wickham. Jane writes: “as to my father, I never in my life saw him
so affected” (PP 343). It is not until this point in the novel that the reader can at all
believe that Mr. Bennet does have some depth. He has thus far been so wholly
indifferent to his daughters’ affairs; he finally confirms that there is some sentiment
between him and his family. He takes responsibility for Lydia to Elizabeth: “Who
should suffer but myself? It has been my own doing, and I ought to feel it. No Lizzy, let
me once in my life feel how much I have been to blame. I am not afraid of being
overpowered by the impression. It will pass away soon enough” (PP 357). He finally
realizes his faults as a father; his absence in his daughters’ lives is a direct result of his
own indiscretion. Although he admits to feeling blameworthy for his daughter’s
impertinence and for having been previously withdrawn from his family, there is still
something missing in the apology. It seems a little narcissistic and self-pitying, and his
sarcasm is still at play with his last statement. He says that he is the person most wrongly
at fault, yet his guilt has no longevity. Though he is sorrowful now, his behavior does not reflect change.

Does a father who refuses to discipline and correct his child, really love and care for the child? Not according to the Judeo-Christian tradition of child-rearing and fatherhood:

My son do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights” (NKJV Proverbs 3:11-12); “Hear my children the instruction of a father, and give attention to know understanding” (NKJV Proverbs 4:1); “Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (NKJV Proverbs 22:15); “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die” (NKJV Proverbs 23:13); “Correct your son and he will give you rest; yes, he will give you delight to your soul” (NKJV Proverbs 29:17); “And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord (NKJV Ephesians 6:4).

According to this tradition, a father disciplines his child out of love. Surely Austen was well familiar with these passages, as her own father was a clergyman; she was not a stranger to the church and to Scriptures. Mr. Bennet will not discipline his daughters; he refuses to correct them even when prodded by Elizabeth. According to this Judeo-Christian archetype of fatherhood, Mr. Bennet fails miserably as a father to his children. He cannot possibly love them on a deep and sincere level. It is not that he is unable to participate in commanding and protecting his family, he simply renounces his paternal
status by his immobility in controlling his daughters. His indifference is palpable in the novel; he does not hate them, he is merely apathetic to them.

Mr. Bennet’s unconcern for his family is the most prevalent motif in the text. It is stated and implied numerously, and nearly every major peak of the text is directly related to Mr. Bennet’s apathy: “Elizabeth saw directly that her father had not the smallest intention of yielding; but his answers were at the same time so vague and equivocal, that her mother, though often disheartened, had never yet despaired at succeeding at last” (PP 317). Mr. Bennet’s unconcern for his family results not just in family shame, but in his failure as a father:

Crisis from within the family itself, other than healthy problems, often indicate that father has failed in some way, since the routine function of father is not to handle crises, but to see that they are avoided. Thus, because internal troubles often imply some degree of paternal inadequacy, and father is the traditional key to family stability, they are the most difficult ones to manage (Benson 59).

He does not obvert crisis, but creates it, by his reluctance and refusal to father the Bennet girls. His rejection of active involvement in their lives ultimately forfeits his role as the Patriarch:

As an authority within the family, father keeps watch over his group in their strictly domestic concerns, but he is also expected to exercise control over their extramarital affairs...He stands at a crucial point of articulation between the family subsystem and that of the wider society, which is the
primary basis for his symbolic significance and the main reason that he is the family’s chief representative of the non-family world (Benson 19). He does not govern the actions of his daughters in the home, or outside of the home. Although there are brief moments when he does seem to care for his children, on deeper look, they are mostly narcissistic inductions and ultimately reflect back on his well being. Even when he wants Elizabeth’s assurance that Mr. Darcy is indeed the right man for her, he brings the discussion back to himself: “My child let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life. You know not what you are about” (PP 399). Does he truly care for Elizabeth’s well being, or is he indulging in a moment of self-reflective pity? At the very end of the text it appears that Mr. Bennet does take the smallest hint of action in Kitty’s life, as he refuses to let her visit Lydia: “her father would never consent to her going” (PP 404). Perhaps he now realizes how severely he has blundered as a father and wishes to take a more active role in the lives of Kitty and Mary. After all, this does seem to be the only decision that Mr. Bennet makes that will enhance the well being of his daughters – with the exception of allowing Elizabeth to refuse Mr. Collin’s marriage proposal. Whether he has finally succumbed to the traditional role of fatherhood, he, nonetheless, has caused acute distress in the lives of his children:

Mr. Bennet’s aloof and satirical disposition, a stalwart defense against disappointment in marriage and domestic life, by and large brings on the family’s misfortune, including Jane’s unhappiness, Lydia’s disgrace, and Elizabeth’s worsening alienation. Smug and superior, he meets his wife’s
and daughters' folly with amused indifference, affecting philosophical resignation (Gross 92).

Mr. Bennet causes family disruption and disgrace, and fails as a father to the Bennet girls. You-me Park argues that Mr. Bennet’s ineptness at fathering the Bennet girls proves the resilience of patriarchy in Britain in the late eighteenth century:

By presenting Mr. Bennet as a morally bankrupt and hapless father rather than a brutal and oppressive one, Austen ironically emphasizes the power of patriarchal authority. You cannot easily abdicate the authority because it is a position you have to negotiate with carefully whether or not you desire it. Once you are born into a society ruled by patriarchal culture, with all its rituals and trappings, you might be able to detach yourself from the rituals but not from its power structure that has very real power over disenfranchised individuals – in this instance, daughters (210).

Though the ‘power structure of the patriarchy’ does have real effects on the Bennet girls, it is nonetheless subverted by their ability to overcome the negative consequences of their father’s deficiencies, and become empowered by the end of the text. Although each daughter is seriously affected by Mr. Bennet’s apathetic fathering, they all survive and end up more self complete by the end of the text. Elizabeth is just as sensible, if not more so, and is happily engaged to Mr. Darcy. Jane, likewise, endures the familial shame that resulted from her father, and is finally happy with Mr. Bingley. Lydia, though still seemingly immature, is at least respectably married, and Kitty and Mary seem to be on the path to betterment. So despite all of Mr. Bennet’s deficiencies, each daughter retains
self significance and importance by the end of the novel and their self-completion is made more wholly recognizable.

One father’s complete neglect for his family is polarized by another’s over-fixation with his daughter. Mr. Bennet and Mr. Woodhouse are bipolar opposites in the novels. While they are both deficient in fulfilling the image of the Patriarch, they demonstrate their inadequacies differently. Mr. Bennet’s disinterestedness with his girls results in scandal, whereas Mr. Woodhouse’s fixation with his daughter Emma, results in a lack of maturity and wisdom. Mr. Woodhouse’s ridiculous behavior is the base of the plot, without it Emma would not cause chaos and disruption in the lives of the other characters. It is his inability to parent Emma that gives her leisure to do whatever she wishes and thwart with others lives. Emma demonstrates early in the text that she is head of the household; she not only is mistress of Hartfield, but acts as a paternal figure to her father in the process. The only discipline or direction that Emma receives comes from Mr. Knightly, who many times acts as a surrogate father figure to Emma.

“When Austen shows the road to Emma’s psyche, all roads lead to Mr. Woodhouse” (Gross 142). The first few paragraphs in the text describe, with fullness, the unequal relationship that existed between Emma and her father: “She dearly loved her father, but he was no companion for her. He could not meet her in conversation, rational or playful” (E 5). Emma was her father’s superior in every way: intellect, temperament, wit. She was the mind of Hartfield, the driving impetus that sustained the functions of the home. Austen implements a complete father/child role reversal in this text, as Emma is clearly the caregiver and security for her father. Emma’s authority over the home and over her father is iconic of Austen’s literature, and the power reversal between father and
child goes against every standard of living in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: “But ultimately the cult of the family merely created dolls’ houses for women to live in within a man’s world, reaffirming men’s grip on the rest of society. And ladies grew doll-like: ornamental, flirtatious, delicate, helpless” (Benson 30). Austen does not create a man’s world, however, as this is clearly Emma’s world, and she dominates every aspect of Hartfield. She acts as the strong, active force in the home and out, and Mr. Woodhouse is the ‘delicate, helpless’ father, who is reliant on her presence, much as a child is on their parent. Their roles are reversed: “Men are best suited to the active, public world, whether this be the world of work or the market, political institutions, or the various institutions of civil society. Women, by contrast, are better suited for the domestic sphere” (Dendith 129). He is infantilized in this way all throughout the text, and is never able to grow in the least as a father or as a character. Austen’s infantilization of Mr. Woodhouse illustrates his powerlessness at Hartfield. She creates in him a helpless, fearful father who cannot operate autonomously from Emma:

“What is to be done, my dear Emma? What is to be done?” Was Mr. Woodhouse’s first exclamation, and all that he could say for some time. To her he looked for comfort; and her assurances of safety, her representation of the excellence of the horses, and of James, and of their having so many friends about them, revived him a little (E 117).

This child/father role reversal is enforced several times in the text. Emma unconsciously comforts and soothes Mr. Woodhouse, as she would a scared child; and he looks to her for strength, security, and assurance, like one would to a parent. His complete dependence on Emma forges her own sense of self-completion and superiority.
prematurely in the novel. Though she acts as a paternal figure at Hartfield, she still lacks several qualities of maturity that are necessary in her road to self-realization. Nonetheless, Emma embodies all of the parental functions that are deficient in Mr. Woodhouse: “I am afraid you will be sitting up by yourself instead of going to bed at your usual time – and the idea of that would entirely destroy my comfort. You must promise me not to sit up” (E 194). Emma sets boundaries for her father; she is the rational Patriarchal figure in her father’s home. She continually looks after his physical health and well being.

Emma must accommodate her father’s peculiarities and doctor him with extreme care. She simplifies words and events for her father, that he might better understand them: “She was obliged to repeat it and explain it, before it was fully comprehended; and then, being quite new, further representations were necessary to make it acceptable” (E 230). Emma must present things to Mr. Woodhouse as one with a fully developed mind would with a simple-minded cretin. She infantilizes her father by her language towards him; she must explain things “slowly” and “repeatedly” until he begins to grasp her meaning. Her ability to out think and out wit her father gives her freedom that many girls in the early nineteenth century did not have, which ultimately causes her mischief. Mr. Woodhouse, despite how willing he was, simply could not keep up with his daughter’s conversation and thoughts: “Emma had done. Her father was growing nervous, and could not understand her” (E 257). Emma had allowances uncommon to her position because of her father’s neurotic, puerile behavior. Austen even compares Mr. Woodhouse to a child in the text: “Mr. Woodhouse had been exceedingly well amused…fortunate in having no other resemblance to a child, than in a total want of taste
for what he saw, for he was slow, constant, and methodical” (E 334). The irony in this statement is that he demonstrates nearly every quality that is generally paralleled to “childish behavior”. He has no self awareness and never shows even a slight possibility of acquiring it. He is stagnant and one dimensional, much like other fathers in Austen’s novels.

Though Emma resolved early in the text that she should never marry or leave Hartfield, her retraction of that promised vow is expected by the end of the novel. She reaffirms this notion to remain single, however, even after her and Knightly have exchanged their pledges of love to one another. She has enough awareness to know that her departure would be catastrophic to the well being of her father: “Marriage, in fact, would not do for her. It would be incompatible with what she owed her father; and what she felt for him. Nothing should separate her from her father. She would not marry, even if asked” (E 384). Emma finally reveals a moment of selflessness, as she is willing to forfeit her own happiness for the benefit of her father. In early nineteenth century England the main objective of the father was to marry his daughter suitably; Austen subverts this cultural model of fatherhood by creating a situation in which the daughter cannot marry for the betterment of the father. It is very possible that Mr. Woodhouse’s health would not be able to sustain itself if Emma moved away from Hartfield. It would destroy him, if not in health, than certainly in spirits. Emma’s commitment to stay with her father is reflective of the familial obligation that was common in her time. This duty to preserve one’s family was not atypical; the irony is that, in this case, the daughter becomes the most important member of the family, which was not at all common in the early nineteenth century. Her decision to stay with her father reflects a responsibility to
family and a deep familial love in a reversal father/child dyad. Austen’s entire storyline is uncharacteristic of nineteenth century England.

Mr. Woodhouse’s indulgence towards Emma only hinders her growth as a character. He never corrects her, as a father should to his child, or finds any fault in her at all. While Mr. Bennet was at least aware of his daughters’ foolishness, Mr. Woodhouse can see no flaws in Emma. Emma embodies perfection to her father, even in the most superficial sense. When she paints the portrait of Harriet, everyone can see how disproportioned it is except for her father, who finds an exact likeness in it (E 43). Mr. Woodhouse is blinded by his own lack of depth as a character. Emma receives her heightened view of herself from her father. She is never held accountable for any of her faults; rather, her father indulges her and behaves as if she were completely unblemished. That Emma is “mistress of his house from a very early period” is established in the first page of the text (E 1). She even has liberty to advise her father: “I shall take Emma’s advice and go for a quarter of an hour” (E 52). The role reversal in the father/daughter functions strengthens throughout the text. Mr. Woodhouse is somewhat aware of Emma’s paternal capabilities exclaiming her to be “an excellent substitute for himself” (E 52). As Emma fulfills the role of mistress, and then as Patriarch, her power over her father becomes strengthened and is manifested through her control over every detail of Hartfield: “Have you thought, my dear, where you shall put her – and what room there will be for the children” (E 73). The smallest minutia is left for Emma to decide. How could she not develop an overestimation of her self? Emma’s command over her father and her home, and her lack of any restrictions enables her to experience liberation uncommon to most daughters in Georgian Britain.
Emma is not blind to the uniqueness of her position. She commands every aspect of her life and proclaims early in the text to never wish her situation altered: “I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband’s house, as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man’s eyes as I am in my fathers” (E 78-79). Why would Emma marry and forfeit her situation? She is fully conscious of how atypical her circumstances are, and how unlikely she will ever achieve them elsewhere:

The wife’s roles were all subservient. It was not merely that she occupied roles calling for her to be different from her husband. This would not necessarily have ruled out emotional equality. It was that in several important realms she was expected to be the inferior...the husband was to take the active role, the wife the passive. In every point at which the husband’s life touched that of the surrounding world, the woman was expected not to initiate démarches (Shorter 72).

Emma operates as master of her father’s house in every way possible. She is the superior, the active participant in the home. Mr. Woodhouse perceives her as right and thinks only upon her, nothing else competes for his attention; furthermore, her father adores her and allows her every possible indulgence. Emma has persuasion over her father like no other daughter figure in all of Austen’s texts.

The novel bursts with images of Mr. Woodhouse’s ineptness. Austen completely emasculates him and creates in him every possible inadequacy. Emma is young, vibrant, and healthy. The bipolarity between her and Mr. Woodhouse presents itself in every layer of the text. Mr. Woodhouse’s neurotic idiosyncrasies prevent him from fulfilling
his role as father. He embodies several female characteristics throughout the text, such as his weakness, fearfulness, uncertainty, instability, timidity, and frailty, solidifying his complete incompetence to act in the father role: “Father is usually the prototype of adult masculinity for both his son and his daughter, and virtually all major values attaching to the masculine role are integrated within the symbolism of fatherhood” (Benson 16). He is Emma’s polar opposite materially and intellectually. Mr. Woodhouse does not possess one archetypal paternal trait; Austen constructs a father figure who is deficient in every way possible:

He was a nervous man, easily depressed; fond of everybody that he was used to, and hating to part with them; hating change of every kind. Matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable; and he was by no means reconciled to his own daughter’s marrying, nor could he ever speak with her but with compassion...and from his habits of gentle selfishness and of being never able to suppose that other people could feel directly different from himself (E 5-6).

Mr. Woodhouse is a shallow-minded, artificial, stagnant character. He is described as a one-dimensional character at the beginning of the text, and so he remains until the end. There is never a moment of depth or growth in character evidenced; he remains consistently flat throughout the novel. Furthermore, Mr. Woodhouse is foolish in his perceptions of the other characters; he is prohibited from seeing any point of view other than his own: “his own stomach could bear nothing rich, and he could never believe other people to be different from himself” (E 16). He is incapable of understanding any character in the novel, as he can only comprehend his own mind, which is vastly
underdeveloped and inferior to the other characters. His immobility is contrasted with Emma’s growth and maturation.

Austen purposefully creates the paternal image in the text as a weak, feminized character. She conceives a character who is the absolute opposite of every father archetype throughout history. He embodies everything a father should not be. Mr. Woodhouse takes pleasure in the trivialities and mindless gossip of the female characters in the novel: “She was a great talker upon little matters, which exactly suited Mr. Woodhouse, full of trivial communications and harmless gossip” (E 18). He lacks the profundity that is exhibited in his fatherly counterpart, Mr. Knightly. His character becomes more and more emasculated throughout the text, restricting any normative “masculine” attributes and heightening all “feminine” attributes: “English ladies were encouraged to conserve their strength by indulging only in teatable gossip and ornamental pastimes. As for talk, a lady’s was assumed to be small, tittle-tattle in fact: society ladies withdrew after dinner, leaving their husbands to settle their destiny” (Porter 24). Mr. Woodhouse embodies this description of an English lady in the late eighteenth century almost unerringly. Austen finalizes Mr. Woodhouse’s feminization by establishing submission in his character: “Unwelcome as it was, Mr. Woodhouse could only give a submissive sigh” (E 74). If any other trait could be questioned as to being legitimately feminine, his deference solidifies this representation. Submission is the ultimate female and child character trait historically portrayed throughout literature: “Cross-culturally, if the father and child relate on equal terms, it is universally though of as a weak power position for the father and the highest possible power position for the child. Cross-culturally the father is rarely submissive to the child” (Tripp 16). The archetypes of
fatherhood descended through myth and Judeo-Christian tradition are strong, bold, resistant figures – the reverse of Mr. Woodhouse. He is puerile, thoughtless, and incapable of change: “Her own father’s perfect exemption from any thought of the kind, the entire deficiency in him of all such sort of penetration or suspicion, was a most comfortable circumstance...she blessed the favoring blindness” (E 177). He is undeveloped and undiscerning, blind to the realities that are before him. His willful ignorance of every matter of importance sustains his infantile position in the familial unit.

Austen employs the use of language to enfeeble Mr. Woodhouse’s character. Weak adjectives are constantly utilized to describe his character and his estimation of the events taking place in the novel. He is described as being “fearful”, “weak”, and “slow-witted” numerous times in the text. Not only is he inferior in conversation with his daughter, but his verbal exchanges outside of the home are often acknowledged as insufficient: “Mr. Woodhouse, always the last to make his way into conversation...” (E 178). His negligence as a father and his nonsensical behavior in society only further illustrates his character’s intended ridiculousness. His temperament is so incredibly delicate, the distress of weather, parties, and general health are too much for him to bear. His happiness is threatened in nearly every scene in which he appears. The other characters must continuously accommodate his frailty: “Which they hoped might keep Mr. Woodhouse from any draught of air, and therefore introduce him more readily to give them the honor of his company” (E 171). Mr. Woodhouse is reliant on Emma, but also on the other characters in the novel, without whom he could scarcely survive. Mr. Woodhouse is the most vulnerable representation of the paternal image in all of Austen’s novels.
Although Mr. Woodhouse is incessantly needy, he is nevertheless beloved by the other characters. Austen wisely creates in him a slight lovability that characters' like Miss Bates lack. The difference between Mr. Woodhouse and someone like Miss Bates is his affability; he seems to be genuinely liked by the other characters in the novel. Though entirely dependant, he does not aggravate the reader, as does Miss Bates. Even with all of his idiosyncrasies, he is never directly portrayed as a nuisance to Emma. He is never bothersome to her; rather, she delights in seeing her father comfortable (E 19). At the end, when Emma decides to forego her marriage for the sake of her father, she is not resentful or angry. Their mutual affection establishes the uncommonness of their relationship in the historical context: “Relations between parents and children in the eighteenth century were expected to be formal – we would find them distant. Even in happy families respect was more visible than affection” (Porter 28). Her attachment and deep love for her father is significant, as she is the only daughter to harbor such filial devotion to her father, despite all of his deficiencies.

While Emma acts as a father figure to Mr. Woodhouse, she also attempts to father Harriet. Harriet is yet another Austen character whose father is absent from her life and is in need of guidance. Emma supplies this direction as she guides Harriet, often incorrectly, throughout the text. Her idle time allows her to freely interfere in the parenting process of Harriet. Austen creates a sub-story in the relationship between Harriet and Emma. Harriet portrays many of the puerile characteristics that Mr. Woodhouse exemplifies, and often plays the part of the obliging child while Emma is the knowledgeable father. Everything Emma says is profound to Harriet: “Whatever you say is always right” (E 68); “How nicely you talk; I love to hear you. You understand
everything” (E 70). Emma re-affirms the importance of marrying suitably to Harriet and even redefines the significance of marrying well to her: “I lay it down as a general rule, Harriet, that if a woman doubts as to whether she should accept a man or not, she certainly should refuse him…” (E 47). Harriet is too immature to see the impropriety in Emma’s words and actions. She adores her, much as Mr. Woodhouse does, and believes Emma to be faultless, also similar to Mr. Woodhouse’s impressions of his daughter. Harriet seems to act as a literary doppelganger to Mr. Woodhouse. She embodies several of his distinctive characteristics, yet she is in a position requiring parental instruction, while he is the paternal figure in the novel. Her situation is vastly different from his, yet she and he both fall into the role of the child. This attempt to parent Harriet only feeds Emma’s ego and prolongs her own self-realization. Emma’s attempt to father Harriet becomes problematic, because once again Austen sets limitations. Ultimately Emma must fail, regardless of the validity of her intentions, because Austen restricts her daughter characters from succeeding in the paternal role to their peers. It is not long before Emma’s attempts at fathering Harriet go drastically wrong. She pushes her in the wrong direction and supplies her with a false sense of self-entitlement, thus potentially ruining Harriet’s chance for happiness with Mr. Martin. Emma’s endeavor to father Harriet only impedes her own maturation and injures Harriet’s self esteem; though, in the end, Emma’s paternal trials allow her to finally see herself with true authenticity, thus modifying her conduct.

Emma seems to be given the most liberty at transcending across roles and functioning as a father. She is fairly successful in her inverted relationship with her father, while poor Elizabeth Bennet is helpless in her attempts to father Mr. Bennet.
Nevertheless, Austen seems to make a point of disallowing her to succeed in her relationship with Harriet. The sole reason that she is even at liberty to form this unusual union with Harriet is because of her father’s deficiencies and lack of command over her. Austen’s dysfunctional father figures create a discourse in her novels of a diminishing Patriarchal order. She cannot permit, however, her daughter characters to successfully father the other characters; Emma can command herself, even her home, but not a fellow companion.

“Emma, accountable to nobody but her father” is in danger of infinite self-centeredness (E 5). She has no one to make her responsible, except her lifelong friend Mr. Knightly. Mr. Knightly intercedes on behalf of Emma’s deficient father and attempts to guide her onto the correct path. Since Mr. Knightly is not Emma’s actual father, adhering to his advice is strictly of her own volition, she cannot be forced into obedience. There are a few moments in the text in which Emma’s choice to not listen to Mr. Knightly result in her humiliation (Box Hill, Harriet). When Emma does adhere to his advice he takes pleasure in her, much as a father would with his child (E 289). Mr. Knightly is constantly thrown into the paternal position; he is even classified with the fathers at the dance (E 299). He is the only character who does not cower to Emma’s strong headedness, and freely gives his opinion on matters, knowing that she will disagree entirely. He recognizes Mr. Woodhouse’s deficiencies and so takes on the paternal duty of protecting Emma himself: “He could not see her in a situation of danger without trying to protect her: it was his duty (E 322); He owed it to her, to risk anything that might be involved in an unwelcome interference, rather than her welfare; to encumber anything rather than the remembrance of neglect in such a case” (E 323). He
feels the responsibility of Emma; her well being and future happiness is dependant on his parental actions. He admonishes her when necessary and expresses his disappointment in her for her harshness to Miss Bates at Box Hill: “Perfections should not have come quite so soon” (E 343). He has a vested interest in Emma and genuinely care for the integrity of her character: “But still, from family attachment and habit, and through excellence of mind, he had loved her, and watched over her from a girl, with an endeavor to improve her, and an anxiety of her doing right, which no other creature had at all shared” (E 384). No one was so concerned that Emma do what was right than Mr. Knightley, not even her own father. Mr. Knightly was pained by her fruitless endeavors and genuinely wanted her to grow out of her selfishness and immaturity. He fulfills the role of the father by his constant correction: “I cannot see you acting wrong, without a remonstrance” (E 346). Emma at once acknowledges the veracity of his claims and is embarrassed by her behavior, much like a chastised child after being punished: “She was forcibly struck. The truth of his representation there was no denying. She felt it at her heart” (E 347). Mr. Knightly is the only character who can awaken Emma from her fantasies and force her to see reality.

Emma loves her father, but she cannot possibly learn anything from him. Their relationship stunts her from fully developing into her own sense of self:

Her relationship with her father is a complex and contradictory one. At one level, her power is enhanced by his imaginary invalidism. She is able to control the household as well as the use of the carriage...His invalidism denies her power, as well as giving it to her, in the sense that she too has to dance attendance on him (Sales 169)
Though she is given much liberty, she also serves the every need of her father, restraining her from living beyond his grasp. Mr. Knightly, on the other hand, has an overabundance of knowledge and wisdom and teaches Emma without restricting her selfhood; Emma respects him deeply and feels sincere shame for faulting in front of him. Her own father is clueless to her behavior and to her true character, giving her praise just moments after Mr. Knightly scolds her. Mr. Knightly remains wise and discerning, however, never giving Emma false praise, thus making his praise all the more meaningful: “He looked at her with a glow of regard. She was warmly gratified…” (E 356). Mr. Knightly has a definite fatherly presence in her life, and he helps her to become more self-complete by acknowledging her true character, faults included. His concerns for her are of a Patriarchal nature and reflect a paternal assiduousness. He functions as Emma’s true father in the novel.

Dysfunctional paternal figures extend past Mr. Woodhouse and Emma in the text. Frank Churchill is subject to the demands of Mrs. Churchill, and his father, Mr. Weston, is mostly absent from his life. Mr. Weston is another deficient father figure; he has absolutely no power or authority in his son’s life. His relationship to Frank is subject to Mrs. Churchill’s temperament: “but one cannot comprehend a young man’s being under such a restraint, as not to be able to spend a week with his father, if he likes it…she is so very unreasonable, and everything gives way to her” (E 113). Austen emasculates Mr. Weston as well, by prohibiting him from having any real influence in his son’s life. She is constantly redefining the nuclear family and re-defining Patriarchy in nineteenth century England by her subversion of the paternal roles throughout her novels. The men
are mostly powerless, while the women gain power and autonomy from the weaknesses of the Patriarchal figures in their lives.

Jane Fairfax is another fatherless character. Her father has died, and so she stays with the Campbells. Jane’s situation is pitied, as she is forced to live in poor circumstances with the Bates due to a lack of paternal figures in her life. Her entire life is adversely affected by her father’s absence, though she does marry well in the end. Jane’s happy ending enforces the strength that springs forth in these daughter characters who have absent or deficient fathers.

Austen’s employment of deficient fathers is a major theme in the novel. Every character she creates has a specific function within this premise, most of whom must submit to a complete reversal in roles. Emma takes more liberties and is allowed more freedom in the paternal role than any of Austen’s daughter characters. Although her father’s deficiencies slow down her maturation process, she ultimately does gain self-realization and completion, thus becoming another example of how Austen destabilizes the notions of paternity and father/child functioning in nineteenth century England.

It seems Austen’s fathers are on a downward spiral, as Sir Walter Elliot is the most ridiculous father in all of Austen’s novels. His absurdity raises questions to his validity as a real character in the text; it seems as though he is characterized as a caricature of the diminishing aristocracy in early nineteenth century England, more than a father to the Elliot girls. He lacks all qualities of goodness and wisdom, and is more concerned with the appearance of problems in his life than the actual problem itself. His addiction to good appearances and material items classifies him with some of Austen’s most superficial characters. Furthermore, his inability to father Anne, and his other two
daughters, solidifies Austen’s refusal to create normative father figures in the lives of her heroines. Persuasion is Austen’s last novel and is generally seen as more sinister than the others; as such, her last father figure is the most repulsive and nonsensical paternal representation, settling any debate of Austen’s intentional creation of her deficient father characters.

Sir Walter Elliot is an arrogant, conceited, narcissistic, self-important man. He has no respect for that which is right and true; rather, he is fascinated with minutia and trivialities. He is the epitome of everything superficial. The first paragraph in the text sets the tone for the ridiculousness of Sir Walter’s character, and how intense his pride for the Elliot name is: “He could read his own history with an interest which never failed” (P 10). His only interests are self-involved, and he cares not for his children’s well being. Sir Walter’s vanity consumes him: “Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot’s character; vanity of person and of situation” (P 10). His egotism guides his life, his behavior to his own children, the other characters in the text, and even his expenses.

Sir Walter Elliot’s relationship to Anne is obstructed because she is not as visually pleasing to him as her elder sister Elizabeth. He disregards Anne for her material simplicity and her indefinite future: “He had never indulged much hope, he had now none, of ever reading her name in any other page of his favorite work. All equality of alliance must rest with Elizabeth” (P 12). His favoritism impinges on Anne’s comfort in her own home. Anne is the only Elliot aware of their generally repulsed “self-importance” (P 39), and feels shame for her family’s misconduct. She cannot reside at Kellynch-Hall without an acute awareness of how undeserving they are to stay: “She could not but in conscience feel that they were gone who deserved not to stay, and that
Kellynch-Hall had passed into better hands than its owners” (P 118). Her sense of decorum is unfelt by her father and sisters; nevertheless, she stands firm in her own principles and is not dissuaded. When her father’s frivolity causes the family to move from their home to prevent complete financial ruin, she is deeply affected. She feels the importance of their leave more so than anyone else, but she also feels the pain of leaving her home and is saddened by her father’s lack of discretion.

Sir Walter shows no restraint in the text and no fear of consequence; he has the mind of a child, not able to fully comprehend the negative outcome of his poor decisions. His greed devours him and he cannot manage his own finances: “While Lady Elliot lived there had been method, moderation, and economy, which had just kept them within his income; but with her had dies all such right-mindedness, and from that period he had been constantly exceeding it” (P 15). His actions directly affect his daughters, yet he demonstrates an inability to feel for anyone other than himself. He is concerned solely with how his move to Bath is perceived by the other characters, always choosing appearances over family: “Sir Walter could not have born the degradation of being known to letting his house” (P 20). He does not care for what is best for his children, or even himself, but rather how his move will influence his reputation. His pride never falters; even when on the brink of bankruptcy, he still questions whether the Crofts are important enough to reside in his home. He finally consents to their application because he likes the sound of “Admiral”, and he feels that an Admiral most be perceived as far more important than a Mr. (P 25). His incapacity to think maturely nearly parallels Mr. Woodhouse’s puerile character. The difference is in Sir Walter’s arrogance and snobbery. He is despised, whereas Mr. Woodhouse is mostly beloved. Furthermore, his
poor decisions affect not only his daughters’ psychology (as Mr. Woodhouse’s did), but also their economic security. His irresponsibility with his finances can harm his daughters beyond repair, further displaying his deficiencies in his role as the paternal figure. He places himself first: “In all their dealings and intercourses, Sir Walter Elliot must ever have the precedence” (P 29). The sacrificial approach to parenting is foreign to Sir Walter, as his narcissism seizes his paternal existence.

Sir Walter’s high regard for himself naturally causes his low esteem of others. He values nominal worth far more than internal worth. Furthermore, his contempt for the nameless characterizes his poor opinion of Mr. Wentworth:

“You misled me by the term gentleman. I thought you were speaking of some man of property: Mr. Wentworth was nobody, I remember; quite unconnected; nothing to do with the Strafford family. One wonders how the names of our nobility become so common” (P 28).

His disregard for Wentworth, as someone of value, indicates his own self-absorption and vanity. His distaste for those of ungentle birth is not completely unfounded, but is a diminishing ideal:

An eighteenth century Englishman acquired his sense of public identity in relation to his birth, his property, his occupation and his social rank. Most women were defined by the honor of their presiding male. The power conferred by wealth, rank, office and status created tensions with people’s basic equality under common law and within the family of a man (Porter 48).
Sir Walter holds fast to these principles of identity through birth and remains unwilling to accept those who have come into property and wealthy, rather than inherited it. Here lies the caricature of the diminishing aristocracy. As industry increased in England at the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century, old family names were being challenged by men and women who had made a name for themselves, not by right of birth (Laslet 50). Mr. Wentworth is one of these men; hence, Sir Walter’s repugnance at the idea of someone calling him a gentleman. Sir Walter is living in the past; he refuses to accept the economic changes in society, and the consequence of defining oneself apart from familial name: “The implications of Jane Austen’s caricatures as criticism of real people in real society is brought out in the way they dovetail into their social setting (Harding 13). Sir Walter has such strong attachments to birthright and nobility that he reads his own family history tirelessly. Fiscal progress in England during this time period allowed nameless persons to make their own fortune, thus disregarding any importance to one’s birth name:

Though the social hierarchy was inegalitarian and oozing privilege (some of it hereditary), it was neither rigid nor brittle. There was continual adaptiveness to challenge individual mobility, up, down, and sideways. More than in other nations, money was a passport through social frontiers. English society was not frozen into immobilized, distended and archaic forms by the mortmain of law...new riches could be manicured into respectability (Porter 341)

Unwilling to adapt to the current social and economic progressions, Sir Walter’s archaism is evidenced again and again in the text. Good breeding is directly related to
this idea of birthright, and Sir Walter relies heavily on his reputation of good breeding: “Sir Walter, who had besides been flattered into his very best and most polished behavior by Mr. Sheperd’s assurances of his being known, by report, to the Admiral, as a model of good breeding” (P 35). These antiquated notions of good character by way of good breeding are all presented in the text as highly comical. Yes, Sir Walter may come from an established family; nonetheless, he is the most ridiculous, pretentious, imprudent character in the whole novel, thus contradicting this outmoded perception of ‘good breeding.’ If anything, he disproves all of the good values believed innate in the aristocracy; hence, his likeness to a caricature.

Sir Walter’s apathetic relationship to Anne is analogous to Mr. Bennet’s relationship with his daughters. Just as Mr. Bennet refuses to actively fulfill his paternal role within the family unit, so Sir Walter neglects all paternal responsibility to his family. He is neither tyrannical nor indulgent, but is indifferent to Anne’s choices. When Anne first made a promise of engagement to Mr. Wentworth, her father gave neither his consent nor his refusal: “Sir Walter, on being applied to, without actually withholding his consent, or saying it should ever be, gave it all the negative of great astonishment, great coldness, great silence, and a professed resolution for doing nothing for his daughter” (P 30). Austen, once again, effeminizes the paternal figure in her protagonist’s life. Sir Walter is oblique in his response to Anne’s potential engagement. He never attempts to sway her or direct her; rather, he brushes her off as someone with so little importance that the application of his advice need not apply to her. He bequeaths his paternal input to Lady Russell, leaving her to counsel young Anne on the wisdom of her attachment. He foregoes all fatherly responsibility by not directing his child.
Furthermore, when Anne expresses her desire to meet up with an old friend whose circumstances have changed for the worse, Sir Walter mocks her - but does not advise her: “Upon my word, Miss Anne Elliot, you have the most extraordinary taste! Everything that revolts other people, low company, paltry rooms…” (P 149). Not only does Sir Walter lack the good judgment to commend Anne for her visit to an old friend, but he does not refuse her visit either, even though his tone is clearly disapproving. He does not care what she does, even if he finds it awfully reprehensible. Anne relies on Lady Russell’s judgment and encouragement of the meeting far more than she does her father’s.

Lady Russell plays a crucial role in the development of Anne’s character; whereas, Sir Walter is insignificant to his daughter’s maturation process. He shames her with his incivility and humiliates her sense of social decorum:

And the door was thrown open for Sir Walter and Miss Elliot, whose entrance seemed to give a general chill. Anne felt an instant oppression, and, wherever she looked, saw symptoms of the same. The comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister. How mortifying to feel that it was so (P 213).

Anne experiences the negative communal regard for her father; she feels the embarrassment of his actions more than he will ever realize. Sir Walter’s vanity prevents him from truly seeing himself as the other characters in the text do. His peers are repulsed by him, yet he is oblivious to their contempt. Anne, once again, is pained by her father’s shameful conduct towards Mr. Wentworth at the closing of the novel:
But to have no family to receive and estimate him properly; nothing of respectability, of harmony, of good-will to offer in return for all the worth and all the prompt welcome which met her in his brothers and sisters, was a source of as lively pain as her mind could well be sensible of, under circumstances of otherwise strong felicity (P 236).

Sir Walter throws away any chance of redeeming himself, even slightly, by his mistreatment of Captain Wentworth. His disregard for every character, excepting himself, is reprehensible. His manners are, ironically, ill bred, and he causes his daughter severe mortification for having to endure his disgraceful conduct silently. Not only does he fail as a father, but he fails as a contributing member to society.

There is a strong sense of familial obligation present in the novel. As most all of Austen’s heroines respect their fathers in spite of their deficiencies, it is no surprise that Anne does the same. She is more sensible than Sir Walter, but still gives him due respect as her father. Moreover, she refuses to parent him: “But her sense of personal respect to her father prevented her. She made no reply – she left it to himself to recollect…” (P 130). She understands her father’s thoughtlessness in regards to the intimacy of his and Mrs. Croft’s relationship may well cause shame to the family, yet she still declines an intervention: “With a great deal of quiet observation, and a knowledge, which she often wished less, of her father’s character, she was sensible that results the most serious to his family from the intimacy, were more than possible” (P 37). She looks on their relationship with disapprobation and appeals to Elizabeth, but will not remonstrate her father for his impropriety. Her faith in her father is slight, and is built solely upon his role as the Patriarch, not on his abilities to command the family. Despite all of Sir
Walter’s deficiencies, he is the head of the family: “though a great deal is due to the feelings of the gentleman, and the head of the house, like your father…” (P 18). There were no Matriarchs in existence in nineteenth century England; the family unit was led by the father, and it was his prerogative to do as he chose. Though Lady Russell seems to have much more power than Sir Walter on Anne’s disposition; she, nevertheless, is only a good friend and counselor and can never take the place of a father in Anne’s life. Austen is still setting limitations as to how much power her characters are allowed or disallowed. She destabilizes these notions of Patriarchy by her creation of weak father figures, and yet she still allows the fathers to retain some power in her novels.

Austen outlines fatherly and motherly duties in the novel, though most of her characters do not abide by them. Such an example of maternal and paternal roles is given when Charles and Mary Musgrove’s child falls sick: “The child was to be kept in bed, and as amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do. This was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him, who could be of no use at home, to shut himself up” (P 56). The mother’s chief concern is to care for the children and provide a healthy place for them in the home; the father, however, need not stay within the confines of the home, as he has much more important things to do than to nurse a child back to health:

The basic assumption governing relations between the sexes, underpinning attitudes and institutions, and backed ultimately by law, was that men and women were naturally different in capacity, and so they ought to play distinct social roles. Anatomy determined destiny, and men were destined to be on top. Men were intended to excel in reason, business, action;
women's forte lay in being submissive, modest, docile, virtuous, maternal, domestic (Porter 23)

This novel portrays these roles more firmly than *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. Anne is much more submissive than Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. She feels her position in the family, and she will not step outside of her role as daughter socially or domestically. She accepts Lady Russell's disapproval of her engagement to Mr. Wentworth, and, out of respect to her and a deep sense of family obligation, she rejects the engagement. Her sense of duty proves stronger than any other Austen heroine. Her deference to the authority figures in her life mirrors the social obligation instilled in her: “Through moral precepts, authority figures, family demands, and work routines, communities effectively applied continual physical, moral and emotional pressure upon their members to conform to certain tried and tested ways of living” (Porter 144). Anne evidences the control that not only the family held, but that society held over the individual. She deferred to everybody before taking hold of that which was truly important to her. She defends her decision to reject Wentworth later in the novel: “I do not think any young woman has a right to make a choice that may be disagreeable and inconvenient to the principal part of her family, and be giving bad connections to those who have not been used to them” (P 75). Her obligation to do what is right in terms of her position as daughter, despite her own wishes, confirms her devotion to familial responsibility. Families still held a lot of sway over their children's marital choices in the historical context of the novel: “Debating whether to marry against his father’s wishes, and finally, prudently, deciding not to marry, Edward Gibbon experienced similar pressures: ‘I sighed as a lover, I obeyed as a son’” (Porter 145). Later in the novel, Anne
expresses content in her decision once again: “I was right in submitting to her, and should I have done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did ever in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience” (P 232). Her duty to family outweighs her own happiness. Anne is more submissive than any other Austen heroine, with the possible exception of Elinor Dashwood; she defers her own pleasure even more than Fanny Price – that awfully submissive creature – because, in the end, though Anne receives the affection she has been long waiting for, she still endures her loss of that affection for many years. Whereas Fanny said no to Sir Thomas Bertram, when applied to marry the cunning Henry Crawford, Anne says yes to Lady Russell, and forfeits her own chance of happiness for the betterment of her family.

Austen’s refusal to create any normative father figure in her novels is evidenced, once again, by Charles Musgrove. He is another father who is incapable of commanding his wife and children. In fact, the only normal relationship in the text, and perhaps in all of Austen, is the Crofts. They are kind, compassionate, sensible people. Austen, possibly, creates these functional characters because they are not in a parental position. It is an odd coincidence that the only normative couple in the text is childless; it is certainly an irony that those who are not in need of influencing un-informed minds, are the very people most capable of doing so. Nonetheless, Austen’s deliberate portrayal of weak father figures guides all of her novels with increasing authority. Mr. Bennet is the most apathetic, Mr. Woodhouse the most puerile, and Sir Walter Elliot the most ridiculous. While Mr. Bennet and Mr. Woodhouse both show some affection for their daughters, Sir Walter shows none, only a deep, increasing affection for himself. He is the most shallow and the most abhorrent father in all of Austen. Strangely, his ill behavior towards Anne
does not alter her self confidence too horribly, and she manages to retain an accurate self awareness. Anne feels her position in the family hierarchy more so than Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse. As she is older, her sense of decorum and familial obligation is also more firmly rooted. Her maturation process is already complete upon the beginning of the novel, so there is no huge growth experienced in her throughout the text, as is in Elizabeth and Emma. Austen’s creation of the most deficient father and the most sufficient daughter is an interesting paradox in *Persuasion*. Her fathers are becoming more and more inadequate, while her last heroine is the most adequate, implying the daughters’ ability to govern themselves. Anne retains her self importance, in spite of her father’s poor treatment of her, and proves to be a much more sensible, prudent character than her father.

Austen subverts these established impressions of hierarchical family units and paternal authority by her creation of these weak father figures. Despite all of the deficiencies presented in these three fathers, their apathetic relationships with their daughters, their inability to command their children, their general weakness of character, their ridiculousness and puerility, and their refusal to operate within the family unit as father, the daughters manage to overcome these inadequacies and learn to command and protect themselves. They destabilize every notion of Patriarchy by their ability to father themselves, and by their attempts to father the other characters as well. The inversion of father/daughter functions further establishes Austen’s challenge to undermine historical impressions of paternity. The daughter characters become the strong, dominant figures, and the fathers are the weak, puerile characters. The reversal of roles is evidenced in all three novels and subverts all prior archetypes of fatherhood.
This chapter will concentrate on the representation of the father as a despot in the novels of Jane Austen, and how the daughter’s functioning is adversely impaired by the repressive father relationship. The social and cultural accuracy in these depictions of the despotic father parallel the historical image of the father, and establish the familial hierarchy of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, absent in the other novels. Both *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* formulate images of the despotic father through General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram. Both of these characters enforce autocracy in the home, and restrict the daughters’ voice almost entirely. The negative psychological effect that these fathers have on their daughters’ physical and mental development impedes the daughters’ self autonomy throughout most of the novel. The binary opposition between Catherine and Fanny’s absent biological fathers and tyrannical surrogate fathers acts as a stimulus which eventually evokes their self completion. Catherine and Fanny are disappointed by the absent and despotic paternal figures, so they must acquire self sufficiency outside of the familial unit. Both enter the dictatorial homes of General Tilney and Sir Thomas fearful and diffident, and emerge confidant and self­possessed. Austen’s literature subverts cultural and historical norms by creating these historically accurate representations of the tyrant father, who generate just as much dysfunction as the other paternal images, and ultimately still fail in their role as father. Austen creates absent fathers, whose lack of presence in the home is detrimental to the well being of the children, deficient fathers, whose inertia and ridiculousness prevents
them from fulfilling the role of father, and then finally despotic fathers, whose totalitarian homes suppresses the daughter’s image of self, and eventually causes irreparable disruption and chaos in the father/daughter dyad.

Social and familial hierarchies are alive and flourishing in Northanger Abbey. The house embodies a kingship, with General Tilney as despot and the children as voiceless appendages to the familial whole. Catherine is still young and her mind is underdeveloped when she unwittingly enters the General’s autocracy. She defers to him out of fear and naivety. In eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain there was no other option for Catherine, but deference:

The social hierarchy was another basic fact. Few questioned that there was some natural order of high and low – that should be aristocrats and shopocrats, nobility and mobility, lords, esquires, plain Mr. and Mrs....Subjects were set into the social strata not primarily by choice, or by ‘faceless’ bureaucracy and paper qualifications, but rather their personal connections with others, esp. authority figures: fathers, masters, husbands, parsons, patrons. People had to shift for themselves. There was no all-encompassing welfare state, no comprehensive system of social serviles, guaranteeing care from cradle to grave. How one made out depended on skills in the games of deference and condescension, patronage and favor, protection and obedience, seizing opportunities and making the most out of them, without protection, the poor and the weak and the sick went under; the rich and the strong prospered (Porter 20)
Catherine lived in a patriarchal world where women and children were not allowed a presence in society. Her own familial background establishes her simplicity, as her parents are neither rich nor aristocratic; moreover, the massiveness of Northanger Abbey overwhelms her, and the forcefulness of General Tilney terrifies. Her self hood is smothered and repressed, much like Eleanor’s, in the General’s presence. She submits to his authority and listens to his judgments, quite simply, because there was no other option available to her. In Eleanor, Austen creates a daughter character who truly feels her inferior position in the house. Her father reigns over her, and she is aphasic in response to him. She must do what her father commands; the hierarchal nature of the family does not give her an alternative. The General’s power over Eleanor increases Catherine’s wonder of him, and she makes foolish presumptions about his past behavior; though in the end, she arrives at the same conclusions of his character, changing the means not the deduction. The General’s fallacious information about Catherine’s pecuniary state causes him to conceal his harshness and true despotic nature to Catherine, confusing her by his inconsistent actions towards herself and his own family. She does not detect his falseness until the end of the novel, and is disheartened by his ill treatment of her. The General’s pride and aggressive nature prevents him from forming any authentic connection with his family; furthermore, his self-importance causes him to disregard Catherine’s safety, and forces her to leave the Abbey unaccompanied and without money. In the end, Catherine gains a sense of self, and is able to discern the arrogance and impropriety of the General’s actions. While her release from his home at fist traumatizes, ultimately she is freed from his repression and able to function apart from a paternal presence.
Catherine Moorland appears just as impaired, if not more so, by General Tilney’s despotic household, than she was by the previous absence of a father in her life. Her mind remains severely underdeveloped when she reaches the Abbey, and she instinctively becomes obedient to the General: “Autobiographies show that children experienced parents as figures of direct power. In many families, youngsters were often still expected to stand silently in their parents’ presence, and obedience was the child’s golden rule” (Porter 149). The primordial archetype of authority and obedience in the paternal relationship applies significantly in this novel. General Tilney is the ultimate source of power, and his children and Catherine defer to his authority. The General fulfills the missing paternal presence in Catherine’s life, and so she obeys him as a child would a father: “but her second was of greater deference for General Tilney’s judgment; he could not propose anything improper for her; and, in the course of a few minutes, she found herself with Henry in the curricle, as happy a being as ever existed” (NA 123).

Catherine’s own lack of self awareness induces her blind trust of the judgments of whoever acts as paternal figure to her. This novel parodies the gothic; hence, Catherine’s naivety and fear of everything, she imagines the worst in the General. Her fear of him predicates her judgment on his character: “Catherine trembled at the emphasis with which he spoke, and sat pale and breathless, in a most humble mood, concerned for his children and detesting old chests…” (NA 131). Catherine allows her fear of the General and her wild imagination to determine his character; though she is accurate in her judgments of his bad temperament and poor social decorum, she is incorrect in her fears of him as murderer and torturer. The General does have a depressive hold on Catherine, however, because of her terror of him: “He turned away; and Catherine was shocked to
find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation” (NA 143). Catherine’s trepidation of the General stimulates Austen’s parody of the Gothic. She is suspicious of him not as a harsh, dictatorial father, but as a murder. Catherine’s immaturity prevents her from witnessing first hand the General’s cruelty of his children and nearly every other character in the novel; instead she requires “proofs of the General’s cruelty” (NA 155). She expects to find an ill-fed wife shut away, or some sort of object with which he murdered his wife, rather than simply recognize his ill treatment of Eleanor and Henry. Catherine’s puerility prevents her from understanding his behavior:

But the inexplicability of the General’s conduct dwelt much on her thoughts. That he was very particular in eating, she had, by her own unassisted observation already discovered; but why he should say one thing so positively, and mean another all the while, was most unaccountable! How were people at that rate to be understood? (NA 170).

Just as Catherine is incapable of understanding the duplicity of John Thorpe, so it is with the General. Her social ineptness inhibits her from discerning his true character, thus delaying her realization of not only his falseness, but also of his heartlessness towards herself and her family.

General Tilney operates as a tyrannical, egotistic ruler in his home. He is callous and thoughtless, and his arrogance prevents him from forming any type of intimacy in the text. His children are fearful of him, but they also despise him. The hierarchy of the house makes it impossible to breathe: “Well proceed by all means. I know how much your heart is in it. My daughter, Miss Moorland,” he continued, without leaving his daughter time to speak, “has been forming a very bold wish…” (NA 108). He often
speaks for his children, and his presence suffocates. His domineering behavior squelches his daughter's voice both literally and figuratively. He never stops to allow Eleanor a chance to speak, because ultimately it is only his voice that matters. He enforces such a degree of rigorousness in the home, that Catherine is at first bewildered: “This seemed the word of separation, and Catherine found herself hurried away by Miss Tilney in such a manner as convinced her that the strictest punctuality to the family hours would be expected at Northanger” (NA 128). The Tilney’s home functions as a militaristic subsystem, and Catherine must adjust to this new setting of imperious strictness and censure. She finds it odd, but not wrong. Moreover, the General’s harshness with his children causes a depression on the home. His strictness to Eleanor, specifically, is evidenced several times in the text: “but Eleanor was called back in half a minute to receive a strict charge against taking her friend around the Abbey until his return” (NA 145). His aggressive command in his children’s lives permeates every level of the text: “When the General, coming forward, called her hastily, and, as Catherine thought rather angrily back, demanding whither she was going” (NA 148). Eleanor is fearful of him and his presence oppresses her. Austen employs the use of harsh language when describing the General, giving more depth to his cruelty: “pulls the bell with violence” (NA 131); “the angry General” (NA 154); “his strict charge” (NA 145); “demanded his food” (NA 170); “resentment towards herself” (NA 198); “his contempt of her family” (NA 199). He is violent, angry, strict, demanding, resentful, and contemptuous; his despotism defines his family and his home. Moreover, his haughtiness prevents him from developing any sort of depth as a character; he is one-dimensional and superficial.
The General tries to manipulate Catherine by his falseness. His abnormal niceties to Catherine are evidenced throughout the novel. His pains to please her are contradictory to his actions and responses to his own children. Catherine senses this disjointedness, but she cannot comprehend the General’s actions, as her own mind is so vastly underdeveloped. She evidences his harsh language to his children, and perceives his cruelty as misplaced:

Had their party been perfectly agreeable, the delay would have been nothing; but General Tilney, though so charming a man, seemed always a check upon his children’s spirits, and scarcely anything was said but by himself; the observation of which, with his discontent at whatever the inn afforded, and his angry impatience at the waiters, made Catherine grow every moment more in awe of him (NA 122-123).

Catherine observes the General’s ill temper to his children and nearly every other character that he comes into contact with, yet she cannot formulate a justification for his congeniality towards herself. She does not immediately admit his falseness, but she does appear conscious of his dual behavior. His excessive attention towards herself inhibits her comfort in the home, as even in his attempts to be friendly he is overbearing, and smothers her with attention:

Nay, perverse as it seemed, she doubted whether she might not have felt less, had she been less attended to. His anxiety for her comfort – his continual solicitations that she would eat, and his often expressed fears of her seeing nothing to her taste – though never in her life had she beheld
such variety on a breakfast table - made it impossible to forget for a moment that she was a visitor (NA 121).

The General exists as one of two extremes; he cannot be in the middle, because his personality is too excessive. His unwarranted attention to Catherine is misplaced, as he believes her to be extremely wealthy and desires a connection between her and his son. Henry and Eleanor are disturbed by their father’s excessiveness, but are not permitted a voice in the home:

Eleanor and Henry can, in this family situation, only have an unspoken alliance of ironic detachment...They have not only to avoid any breach of deference to their father and any open condemnation of members of their family, which would be embarrassing to a guest, but they must at the same time indicate clearly their knowledge of their father’s character defects and express their own detachment from his scale of values (Harding 139)

The General’s false humility and flattery humiliates his children: “The General, perceiving how her eye was employed, began to talk of the smallness of the room and simplicity of the furniture, where everything being for daily use, pretended only to comfort...” (NA 128). Catherine’s obliviousness captures her complete puerility; she does not recognize the General’s falseness, nor Henry and Eleanor’s discomfit:

“Catherine did not exactly know how this was to be understood. Why was Miss Tilney embarrassed?” (NA 141). The General’s falseness towards Catherine educes a double evil; Catherine cannot recognize the implications of his attention nor the consequences of disappointing him. She becomes an easy victim to the General; his intentions could not be more lucid, yet Catherine remains unconscious of his desire for her and Henry.
General Tilney has such a tyrannical hold on every aspect of Northanger and on his children's lives that his absence is equivocated with freedom:

His departure gave Catherine the first experimental conviction that a loss may sometimes be a gain. The happiness with which their time now passed, every employment voluntary, every laugh indulged, every meal a scene of ease and good humor, walking where they liked and when they liked, their hours, pleasures, and fatigues at their own command, made her thoroughly sensible of the restraint which the General's presence had imposed, and most thankfully feel their present release from it (NA 177).

The General's presence is depressive, and his absence is a source of pleasure and relief. His tyranny has a harmful effect on the lives of his children, and the cruelty of living under his autocracy is juxtaposed by the liberty felt in his absence: "His unlooked for return was enough in itself to make the heart sink, and for a few moments she hardly supposed there was anything worse to be told" (NA 180). While Catherine, and Fanny Price, suffer the negative qualities of paternal absence, Eleanor and Henry experience liberation in their father's absence. The harsh realities of the home and the General's excessive authority over even the smallest minutia encumbers Eleanor's developmental process, and it is not until he is absent from the text that her character really takes shape and her gregariousness is evidenced.

Upon the return of General Tilney, Catherine is immediately ordered home. He expels her from his house with no warning and no reason indicated. His behavior comes as a shock, and Catherine is clueless to what she might have done to cause such rudeness:
When we have been tempted to dismiss Catherine’s ideas about evil at the Abbey as a complete load of rubbish the tables are turned on us by the General’s sudden and socially violent expulsion of her. We are confronted with the fact that startling and highly unpleasant things – psychologically violent things – can happen even in a milieu where wives are not poisoned or shut away in the cells of old monasteries (Harding 143-144).

His incivility toward Catherine is felt by Eleanor, and she is saddened by her father’s misconduct: “for my feelings as a daughter, all that I know, all that I answer for is, that you can have given him no just cause for offence” (NA 183). Eleanor’s position as the daughter does not allow her to intervene, so she must defer to her father’s decision to send Catherine away. The Moorlands are confused and slightly angered by the General’s ill behavior toward their daughter:

Mr. and Mrs. Moorland could not but feel that it might have been productive of much unpleasantness; that it was what they could never have voluntarily suffered; and that, in forcing her on such a measure General Tilney had acted neither honorably nor feelingly – neither as a gentlemen nor as a parent (NA 190).

The General’s actions are unpardonable. Catherine was in his charge and it was his responsibility to protect her; he does just the opposite by forcing her out of his house with no companion or money for the way home. He does not even give a defense for his actions; it is not until Henry comes to the Moorland’s home and apologizes, that the whole enigma is unraveled:
The General had nothing to accuse her of, nothing to lay to her charge, but her being the involuntary, unconscious object of a deception which his pride could not pardon, and which a better pride would have been ashamed to own. She was guilty only of being less rich than he had supposed her to be. Under a mistaken persuasion of her possessions and claims, he had courted her... On discovering his error, to turn her from the house seemed the best, though to his feelings an inadequate proof of resentment towards herself, and his contempt of her family (NA 198-199).

His cruelty towards Catherine is deplorable, and, even in the end, he refuses to apologize for his ill conduct, and for the offense he must have caused the Moorlands. His pride consumes his life, and ultimately causes his failure as a father figure to Catherine. Pride is historically acknowledged as the greatest vice in the church and the highest evil in political affairs:

The essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice... For, of course, power is what Pride really enjoys: there is nothing makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers... But Pride always means enmity- it is enmity (Lewis 164-166).

General Tilney behaves as a monster to Catherine because of his wounded pride. He allows his self-importance to prevail over his paternal responsibilities and duties. Catherine was an innocent party to his deception, and deserved better than to be cast...
away as a leper. His disregard for her safety and feelings are characteristic of his
despotic personality. He is wholly narcissistic, only thinking of his hurt pride at having
so publicly courted and suggested her to his son. His actions have a distinct, negative
effect on Catherine’s psychological disposition: “Her loss of spirits was a yet greater
alteration. In her rambling and her idleness she might only be a caricature of herself; but
in her silence and sadness she was the very reverse of all that she had been before” (NA
195). Catherine’s impressionable nature is harmfully affected by the General’s
imperiousness. It is not until Henry comes to her house and apologizes for his father’s
indecorum, that Catherine begins to gain self awareness. Henry, always an encourager
for the development of her own ideas and judgments, cultivates self assurance in
Catherine. His concurrence of her ill impressions of General Tilney restores confidence
in her selfhood, and she finally sees the General as the tyrannical, mean-spirited, heartless
father he had been all along: “Catherine, at any rate, heard enough to feel that in
suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely
sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty” (NA 201). Catherine’s
despondence after being sent away established her still forming character and
vulnerability; with the prompting of Henry, she gains self awareness, however, and
finally sees the General for who he has always been. His behavior no longer influences
her life, because all nervousness and apprehension dissipates after she is conscious of his
falseness and deceit. She obtains self realization and completion by acknowledging his
absence in her life as healthy and liberating, becoming a much stronger and rounded
character. The General does not outwardly act typical of the Gothic novel: “The fact that
his mania is money, and he no more than a miserable swine of a social climber is part of
Austen’s glee at puncturing the conceits of gothic extravaganza, as well as bourgeois ulterior motive. ‘English’ and ‘Christian’, the general is ferociously ordinary” (Gross 49); yet his inward character is just as selfish and mean-hearted, confirming that realism is indeed just as destructive as fantasy.

General Tilney’s callousness and pomposity instigate his maliciousness as a father. His narcissism prevents him from fully developing an intimate relationship with his children, and his egotism injures Catherine’s psychological and physical being. Just as he hinders Catherine’s development, Sir Thomas Bertram also impinges on his children’s maturation and growth. The despotism in both homes functions as a subversion of the historical and cultural image of the father. Both fail in their role as father, and both cause emotional devastation in their daughters. Sir Thomas’s tyrannical presence delays Fanny’s self awareness and possession, and affects her psychological disposition indefinitely. He destroys all self confidence in her, and his differential treatment to her humbles her to a point of near unrecognition. Fanny cowers at the sight of him, as his presence inspires fear. Her fear of the despotic father takes hold of her life, and she becomes meek, servile, frail, and aphasic. Fanny gains eventual self awareness, and she even stands up to Sir Thomas, refusing to adhere to his request of an engagement with Mr. Crawford. Sir Thomas demonstrates his authority over Fanny by casting her away from Mansfield, but she, nevertheless, illustrates her control by resisting his demands. Fanny is not the only child affected by Sir Thomas’s autocracy, however, as Maria and Julia both suffer from the suffocation of their father’s parenting. His tyranny produces disruption in the family and eventual degradation.
The dichotomy between Sir Thomas Bertram and Mr. Price is analogous to the juxtaposition between General Tilney and Mr. Moorland. Austen creates an absent father, wholly uninvolved in the life of his daughter, and a despotic father, who suffocates his children with aggression and manipulation in both *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*. Both pairs of fathers act as literary foils and stand in binary opposition to one another; the despotic father seems to be the primary father, as he is privileged over the absent father by his direct influence in the life of the daughter. Both the absent and the despotic are too excessive in their roles and create dysfunction amongst the family unit:

The pathologies of the father lie in the physical and psychic distance between a father and his children on two key dimensions, the erotic and the aggressive. A father who is too close or too remote will not be good enough. A father too close erotically will be perceived as "incestuous," if not actually abusive, leading to a distorted relation to sexuality and relationships. A distanced father will leave his child disconfirmed in relation to his or her own basic self worth. When a father is too close aggressively, the child will be overwhelmed and symbolically castrated, unable to stand up to authority or for himself. An emotionally absent father leaves the child unprepared for the world and prone to self-doubt (Abramovitch 31).

Austen's texts establish the psychological dysfunction that incurs when the daughters are subjected to these fanatical representations of the father. Both the absent and the despotic
are equally harmful to the daughters’ development, and both fail miserably in their role as father and protector to Catherine and Fanny.

Sir Thomas’s despotism functions as an ultimate source of authority and power in the novel. He is the alpha-male, and his word is conclusive. Even when Sir Thomas attempts to please Fanny and welcome her into the home, he fails. His despotic nature deters him from behaving friendly:

Sir Thomas seeing how much she needed encouragement, tried to be all that was conciliating; but he had to work against a most untoward gravity of deportment and Lady Bertram, without taking half so much trouble, or speaking one word where he spoke ten, by the mere aid of a good humored smile, became immediately the less awful character of the two (MP 9)

His prideful nature disallows him from being kind and convivial towards Fanny. He oppresses her with his intended kindness, and patronizes her without realizing it: “In vain were the well meant condescensions of Sir Thomas” (MP10). The Bertram girls do not know how to respond to their father’s notice of them; they are so used to his disregard. He acts favorably towards them upon Fanny’s arrival: “The two girls were more at a loss and in greater awe of their father, who addressed them on the occasion with rather injudicious particularity” (MP 10). His harshness seems to be all they know, and so they are bewildered by his sudden notice of them. His repressive presence is felt in every corner of Mansfield: “Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because, though a truly anxious father, he was outwardly affectionate, and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of spirits before him” (MP16). His imperiousness produces
harmful effects on his children, and he sincerely does not recognize his children's needs. This unconsciousness causes his children to fear him more, and distances him from their lives even further. Dr. Gross parallels his slave trade to his fathering in her text on Austen and Dr. Johnson:

As Johnson spells out, the correlation between parental tyrant and slavemaster is easy and natural. Much has been made of Sir Thomas's wealth deriving from the slave trade, where the topic ramifies in contemporary politics and society. The psychological ramifications are just as awful, as Austen put it euphemistically, "Sir Thomas found it expedient to go to Antigua himself, for the better arrangement of his affairs" (MP, vol. 1, chap. 3; Austen Works, III, 32). We may assume he arranges his affairs much the same in both venues, striking fear and foreboding and misery in his subjects. Fanny withers at his very approach; Maria, Julia, and Tom dread the lash of his authority; and Edmund, with grave looks and crosses to bear, slumps at 'the contradictions of his dark brow' (118).

Sir Thomas's house is dictatorial and all of his children concede to his wishes. The repression over the home subsists due to his overbearing presence, and family life lacks all gaiety. Furthermore, his presence evokes silence:

He values the very quietness you speak of, and that the repose of his own family-circle is all he wants...There was never much laughing in his presence; or, if there is any difference, it is not more I think than such an absence has a tendency to produce at first. There must be a sort of
shyness. But I cannot recollect that our evenings formerly were ever merry, except when my uncle was in town. No young people’s are, I suppose, when those they look up to are at home (MP 177).

The children defer to his wants, and live in oppression under his authority. The archetypal relationship between father and child of authority and obedience is concentrated in Sir Thomas’s relationships with his children. His authority induces their obedience.

Often acknowledged as the weakest and most fragile heroine, Fanny is heavily influenced by Sir Thomas’s despotism. Her psyche suffers indelible injury by the harshness incurred from Sir Thomas’s tyranny. She becomes fearful and hesitant of everyone: “The little visitor meanwhile was as unhappy as possible. Afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying” (MP 10).

Transporting her from her previous negligent home to her new despotic home is too much for little Fanny to handle. The alteration in her home life produces deep injury to Fanny’s psychological development: “Fanny whether near or from her cousins, whether in the school-room, the drawing room, or the shrubbery, was equally forlorn, finding something to fear in every person and place. She was disheartened by Lady Bertram’s silence, awed by Sir Thomas’s grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris’s admonitions” (MP 11). Fanny behaves as a scared child, and lacks a comforting, protective father to reassure her and build her self esteem. Everything frightens her at Mansfield, even the magnitude of the house: “The grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease; whatever
she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or
other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry” (MP 12). Her lack of stability
has obliterated her confidence, and the harshness of her new home affects her frail
disposition even more. The malleability of her character impedes her sense of worth, as
she is so easily influenced. The Bertram’s segregate and humble her through their words
and actions, humiliating Fanny and causing her to defer to their wants over her own:
“and though Fanny was often mortified of their treatment of her, she thought too lowly of
her own claims to feel injured by it” (MP 17). Her sense of self suffers acutely, and she
behaves subordinately. The lack of positive reinforcement from a paternal figure
produces her apprehension and diffidence:

Positive paternal engagement is significantly related to a cluster of
outcomes including self-control, self-esteem, life skills, and social
competence…For both boys and girls, high positive paternal engagement
is significantly associated with lower frequency of eternalizing and
internalizing symptoms, and higher sociability (Pleck 97).

Fanny does internalize the Sir Thomas’s poor treatment of her, and she isolates herself
from the others throughout most of the text. Her inability to socialize prevents her from
developing a healthy image of self, and provokes her self deprecation and social
incompetence.

Fanny’s timidity consumes her character, and she can seldom speak for herself:
“Fanny would rather have Edmund tell the story” (MP 54). Her voice is consequently
squelched throughout the text: “But though her wishes were overthrown, there was no
spirit of murmuring within her. On the contrary, she was so totally unused to have her
pleasure consulted, or to have anything take place at all in the way she could desire, that
she was more disposed to wonder and rejoice in having carried her point so far” (MP
254). Her aphasia is a consequence of living in the despotic household. According to
Lacanian philosophy, one develops identification through the linguistic sign system;
one’s connection to the world is mediated through language (Lacan 441-446). The use of
the sign system separates one from the others, and develops identification through culture
and socialization. The daughter enters into the Lacanian semiotic order, by means of
recognizing her subjection to the law of the father (Lacan 441-446). Fanny’s identity
materializes from external identifications of herself, hence, her low estimation of self.
Any self-assurance that Fanny may have developed previous to her stay at Mansfield is
depleted by Sir Thomas’s cruelty towards her. His presence inspires dread: “Her
agitation and alarm exceeded all that was endured by the rest, by the right of disposition
which not even innocence could keep from suffering. She was nearly fainting: all her
former habitual dread of her uncle was returning” (MP 158). Furthermore, the thought of
him discussing her causes apprehension and fear: “Fanny immediately slipped out of the
room; for to hear herself the subject of any discussion with her uncle, was more than her
nerves could bear” (MP196). Her image of self becomes lower and lower, until she
refuses to recognize any value and self worth at all.

Sir Thomas’s treatment to Fanny and his despotic nature prevents her from feeling
worthy of being an integral part of the family. She is reminded continuously of her
inequality to the other daughters: “She had been quite overlooked by her cousins; and as
her own opinion of her claims on Sir Thomas’s affections was much too humble to give
her any idea of classifying herself with his children, she was glad to remain behind and
gain a little breathing time” (MP 158). She is an outsider looking in on the affairs of the family. Nothing has been done to include her in the familial unit; rather, Sir Thomas takes care to treat her differently from his daughters to ensure Fanny’s humbleness: “I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account, authorize in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but still they cannot be equals. Their rank, future rights, and expectations, will always be different” (MP 8).

Before Fanny arrives at Mansfield, it has already been determined that she will not be given the same opportunities as the Bertram girls. Sir Thomas is egotistical and believes his daughters superior to Fanny, though he has yet to meet her. He forms his opinions of Fanny prematurely and lets his arrogance guide his prejudgments of her character: “We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults – nor, I trust, can they be dangerous for her associates” (MP 8). Fanny proves all of these estimations of her character false, and yet she continues to be treated as something less than the others. Sir Thomas desires his own daughters to demonstrate a superior nature in contrast to Fanny. His competitiveness adversely influences his management of Fanny, as he ingrains in his daughters’ minds their cousins inferiority: “it is not at all necessary that she be as accomplished as you are: - on the contrary, it is much more desirable that there should be a difference” (MP 16). He encourages his daughters to pity and look down on her, producing haughtiness in his daughters and lowliness in Fanny. Sir Thomas’s opinion matters a great deal to Fanny; moreover, his observations greatly influence her psyche:
If William does come to Mansfield, I hope you may be able to convince him that the many years which have passed since you parted, have not spent on your side entirely without improvement – though I fear he must find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten.”

She cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone (MP29).

Sir Thomas’s constant negativity and aggressiveness hinders her psychological development. She looks to him for encouragement and, in turn, he devastates her sense of value. His harmful behavior towards Fanny directly produces her nervousness, fear, and apprehension:

In a comprehensive review of factors influencing child development, Lee and Gotlib identified paternal emotional availability and responsivity to children’s needs as central themes that cut across many situations in which children are at risk for the development of psychopathology. They argued that fathers emotional unavailability and unresponsiveness to their children may mediate the impact of disruptive family situations on children’s development (Phares 265).

Positive paternal engagement is then necessary, according to Phares, for normative psychological development in children. Fanny experiences neither positive engagement nor responsivity to her needs, thus hindering her psyche beyond full restoration. Though Fanny does achieve a more complete image of self in the end of the novel, she still remains tentative and even apprehensive.

The Bertram children show no deep attachment to their father, much like General Tilney and his children, and his absence evokes relief:
Their father was no object of love to them, he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at one gratification that would have probably been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach (MP 28).

Sir Thomas's harsh treatment to his children and his overtly despotic household does not create obedient, subservient children; rather, it creates an appearance of obedience, built from fear, not respect. The children are then at liberty to do as they choose when their father is absent from the home. They refuse to act prudently in Sir Thomas's absence, but do as they desire, without fear of consequence. He fails as a father at instilling lasting principles and good judgment in his children, as they illustrate poor discernment the moment he leaves Mansfield. The authority of the father departs with his departure, and the children do not think of him or respects what he would have wanted. They settle on acting out a play, despite the impropriety, and live momentarily without self restrain or inhibition. The day of Sir Thomas's return inspires sullenness and gloom in the children: "November was the black month fixed for his return" (MP 96). Meanwhile, Sir Thomas remains oblivious to the true state of Mansfield, and to his daughters' true opinion of him: "Sir Thomas would have been deeply mortified by a suspicion of half that his daughters felt on the subject of his return" (MP 97). His absence causes chaos in the household, confirming his failure to act as moral guide and teacher to his children.

Without his presence, the fear of his discipline is eradicated, so that the children are left dependant on their own moral fiber and principles to govern their behavior. The Bertram
children are not successfully interpellated into the familial unit in the late eighteenth/early
nineteenth centuries, because they move against the dominant familial ideologies the
moment there father is gone (Althusser 693-702). Foucault’s Panopticon applies here, as
the children only self-regulate when they fear they are being watched by the father:

The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce a state of conscious and
permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So
to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it
is discontinous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to
render its actual exercise unnecessary: that this archetypal apparatus
should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation
independent of the person who exercises it…The Panopticon is a machine
for dissociating the see / being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is
totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything
without being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and
disindividualizes power (Foucault 554-555).

The Panopticon ensures obedience and servility through this concept of ‘being watched’.
Then, once it has established conformity, the actual ‘permanent visibility’ is no longer
necessary, because one has now been successfully interpellated into society and no longer
needs the threat of the Panopticon, to force adherence to cultural and social standards.
The Bertram children, however, submit to the father only out of fear, not a willingness to
obey because they believe they ought to, thus that ‘permanent visibility’ is necessary to
coerce them into conformity. Sir Thomas fails as father, as his duty is to interpellate his
children into controlled social and cultural realms. Fanny is the only child who has been
successfully interpellated, as she obeys the father even when he is absent from the home: “the individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection, i.e. in order that he shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection ‘all by himself’. There are no subjects except by and for their subjection. That is why they work all by themselves” (Althusser 701). She is the ideal child, who willingly submits to the authority of the father and internalizes the paternal control that monitors and maintains the integrity of the familial unit.

Sir Thomas elicits fear in his children through his despotism. Though they behave disobediently in his absence, his presence restores immediate propriety to the group:

And after the first starts and exclamations not a word was spoken for half a minute; each with an altered countenance was looking at some other, and almost each was feeling it a stroke the most unwelcome, most ill-timed, most appalling! ...but every other heart was sinking under some degree of self condemnation or undefined alarm, every other heart was suggesting, ‘what will become of us? What is to be done now? (MP157). They identify his presence with repression and censure, and are terrified of his response to their play. Their disregard for their father materializes through their theatrics, even when Edmund warns them several times of how much their father would disapprove; they ignore his guidance and continue with the play. Sir Thomas is disheartened by the disorder of Mansfield and his children’s imprudence: “and it needed all the felicity of being again at home, and all the forbearance it could supply, to save Sir Thomas from anger on finding himself thus bewildered in his own house, making part of a ridiculous
exhibition in the midst of theatrical nonsense” (165). He realizes that his children are not as well behaved as he had hoped, and is disappointed by all, with exception of Fanny. His pleasure at Fanny’s steadfastness bewilders her; she cannot understand his sudden attention to her, when all her life she has been brushed aside: “Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed. He had never been so kind, so very kind to her in his life. His manner seemed changed; his voice thick from the agitation of joy” (160). Fanny’s disbelief at his niceties stems from his own poor treatment of her. His constant harshness and cruelty causes her low self esteem, and she does not know how to accept or reciprocate his attentions.

Fanny’s sense of self becomes more fully developed while Sir Thomas is in Antigua. She defies her cousins’ wishes for her to act in the play, and retains her integrity in spite of all the indecorum surrounding her. Her self confidence and awareness allows her to finally challenge Sir Thomas’s despotism: “To be urging her opinion against Sir Thomas’s, was a proof of the extremity of the case, but such was her horror at the first suggestion, that she could actually look him in the face and say she hoped it might be settled otherwise; in vain, however…” (MP 147). Fanny gains enough courage to stand up against Sir Thomas, but is, nevertheless, defeated by his totalitarianism. She, again, defies her uncle’s authority by refusing an engagement with Mr. Crawford. He detests her newfound audacity, and becomes even more tyrannical over her. He must have his way, despite the questionable judgment behind it. He exerts his authority over Fanny by sending her off to bed in the midst of a party: “Sir Thomas was again interfering a little with her inclination, by advising her to go immediately to bed. ‘Advise’ was his word, but it was the advice of absolute power…” (MP 254). He
has to retain complete power over every part of Fanny’s life. Nevertheless, Fanny develops a tolerance for his despotism. Her skin thickens to his harshness and she no longer is the feeble minded girl to fearful to look at her uncle: “She was thankful that she could now sit in the same room with her uncle, hear his voice, receive his questions, and even answer them without such wretched feelings as she had previously known” (MP 257). Sir Thomas thrives off of his absolute authority and his children’s unquestioned deference, and so Fanny’s obstinacy enrages him. He tries every route possible to make Fanny receive Mr. Crawford as her husband, but mostly he tries to manipulate her soft spirit by cruel language and unjustified guilt:

“Yes,” said Fanny in a faint voice, and looking down with fresh shame; and she did feel almost ashamed of herself, after such a picture as her uncle had drawn, for not liking Mr. Crawford (MP 286); Sir Thomas came towards the table where she sat in trembling wretchedness, and with a good deal of cold sternness, said, “It is of no use, I perceive, to talk to you. We had better put an end to this most mortifying conference. Mr. Crawford must not be kept longer waiting. I will, therefore, only add, as thinking it my duty to mark my opinion of your conduct – that you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of what I had supposed. For I had, Fanny, as I think my behavior must have shown, formed a very favorable opinion of you from the period of my return to England…But you have now shown me that you can be willful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself, without any consideration or deference for those who have surely
some right to guide you – without even asking their advice. You have shown yourself very, very different from anything that I had imagined (MP 288).

Fanny’s sense of self nearly breaks by her uncle’s harsh words and horrible depiction of her refusal to comply with his demands. She does need Sir Thomas’s advice on the potential engagement to Mr. Crawford, because she has witnessed his character first hand, and knows of his discrepancies and falseness. Sir Thomas wishes her to accept merely because he finds it an advantageous match, not because he truly knows the character of Mr. Crawford, and finds him a suitable match for Fanny. He would make Fanny miserable, and despite all her uncle’s manipulations she stands firm in her decision. She hates Sir Thomas’s depiction of her, but does not let it sway what she knows to be best: “Her heart was almost broke by such a picture of what she appeared to him; by such accusations, so heavy, so multiplied, so rising in dreadful graduation! Self willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?” (MP289).

Fanny’s future stability is lost by her refusal to marry Mr. Crawford. Not only does she sacrifice the security of having a husband in early nineteenth century Britain, but her future lay in her uncle’s hands, and he most certainly will dismiss her from Mansfield. He tries once more to manipulate her by sending her back to the Price home:

For his prime motive in sending her away, had very little to do with the propriety of her seeing her parents again, and nothing at all with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of home before her visit ended; and
that a little abstinence from the elegancies and luxuries of Mansfield Park, would bring her mind into a sober state, and incline her to a juster estimate of the value of that home of greater permanence, and equal comfort, of which she had the offer (MP 337).

His despotism interferes with his reason, as he forces Fanny out of the home in an attempt to force her into submission, without regard for her well being or psychological development. In fact, he would almost rather her die, than defy his wishes: “and though Sir Thomas, had he known all, might have thought his niece in the most promising way of being starved, both mind and body, into a much juster value for Mr. Crawford’s good company and good fortune, he would probably have feared to push his experiment farther, lest she might die under the cure” (MP 376). His despotism disallows him from truly caring for Fanny; he requires servility and complete obedience, nothing else.

Sir Thomas’s poor judgments and tyrannical behavior cause his family ignominy. He allows Maria to marry Mr. Rushworth, even though he knows she is not in love with him: “It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain; and thus he reasoned, Mr. Rushworth was young enough to improve” (MP 181). His motives are selfish and mercenary, and he allows his pride and greed to interfere with his good judgment. Maria only accepts Mr. Rushworth because she can no longer stand to be under her father’s autocracy. His oppressive presence leads her into Mr. Rushworth’s arms: “She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and from Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit” (MP 182). She desires to
escape from her father’s grasp, much as a convict would have prison. Mansfield is her prison, a symbol of oppression and tyranny. Her father’s despotism causes her to rebel against his authority: “being prepared for matrimony by an hatred of home, restraint, and tranquility…” (MP182). She associates all restraint with evil, as her father’s restraint suffocated her and prohibited free will. She eventually leaves her husband for the cunning Mr. Crawford, showing her poor judgment and moral fiber, and forever shaming her family with her misconduct. Likewise, Julia also despises her father’s despotism, and elopes with Mr. Yates out of fear for his tyrannical nature:

This had been her motive in going to her cousins. Mr. Yate’s convenience had nothing to do with it. She had been allowing his attentions sometime, but with very little idea of ever accepting him; and, had not her sister’s conduct burst forth as it did, and her increased dread of her father and of home, on that event – imagining its certain consequence to herself would be greater severity and restraint – made her hastily resolve on avoiding such immediate horrors at all risks, it is probable that Mr. Yates would never have succeeded. She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm. It appeared the only thing to be done. Maria’s guilt had induced Julia’s folly (MP 425-426).

Julia, much like Maria, has no moral backbone. The primary responsibility of the father is to instill moral judgment in his children, something lacking in entirety in the Bertram girls. Though Sir Thomas was much more involved and stern than other Austen fathers, he still does not effectively train and teach his children to value noble things, rather than the fleeting. Maria’s behavior elicits scandal and is wildly indecorous in the historical
context. There can be no excuse made for her, and all association with her must cease: “as far as this world alone was concerned, the greatest blessing to everyone kindred to Mrs. Rushworth would be instant annihilation” (MP 403). Lydia’s elopement with Mr. Yates is not quite so severe, but still shames the family. Sir Thomas’s eldest son’s vanity and selfishness is further testament to his poor fathering. Three of his four kids misbehave horribly and inappropriately. Sir Thomas has failed, by all worldly views, as a father:

Some of the limitations of the family as a psychological matrix and as a social institution, however, are made unmistakably clear in the failure of Maria’s and Julia’s upbringing, in the substitution of roles and propriety for deeper principles of conduct and in the failure of Sir Thomas to make a personal relation with his daughters and secure their real affection (Harding 30).

Maria, Julia, and Tom all lack decorum and moral rightness; not one of them is concerned with how their behavior will affect the greater whole of the familial unit. They are entirely selfish, and are a result of two extremes. All rod with no love leads to the same conclusion as all love with no rod; he is the literary foil to Mr. Woodhouse. All of the fathers in Austen’s literature lack balance; they are either wholly lenient, or wholly dictatorial, or absent all together. Austen refuses to create normative fathers; they are all excessive.

Sir Thomas experiences a self realization, very similar to Mr. Bennet, at the end of the text. All of his children, with exception of Edmund, have wildly disappointed his expectations, and he realizes that his harshness causes their waywardness. His
totalitarian household oppresses his children and instigates their desire to be free of his despotism, no matter the cost. His domineering parenting in opposition to Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris's indulgence of the children evokes their misbehavior:

Too late he became aware how unfavorable to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had always been experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt had been continually contrasted with his own severity. He saw how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs. Norris, by its reverse in himself, clearly saw that he had but increased the evil, by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, as to make their real disposition unknown to him” (MO 422).

Maria and Julia flee from their father's despotic reign, only to secure themselves in their aunt's over-indulgence. They have become spoiled by Mrs. Norris's constant affirmation and false praise, and deride their father's tyranny. Sir Thomas's realization of the error in producing two wholly different styles of parenting comes too late, as his daughters have already formed their hatred of him and despise his restraint. His guilt for their ill behavior appears genuine and takes an entirely different route than Mr. Bennet's momentary self-pity for his daughter's imprudence:

Sir Thomas deadening his sense to what was lost, and in part reconciling him to himself, though the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, was never to be entirely done away...He feared that principle, active principle, had been wanting, that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and
tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice...Bitterly did he deplore a deficiency which now he could scarcely comprehend to have been possible. Wretchedly, did he feel, that with all the cost and care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters, without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper (MP 422-423).

Sir Thomas’s despotism created division in his household, and prevented him from truly understanding his own daughters’ character. His harshness distanced his children from him, and allowed their ill behavior. He fails as a father to his children, primarily because he refused to really train and instill good principles in them. They only behave in his direct presence, for fear of his repression; they are not adequately interpellated into the familial unit, hence their disorder. Fanny, never subjected to the over indulgence of Mrs. Norris, only experiences her uncle’s domination and authority, and thus never has a fortress to run to when he represses her through language and action. Fanny’s psychological development is altered because of this harsh treatment towards herself, but nevertheless materializes into a fully self conscious, well principled being. She is obedient and submissive, an ideal child, but still holds fast to her principles and refuses to submit when she knows herself to be right. Her tentativeness carries through to the end, but she is a wholly different being from the beginning of the text, and finally develops a healthy image of self. Her refusal to submit to Mr. Thomas proves noble in the end, as Mr. Crawford’s falseness becomes public; furthermore, she gains even more favor for having withstood Sir Thomas’s cruel chastisement and disapproval despite her servile
character. She refuses to bend her principles even when kicked out of Mansfield and sent back home to the lowly company of the Prices. Withstanding Sir Thomas’s despotism evokes Fanny's self completion, and her marriage to Edmund elicits her autonomy.

That despotic households ultimately fail is established through Sir Thomas and General Tilney. General Tilney’s destructive influence on his family parallels Sir Thomas’s negative impact on his familial unit. Both the General and Sir Thomas act as surrogate father figures, and both use their absolute authority in the home to manipulate and control their children. These fathers are analogous to their mythological counterpart, Zeus, who's dictating, abusive, and controlling qualities defined his dyadic relationships with his children. They are head of the familial hierarchy and restrict autonomy in all other members; furthermore, they operate as the harsh, judgmental father archetypes of the past, established through mythological and theological conventions. The responsibilities of cultural expectations fall on the father, and both the General and Sir Thomas disappoint, as their despotic households creates more dysfunction than benefit. Both Fanny and Catherine had little presence in the home and were not permitted a voice. Their social development is reliant on the father, and both fathers fail to adequately socialize and protect their daughters. The fathers’ failure to perform their required functions causes chaos in the home, and places the girls in danger. Fanny and Catherine suffer psychological consequences of the paternal despotism they are subjected to; nevertheless, both daughters surmount their tentativeness and develop self confidence in spite of the negative, autocratic authority in their lives. Austen allows Fanny and Catherine to express free will in their despotic homes, establishing even further the
daughters' power in the texts. Their ability to be heard and achieve their desires destabilizes the nature of despotic households, and subverts cultural power in the home.
Conclusion

Fatherhood has been widely neglected in literary studies and social research: "We study men’s work roles, their political behavior, religious philosophies, and leisure habits, and we earnestly talk about their athlete records, but their role as father has exceptionally low priority for methodical inquiry, record keeping, and conjecture" (Benson 7); thus, the need to reinstate the importance of the father in not only social history, but more specifically in the novels of Jane Austen, is vastly important. Though Austen has been severely criticized for being ‘ahistoric’, her novels reflect a deep concern with social history in Georgian and Regency Britain, particularly through her representations of the father. Her application of cultural images of the father and her neglect to create normative father figures debunks any criticism of her narrow-mindedness: “Austen combined genres said to be ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ into something that was both – or neither. Austen did not avoid history. On the contrary, she engaged it directly, grappled with it, and refashioned it for her own purposes” (Looser 35-36). Looser explicates on Austen’s subversion of class in his essay as evidence for Austen’s concern with history. Likewise, my thesis argues for Austen’s rebellion against cultural and historical norms through the image of the deviant father. Austen’s refusal to create one normative father figure in her novels evidences her destabilization of patriarchal order in Georgian and Regency Britain.

Women, daughters specifically, functioned as silent members of society. Not only was their voice restricted, but they were granted virtually no autonomy outside the familial unit:
Throughout history men have held almost all the world’s power and prestige, women almost none. Within the social microcosm of the family, fathers have commanded, daughters obeyed. Traditionally, the good father has been required only to protect his daughter; if he abused his power over her at her expense, there was no one to hold him accountable, no one to protect her from him (Carter 82).

The father has been given unlimited power over the daughter through social convention; thus, the daughter is completely reliant on the father’s good sense and mercy. As the daughter embodies the weak particle of the familial unit, she has no authority over herself or other members. Father’s matter most, daughter’s least, at least in Georgian society. Austen inverts this concept through her novels, however, empowering the daughters and disabling the fathers. The fathers are either absent or deficient in their role, all lack the capacity to father the daughters sufficiently. Austen states her disapproval of patrilineal Britain in nearly every novel, and subverts the patriarchal order by her creation of weak father figures. Those critics who claim she rejects history or philosophical understanding, need only look at her characterization of the fathers in her novels. Her voice is evident in each text:

The saving irresponsibility of Jane Austen is her freedom, as the prisoner of that society, to say what she likes about it. It is astonishing to me that prejudice should still linger that she is a constricting and censorious writer, a writer claustrophobically preoccupied with the right and wrong thing. In fact it would be more accurate to see her works as a particular kind of liberation from morality...She uses the rigidity of society as a means of
liberating her fancy and her creative joy, whereas for the later novelists the society they create is the product of their own interpretive and meaning-seeking vision (Bayley 8).

This ‘liberation from morality’ resonates within each of her heroines, as they defy social order by their strength and voice in the home. Their concern is not with maintaining and solidifying the status quo, but in resisting it. Austen’s progressive depictions of the substandard father cultivate an iconoclastic figure within literature; she undermines bourgeois values and paternal ideologies by emasculating the father in every one of her novels.

The relationship between the realities of fatherhood in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Britain and the representations painted of the father through Austen’s literature is contradictory. The despotic father may be the most closely aligned with the historical image of the father; nonetheless, all of Austen’s paternal figures fail in their role as father. Austen excludes paternal normalcy from her novels completely, disallowing fathers a chance to maintain their power in the home. Each heroine has a greater sense of propriety and possibly even morality than the father, and must exert their own free will to maintain their integrity. The father and daughter must reverse roles to sustain some sort of family order in the home:

It is largely through the family that a society passed on its established values to the child, and some of those are likely to be values that the family itself fulfills only very imperfectly in its own behavior...Some children, however – perhaps many children in some limited fields of behavior – remain in a state of conflict between the ideals they have been
taught and the behavior of people they are supposed to respect, perhaps
the very people from whom they learnt the ideals, and characteristically
their parents (Harding 42).

The daughter cannot identify with her father, and the mothers are a whole other thesis
paper, and so they are left to forge their own way, and eventually act against the father
figure. The girls all display self sufficiency and completion by their ability to function
independently from the father, so as to achieve what is best for them in the end.

Society sanctions fathers to be head of the home. They function as the leaders,
the innovators, the participators of society; furthermore, they have an obligation to
society to properly interpellate their children into the standard culture. Their success or
failure depends upon their children’s acceptance or rejection of cultural norms. Social
order empowered the father, but also rebuked the father when he failed:

The actions of fathers can be viewed as a collective response to social
necessity, not simply a collection of responses of individual men each
acting in terms of his own self-generated personality traits. Thus, the
community establishes general expectations for fathers, but it also
generates innumerable social agencies that help fathers to do what is
expected of them, to reward them for living up to expectations, and to
rebuke them when they fail (Benson 38).

As all of Austen’s fathers fail horribly in their role as teacher, protector, disciplinarian,
and economic provider, they are their own cause of reduction and powerlessness in the
home. Society does not punish them for their deficiencies, but Austen punishes them by
reversing the patriarchal order in the home. The father’s are ultimately responsible for
their failure in their paternal roles, and for the inversion of power in the father/daughter
dyad:

Patriarchal ideology has always imagined that women – and especially the
unstructured daughter – pose the ultimate threat to its power. But women
may not be the real threat to patriarchy; it may instead be the fathers
themselves. To quell the menace of paternal behavior deviating from the
authoritarian ideal, the cultural mythmaking apparatus seems continually
to have needed to reproduce patterns of dictatorial, resolutely
unsentimental fatherhood modeled into father-gods and god-the-fathers.
By insinuation, the model is divinely sanctioned. The greatest menace to
patriarchy would be the threat of fathers rebelling against the archetypes
they inherited (Boose 37)

The fathers in Austen’s novels do just this, they ‘rebels against the archetypes they
inherited.’ From the absence of Mr. Dashwood, Mr. Price, and Mr. Moorland, to the
deficiencies of Mr. Bennet, Mr. Woodhouse, and Sir Walter Elliot, to the despots of
General Tilney and Sir Thomas Bertram, all of Austen’s fathers fail in their fundamental
role as protector and commander of the home. Their failure signifies culture’s failure at
large to protect the daughter’s from the harshness and unjustness of patrilineal Britain;
furthermore, their failure, while at first hindering the psychological development of some
of the girls, ultimately enables the daughters to gain self autonomy a part from the home,
something unheard of in Georgian Britain. Whether Austen intended to subvert
patriarchal authority in her novels, or not, her literature does challenge the Patriarchy and
the male-centered hierarchal order of the family in late eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain.
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