INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

ProQuest Information and Learning
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
800-521-0600

UMI®
RICE UNIVERSITY

Literary Servants' Vanishing Act in the Eighteenth Century

by

Tracy Michelle Volz

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

Doctor of Philosophy

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE:

William B. Piper, Professor
English

Helena R. Michie, Professor
English

Robert S. Bledsoe, Assistant Professor
German & Slavic Studies

HOUSTON, TEXAS

February, 2001
February 2001

ABSTRACT

Literary Servants' Vanishing Act in the Eighteenth Century

by

Tracy Michelle Volz

The increasing invisibility of servants in the novels of Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and Jane Austen corresponds to the gradual transition of the master/servant relationship from a paternalistic to a contractual model in mid to late eighteenth-century England. Fielding's Joseph Andrews (1741) and Tom Jones (1749) illustrate the destabilizing effects of capitalism, individualism, and the formation of the middling class on the paternalistic model, a model in which Fielding was deeply invested. In the paternalistic model the master's authority to govern and the servant's duty to submit are absolute and unquestioned. Richardson's Pamela (1740) and Clarissa (1747) first critique and then reaffirm the paternalistic model. Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison (1753), on the other hand, articulates the contractual model of master/servant relations, which recognizes servants as autonomous wage laborers. Grandison also introduces a new paradigm of domesticity. This new paradigm transfers the management of the household to a housekeeper, an arrangement that frees the master to pursue political and economic interests in the public sphere and allows the mistress to engage in leisure and philanthropic service. Grandison thus redefines the roles and responsibilities of the
master, mistress, and servants in order to validate emerging bourgeois assumptions about
gender roles, family, and class distinctions.

Austen adopts Richardson's new domestic paradigm, but she moves even further
in the direction of servant as paid commodity rather than as protected member of the
household. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, she revisits *Pamela* in order to show the
dangers of blurring class boundaries. Even more noteworthy, however, is Austen's use of
rhetorical strategies that are designed to push servants to the social periphery. Austen
exploits servants as visible, class-bound commodities that signal their superiors' social
status, but she renders servants invisible as subjects in order to legitimize the emerging
and vulnerable middling class as it strives to establish itself as a new source of social and
moral order.
Acknowledgments

I first want to thank the members of my dissertation committee, Drs. William B. Piper, Helena R. Michie, and Robert S. Bledsoe for their guidance and encouragement.

Dr. Linda and Frank Driskill have looked after my personal and professional well being for many years. Linda’s heroic support of my development as a teacher and a scholar “put my dreams within reach,” to borrow an expression of Norman Cousins, M.D. Many thanks also go to Carolyn Jackson whose financial support made those dreams easier to attain.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to Dr. Jan Hewitt who provided me with courage and good cheer. Her thoughtful and careful responses to my writing helped me to produce a dissertation of which I could be proud. I also wish to thank Drs. Susannah Mintz, Terry Doody, and John Nelson for commenting on my early drafts.

I offer my heartfelt thanks to my parents, my brother, and my friends who never stopped believing. I spent countless hours walking and talking with my dear friend, Karen Lewis, whose companionship sustained me. Karen's efforts were reinforced by Joseph Williams and Michele Hollar. Their strong faith in my ability to finish this project enabled me to overcome my fear.

Finally, I am grateful to my colleagues and my students at Rice University who have inspired me, delighted me, and motivated me to complete my doctorate.
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1

Chapter Two: Fielding’s Paternalism Under Pressure ................................................................. 23

Chapter Three: Richardson Redefines What it Means to be a Master, a Mistress, and a Servant ........................................................................................................................................... 80

Chapter Four: The Paradox of Austen’s Invisible Servants ......................................................... 129

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................... 191
Chapter One: Introduction

Where are the servants in Jane Austen’s novels? What causes servants to vanish from the literary landscape between the publication of Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela* (1740) or Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1741) and Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811)? This dissertation argues that the apparent invisibility of servants in Austen reflects the historical shift from the paternalistic to the contractual model of master/servant relations, a transition which occurred during the second half of the eighteenth century.

The crisis in the master/servant relationship resulted from a more significant crisis in class related to the formation and growth of the middling class. The emergence of the middling class in the eighteenth century challenged dominant social and political hierarchies and created a climate of social upheaval. The novels of Fielding, Richardson, and Austen illustrate the destabilizing effects of progressive individualism, free market capitalism, and the rise of the middling class on the paternalistic model.

In the paternalistic model a master derived his authority from the widely held belief in a divinely preordained “Natural Order.” A servant’s loyalty and submission to his master were unquestioned. In many respects, the paternalistic master/servant relationship resembled the parent/child relationship because the master was responsible

---

for the servant’s housing, nutrition, morality, education and health. Apart from these perquisites associated with service, the servants of paternalistic masters were not necessarily compensated for domestic work. The contractual model, which emerged during the second half of the eighteenth century, was based principally on self-interest. Servants exchanged their labor for cash. Although servants remained economically and socially subordinate to their masters, the new contractual model was touted as being more egalitarian and providing reciprocal benefits for both master and servant. As the master/servant relationship evolved through time and became more contractual, servants in literature became more invisible.

The trajectory from servant visibility to apparent invisibility can be traced in the novels of Fielding, Richardson, and Austen. Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* promote a paternalistic model of master/servant relations, one in which the servants are visible and important as agents of the plot. This paternalistic model is under stress due to the influence of progressive individualism, which motivates servants to pursue financial and social advancement, carve out time for recreation and relationships, and seek validation from their superiors. When class tension erupts between servants and their social superiors as a result of competing agendas, Fielding actively suppresses self-interested servants by banishing them.

Richardson critiques the paternalistic model in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, yet he does not completely abandon his allegiance to it. The servants in *Pamela*, for example, actively rebel against their paternalistic master’s abuses, but servant subversion is

---

ultimately contained through the marriage plot, and domestic authority is restored to Mr. B at the conclusion of the novel. Richardson then makes a significant move towards the contractual model of master/servant relations in *Sir Charles Grandison* (1753). There are no signs of class tension at any level of the social hierarchy in this novel. The threat of servant subversion is contained through a new approach to domestic management — control through kindness, a philosophy that transforms servants into "docile bodies." Compared to the servants in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, the servants in *Grandison* are much less visible as subjects and are of no importance to the plot, yet they gain significance as the guarantors of their superiors’ reputations.

The trajectory of servant invisibility culminates in Austen’s novels. Her servants are invisible, anonymous subjects who have no role in shaping the plot. Furthermore, the kindness and reciprocity with which Grandison treats his servants is no longer required of Austen’s principals because the need to treat servants kindly assumes that servants’ needs and opinions matter to their principals. In the contractual model, servants are commodities who are paid wages. In Austen’s novels the principals want approval only from the people situated above them in the social hierarchy. They do not seek the approval of those situated below them. Despite their diminishing presence in the narrative as subjects, Austen’s servants take on astonishing importance as visible signs of the middling class’s social position, manners, and morality in that class’s campaign for moral authority and social power.

---

Before examining the historical factors that contributed to the crisis in the master/servant relationship, I want to define "servant" and "middling class," two terms that are central to this project. When the term "servant" appears in this study, I am referring exclusively to domestic servants who wait upon masters and mistresses and maintain their superiors' homes and property. In Fielding's *Tom Jones* this definition includes figures such as Honour, Sophia Western's lady-in-waiting; and Black George, the gamekeeper. In Richardson's works it includes, among others, Pamela, Mrs. Jewkes, and Joseph Leman. In Austen the term encompasses a cadre of anonymous servants, as well as a few upper servants who are identified by name, such as Mrs. Reynolds, Thomas, and Rebecca. My use of the term "servant" does not include figures such as Square and Thwackum, the scholars in residence at Paradise Hall who enjoy Allworthy's patronage in *Tom Jones*, nor does it include men such as Robert Martin, Mr. Knightley's tenant farmer in *Emma*.

For the purpose of this project, members of the "middling class" are defined as those who possess the financial means to employ servants to do domestic work but do not derive their incomes from property. Historians use the term "middling class" to describe the group of merchants, artisans, professionals, and shopkeepers who were positioned above the laboring class and below the gentry in pre-industrial England. When this definition is applied to Fielding's works, it encompasses innkeepers and professionals, such as Mrs. Tow-wouse and Lawyer Dowling in *Joseph Andrews*. In Richardson the middling class is composed of figures such as the vicious Mrs. Sinclair, Lovelace's accomplice in *Clarissa*, as well as the virtuous Harriet Byron in *Grandison*. Turning to Austen, this category of social class spans a broad spectrum of people ranging from those
who barely manage to stay above the threshold of the laboring poor, such as the Prices of Mansfield Park, all the way up the ladder of financial prosperity to the Coles in Emma.

Now that I have briefly mapped out the trajectory towards servant invisibility in literature and have defined the terms that are central to understanding this argument, I will provide historical background on the crisis in class that caused the shift from the paternalistic to the contractual model of master/servant relations.

The Impact of Middling Class Formation on the Master/Servant Relationship

Following the Settlement of 1688, the established hierarchical class structure in England, which traditionally had been based exclusively upon a person’s birth and rank, was no longer as tightly fixed due to economic, social, and political changes. The class system became even more unstable in pre-industrial England, a period marked by increasing economic development in the agricultural and commercial sectors, expanding foreign and domestic trade, and urban development.\(^5\) Merchants, traders, and farmers acquired wealth as a result of prosperous trading and specialization, and their ascent into the middling class placed stress on the established class system.\(^6\)


\(^6\) Earle, pp. 17-18.
The restructuring of the pre-capitalist economy was accompanied by new attitudes related to social and moral individualism. Eighteenth-century intellectuals influenced by the Protestant ethic stressed that a person's worth should be a measure of moral conscience, individual action, and accountability rather than traditional kinship ties and property.\(^7\) In other words, people's actions should determine their value and how far they can advance in the world. Men were encouraged to pursue their political and economic interests in the public space of the marketplace rather than in the private space of the home. According to Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, these shifting priorities for men required the "sexual division of labour."\(^8\) Men needed to be freed from the burden of domestic management, but that burden could not simply be displaced onto the mistress because it threatened to turn the mistress into a glorified maid. Therefore, the housekeeper's role in maintaining the domestic sphere was expanded. The housekeeper became the primary guarantor of domestic harmony and order, and the mistress simply supervised the housekeeper's work. The separation of spheres and the housekeeper's ability to manage the home allowed the mistress to function as a domestic angel and sustained the "capitalist enterprise."\(^9\)

As a result of this new domestic paradigm, households were primarily managed by women.\(^10\) Young girls migrated from England's rural areas into urban centers to fill

\(^7\) Maza, p. 243.
\(^8\) p. 13.
\(^9\) p. 13. According to Davidoff and Hall, the mistress' "association with non-productive, more decorous activities cut her off from validation of the external world even while religious, educational and moral experts extolled her new authority," p. 391. For a history that investigates the intersection of the domestic woman, the rise of the novel, and the growth of the English middle class, turn to Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1987).
the servant positions that had been vacated by male domestics who left service to seek their fortunes in the marketplace. Women were especially well suited for domestic work because they had few career alternatives and no specialized skills. Moreover, employers preferred to hire women because they could pay women lower wages for their work, and they were taxed less for female servants than they were for male servants living in their homes. Only the wealthiest could afford the ostentatious presence of male servants. Domestic service, therefore, tended to be dominated by women in the second half of the eighteenth century due to the increasing demand for servants.

Servants were in greater demand in the early modern period because the middling class was empowered by economic success, and it sought the social prestige and class identity that were commonly associated with the landed gentry. Even though members of the middling class enjoyed greater consumer buying power in this period than they had in the past and lived more comfortably, they were not granted automatic acceptance into the gentry or the highest ranks of society. In fact, more often than not, they were received with ambivalence or open animosity. And, in addition to overcoming the barriers that prevented their assimilation into the gentry, the middling class also had to protect its

---

with Burke’s position and contends that the middle class household was a “battlefield” in which the mistress’ and maid’s class-specific ways of thinking came into immediate conflict with one another, p. 167. Seleski’s essay is included in Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850, Tim Harris, ed., (Houndmills: MacMillan Press, 1995), pp. 143-67.

11 For a description of the types of work servants performed in the eighteenth century, see Hill, pp. 17, 39-40; and Jean Hecht’s The Domestic Servant Class in the Eighteenth Century (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 35-70.

12 Hill explains that employing male servants instead of female servants was considered a symbol of one’s economic power because male servants received higher wages, p. 32. Judith Terry’s “Seen but Not Heard: Servants in Jane Austen’s England” provides evidence which suggests that male servants were “a mark of rank and wealth” because masters not only had to pay more in wages to male domestics, but they also had to pay higher taxes on them, Persuasions, 10, (1988), p. 107. See also Olwen Hufton’s “Women, Work and Family” in A History of Women, Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds., iii (1993), p. 20; and Maza, p. 277.
vulnerable status from the pressures being exerted by those situated below in the social hierarchy. One of the ways in which the middling class allied itself with the gentry’s lifestyle and distanced itself from the laboring class was by hiring servants to perform domestic work.

Servants, therefore, played an important role in the negotiation and construction of the middling class’s cultural and class identity, which were tentative and relational. However, employing servants was a source of tension for the middling class because they wanted to distance themselves from the laboring poor, yet they also needed the laboring poor to establish their relative social superiority. For the anxious members of the middling class, being able to keep a servant, or better yet, to keep many servants, was recognized as a sign of a master’s economic prowess and elevated social status.¹³ As Thorstein Veblen observed at the end of the nineteenth century, servants were not simply employed to maintain the homes of the leisure class; they also were employed to perform its wealth.¹⁴ In fact, servants’ public performance of the middling class’s wealth was undoubtedly more important than their domestic production in the eighteenth century. The middling class’s preoccupation “with new patterns of consumption: what goods to buy, how much, how to display and care for them”¹⁵ is captured in concrete terms by

---

¹³ The Theory of the Leisure Class (New York: Macmillan, 1917), pp. 75-80. Fairchilds explains that servants were a “public proclamation of one’s social rank,” p. 6. In Industry and Empire Eric Hobsbawn points out that the best way for the middle class to distinguish itself from the laboring class was to put itself in a position to hire servants and laborers, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 85.

¹⁴ Veblen suggests that wives and servants’ attendance on their master’s person and in producing goods for him created an environment of leisure and conspicuous consumption, pp. 62-3. Davidoff and Hall emphasize that servants were hired to distance the middle class from the “degradation associated with manual tasks” such as housework, p. 22. For an interesting and thorough discussion of servants as signatories, see Sandra Sherman’s “Servants and Semiotics: Reversible Signs, Capital Instability, and Defoe’s Logic of the Market,” Eighteenth Century Literature and History, 62, (1995), pp. 551-573.

¹⁵ Davidoff and Hall, p. 320. For a study of consumers’ tastes in the eighteenth century, see Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb’s The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of
Cissie Fairchilds: “Like fashionable clothes, fine china and furniture and a taste for coffee, tea or cocoa, [servants’] employment was one of the markers of the growing affluence of the 18c. urban elite.” Servants became an attractive commodity for consumption in the middling class’s efforts to advance socially.

In turn, their increased value as a social commodity improved servants’ bargaining position in negotiating the terms of their employment. Like their middling class masters who sought to improve their social and economic standing, servants took advantage of their newly acquired power and searched for better positions and higher wages, which resulted in high turnover rates in domestic service. Servants also began to imitate their employers’ habits of dress and manners, which further confused and obscured class distinctions that already were in a state of flux. While some members of the ruling class dismissed the problem of servant emulation as a “National Nuisance,” Daniel Defoe bitterly protested against servants who boldly masqueraded as their superiors in public. He complained that is was “a hard Matter to know the Mistress from the Maid by their Dress.” Defoe and others recognized that servants’ imitation of their masters meant that servants could potentially displace their masters.

Disturbed that servants’ transgression of social boundaries could potentially erase class distinctions, authors such as Jonathan Swift, Samuel Richardson, Daniel Defoe, and Henry Fielding published pamphlets and wrote conduct manuals for masters, which

---


16 p. 1.

17 Seleski emphasizes the independence that servants derived from their ability to change positions easily, pp 149-50. Davidoff and Hall describe the problem of retaining servants and the high turnover rate, p. 389. See also Maza, p. 126.

18 Fairchilds, pp. 109-112. See also Sherman, p. 561.

19 Mary Perkins, *The Servant Problem and the Servant in English Literature* (Boston: Gorham Press,
encouraged them to reform their servants’ manners and to educate servants to know their proper place. The authors of conduct manuals enforced class distinctions by deploying a new strategy that was designed to realign the servant class’s identity with that of the ruling class. Instead of exclusively targeting masters to contain the threat of servants’ socially subversive behavior, these writers appealed directly to servants’ desires for self-improvement and social promotion. In a wonderfully ironic and paradoxical move, they encouraged servants to adopt their master’s values and attitudes instead of simply aping his superficial manners. Servants were told that if they emulated their master’s virtuous, self-regulating conduct, they might gain access to those social domains from which they formerly had been barred. This new approach proved to be surprisingly successful in controlling servant subversion. Servants not only regulated their own behavior; they began policing one another’s behavior. Thus, the emerging contractual model preserved the traditional power differential between masters and servants through consent rather than coercion.

The Evolving Master/Servant Relationship in Fielding, Richardson, and Austen

The chief differences between the paternalistic and the contractual models of the master/servant relationship are manifest in the works of Fielding, Richardson, and Austen. First, in the paternalistic model servants are considered part of their master’s extended family. A friendly rapport, which involves frequent contact and communication,

---

20 Defoe’s statement is taken from Everybody’s Business if Nobody’s Business (1767), p. 4.
21 Maza notes that authors of didactic literature began to acknowledge servants’ “professional autonomy” and their ability to make moral decisions in the eighteenth century, p. 264.
22 Armstrong, p. 22; see also Maza, p. 332.
exists between master and servant. The affinity between Fielding’s Tom Jones and Partridge or Richardson’s Mr. B and his housekeeper Mrs. Jervis serve as examples. In the contractual relationship a clear demarcation exists between the affectionate, nuclear family and its servants, who are considered wage laborers. The relationship between these two parties is distant and formal. It is founded upon professional trust but not personal trust. Furthermore, the dialogic interaction associated with the paternalistic model is replaced with silence and non-verbal communication in the contractual model. For example, Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison communicates his commands through the power of the gaze, and his servants signal their compliance through a combination of nods, curtseys, and bows.

Second, servants in paternalistic households not only interact with their masters on friendly terms, they are enmeshed in their masters’ personal lives. The scene in Pamela where Mrs. Jervis lunges into bed between Mr. B and Pamela to prevent the master from ruining the maid provides an example of enmeshment. In the contractual model, on the other hand, masters and mistresses guard against opportunities for servants to learn of their private affairs. Richardson’s Grandison and Austen’s novels caution against the desire to confide in one’s servants. They warn that servants use personal information about their superiors either to manipulate or to defame them.

In many respects, however, the potential threat of public exposure at the hands of one’s servants was an unavoidable vulnerability. Servants had to be nearby in order to wait upon their masters and mistresses and to complete household chores. Yet having servants nearby was precisely what enabled them to have access to information about their employers’ private, interior lives. Characters of high moral and social standing, such
as Richardson’s Harriet Byron or Austen’s Elinor Dashwood, consciously work to insulate themselves from this danger by not speaking in the presence of servants.

Third, the paternalistic model is based on the assumption that servants are innately inferior creatures, who do not deserve personal freedom, and whose sole purpose of existence is to wait upon their superiors. This paternalistic attitude is well represented in Fielding’s *Tom Jones* by Nightingale, a master who beats his servant for pursuing his desire for recreation and personal relationships. Fielding’s paternalism also requires lowly servants to bear the burden of guilt for their superiors’ misdeeds. For example, Jenny Jones, a servant girl, takes the blame for Miss Bridget Allworthy’s illegitimate child. Furthermore, Fielding employs a class-specific double standard of conduct. He treats the moral transgressions of the ruling class more leniently than he does those of the lower classes.

Servants in a contractual relationship retain their inferior social status relative to their masters, but the two parties are considered equals within the moral hierarchy. As a result, masters such as Sir Charles Grandison recognize and encourage servants’ autonomy and personal freedom. In contrast to the double standard that Fielding’s novels promote, Richardson’s *Grandison* and Austen’s novels advocate a moral economy that holds all individuals accountable for their actions, regardless of class or gender. Austen’s unsympathetic treatment of Maria Rushworth in *Mansfield Park* provides a striking counter example to Fielding’s Miss Bridget Allworthy. Maria’s act of infidelity is revealed by a servant, and as a result of this exposure, Maria loses her husband, her social position, and her family’s support.
Finally, the paternalistic master expects absolute loyalty and obedience from his domestics, and he occasionally resorts to corporal punishment to enforce his authority. Contractual masters, on the other hand, promote obedience through a socialization process that instructs servants to emulate their masters’ manners and morals with the promise that servants who do so may be promoted into the middling class. Lord W affirms the merits of this new style of domestic management. Of the servants at Grandison Hall, he observes, “They have the looks of men of ease: They know their duty, and need not a reminding look. A servant of yours, Sir Charles, looks as if he would one day make a figure as a master” (Grandison 2.353).

Richardson’s Grandison not only serves as a pivotal literary text that illustrates the move towards the contractual master/servant relationship, this text also introduces the new paradigm of domesticity that accompanied the rise of the middling class. In Richardson’s formulation of this paradigm, housekeepers enjoy a relatively prominent position in the household hierarchy, while the visibility of all other servants diminishes considerably. Richardson’s decision to transfer the bulk of domestic responsibility to the housekeeper serves a moral purpose. It allows men to improve their financial and social standing, which then increases their ability to spread benevolence. Expanding the housekeeper’s role also enables the mistress to perform philanthropic service. In Richardson’s view, every person had a moral and civic duty to serve the community.

Austen clearly appreciates the benefits associated with Richardson’s paradigm. Fanny Price of Mansfield Park, for example, continues to embody the role of mistress as domestic angel. However, in Austen the new paradigm also serves an implicit class-based agenda. She wants to promote emerging middling class values such as discipline,
industry, and individual accountability. To advance that agenda, Austen first has to raise the landed gentry’s estimation of the middling class and its values. In order to gain the gentry’s esteem and friendship, middling class characters must establish a lifestyle of leisure that is equivalent to the landed gentry’s. Therefore, the middling class must distance itself as much as possible from domestic work and domestic servants, which the new domestic paradigm allows them to do.

In addition to adapting Richardson’s domestic paradigm to promote a social agenda, Austen also modifies the roles of the mistress and the housekeeper. Her mistresses are more devoted to leisure than community service. Exemplary mistresses in Austen display some interest in domestic affairs, but they do not actively participate in them. Mistresses who perform domestic labor (Mrs. Price) or call attention to domestic labor (Mrs. Bennet) or completely neglect the domestic enterprise (Lady Bertram) are criticized as poor managers. And, the housekeepers in Austen’s novels tend to be even more prominent than the housekeeper in Richardson’s Grandison, which reflects a strain of retrospective paternalism. Mrs. Reynolds in Pride and Prejudice and Mrs. Whitaker in Mansfield Park serve as guardians of the estate’s history and thus provide moral and social continuity across generations as well as across lines of inheritance.

While housekeepers enjoy some visibility as subjects in Austen’s novels, Austen erases the vast majority of servants. She does this to neutralize the threat that servants pose to the middling class’s fragile identity. One of the most effective strategies she employs to erase servants is to subsume the term “servants” in lists of material objects, which essentially dehumanizes servants and reduces them to the status of property.
Neither Fielding nor Richardson commodifies servants. Fielding’s socially conservative, deterministic view of class and gentility would not have allowed for the possibility that a person’s material possessions could successfully conceal the reality of being base-born. In contrast to Fielding’s belief in a direct correlation between birth, status, and character, Richardson’s assessment of a person’s worth emphasized moral virtue over rank and fortune. Consequently, Richardson would never have considered using servants as props to legitimize a person’s character because character, in his view, was not something that could be derived from material possessions. Furthermore, Richardson identified too strongly with working class people who were trying to get ahead in the world to dehumanize servants by transforming them into class-bound commodities in the way that Austen does.

In addition to commodifying servants, Austen uses other rhetorical strategies to marginalize servants’ voices and to diminish their status as human subjects, strategies that are unique to her style of exposition. For example, she reports servant dialogue as indirect speech, incorporates a device I term “disembodied speech,” and she relies on passive voice constructions to eliminate servants as agents. In addition, the servants in her novels are not referred to by name, which is a subtle cue signaling that servants are unworthy of being named.

While Austen is the only author, of the three discussed in this study, who exploits servants as markers of social class status, all three authors use servants as moral and ethical reference points. In Fielding servants provide a negative pole on the moral continuum, one that inversely defines the superiority of the ruling class. Examples include Susan, the promiscuous chambermaid, and Black George who lies and poaches
game. In Richardson’s early works servants such as Pamela, Mrs. Jervis, and Clarissa’s attendant Hannah set positive moral examples and denounce their paternalistic masters’ wickedness. In *Grandison* servants take on additional significance as signs of their master’s morality because servants are understood to function as metonymic extensions of their masters and mistresses. In other words, ruling class characters read the manners of their social peers’ servants, and on the basis of these observations, they draw conclusions about their peers’ manners and morals. Like Richardson, Austen also uses servants as signs of their master’s value system, but in her novels, servants primarily function as superficial signs of their master’s class identity; otherwise, the servants in Austen tend to be invisible.

**The Invisibility of Servants in the Social History**

Despite the important role servants played in defining the middling class in relation to those above them and below them in the social hierarchy, and despite servants’ notorious status as a “National Nuisance,” servants are not represented as a significant presence in the social histories that document life in eighteenth-century England. Social historians appear to have followed Austen’s lead for they have treated servants as if they were invisible. It was not until the 1980’s that servants began to be included in discussions of domesticity. Prior to that shift, social historians and literary critics routinely deemed servants in history and literature either absent or marginalized subjects.

Social historians have produced competing representations of the labor class’s experience, but none of their interpretations adequately explains the significant changes that occurred in the master/servant relationship in eighteenth-century England. Instead,
social historians tend to write about domestic service as if it were a “monolithic phenomenon unchanging over time.”\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, historians tend to generalize about the entire laboring class, in which they include domestic servants, and in doing so they overlook the individual’s experience, particularly the female servant’s experience.

Marxist historians are the logical candidates to examine the ways in which domestic servants were exploited for the purpose of middling class identity formation in the early modern period, but Marxists exclude domestic servants from their discussions of social and political history on the basis of ideological grounds. First, Marxists ignore forms of domestic production because they define “work” narrowly as an activity towards production that is performed by men in the public sphere. Therefore, Marxists are reluctant to acknowledge the cultural value of domestic work because women performed much of the labor, and the women were not always paid for it. Second, Marxist critics resist assigning an authentic subjectivity to servants because they strictly define class position, autonomy, and identity in relation to work. Finally, Marxists’ emphasis on superstructure generally neglects the individual’s psychological experience. According to the Marxist interpretation of history, domestic servants are not legitimate victims of oppression. In fact, because servants frequently identified with their employers, servants represent a scandalous embarrassment to the true victims of political oppression and economic exploitation. At the risk of overstating the Marxist position, they basically believe that servants are nothing because they produce nothing.

The dearth of information on servants’ contributions to social, political, and domestic life in the eighteenth century is not entirely ideological. The truth is that

\textsuperscript{23} Hill, p. 16.
historians are hampered by incomplete and fragmented evidence. They have been forced
to rely almost exclusively on bookkeeping records that merely identify a servant's name,
job title, and wages -- facts that do not lend themselves to a thorough understanding of
the master/servant relationship. Furthermore, much of the information collected from
these records, as well as from journals and diaries, reflects the dominant culture's point of
view.

In contrast to those social historians who have completely ignored or abandoned
the study of eighteenth-century servants, some have attempted to describe servants' roles
and contributions to domestic life. Lawrence Stone, for example, recognizes the
importance of servants in domestic life. In *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England
1500-1800* he writes, "from the time of the first censuses in the early sixteenth century to
the mid-nineteenth century, about one third or more of all households contained living-in
servants."²⁴ Franklin Mendels also contends that servants were a standard part of most
households in the eighteenth century, but without reliable evidence to substantiate
historical claims, the topic of servants "just withered away," he says; "it left neither the
documentary sources nor the motivation for historians and others to study this
phenomenon."²⁵ Despite Mendel's bleak pronouncement, Jean Hecht's *The Domestic
Servant Class in Eighteenth Century England* provides a substantial amount of
information on large households that employed many servants.²⁶ Although these three
historians' arguments differ greatly in purpose and scope, their studies of servants

²⁴ pp. 27-8.
²⁵ "Family Forms in Historic Europe," *Social History*, vol. 11, 1986, p. 85
²⁶ To this day Hecht's book is recognized as the most comprehensive source of information on servants in
eighteenth-century England.
perpetuate a hierarchical, upstairs/downstairs model, and they tend to focus on male servants. Hence, their work is criticized for its class and gender stereotyping.

In recent years feminist scholars have tried to compensate for the class and gender stereotyping that characterized many of these earlier descriptions of servants in the eighteenth-century. In Servants, for example, feminist social historian Bridget Hill reconstructs the female servant as a psychological subject by exploring servants' attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. She concedes that this task requires "a little historical imagination."27 One of the ways in which Hill stimulates the imagination is by turning to fictional accounts of servants: "Novels are an excellent source for much unwitting testimony about employers' attitudes towards servants, the nature of the household, customs, hiring and firing."28 But Hill does not use Pamela to discuss Richardson's representation of Mr. B; instead, she uses the character of Pamela to reconstruct the attitudes and desires of eighteenth-century waiting maids, and she uses scanty historical data on waiting maids to discuss the realism of Richardson's heroine. While I agree with Hill's assumption that novels are cultural products that reflect the socio-political ideology and culture of a particular place and time, I am skeptical of her decision to use Pamela because Pamela hardly qualifies as an average eighteenth-century maidservant.

The Invisibility of Servants in Literary Criticism

One finds a similar conflation of literature and history in literary critics' discussions of servants because Marxists, who emphasize the general exclusion of the

27 p. 10
28 p. 21
working class experience from eighteenth-century literature, have published much of what has been written on the subject. Marxists deplore the fact that novelists reduce the diverse population of the under class into the “overly conventionalized figure” of the domestic servant, a practice that they claim exposes the novel’s preference for “rhetoric rather than realism.”

In *The Servant’s Hand* Bruce Robbins claims that throughout literature servants are “mere appendages of their masters,” comic foils stripped of agency and subjectivity. In his introduction, he writes:

Much has changed between Homer and Virginia Woolf, but the literary servant has not undergone proportional changes . . . The jokes, character types, parallelisms, and plot devices that made up the literary servant were of course not entirely identical from Terence to Thackeray, but the differences, I found, were not particularly illuminating — were less illuminating, at any rate, than an analysis of the disturbing fact of continuity.

John Richetti joins Robbins in arguing that the eighteenth-century novel’s comic universalizing obscures the visibility of class differences and erases moments of subversion when the master/servant hierarchy is temporarily destabilized. Terry Eagleton offers a completely distopic view of lower class subversion in literature. He suggests that all subversive activities are, in fact, appropriated by the state; therefore,

---

30 p. 39.
31 p. 39.
transgressive acts pose no genuine threat to the dominant power structure and offer no real potential for social or political change.\textsuperscript{33}

I cannot argue that servants in eighteenth-century literature are responsible for instituting social or political change, nor can I claim that they possess the agency, subjectivity, and power ascribed to the ruling class in the works of Fielding, Richardson, or Austen. I would be imposing an ideological fantasy on the novels, in essence mirroring the moves I find most dissatisfying in Marxist interpretations. However, it is my intention to recuperate servants from the devaluations they receive at the hands of Marxist literary critics.

My work represents a departure from Robbins's work in a number of ways. Most notably, he emphasizes the similarity in the functions and representations of servants throughout literature, whereas I have chosen to focus on the differences in the master/servant relationship that reflect the shift from paternalism to contractualism.\textsuperscript{34}

Apart from that distinction, I do not agree with Robbins's claim that servants in eighteenth-century novels are "mere appendages" to their masters. If servants were in fact completely devoid of agency, subjectivity and power, as he contends, then Black George would not be banished for pursuing his own interests, Pamela would not become mistress of B Hall, and Austen's characters would not be so careful to notice the servants slipping in and out of the drawing room while pretending not to notice them.

My final point of disagreement with Robbins is his conclusion that throughout literature servants' functions constitute an "affront to historicality."\textsuperscript{34} I do not deny the

\textsuperscript{34} p. 42. Robbins does acknowledge that the representation of the master/servant relationship in literature changes as a result of the rise of the middle class. However, he locates this change firmly in the Victorian
fact that paternalism has been at odds with servants' self-interest throughout history. However, I believe the juxtaposition of Fielding's, Richardson's, and Austen's novels maps the trajectory from servant visibility to invisibility, and these authors' works illustrate the historical trajectory from the paternalistic to the contractual model of master/servant relations. Chapter two, "Fielding's Paternalism Under Pressure," argues that the paternalistic model of master/servant relations in Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and *Amelia* is destabilized as a result of servants' progressive individualism. Chapter three, "Richardson Redefines What It Means to Be a Master, a Mistress, and a Servant," explores the ways in which Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* expose the abuses and dangers associated with the paternalistic model. Richardson's *Grandison* introduces an exemplary contractual master who solves the problem of servant subversion. Chapter four, "The Paradox of Austen's Invisible Servants," examines the rhetorical strategies that Austen uses to erase servants from the narrative. Her rhetorical intervention is necessary because she wants to merge the values of the middling class with those of the gentry and then present this combined value system as the preferred model of moral and domestic order.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\)Lawrence Stone and Jeanne C. Fawtier Stone argue that the middling class and gentry formed a relatively fluid group. The middling class acquired the economic resources to buy landed titles and estates, which made marriages between people of the gentry and the middling class more socially acceptable, and members of the gentry were sending second born sons into trade, *An Open Elite? England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), p. 24.
Chapter Two: Fielding’s Paternalism Under Pressure

Henry Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* (1741), *Tom Jones* (1749), and *Amelia* (1751) present an anachronistic, paternalistic model of master/servant relations that is beginning to show signs of stress under the weight of pre-capitalist, progressive individualism. In Fielding’s fiction the gentry clings to its outdated paternalism when confronted with servants’ aggressive self-interest, a self-interest that the author actively suppresses in order to erase evidence of class tension. The primary site of class conflict in the novels is located on the tenuous border that separates the middling class from the servant class. The competing economic and social interests of middling class women and female servants erupt in domestic skirmishes. Fielding uses female servants as moral and ethical reference points to reveal the hypocrisy and self-interest that pervade all ranks of society, but in particular the middling class. He is critical of the way in which the middling class is pre-disposed to pursue its own economic interests and to shirk its moral responsibility to the larger community. Despite Fielding’s reservations concerning the middling class’s pre-capitalist values, his novels suggest that the middling class remains superior to the vicious, licentiousness of lower orders.

The increasing influence of progressive individualism and emerging capitalism on eighteenth-century British society led to the formation of the middling class. Progressive individualism was part of the Enlightenment philosophy, which promoted rationalism, social advancement, and personal liberty for all people. A value system based upon the principles of progressive individualism assumes that all human beings are equal; it empowers individuals by giving them the freedom to choose their own destinies; and it
encourages people to work to get ahead of others. Progressive individualism fostered the growth of the middling class, which caused a crisis in social class in the early modern period.

The crisis that resulted from the proliferation of new social categories was especially intense between the middling class and domestic servants. Members of the middling class, who had managed to rise above the dregs of the laboring poor and the servant class, wanted to protect their precarious position from the intrusion of those situated them below in the social order. Domestic servants, motivated by the rhetoric of self-determination, aspired to improve their lives by joining the ranks of the expanding middling class rather than settling for the status quo. In addition to wealth and social status, many servants sought long-term financial security in the event that they became infirm or advanced to retirement age. However, the strategies available to servants to reach those goals were relatively limited, since most servants were not educated, had no other specialized skills, and had no capital to invest.

Fielding's novels illustrate the two strategies that servants commonly resorted to for improving their situations. These included saving their wages or marrying someone who could contribute to their wealth and status. Male servants used their savings to go into business for themselves as moneylenders, innkeepers, shopkeepers, or traders. Female servants had fewer options than their male counterparts because they earned lower wages, had few career alternatives, and could not own property. Marriage represented one of the only ways in which female domestics could improve their prospects; therefore, they reserved their earnings for their wedding dowries, which
enhanced their ability to attract suitors. In Tom Jones Aunt Western articulates women’s mercenary attitude towards marriage by describing it as “a fund in which prudent women deposite their fortunes to the best advantage, in order to receive a larger interest than they could have elsewhere” (304).

In addition to financial security, marriage provided sexual fulfillment to eighteenth-century women who were discouraged from engaging in pre-marital sex. Because “chastity define[d] the female self in its social and moral relation to the world,” women who sought sexual fulfillment outside of marriage sacrificed their reputations and their marriageability, which in the case of female servants, meant that they forfeited their ability to escape the life of service.

Fielding’s Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia expose the tension that accompanied the evolution of the master/ servant relationship as self-determined servants began to challenge the gentry’s paternalism and attempted to leave service by saving their own money, taking their master’s money, or marrying someone with money. The novels illustrate the ways in which servants’ needs, desires, and opinions are at odds with their paternalistic masters or mistresses who expect absolute loyalty, obedience, and self-abnegation. When confronted with competing agendas, the servants must decide whose interests deserve their attention and action, and in most cases, the servants in Fielding’s novels choose their own. Black George, for example, attempts to take advantage of the

---

growing market economy to improve his financial and social standing, and he does so at his master’s expense. Honour and Slipslop resent the distinctions arbitrarily assigned to persons of birth and rank. They rebel against inherited categories of social classification, espousing an egalitarian rhetoric that promotes class equality, especially with respect to choosing a spouse.

In this chapter I argue that the servants in *Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones,* and *Amelia* who pursue individualistic desires for financial security, social status, or personal validation, get punished or dismissed by their masters, whereas the servants who subordinate their needs and goals in order to serve their masters’, reap rewards at the conclusion of Fielding’s novels. In short, the servants who serve ruling class interests are obedient and submissive and thus conform to the expectations of paternalism. The servants who serve themselves are actively suppressed by Fielding, who makes them disappear and renders them invisible.

In addition to examining the tension caused by the competing agendas of paternalism and self-interest within the master/ servant relationship, this chapter also explores the ways in which Fielding’s servants re-negotiate their status in relation to the expanding middling class. When I use the term the “middling class” in my discussions of Fielding’s works, I am referring to innkeepers and professionals, such as Mrs. Tow- wouse and Lawyer Dowling, who hire servants to do work. These members of the middling class and domestic servants are jockeying for position and respectability within the fluctuating class system. The middling class’s claims to social power and moral

---

4 Bruce Robbins argues that servants in literature seem to be oblivious to their own interests because they support the goals of the establishment, even to their own detriment, *The Servant’s Hand* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), p. 68.
authority are questioned by their own domestic servants and aggressively attacked by the servants of the gentry who assert their own prior claims to superiority based on their master’s status. This dispute over status between the middling class and domestic servants is the primary site of class conflict in Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia.

This crisis in class often erupts in conflicts between women, in particular female innkeepers and their maids, who get into fights over rebellious female servant sexuality. Female servant sexuality presents a threat to marital harmony. More importantly, however, in a pre-capitalist economy fueled by self-interest, servant sexuality interferes with domestic production, which jeopardizes the middling class’s prosperity. Unbridled servant sexuality also undermines the middling class’s claims to legitimacy and moral superiority. Fielding’s negative portrayal of servants and the middling class suggests that neither group is equipped to establish a new social order or to set a moral example. In fact, the domestic skirmishes over status between the two classes are a primary source of comedy in his novels. Despite Fielding’s critique of middling class values, the middling class and the gentry are permitted to abide by more relaxed standards of conduct, whereas servants are held accountable for their moral and social transgressions.

---

5 In Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel Nancy Armstrong argues that Fielding is one of many eighteenth-century authors of domestic fiction who translates the social contract into a sexual transaction between men and women (New York: Oxford UP, 1987), pp. 38-9. In Fielding, however, the negotiation of the social contract takes place between women.

Servants’ Bodies Marked by Self-Interest

Fielding’s general disapproval of self-interested servants is conveyed most visibly through his taxonomy of characterization, which makes it easy to identify the servants who serve themselves. In The Rise of the Novel Ian Watt calls attention to the way in which Fielding relies on superficial features to assign individuals to moral and social species. This approach to characterization served Fielding’s self-stated purpose of using the evolving genre of the novel as a mechanism by which to provide general maxims about human nature. Samuel Richardson and Jane Austen did not approach characterization in this simplistic fashion. Their descriptions of servants primarily focus on character rather than physical appearance, an emphasis that suited their more psychologically complex novels. Fielding’s descriptions of servants, on the other hand, emphasize servants’ physical features and behavior, characteristics that are also captured in some servants’ names. The name “Black George,” for example, reflects the gamekeeper’s black beard and instantly signals his villainy. In addition to the obvious negative connotations associated with servants’ names, Fielding combines the language of mock-heroic epic with grotesque, concrete details to characterize female servants who pursue their own interests and to communicate his disapproval of them.

The unsightly appearance of the maids in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones illustrates Fielding’s particular aversion to strong working-class women. His descriptions

---


8 Fielding characterizes Black George and Partridge, Tom Jones’s attendant, in terms of their dispositions and intellectual capacity rather than focusing on their physical attributes, which marks a significant departure from Fielding’s descriptions of female servants.
of female domestics focus on their visceral, physical bodies, which tend to be ugly and masculine, bordering on monstrous.  

9 The “tow’ring head” and “stately steps” of Mrs. Wilkins, Allworthy’s housekeeper, symbolize her exaggerated sense of self-importance as well as her power to dominate those below her in the domestic hierarchy (Tom Jones 62). Susan, a promiscuous chambermaid in Joseph Andrews, has a face “well contrived to receive blows without any great injury to herself,” which implies that she is already so repulsive that even marks of violence could not further mar her appearance (447-8).  

10 Slipslop, a housekeeper in pursuit of social status and sexual fulfillment, is by far the most repugnant of the bunch. She is described as bearded, red-faced, and foul-smelling, an unflattering portrait that leaves Slipslop’s gender identity open to speculation.  

11 Fielding’s female servants are not only physically unattractive, but also physically violent.

In Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones female domestics resort to violence to resolve disputes, and Fielding uses this penchant for violence to differentiate between the degradation of the low-born maids and the superiority of their high-born mistresses. In Fielding’s novels ruling class women do not stoop to the level of physical retaliation to defend themselves or their reputations; instead, they use their servants as stand-ins for them. This is not the case in Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison or in Austen’s novels in

---


11 Slipslop, like other female servants in Fielding’s fiction, could be the poster-child for Bakhtin’s notion of grotesque realism as it pertains to the human body. Peter Stallybrass and Alon White describe this physical body as an “an image of impure corporeal bulk,” The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986), p. 9. Astrid Costa’s discussion of Bakhtinian carnivalesque in Joseph Andrews calls attention to Slipslop’s “essential mutability,” but instead of exploring the housekeeper’s ambiguous gender
which members of the ruling class resolve disputes rationally through dialogue rather than using their servants as personal vigilante forces. Servants never engage in violent acts or become the target of a master’s abuse in _Grandison_ or in Austen’s canon, which suggests that other forms of social control were in place to maintain order and civility in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Fielding’s maids, however, use their disproportionately large hands as the primary mechanism of social control, and their oversized hands signal the women’s membership in the servant class. In the preface to _The Servant’s Hand_ Bruce Robbins comments that the recurring images of hands in literature symbolize the fragmented and disembodied presence of ordinary working class people. Robbin’s assertion has merit, however, his Marxist position blinds him to the labor, productivity, and power embodied in servants’ hands.

Fielding’s female servants use their powerful hands to assault middling class men and male servants who insult their mistresses’ dignity or personally offend them. Honour, for example, uses her “meaty” hands to claw an innkeeper who calls her mistress Sophia Western a whore (_Tom Jones_ 469-70, 538). Susan, a “two-handed wench,” uses her “robust and manlike” strength to pummel Partridge in _Tom Jones_ (447-8). Slipslop delivers staggering blows to Parson Adams’s mid-section when he races into a dark bedchamber to rescue her, but mistakes Slipslop for her pretended male attacker on

---

12 p. xi
account of her rough beard (*Joseph Andrews* 310-12). The female servants emerge from these scuffles battered and bruised but victorious. In Fielding’s view the women’s ability to dominate men only underscores their vulgarity, but it also reveals the author’s anxiety about powerful women.

Richardson’s depictions of female servants differ significantly from Fielding’s, but Richardson’s works do contain a few vicious female servants, but these women serve patriarchy, in contrast to Fielding’s maids who attack it. Ronald Paulson has pointed out that Fielding’s portrait of Slipslop closely resembles that of Mrs. Jewkes in Richardson’s *Pamela*. Both servants are monstrous, masculine, and violent, but Slipslop is a much more sympathetic figure than Mrs. Jewkes because Slipslop takes more abuse than she directs at others, and she defends those who cannot defend themselves. Richardson’s mean-spirited female servants with over-sized hands, such as Mrs. Jewkes and Betty in *Clarissa*, direct their aggression at Richardson’s young, defenseless heroines on behalf of their male masters. Richardson locates uncontrollable sexuality in his male protagonists who use their female servants to act out their aggression. Fielding, on the other hand, locates aggression and promiscuity in female servants who essentially use their hands to emasculate middling and lower class men.

---


15 Instead of seeing Slipslop is a mere comic foil to Lady Booby, Spilka agrees that Slipslop is a more complex and sympathetic figure. He writes, “There is something almost touching, as well as ridiculous, about her faulty speech, her grotesque body, and her foolish dream of becoming ‘Mrs. Andrews, with a hundred a-year.’” p. 12.
In addition to being physically dominant, the female servants in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews* who pursue individualistic desires are sexually aggressive, which is another quality Fielding uses to distinguish high-born women from low-born women.\(^{16}\) When Allworthy summons Mrs. Wilkins in the middle of the night, she pauses to fix her hair before entering his bedchamber, which not only signals her self-absorption but also reveals the latent sexual component to their master/servant relationship (*Tom Jones* 56). The narrator, who is amused by the housekeeper’s vanity and presumptuousness in thinking that Allworthy might wish to seduce “an elderly matron,” casts her primping in an ironic light (56). His tone makes it clear that Mrs. Wilkins’s age and inferior class automatically eliminate her from being considered a suitable love interest for Allworthy.

Mrs. Wilkins’s tactics of seduction are tame compared to Slipslop’s. This sex-starved servant tries to get Joseph, one of her subordinates, drunk in order to take advantage of him. Slipslop also attempts to trick Beau Didapper into thinking that she is Fanny so that he will make love to her. When he wises up to her scam and rejects her, she attempts to assault him sexually, and the force of two men is required to subdue her.

Female servants receive much harsher treatment from Fielding than their male counterparts, but both groups are viewed with disdain and apprehension.\(^{17}\) Female servants’ desire for power and their rebellious sexuality pose a threat to male patriarchal

---

\(^{16}\) In the introduction to the Penguin edition of *Joseph Andrews* (1977), R.F. Brissenden suggests that Fielding situates the locus of healthy sexuality within the servant class. He writes, “Thus good-natured people, [Fielding] would maintain, are usually sexually generous and affectionate, while the selfish and the hypocritical are often puritanical and intolerant in sexual matters. It is significant that the only person who treats Joseph with any common human decency when he is carried naked, bleeding, and half-dead into the inn is Betty,” (Penguin: London, 1977), p. 13.

\(^{17}\) Feminists have attacked Fielding’s “masculine ethic,” though some feminist critics have argued that characters such as Sophia Western and Amelia Booth show that Fielding was sympathetic to women’s interests. See Angela Smallwood’s *Fielding and the Woman Question* (New York: St. Martin’s Press,
authority. Male servants’ desire for property and autonomy poses a threat to the gentry’s hegemonic authority. Fielding goes to great lengths to suppress all servants’ appetites for property, status, and pleasure.

**Paternalism Denies Servants’ Desire for Property, Social Status, and Autonomy**

The philosophy of progressive individualism, which led to the expansion of the middling class in the eighteenth century, was closely tied to Lockean assumptions about an individual’s right to own property. According to Brian McCrea, a new-historicist scholar who has analyzed the connections between Fielding’s politics and his literary publications, “Fielding was unequivocal and unsparing in his defense of property.”¹⁸ Even though Fielding did not own property, he believed that educated members of the middling class, who prospered as a result of growing commercialism and accumulated sufficient wealth, should have the opportunity to join the ranks of property owners.

Up until this time in history, property ownership had been a privilege reserved primarily for the elite. This land-holding elite served as “the guarantor and permanent reflection of public order.”¹⁹ Landed proprietors were thought to possess the civic responsibility and financial security that would ensure social stability.²⁰ While Fielding believed that hard working, educated members of the middling class ought to be accorded the status and responsibility of landed proprietorship, he did not think the privilege of

---

¹⁸ *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth-Century England*, p. 203
²⁰ The Black Act of 1723 established strict punishments for crimes against property. According to James Thompson, for many in the eighteenth century, land represented “genealogical and possessive continuity,”
property ownership should be extended to servants, whom he considered vulgar, reckless, and selfish. The servants in Fielding's novels who damage or steal their master's property are portrayed negatively and ultimately get punished and banished.

*Tom Jones* provides evidence of Fielding's opposition to servants' desires for property, autonomy, and pleasure. Nightingale, a member of the gentry, returns home from an outing to discover his attendant socializing with friends. He attacks the servant for damaging his "best Hoyle" and insulting Nancy, his lover who barely reaches the threshold of middling class status (623). When confronted, the servant does not resume his subordinate position and apologize for his misconduct as Nightingale expects him to do; instead, the servant physically fights back, behavior that is unexpected and unacceptable to his paternalistic master. The servant also suggests that his master deduct the cost of the damaged book from his wages, which may have resolved the matter to Nightingale's satisfaction if he had been dealing with someone other than his personal servant.

The servant approaches the problem from the perspective of an emerging pre-capitalist. He sees economic restitution as a fair and equitable solution to the problem, but for Nightingale the issue is not about money; it is about authority. Nightingale cannot tolerate the idea of employing a rebellious servant who feels entitled to use his master's property without permission and then has the gall to defend that action. This clash over property between master and servant exposes the tension associated with the competing value systems of paternalism and emerging capitalism.

The incident between Nightingale and his attendant also illustrates the effects of progressive individualism on the servant's understanding of what it means to be a servant during this period of dynamic social change. For Nightingale's attendant, domestic service is simply an occupation, a means of earning a living; he will not be coerced into the obligatory subordination of paternalism. He does not believe that servants should be required to abandon their desires for personal relationships and amusement on account of their masters' outdated paternalistic expectations. He insists that servants "must have their diversions as well as other people," which is a radical, egalitarian idea (Tom Jones 230). Furthermore, Nightingale's attendant refuses to vacate the premises until he receives his wages, which underscores his identity as an economic man.

The servant's wages are of no consequence to Nightingale; however, he does expect his servant to treat him with honor and veneration. From Nightingale's paternalistic perspective, the most severe punishment he can exercise upon his attendant is to revoke the privilege of being employed to wait upon him; therefore, he orders the man to remove his livery, which represents a symbolic dissolution of their identities and obligations to one another. Wearing livery had advantages and disadvantages for servants. On the one hand, livery was demeaning because it automatically defined a man as a servant, a subordinate, a visible object that signified his master's superior class. On the other hand, a servant in livery gained access to some of the social spaces and privileges enjoyed by his master. Despite these social perks, Nightingale's servant does

21 "Hoyle" refers to a famous rulebook for card games such as whist that was published in the eighteenth century by Edmond Hoyle.
not consider a life of subjugation a privilege worth protecting, which explains why he readily sheds his livery.

Nightingale's attendant is not only stripped of his livery but also beaten and dismissed by his master, which is the servant's punishment for asserting his own interests. Fielding does not employ the language of mock-heroic epic to capture moments when members of the gentry and pseudo-gentry beat their servants as he does when describing the violent yet comical clashes between the middling class and its servants. This difference in treatment reflects Fielding's belief that the grievances of the ruling class deserved to be taken seriously and that socially sanctioned corporal punishment ensured that they would be. Nightingale assures Tom Jones that he does not "make a custom of striking [his] servants" (Tom Jones 623). While there is no evidence in the text to contradict Nightingale's statement, Sarah Maza's review of eighteenth-century domestic handbooks reveals that corporal punishment directed at servants was regarded as an appropriate means of "moral education" in the eighteenth century. 22

Fielding's valorization of property is not only confirmed through Nightingale's willingness to beat his servant for it, but also in the relative value that Nightingale assigns to property and proprietorship compared to the value of his lover's reputation. Nightingale's justification of the beating focuses entirely on the servant's violation of his property. He tells Tom that the servant was playing cards with friends at "my fire" where they damaged "my best Hoyle" (Tom Jones 230). His desire to punish the servant for being insubordinate and challenging his privilege of property ownership and social power is more important to him than vindicating Nancy's honor. One might not expect Nancy's
honor to be at stake when a mere servant impugns it; however, her status as a working class woman is not vastly different from her antagonist’s status as an upper servant of the gentry. Tom says little in response to his friend’s argument; however, he does hint that only the insult leveled at Nancy, a detail that completely dropped out of Nightingale’s tirade against the servant, would give him cause to beat a servant. It is reasonable to assume that Fielding’s position is aligned with Tom’s, which emphasizes the defense of women and relationships over property. However, if one considers this incident in light of Fielding’s attitudes about property and the master/servant relationship, then it is clear that Fielding sympathizes with Nightingale’s position and views Tom’s judgment as errant but pardonable. Tom simply cannot appreciate Nightingale’s outrage because he is not of the landed class.

In *Amelia* a maid takes her mistress’s clothes in lieu of her unpaid wages. In this instance the master’s protection of his property and his paternalistic expectations of servant self-abnegation are at odds with his servant’s expectations of fair and timely compensation. Even though Booth is inferior to Nightingale in terms of class (although he is at least ostensibly a member of the leisure class), he shares Nightingale’s values, in particular his attitude towards servants. Booth, however, does not beat his servant for making off with his wife’s clothes; instead, he has her arrested. Booth vents his paternalistic ire when speaking to his wife of Betty: “She is besides guilty of ingratitude to you, who have treated her with so much kindness, that you have rather acted the part of

---

22 pp. 172-4.
a mother than of a mistress” (*Amelia* 479). He berates Betty for her breach of trust and for abusing his wife’s parental generosity.

The influence of progressive individualism is reflected in Betty’s behavior. Booth expected the maid to subordinate her need to be compensated, since she was aware of his dire financial situation. On a previous occasion Betty had conformed to the exigencies of paternalism by agreeing to take the blame for a household theft that she did not commit in order to protect her mistress’s sister from blame. In this instance, however, she chooses to look after her own interests by pawning her mistress’s clothes to substitute for her wages. Betty’s conduct appears to be vindicated by the judge’s ruling that her theft of the clothing is not punishable, a decision which completely infuriates her master. However, before chalking up this moment as one in which a self-determined servant triumphs over a paternalistic master, recall that Betty was threatened and abused by her master and ultimately turned out onto the streets with nothing to show for her years of loyal service.

Allworthy’s reaction is akin to Booth’s upon discovering that Black George has abused his trust and generosity in *Tom Jones*. Even though Allworthy’s “lost” bank notes are returned to him, the squire is furious that the gamekeeper cannot be criminally prosecuted for taking them. His personal, moral outrage strikes a chord with readers: “I think a highway man, compared to him, is an innocent person” (*Tom Jones* 862). Despite Allworthy’s previous bad dealings with Black George related to illegal poaching on a neighboring estate, his paternalism led him to expect more gratitude, honor, and personal integrity from the gamekeeper. But the gamekeeper’s actions are not guided by a

---

sense of moral obligation to his employer or his superiors. He only feels obliged to look after his own interests.

Black George represents the epitome of the progressive, pre-capitalist servant whose actions are guided exclusively by self-interest. His list of misdeeds includes lying, poaching, and keeping property that does not belong to him. In contrast to Betty, who takes her mistress’s clothes as a substitute for the wages owed to her, Black George steals without justification and at his friend Tom’s expense. In the opening pages of the novel Black George covers up his involvement in a poaching incident and scapegoats his accomplice: “He basely suffered Tom Jones to undergo so heavy a punishment for his sake” (Tom Jones 134). In the moral economy of paternalism, it is wrong for a servant to allow his or her superior to take the blame for any misdeeds. In fact, servants are expected to bear the burden of guilt for their superiors’ criminal misdemeanors and moral indiscretions. Black George learns this lesson the hard way and gets fired.

Getting fired from his position at Paradise Hall does not, however, deter Black George from repeatedly exploiting the ruling class and its property in order to propel his rise in the world. When the gamekeeper finds the bank notes that Tom received from Allworthy, he “very carefully put them up for his own use” instead of returning them to Tom (Tom Jones 290). In addition to pocketing the £500, Black George further improves his financial and social standing by joining Squire Western’s retinue as his gamekeeper, a

---


26 Dr. Terrence Doody brought this to my attention in a graduate seminar on the eighteenth-century novel at Rice University.
move that provides more lucrative opportunities to poach game for personal profit. The subsequent improvement in Black George’s status is evident when Partridge bumps into the gamekeeper in London and hardly recognizes him because he is so “very well drest” (*Tom Jones* 737).

In addition to lucrative financial advantages, the position of gamekeeper includes unusual social freedoms. As a gamekeeper Black George is authorized to run wealthy citizens off of his master’s property and to confiscate their weapons, laying claim to their property. In other words, he appropriates ruling class authority and uses it for his own personal gain. He also enjoys the privilege of hunting, an activity that some of his social superiors are prevented from doing because they do not meet the minimum income threshold established by the Game Act of 1671. As a result of these special privileges, Black George is envied by members of the ruling class and “universally hated” by his fellow domestics at Paradise Hall who see him doing things that they are not allowed to do and advancing quickly at other people’s expense (*Tom Jones* 135). These special privileges along with Black George’s cavalier self-interest alienate him from his social peers but aid him in his efforts to join the rank of property owners.

Black George achieves some degree of financial independence, but when he attempts to purchase a piece of property, Fielding ends his upward mobility. In the process of negotiating a mortgage, the gamekeeper produces Allworthy’s notes, the act which leads to his undoing. Fielding’s social conservatism will not allow servants to become property owners because they are not civic-minded enough to warrant such a responsibility and privilege, and they certainly will not rise at their masters’ expense in
Fielding’s novels. Male servants with appetites for property or genteel living get berated, beaten, and banished, and female servants who attempt to achieve those same goals through marriage do not fare any better in Joseph Andrews or Tom Jones.

Female Servants and Marriage: A Means of Making Their Fortunes

Generally speaking, the female servants in Fielding’s novels have little to lose and much to gain by marrying almost any man if their goal is to avoid the drudgery of service. Honour shares Black George’s desire to escape from the life of service, but her prospects are much more limited than his because she earns lower wages as a female servant and cannot own property. Therefore, Honour’s best alternative to is to marry someone above the servant class. While she would prefer to marry an attractive man, she “viewed all handsome men with that equal regard and benevolence, which a sober and virtuous mind bears to all the good” (Tom Jones 210). In other words, any man will do for Honour.

Slipslop, Lady Booby’s lady-in-waiting, has advanced beyond a marriageable age, yet she remains confident that she will find a husband. The criterion that she uses to screen potential suitors suggests that she is more overtly invested in social mobility than in physical appearance or compatibility. When Slipslop imagines herself entering into a

---


28 Molly Seagrim wishes to bypass domestic drudgery, so she refuses a position as a servant at the Western estate: “I shan’t wash dishes for anybody. My gentleman will provide better for me” (Tom Jones 179). Molly rejects the offer to go into service because she knows she will enjoy a more comfortable existence as someone’s wife or mistress. She figures that it is better to prostitute herself to a lover or a husband than to
marital alliance, she feels quite certain that she is “not meat for a footman” (Joseph Andrews 264). Despite having relatively low standards, neither one of the maids succeeds in finding a husband, which is a predictable outcome in Fielding’s paternalistic system. The author sees to it that female servants who focus their energies on their own goals fail to achieve them.

Fielding has no compassion for female servants who place their interests above their mistresses’. Honour’s hunt for a husband is the primary impetus behind her decision to support Sophia’s plan to runaway to London. The lure of London’s attractions, the prospect of finding a husband, and the promise of a generous reward for attending to Sophia’s needs, motivate Honour to follow her mistress. However, the line between self-interest and loyalty is never black and white: “Tho Honour was principally attached to her own interest, she was not without some little attachment to Sophia” (Tom Jones 319). While Honour does demonstrate some loyalty to Sophia, the maid’s commitment to her own agenda, which is driven by vanity and class aspirations, ultimately surpasses her devotion to her mistress. When she abandons Sophia in order to stay in London and wait upon Lady Bellaston, Honour’s disloyalty to her young mistress results in her exclusion from the Somersetshire community and from Tom and Sophia’s charity (Tom Jones 804).

Fielding does not champion the cause of oppressed female domestic servants, yet he does create a discursive space for them to vent the frustration they feel as a result of being low-born. Female servants are particularly exasperated at the way in which their low-born status prevents them from being legitimate contenders for the hearts of men of

---

have to serve and possibly prostitute herself to a master. Moll adopts a similar position and chooses to avoid service in Daniel Defoe’s Moll Flanders.

29 This statement is directly contradicted by Slipslop’s interest in Joseph Andrews.
rank and fortune. Honour and Slipslop are especially strong advocates of egalitarianism, challenging conventional class-based assumptions regarding who may marry whom. In their view men and women of fortune should be able to marry whomever they wish regardless of their prospective spouses’ social status, and considering the women’s lowly status and determination to advance through marriage, it is easy to understand why they would support such a position.

The maids resent the fact that they are expected to abide by social codes, which not only limit their marital prospects, but also restrict their right to express themselves openly in the presence of their superiors. Slipslop launches into a vigorous defense of servants’ right to speak after being reprimanded by her mistress for the “extraordinary degree of freedom in which she thought proper to indulge her tongue.” Slipslop declares, “Freedom! . . . I don’t know what you call freedom, madam; servants have tongues as well as their mistresses” (Joseph Andrews 60).30 Slipslop baits Lady Booby with this remark, pretending not to understand that the different degrees of freedom to which her mistress refers are dictated by class distinctions, which authorize mistresses to speak and to command their servants’ silence. The maid rejects the idea that some people are born to rule over others; instead, she posits the progressive, democratic belief that all human beings are equal and possess tongues for the purpose of speaking their minds.

Literary critics such as Frederick Blanchard and Paulson who support a more democratic interpretation of Fielding’s project emphasize these carnivalesque moments in which characters assert egalitarian ideals, but I contend that Fielding would not have

---

30 Robbins points out that Slipslop’s comment actually responds to the narrator’s paraphrase of Lady Booby’s thoughts, and this “raises [Slipslop] if only briefly to a higher level of discourse,” p. 62.
placed these ideas in the mouths of Slipslop and Honour, two highly satirized maids who have no authority or social power, if he had meant for their platform of radical social change to be taken seriously.\footnote{31} It is significant, although not surprising, to note that Fielding’s male servants do not voice egalitarian opinions related to the subject of marriage, even though the prospect of marrying women above their station ought to appear equally advantageous to them. Male servants, unlike their female counterparts, can hypothetically advance through their own industry and labor. But why would they want to work if they could find women to support them? Fielding’s male servants do not express a desire to attain status and wealth through marriages to high-born women because in the author’s view the notion was completely preposterous, even in the realm of the hypothetical.

While no men express an explicit wish to marry up in the social hierarchy, two men stridently oppose Joseph’s decision to marry Fanny, a poor servant girl whom they view as being beneath him. Only after Mr. Booby makes a generous contribution to the maid’s dowry, rendering her a more attractive commodity in the economy of patriarchy, does Joseph’s father agree to the match (\textit{Joseph Andrews} 319).\footnote{32} Male servants did not have the same incentive that female servants had to promote new social connections through marriage, connections that would disturb the traditional social order.

Fielding’s investment in inherited categories of social classification are equally oppressive to ruling class women as they are to working class women, though Slipslop

and Honour fail to recognize it. The two maids do not fully appreciate the degree to which their mistresses are also at the mercy of social codes that dictate whom one may or may not marry. Slipslop and Honour encourage their mistresses to reject convention. In a conversation with Lady Booby, Slipslop declares, "If I was a woman of your ladyship's fortune and quality, I would be a slave to nobody" (Joseph Andrews 278). Honour shares Slipslop's egalitarian views on class mixing through marriage and likewise dismisses the constraints imposed by distinctions of rank. In a tone containing a hint of admonishment, Honour queries her mistress: "And what signifies your la'ship having so great a fortune, if you can't please yourself with the man you think most handsome? Well, I say nothing, but to be sure it is a pity some folks had not been better born; nay for that matter, I should not mind it myself" (Tom Jones 270). As Robbins has pointed out, "It is impossible for the sympathizing servant to put herself in her mistress's shoes without evoking the eventuality of walking away in them." The maids mistakenly believe that if they were to trade places with their mistresses that they would be free of the class and gender oppression that structures Fielding's literary landscape.

While Sophia and Lady Booby possess the advantages of rank and fortune, which make them appear to be free of oppression, they cannot risk sacrificing their reputations and prospects, which would be the consequence of marrying a man on the sole basis of merit with no regard to social class. Therefore, the mistresses vicariously explore the

---

32 Mr. Booby opposes Joseph's decision because he feels that having Fanny as his sister-in-law will debase his family, even though he granted himself permission to marry Pamela, his servant (Joseph Andrews 302, 283-4, 279).
33 p. 69.
possibility of marrying beneath their station through their maids.\textsuperscript{34} Lady Booby encourages Slipslop to imagine herself in her mistress’s position: “And so, if you was a woman of condition, you would really marry Mr. Andrews?” (Joseph Andrews 279). Only female servants possess the “freedom” to articulate aloud the utopian vision of marrying whomever one wishes, but even they are aware that the subject must be broached with some caution. Honour, for example, intentionally downplays the implications of her egalitarian statement, referring to it as “nothing,” in order to slip it past Sophia’s social conscious.

Fielding suppresses the maids’ democratic views by having their mistresses abrogate the discursive space. Neither Sophia nor Lady Booby directly responds to her maid’s egalitarian rhetoric. In other words, the maids’ remarks do not lead to a serious discussion in which ideas are exchanged, tested against a social reality, and then either endorsed or rejected. The failure of the two parties to engage in a meaningful dialogue corresponds with Robbins’s contention that servants throughout literature offer “fragments of social consciousness” that are “subdued or underdeveloped.”\textsuperscript{35} In these particular cases, neither mistress participates in a conversation that may expose class tension, nor do they allow the hypothetical role reversal to be carried too far.\textsuperscript{36} Lady Booby tells Slipslop, “I am astonished at the liberty you give your tongue” (Joseph Andrews 279). Sophia echoes this sentiment: “I am afraid of your tongue. Why, my girl,

\textsuperscript{34} The role reversals in Fielding’s fiction support Terry Eagleton’s skeptical view of carnival as a form of subversion that is sanctioned and controlled by the dominant culture, William Benjamin: Towards a Revolutionary Criticism (London: Verso, 1981), p. 148.
\textsuperscript{35} p. 73.
\textsuperscript{36} In the role reversals between mistresses and maids, Fielding will not allow for hybridization, a type of inversion that includes “the possibility of renegotiating the very terms of the system, by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it,” Stallybrass and White, p. 58.
will you give it such liberties?” (Tom Jones 197). Both mistresses reassert control over their subordinates by shaming them into silence.

From a mistress’s perspective, Slipslop and Honour have the freedom to articulate their own desires, desires that subvert the class and gender oppression that characterize a patriarchal, paternalistic society, and to make decisions based on self-interest. But the maids only have those freedoms because they have limited agency to act and little or nothing at stake. From a maid’s perspective, Lady Booby and Sophia possess the wealth and status that empowers people to do as they please. But these mistresses would be stripped of their status and prospects if they were to marry beggars or bastards. Of the four women, only Sophia marries, and only after she surrenders to the terms of patriarchy. Slipslop, Honour, and Lady Booby are all frustrated in their efforts to find husbands. Ultimately the maids’ dream of leaving service is denied, which is their punishment for challenging the status quo.

Servants’ Desire for Validation

In addition to seeking greater financial security and social status through work or marriage, the servants in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones seek validation from their social peers and superiors despite their inferior education and breeding. This desire for validation once again reflects the influence of eighteenth-century progressive individualism, which rejected the assumption that the lower orders were innately inferior. Honour sums up the progressive argument advocating social equality with her usual eloquence, “To be sure gentle-folks is but flesh and blood no more than us servants” (Tom Jones 196). Empowered by this type of egalitarian rhetoric, servants in the
eighteenth century began to demand acknowledgement from those closest to them in social class. Servants believed that if they received acknowledgement and validation from their peers, they might eventually get it from their betters, and their dream of social inclusion might be realized.

In Fielding’s novels, servants’ need for acknowledgement and validation registers in their desire to be recognized by name. Servants were familiar with forms of social protocol because they hovered on the fringes of polite circles, carefully observing their superiors as they waited upon them. Based on their observations, servants gained an understanding of, and an appreciation for, the social significance attached to the practice of addressing a person by name.

Proper names were loaded with meaning for three reasons. First, on the most basic level, proper names correlate to distinct individuals with distinct identities. They constitute an important part of self-definition, which was an issue of great concern to servants who struggled to establish a personal identity against the self-abnegation imposed upon them by their masters’ oppressive, ruling class paternalism. In fact, masters often renamed their servants for the sake of sheer convenience, as if servants were their property. Secondly, referring to someone by name is considered a sign of courtesy and respect in polite society. Finally, names operate as a form of social currency. People drop names to establish a network of social connections, and they do so with the intention of defining their own status relative to others’ status. For these reasons names are an integral part of one’s personal and social identity.

---

37 For a discussion of the motivation behind the re-naming of servants as well as the use of nicknames for servants, see Maza, 176-8; and Fairchilds, p. 102.
Fielding and Richardson refer to servants by their proper names, which is befitting of the intimacy that characterizes the paternalistic master/servant relationship. In "Black George and the Black Act" Stevenson claims that Fielding's use of nicknames and allegorical names signals a "desire to be more affectionate or singular in the specification of identity." 38 The singularity of servants' names serves a second purpose in Fielding's narrative. Servants are the primary agents of the plot in his novels, functioning as stand-ins or foils for the principals. Therefore, they must be named; otherwise, readers would be confused about who was doing what and why. For Fielding, naming servants is a logistical matter.

While proper names are necessary in order to identify specific characters in Fielding's works, names generally are not of such great importance as a form of social currency. 39 Fielding's characters are often traveling, and when proper names are removed from a specific social context, they become empty signifiers; they lose their cache. In that respect Fielding's novels significantly differ from Austen's where proper names are of utmost importance as social exchange tokens. This explains why Austen identifies only upper servants by name, while the vast majority remains anonymous. In Austen's polite society domestic servants are of no social consequence, and she communicates the message of servants' unworthiness by not giving servants names.

Fielding shared Austen's view that servants' inferiority barred their claims to validation and social acceptance. His fiction makes this plain by satirizing the way in

38 pp. 362-5. I feel compelled to qualify Stevenson's comment by pointing out that the names that Fielding chose for servants are pejorative and not affectionate.
39 However, one important exception comes to mind. Partridge's naming of Sophia in public constitutes his greatest offense in the novel. Using Sophia's name as a form of social currency not only is thought to cheapen her name, but is also thought to cheapen her (Tom Jones 647).
which servants adopt their superiors’ style of polite address and insist upon being called by name. In the battle over domestic turf at Western’s estate, Honour requests that Mrs. Western’s maid call her by her surname to demonstrate the respect that Honour feels she is due (Tom Jones 325). When Mrs. Tow-wouse calls her maid Betty a “B —” for sleeping with her husband, Betty responds, “That’s no reason you should call me out of my name . . . I am a woman as well as yourself, she roared, and no she-dog” (Joseph Andrews 95). On a female servant’s scale of moral propriety, a master’s infidelity with his servant is a relatively minor infraction compared to calling a woman a bitch. In Betty’s opinion, to be stripped of one’s name and reduced to the status of a lusty animal, more precisely a “she-dog,” is to be completely degraded and stripped of human dignity. Betty demands that her mistress address her with respect, yet she behaves disrespectfully, a hypocritical act that accentuates Fielding’s belief that servants are unworthy of the recognition and respect that they demand of their peers and the middling class.

The desire for acknowledgement and personal validation is also a source of tension between the gentry and its servants, but servants of the gentry do not demand recognition of their masters in the way that servants demand it of one another and attempt to garner it from the middling class. Mrs. Wilkins, Squire Allworthy’s housekeeper, provides a case in point. She expects validation to come in the form of a legacy upon her master’s death. Even though Mrs. Wilkins loyally performed her household duties, served the establishment, and most importantly, protected the secret of Tom’s paternity (or so she thinks anyway), her wish goes unfulfilled. When Allworthy’s will is read and the housekeeper discovers that her master “lump[ed]” her in with all of the other servants in his will, she is shocked and personally insulted: “Ay, ay, I shall remember you for
huddling me among the servants. One would have thought he might have mentioned my name" (Tom Jones 230, emphasis added). Considering the housekeeper's avarice, one expects her to be disappointed by the small monetary token of appreciation she receives from Allworthy, but in fact, Mrs. Wilkins's disappointment focuses on her anonymity, her unfulfilled desire to be acknowledged in a public way by her master. In disgust she declares, "This is my reward for taking his part so often" (Tom Jones 230).

Fielding is critical of servants who lose sight of the fact that it is their humble obligation to serve their masters and to do so with no expectation of gratitude or reward. The author's attitude is communicated through the narrator who does not think Mrs. Wilkins is justified in feeling slighted for not being named in Allworthy's will. The narrator's lack of sympathy for the housekeeper is revealed through his unflattering description of the "ceremonial tears" flowing in "briny streams" down her "mountainous cheeks," details that suggest that her grief is insincere, her self-pity is reprehensible, and her sense of entitlement is inappropriate for a servant (Tom Jones 230). In the narrator's view Mrs. Wilkins is not only presumptuous for expecting a reward for her service but also ungrateful for not showing sufficient appreciation for the gift that she did receive. Fielding's message, the message of paternalism, is clearly that servants should not work for personal gain or glory.

Fielding's paternalism sends confusing messages to servants regarding their role and value, which helps to explain Mrs. Wilkins's disappointment in Tom Jones. On the one hand, the servants who reside on an estate governed by a paternalistic master are

40 The narrator may also believe that Mrs. Wilkins's demise is justified since she also admits to having taken "a little something now and then" from Allworthy, perhaps through creative bookkeeping or from
considered part of the family, and in many cases, they are deeply enmeshed in the family’s private affairs. Mrs. Wilkins, for example, defends her master’s “pretty story” about finding the foundling in his bed and actively works to protect the family from scandal. This sort of personal entanglement, which is characteristic of the paternalistic model of master/servant relations presented in the works of Fielding and Richardson, fosters the illusion that servants are an important and integral part of the family. Mrs. Wilkins’s belief that her master will recognize her personally in his will is even more understandable considering her position at Paradise Hall. Being the housekeeper of Allworthy’s estate places her at the top of the domestic hierarchy where the blurring of social boundaries between the gentry and its servants is most likely to occur. Mrs. Wilkins’s position makes her susceptible to the fantasy of social inclusion and fosters her false expectation that Allworthy will name her in his will to demonstrate his appreciation for her loyal service.

Despite the personal familiarity that characterizes the paternalistic master/servant relationship, Fielding maintains a clear social demarcation between the gentry and its servants. Even though Allworthy refers to his housekeeper by name and the two of them share a long-standing history, she remains one servant among many to him. He does not distinguish between Mrs. Wilkins’ professional identity as a servant and her identity as a person. Mrs. Wilkins’s classification as a servant automatically renders her unworthy of stealing and selling food from the pantry. Regardless of the means, Mrs. Wilkins manages to accumulate a sum of £500 through a combination of personal savings and petty theft (Tom Jones 230).
her master's individual attention, which is why Allworthy does not specifically recognize her in his will.\textsuperscript{41}

Other servants resort to rebellious strategies, some more subtle than others, to make their presence known. These servants are similar to Mrs. Wilkins in the sense that they know better than to demand recognition from their superiors, but they lack her patience and faith in a final reward. Fielding's novels demonstrate how rebellious servants exploit their access to private information to get their superiors' attention. They manage this chiefly by interfering in their masters' ability to communicate with other members of the ruling class.

The ruling class relies on its servants to gather information since servants circulate more freely in public and have access to private spaces and private conversations. In addition to collecting information, servants distribute information as messengers on behalf of their superiors. In the act of delivering messages servants are given permission to use their superiors' names and reputations. In other words, they speak on behalf of someone with social power. Robbins explains how this type of dialogic interaction "authorizes subversive, multi-directional speech."\textsuperscript{42} The servant is "freed of responsibility for whatever verbal aggression he or she may deliver."\textsuperscript{43} In some instances, rebellious servants abuse this privilege by revising messages or withholding them from their superiors.

\textsuperscript{41} Didapper tries to identify his mysterious bedfellow but never even considers Slipslop as a possibility because she has been invisible to him. Servants are beneath Didapper's notice. They do not register on his social radar: "He had taken so little notice of this gentlewoman, that light itself would have afforded him no assistance in his conjecture" (Joseph Andrews 311).

\textsuperscript{42} p. 60. According to Robbins, drunkenness creates a similar subversive dialectic, one that allows servants such as Honour and Slipslop to assert their voices or visions, p. 65.

\textsuperscript{43} Robbins, p. 61.
Servants revise messages to suit their own subversive, mean-spirited purposes and to exert power over their masters and mistresses. One of the funniest examples of this rebellious behavior occurs when Mrs. Western’s maid lies to her mistress in delivering the message that Honour called her an “old ugly cat,” when in fact Honour merely observed that her mistress Sophia was “ten thousand times more handsome” than Mrs. Western (Tom Jones 324-5). Mrs. Western’s maid not only manages to insult her mistress without fear of retribution, which is a rare treat for a servant, but also to implicate Honour, her nemesis, in the process. Fielding includes this incident to show that servants not only abuse those who typically abuse them, which is somewhat justifiable, but servants also abuse one another for no apparent reason other than their own empty conceit.

Servants also intentionally delay the delivery of messages or withhold information to force their superiors to acknowledge their existence. Tom Jones, for example, relies on Honour to stay informed of his sweetheart Sophia’s activities and to communicate with her. Honour, who functions as Sophia’s stand-in in courtship, occasionally frustrates Tom’s desire for news about Sophia: “And what greatly aggravated his concern was, that Mrs. Honour, who had promised to enquire after Sophia, and to make her report to him early the next evening, had disappointed him” (Tom Jones 731). Honour’s failure to provide Tom with information leaves him feeling powerless and dependent.

Fielding uses a second incident between Tom and Honour to demonstrate both servants’ ability to manipulate their superiors as well as servants’ rampant self-interest.

---

*Fielding’s narrator withholds information from the reader, and Betty withholds sex from her master to feel powerful.*
The anxiety that Tom previously experienced as a result of Honour’s failure to deliver news of Sophia is relatively insignificant compared to the terror she incites when she informs Tom that she has “lost her lady forever” (Tom Jones 716). Tom interprets “lost” to mean that Sophia is dead when, in fact, Honour meant that Sophia is lost to her because Western dismissed her as the girl’s maid. Honour realizes that Tom has mistaken her meaning, but she does not relieve his fears. Instead, she launches into a long digression about the lack of respect servants receive from their betters. Robbins explains how the “[l]ong-winded, digressive delivery of a message to an impatient interlocutor” is another means by which a servant “interpos[es] the pressing fact of his or her own existence between the master and his news.”

Honour’s digression is a form of retaliation prompted by Tom’s lack of sympathy for the vulnerable position in which she finds herself as an unemployed servant. Honour’s preoccupation with the need to secure another position strikes Tom as trivial and self-centered, and he lets her know it: “D--n your place” (Tom Jones 716). In this instance Honour withholds accurate information, intentionally perpetuating a misunderstanding and exploiting her position of superior knowledge in order to punish Tom for disapproving of her self-interest.

Servants also use their knowledge of private information about their masters and mistresses as leverage to get their superiors’ attention and to renegotiate the distribution of power within the master/servant relationship. Slipslop’s knowledge of Lady Booby’s secret desire to take Joseph as her lover suspends the maid’s subordinate position and

---

45 Other examples of digressive servant speech include Partridge’s delay in telling Tom of Sophia’s arrival in London and Slipslop’s report to Lady Booby of Fanny and Joseph’s arrest.
46 Robbins, p. 70
gives her greater license to vent her opinions. "Slipslop, who had preserved hitherto a distance to her lady, rather out of necessity than inclination, and who thought the knowledge of this secret had thrown down all distinction between them, answered her mistress very pertly" (Joseph Andrews 60). In fact, Slipslop taunts Lady Booby with her knowledge of the secret, which prompts Lady Booby to ask: "What do you know, mistress?" (61, emphasis added). Even if Fielding had meant for Lady Booby's question to be interpreted ironically, Lady Booby's reference to Slipslop as "mistress" acknowledges the housekeeper's superior position of knowledge and power.

With the exception of Miss Bridget's well-placed confidence in Jenny Jones, Fielding's novels illustrate the danger of sharing personal secrets with servants, a lesson that Austen's novels also teach.47 In Fielding's novels only women commit the social blunder of confiding in their servants. Men recognize the risk and avoid it. (Men can always be counted on to do the right thing in Fielding's works.) In Jonathan Wild (1743) the Count asks, "Is it not the same qualification which enables this man to hire himself as a servant, and get into the confidence and secrets of his master, in order to rob him, and that to undertake trusts to the highest nature with a design to break and betray them?" (27).48 Captain Blifil is also cautious when it comes to entrusting servants with private, personal information. He resists confiding in Mrs. Wilkins because "[t]here is no conduct less politic, than to enter into a confederacy with your friend's servants, . . . [f]or, by

47 Robbins writes, "Deference to the power of servant observation and rebellion against that power seem to have created a prolonged crisis in the course of the eighteenth century and continued into the nineteenth." p. 108. Samuel Richardson also cautioned against confiding in servants. In Pamela Mr. B exclaims: "Be secret, I charge you, Pamela;" To which she replies: "O how poor and mean must those actions be, and how little must they make the best of gentlemen look, when they offer such things as are unworthy of themselves, and put into the power of their inferiors to be greater than they!"
these means, you afterwards become the slave to these very servants; by whom you are constantly liable to be betrayed” *(Tom Jones* 100). Lady Booby does not heed this lesson; consequently, she agonizes over the fact that “her dear reputation [is] in the power of servants” *(Joseph Andrews* 62). Fielding has no sympathy for her because she put herself in a position to get exploited.

Even though Fielding punishes Lady Booby for disregarding social boundaries, he never allows servants to prevail over the ruling class. The power that servants wield as a result of exploiting their mistresses’ confidence is only temporary.⁴⁹ Slipslop resumes her subordinate place in order to keep her place. She “found on mature deliberation, that a good place in possession was better than one in expectation; as she found her mistress therefore inclined to relent, she also thought proper to put on some small condescension” *(Joseph Andrews* 61). In return for her silence, Slipslop is rewarded with a hand-me-down gown and petticoat, the trappings of a mistress.

Slipslop is a savvy servant. She knows when to speak and when to remain silent, a lesson that is lost on Partridge. Partridge always attempts to make his presence known by providing an excess amount of information. He overwhelms Allworthy with an account of his personal history that stretches for several pages in which he describes specific persons and places, an incident with an escaped hog, the exact amounts of his debts, etc. *(Tom Jones* 736). Partridge ought to know that the minute details of a servant’s existence are not of interest to a man of Allworthy’s stature. He ought to demonstrate his humility by briefly summarizing his life’s story, but instead he delivers a monologue that is

⁴⁹ Robbins also notes that “real opportunities to become party to their masters’ secrets do not seem to have given servants even local leverage,” p. 108.
"tediously circumstantial and digressive, lacking direct relevance, undisciplined and unfocused." 50 Partridge is so grateful to have Allworthy’s personal and undivided attention and to have his life considered a subject of interest to someone other than himself that he fails to abide by codes of social decorum. In this instance Partridge inappropriately seeks the attention of his betters; otherwise, he consistently conforms to paternalism’s definition of a faithful servant.

**Paternalism’s System of Rewards and Punishments**

Servants such as Partridge who conform to the traditional class and gender hierarchies associated with a paternalistic, patriarchal system are rewarded with financial settlements and improved social status in Fielding’s fiction. 51 Partridge never loses confidence that his beggarly master Tom Jones is of genteel birth and that he will be rewarded once Tom reconciles with Allworthy, which turns out to be true. Once Tom assumes his position as Allworthy’s paternalistic successor, he and Sophia begin “dispensing favours and arranging that disposition of goods that will preserve order." 52 In return for Partridge’s loyalty, he receives an annual income and is made the supervisor of a school, two rewards which raise him above the servant class and allow him to win the illustrious Molly Seagrim’s hand in marriage (*Tom Jones* 873). 53

---

50 In “Narrative Authority in Fielding and Smollett,” Richetti notes that Partridge’s voice is normally excluded from the narrative in order to control the ideology and plot symmetry, p. 192.
51 That is not to say that this cohort of servants who faithfully serve the establishment is devoid of self-interest. Rawson points out that Partridge’s loyalty is attached to the expectation of a future reward, p. 64. But Partridge never acts at his master’s expense.
52 Richetti, “Narrative Authority in Fielding and Smollett,” p. 190.
53 When Partridge refused to take the blame for the foundling and refused to tell Allworthy, the region’s patriarch, what he wanted to hear, Partridge lost everything – his wife, his job, and his property.
More than mere loyalty, however, is required of female servants who wish to be rewarded by Fielding’s paternalism. In order to reap rewards, female attendants must protect the dignity of the ruling class by concealing their mistresses’ moral indiscretions. In some cases the maids sacrifice their job security, reputations, and personal relationships so that their superiors’ can avoid sustaining social, financial, or psychological losses. In Fielding’s view this sufficiently demonstrates the maids’ respect for the traditional social order and makes them deserving of a reward. Jenny Jones, for example, takes the blame for the scandal surrounding Tom Jones’s illegitimate birth. She leaves behind her life in Somersethshire, essentially making herself invisible to members of the community, in exchange for a bribe from Miss Bridget Allworthy, the child’s mother. Like Partridge, Jenny’s sacrifice results in her social promotion to the middling class. At the conclusion of the novel she is no longer an ugly servant; instead, she is the fair wife of Parson Supple.

Self-determined servants, on the other hand, are the definitive losers in Joseph Andrews, Tom Jones, and Amelia. Fielding consistently tramples upon servants’ efforts to attain wealth, status, and validation through their labor, marriage, or manipulation, which supports the general conclusion that the author viewed the social empowerment of the low-born with great skepticism. James Thompson points to the example of Peter Pounce, a former servant turned moneylender in Joseph Andrews, to show how Fielding negates the potential power of money to transform the lowly into gentlemen.\textsuperscript{54} In that respect Fielding’s attitude differed significantly from Daniel Defoe’s, whose works link the

\textsuperscript{54} p. 120. For an alternative view, see Stevenson’s essay, which argues that it is overly simplistic to interpret Black George’s punishment as Fielding’s attempt to show readers that “class ambiguity is
accumulation of capital to social mobility and moral development.\textsuperscript{55} In contrast to Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* or *Moll Flanders*, Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* suggest that it is not appropriate for servants to shape their own destinies. Only the ruling class is authorized to promote servants into the middling class.

**Servants' Perpetual Struggle for Power and Status**

Female servants in Fielding's novels are entrenched in negotiations for power and social status with several different constituencies within the confines of the domestic sphere. This part of the chapter explores the ways in which servants define themselves in relation to and in opposition to the gentry, the middling class, and other servants. Female servants, in particular, struggle to coexist with their mistresses in a sphere that is charged with complicated social and sexual politics. In larger households servants also vie against one another for positions of power within the domestic hierarchy. In addition to competing for status against their fellow domestics, servants have to defend their status against the competing claims made by the attendants of their master's household guests.

And yet, despite the various negotiations for power that engage servants within the household, Fielding's novels suggest that servants struggle the most with issues of self-definition and the social identification of others when they venture outside of the home. The negotiation of status between the servants of the gentry and middling class persons such as innkeepers, and between middling class persons and their own servants,

\textsuperscript{55} Thompson, p. 124
are the two sites of greatest class tension in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, and this tension inevitably erupts between women over female servant sexuality.\(^{56}\)

From Fielding’s perspective, domestic servants did not pose a serious threat to the gentry’s power and status in the eighteenth century. The author diffuses what little potential class tension exists between these two groups by suppressing the individualistic servants who attempt to subvert the established, paternalistic order. However, *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* show servants aggressively, and in many cases, legitimately challenging the status and authority of the expanding middling class. The discord between these two parties proffers slight indications of the evolving contractual master/servant relationship.

Instead of exploring the social tension between these two groups in an authentic way, Fielding turns to it primarily as a source of comedy. The middling class’s imposition of its emerging bourgeois value system upon its own domestics, and in some cases upon the guests staying at inns, often leads to physical skirmishes. The violence tends to be anti-climactic, diffused, and comical, which suggests that fighting to defend one’s status as a servant or as a person of middling rank is silly in Fielding’s view -- petty battles over petty stakes.

**The Struggle for Superiority above Stairs**

Female servant sexuality poses a threat to a mistress’s dignity, a threat to domestic harmony, and by extension, a threat to the middling class’s moral authority and

---

\(^{56}\) Instead of seeing the sexual contract as providing the resolution of class conflict, as Nancy Armstrong does, McCrea points out that Fielding resolves class conflicts through the birth mystery plot which restores hierarchy, “Rewriting *Pamela,*” pp. 138-9.
social superiority. Most female servants do not intentionally set out to disrupt the middling households in which they are employed, yet they pose a threat to domestic stability because they are the targets of their masters’ interest and sexual harassment. Consequently, mistresses view their maids as competitors who threaten their ascendancy. One of the ways in which mistresses reduce the competition is by firing attractive maids or hiring ugly ones.

For example, Fanny Goodwill, a beautiful, young maid, stands in the way of Lady Booby’s efforts to seduce Joseph, so Lady Booby dismisses her from service (Joseph Andrews 65). Fanny represents Fielding’s ideal maid. Her introduction in the narrative focuses almost exclusively on Joseph’s fondness for her “swelling breasts,” which are practically “bursting through her tight stays” (66). In addition to being an erotic object of the male gaze, Fanny embraces her subordinate position within class and gender hierarchies. She is also chaste and docile, allowing men to speak and act on her behalf (Joseph Andrews 65-6). Judith Frank attributes Fanny’s invisibility to the fact that the maid can “neither write nor read” rather than attributing it entirely to her status as a

---

57 Maids were expected to minister to all of their master’s needs, including his sexual needs, and sometimes maids were pressured through manipulation or sheer force to capitulate. Servants were also the targets of sexual harassment initiated by other servants and household guests. See: Maza, pp. 90-1; Fairchilds, pp. 164-92; and Hill, pp. 44-63. Stallybrass and White devote a chapter to elucidating the psychoanalytic dimension of the middling class master’s forbidden attraction to the dirty serving maid.

58 In “Women, Work and Cultural Change in Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century London,” which is included in Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850. Tim Harris, ed., (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995): 143-67, Patricia Seleski problematizes recent historical interpretations of the domestic sphere and suggests that the relationship between the mistress and housekeeper/maid was loaded with tension due to the women’s competing social agendas and desire for control. The tension Seleski describes is not so closely tied to issues of sexuality, which is the source of tension between mistresses and maids in Fielding’s novels.
female servant (Joseph Andrews 66). In either case, Fanny is invisible except as an object of desire to be consumed by men.

Fanny’s “extraordinary beauty” and submissiveness make her a notable exception among Fielding’s female servants, the majority of which resemble a rebellious “set of scarecrows” (Tom Jones 60). Fortunately, ugliness is one of the primary job qualifications that mistresses seek in a maid because it reduces the potential sexual competition. Mrs. Partridge hires Jenny Jones, a woman belonging to “that order of females, whose faces are taken as a kind of security for their virtue” in order to “guard herself against matrimonial injuries in her own house” (Tom Jones 92). Jenny is not a great beauty, but she nevertheless attracts her master’s attention because she is intelligent. Moreover, Jenny’s knowledge of Latin allows her to communicate with her master and exclude her mistress from their conversations. Mrs. Partridge, a former servant herself, cannot tolerate employing a literate maid who makes her feel stupid and inferior, so she dismisses Jenny. As a result of their mistresses’ jealousy and wounded pride, Fanny and Jenny lose their places before the perceived threats that they pose to their mistresses’ ascendancy are realized.

Fielding uses servants to critique the middling class’s tendency to prioritize its quest for social status over its social responsibility to serve as moral exemplars to the lower orders. In contrast to Mrs. Partridge who hires only ugly maids, Mrs. Tow-wouse

---

lacks the foresight to dismiss her maid Betty, whose generosity and aggressive sexuality pose a significant threat to her marriage. When Mrs. Tow-wouse discovers her husband and Betty in bed together, she is more offended by the quality of her competition, her husband’s choice of a mistress, than by his act of infidelity. She wishes he had chosen a gentlewoman like herself rather than a “beggarly, saucy, dirty servant-maid” (Joseph Andrews 95). Her husband’s decision to sleep with a servant lowers Mrs. Tow-wouse’s estimation of her own worth. In other words, Mr. Tow-wouse’s infidelity offends his wife’s pride and class-consciousness rather than her sense of morality.

Fielding also uses servants to call attention to the middling class’s social hypocrisy and the unfairness of the double standard it uses to judge servants’ conduct. Betty, for example, admits to her mistress that having sex with her master was a “little naughty,” but she argues that her conduct merely conforms to society’s low expectations of servants (Joseph Andrews 95). Speaking in her own defense, Betty turns the tables on Mrs. Tow-wouse and suggests that those who are socially superior, such as her master, bear more responsibility than she for setting a moral example. Betty employs the arguments used by the middling class to assert its moral superiority in order to reveal its hypocrisy. Despite Betty’s impassioned pleas for fair and equal treatment, she is held accountable and dismissed.

Despite Fielding’s critique of the middling class’s emerging values, servants still bear the brunt of his disdain. His anachronistic paternalism punishes servants who

---

60 Both women receive assistance from older, male paternalistic protectors, such as Allworthy and Parson Adams.
61 This exchange between Betty and Mrs. Tow-wouse is reminiscent of Pamela’s attempts to shame Mr. B into good behavior in Richardson’s Pamela. When Mr. B scolds Pamela for sauciness, Pamela charges:
presume to point fingers of blame at their superiors, even when their superiors are at fault. In contrast to Betty, who gets banished, Mr. Tow-wouse’s penance is much less severe on account of his class and gender. His punishment amounts to nothing more than “many hearty promises never to offend any more in the like manner” (Joseph Andrews 98). While Fielding’s novels imply that the middling class does bear some responsibility in setting a good example for servants, he never holds the middling class accountable for their social and moral misconduct, whereas Richardson and Austen do.

Fielding uses the competition between maids and middling class mistresses within the home to illustrate the sexual licentiousness of female servants, as well as the dubious morality of the middling class. The domestic skirmishes over sexuality that erupt between servants and their middling class mistresses expose both groups’ hypocrisy. Fielding satirizes and scolds the middling class for its bad behavior, whereas servants are beaten and banished for their transgressions.

The Battle for Power below Stairs

Fielding’s novels illustrate how servants are no different from the people of other classes who rely on force to maintain their positions of power. Servants positioned at the top of the domestic hierarchy wield power over their subordinates. In Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones upper servants tend to abuse their power, treating lower servants with disdain, and in some cases, subjecting them to heavy-handed discipline. Slipslop and Mrs. Wilkins, two servants situated at the top of their respective household hierarchies,

“You have taught me to forget myself, and what belongs to me; and have lessened the distance that fortune has made between us, by demeaning yourself, to be so free to a poor servant.”
adopt an authoritarian style of domestic management and have reputations for abusing the servants under their supervision. Mrs. Wilkins uses force and intimidation to “tyrannize over little people” (Tom Jones 63). Slipslop uses “hearty cuffs” to discipline the lower servants in the Booby household (Joseph Andrews 126). The narrator in Tom Jones aptly remarks that upper servants’ displays of power and abuse are “the means which they use to recompense to themselves their extreme servility and condescension to their superiors” (63).

In addition to physical domination, servants at the top of the hierarchy attempt to extend their power over their subordinates by appropriating the power of their masters and mistresses for their own purposes. Even in those moments when servants believe they are using their employers to their advantage, Fielding finds a way for the ruling class to exploit the servants. Slipslop, for example, uses her domestic power to take revenge against Joseph for rejecting her sexual advances. She goes to her mistress and heaps false accusations on the footman, charging that he drinks, gambles, and swears. When this list of vices proves ineffectual in moving Lady Booby to punish Joseph, Slipslop manufactures evidence, which triggers the desired result, his dismissal. It appears that Slipslop’s ready access to Lady Booby and her expert knowledge of how to manipulate her mistress’s reactions give the housekeeper power over Lady Booby, but in this case, Lady Booby ultimately exploits Slipslop. Lady Booby uses the information that the housekeeper provides in order to execute her own personal revenge against Joseph for having rejected her sexual advances. In other words, Slipslop’s timely accusations allow Lady Booby to shift the responsibility for her decision to dismiss Joseph to her housekeeper. The servant takes the blame, and the mistress’s dignity is preserved.
The Negotiation of Servants’ Status Outside of the Household

Servants’ claims to status and power are much more problematic and complicated when they move outside of the household. In Fielding’s novels servants travel from place to place, which brings them into contact with characters of various classes. In contrast to the well-defined hierarchical space of the household, these unfamiliar social spaces, such as stagecoaches and inns, require the strangers to explore and interrogate one another’s claims to superiority and to re-negotiate the codes of deference and propriety. According to Paulson, “The inn projected a milieu through which a traveler pauses, encountering strangers and new configurations out of which he tries to make some order.” 62 One would expect class divisions to become more fluid at these moments; however, a review of Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones suggests that servants located outside of the home apply the same criteria used inside of the home to establish authority and status. McCrea writes, “[E]ven as characters discredit notions of rank and class; Fielding suggests the need for them.” 63

Servants carry their ideological baggage with them into ambiguous social spaces, using the criteria of the ruling class to construct social identities and to judge others. For example, a power struggle erupts between two servants at Western’s estate when Mrs. Western’s lady-in-waiting enters the domestic space as a guest and challenges the established order. Mrs. Western’s maid asserts her superiority over Honour, Sophia’s lady-in-waiting, on the basis of her birth, her wages, and her knowledge of the world (Tom Jones 324). Her claim to higher status is based upon kinship and compensation,

63 “Rewriting Pamela,” p. 141.
which reflect a combination of paternalistic and pre-capitalist criteria. She derives her pride of kinship from “her great-grandmother on the mother’s side, [who] was a cousin, not far removed, from an Irish peer” (Tom Jones 324). Fielding includes this ridiculous detail to reveal the pretentiousness and ignorance of the servant class.

Servants not only adopt their superiors’ standards to define their own status and to judge the status of others, they also emulate their high-born masters and mistresses in an effort to deceive people into thinking that they in fact are superior. Slipslop and Honour, the two most vocal advocates of egalitarianism, are the most deeply invested in the traditional criteria of self-definition and the most firmly committed to camouflaging their professional identity by imitating their employers. Slipslop and Honour fashion social selves that mirror their superiors’ style of dress, manners, and discourse. Honour, for example, transports a “huge portmanteau, well stuffed with those outside ornaments, by means of which [she] hoped to gain many conquests, and finally to make her fortune in London City” (Tom Jones 499). Fielding shows that fancy clothing cannot obscure servants’ inferior breeding because it surfaces in other ways such as in speech.

In addition to wearing their mistresses’ cast-off clothing, domestics adopt their superiors’ elevated discourse, which maligns their social pretensions. Honour, for example, reproduces Sophia’s phrasing and diction in her remark to an innkeeper, “—But, prithee, without troubling me with your impertinence, do tell me what I can have for supper” (Tom Jones 480-1). Whenever someone insults Partridge’s class-consciousness by referring to him as Tom’s servant, he drops Latin phrases to show that he is
educated.\textsuperscript{64} Slipslop, however, has the unique distinction of being a “mighty affecter of hard words” \textit{(Joseph Andrews 45).} Her sentences are littered with malapropisms.\textsuperscript{65} When Joseph rejects Slipslop’s sexual advances, she asks, “Do you intend to \textit{result} my passion? Is it not enough, ungrateful as you are, to make no return to all of the favours I have done you: but you must treat me with \textit{ironing}?” (52). The substitution of “ironing” for “irony” is particularly funny since ironing is a task a female servant would perform. “Ironing” also connotes the idea of being flattened and scorched, which is apropos considering that Slipslop crashed and burned in her attempt to seduce Joseph. As Robbins has observed, for Slipslop to be “‘treated with ironing’ alludes to the fact that failure in love means more housework.”\textsuperscript{66} Fielding mocks Slipslop’s slippery grasp of vocabulary, which suggests that the threat of imitation is laughable in Fielding’s fiction.\textsuperscript{67} Instead of positively contributing to servants’ efforts to bridge the social chasm, the practice of emulation only underscores their social and moral degradation.

\textsuperscript{64} Frank deems Latin the “engine of social mobility,” p. 162.
\textsuperscript{65} Robbins’ quotes Win Jenkins’s final words in \textit{Humphrey Clinker} to show that “malapropism is more variably and flexibly eloquent,” p. 85. But Robbins also argues that there is no distinction between the speech of masters and servants in eighteenth-century novels. He claims that even Slipslop drops her typical malapropisms when speaking to Lady Booby, which is not accurate. Richetti, on the other hand, notes that the servant discourse in Fielding’s novels “is marked by grammatical and orthographic awkwardness that makes it worthless for self-definition,” in “Representing the Under Class,” p. 85.
\textsuperscript{66} p. 85. Servant literacy is another form of emulation, but Fielding’s attitude on the subject is difficult to apprehend. In “Literacy, Desire and the Novel” Frank argues that Fielding aligns literacy with Slipslop’s grotesque body rather than Fanny’s erotic body. Frank declares, in short, that literate female servants are undesirable in Fielding’s fiction, pp. 163-5. Her conclusion concurs with the prevailing belief in the eighteenth century that servant literacy posed a threat to the dominant power structure because it was thought to decrease servant productivity and increase the desire for upward mobility. But Fielding’s works present a range of contradictory examples of servant literacy that complicate the pattern Frank asserts. Jenny Jones and Partridge, for example, are literate servants who protect ruling class interests in \textit{Tom Jones}. This suggests that education can be an effective means of reinforcing paternalistic, patriarchal values. Furthermore, Jenny Jones, who resurfaces late in the novel as Mrs. Waters, is sexually attractive to Tom Jones. On the other hand, semi-literate servants, such as Joseph, Slipslop, and Black George, present a variety of outcomes. Joseph embraces his subordinate position in the social hierarchy, whereas Slipslop and Black George usurp their employers’ authority to varying degrees, which suggests that servants with a little education undermine patriarchy.
In addition to imitating their superiors, servants sometimes claim their masters' rank and fortune as if it were their own in order to establish their status relative to other people whom they encounter outside of the household. For example, Partridge exaggerates Tom's wealth in order to elevate his own status as Tom's attendant in conversations with strangers.

In unfamiliar social situations servants use the criteria of classification that they inherit from their superiors, they emulate their superiors, and they occasionally claim their superiors' status as their own. All of these factors simultaneously come into play when servants travel in stagecoaches and stay at inns where they grapple with the difficulty of asserting their own social identity and defending it against their identity competing claims of the middling class.

*The Stagecoach*

The stagecoach is a recurring site of social negotiation between individuals of different classes in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*. The decision regarding who should have the privilege of riding inside a carriage, who should ride on horseback behind a carriage, and who should walk, is a complicated problem that involves the sorting out class and gender issues. Instead of seeing this situation as an opportunity to re-organize social relationships in new ways, most servants reenact the class tension and subordination of the status quo. Honour, who has a strong sense of superiority and entitlement, reluctantly surrenders her privileged place inside a coach and "fall[s] into the

---

67 Fielding was seriously concerned about the problem of servant emulation in history. He also attacks this type of behavior in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*. 
rear” to accommodate the “fine habit of a stranger” (Tom Jones 510-1). She decides to forfeit her seat on the basis of the woman’s clothing, a superficial sign of social identification, even though Honour uses cast-off clothing to deceive others about her own social classification.

The tension that servants’ experience between the desire to camouflage their professional identity and the individualistic desire to defend it is evident when they find themselves surrounded by people of various classes. In Joseph Andrews Slipslop tries to coax Joseph into joining her inside the coach, even though it goes against codes of social propriety: “Mrs. Slipslop would have had [Joseph] quit his horse to the parson, and come himself into the coach; but he absolutely refused . . . and added, he hoped he knew his duty better than to ride in a coach while Mr. Adams was on horseback” (109). Slipslop rejects conventional social codes because she wants to flirt with Joseph, whereas Joseph abides by them and defers to Adams on the basis of the parson’s occupation and age. Miss Grave-Airs, a “little paunchy gentlewoman” and fellow passenger, refuses “to suffer a fellow in livery to ride in the same coach with herself” (Joseph Andrews 109). She is protective of the social boundaries that narrowly separate her from the servants of the gentry. Miss Grave-Airs’s condescending attitude offends Slipslop, who counters, “I am sure no one can refuse another coming into a stage-coach” (Joseph Andrews 128). Slipslop’s own status as a servant prompts her defensive reaction, and her egalitarian beliefs lead her to declare the coach a social space over which no one can claim automatic or absolute authority.

Despite Slipslop’s bold proclamations of social equality, she does not extend social freedom consistently to all people, which reveals her social hypocrisy. She defends
Joseph against Miss GraveAir's class oppression, but she engages in class oppression when she encounters Fanny Goodwill, her former subordinate at the Booby estate and her rival for Joseph's affection. When these two servants meet while traveling, Fanny respectfully greets her former supervisor. Slipslop, however, "would not return her curt'sies; but casting her eyes another way, immediately withdrew into another room, muttering as she went, she wondered who the creature was" (Joseph Andrews 157). Slipslop distances herself from Fanny by avoiding eye contact, removing her self from the same physical space, and insulting the girl. The diminutive label "creature" recalls the language of Slipslop's superiors and strips away Fanny's humanity, reducing her to a thing unworthy of being named. Slipslop's behavior renders Fanny invisible both literally and figuratively.

It is easy to attribute Slipslop's rejection of Fanny as a sign of her jealousy, but Slipslop has additional incentive to pretend not to recognize the maid. If Slipslop acknowledges her prior professional association with Fanny, she must acknowledge her own position as the housekeeper. She wants to avoid being identified as a servant in this ambiguous social space because to be a servant is to be socially inferior to nearly all other people. Partridge is more adamant than Slipslop in rejecting people's tendency to classify him as a servant. He outright denies the designation of "servant" on several occasions such as when he informs the people gathered at Mrs. Whitefield's Inn that: "Tho he carried a knapsack, and contented himself with staying among servants . . . he was not

---

[Tom's] servant, but only a friend and companion" (Tom Jones 390). In Fielding's world, to be a classified as a servant is to be the lowest of the low-born.

Miss GraveAirs is not deceived by Slipslop's affected airs and accuses the housekeeper of pertness: "[your] mistress would not encourage such sauciness to her better." (Joseph Andrews 129). Slipslop challenges Miss GraveAirs's presumption of superiority and demands, "Who is my betters, pray?" (129). Neither woman qualifies as a "better" in Fielding's view, but he uses their competing definitions of a "better" to expose class tension. Based on Fielding's description of Miss GraveAirs, it is clear that she is not a woman of rank and fortune, yet she still considers herself a "better" compared to a serving woman. Slipslop defines a "better" as someone who has the authority to issue orders to servants, which is a power that she does, in fact, possess. She proceeds to inform the woman that she has more servants under her command than many fine ladies, insinuating that Miss GraveAirs is not a fine lady. Of course there is a significant difference between these two women's situations that Slipslop wants to deny, and the difference is that while Slipslop does indeed command a brigade of servants below stairs at the Booby estate, she too resides below stairs and must heed the orders issued from those above stairs. Miss GraveAirs, on the other hand, may have only one servant at her command, but she is not subservient to a mistress.

The Inn

The social quibbling between Slipslop and Miss GraveAirs in the coach is thrown into intense relief as Fielding continues to explore and expose the ambiguity and the antagonism built into negotiation of power and status between middling class innkeepers,
their personal servants, and the servants of their gentry guests. The animosity results from servants and middling class persons asserting competing claims to superiority. The middling class’s tenuous status is threatened by the gentry’s servants, who dress and behave (or at least attempt to) as their superiors do, and who demand the same privileged treatment.

Servants see themselves as part of the leisure class because they live amongst it and enjoy perks such as living in their master’s house, eating what their master eats, wearing his cast-off clothes, and attending the same entertainments. The lifestyle of domestic service results in a servant’s identity and status becoming closely aligned with his or her employer’s status. In Honour’s view, her reputation and Sophia’s are practically interchangeable. The narrator comments that Honour defends her mistress’s reputation as if she were defending her own: “In proportion as the character of her mistress was raised, hers likewise, as she conceived was raised with it; and, on the contrary, she thought the one could not be lowered without the other” (Tom Jones 539).

Middling class innkeepers see themselves as being superior to all servants, their own as well as their guests’, because members of the middling class lead a relatively autonomous existence, and in that respect, they are more similar to the gentry and pseudo-gentry. Innkeepers take pride in their economic independence and self-reliance, and they view servants as beasts of burden who exchange their liberty for superficial perks and security. And yet, in many respects, being an innkeeper is much like being a domestic servant. They must be hospitable and servile to their guests, including the

---

69 Maza, p. 131.
servants of their guests, in order to accumulate money, which fortifies their social ascendancy.

Honour is especially assertive in defending her claims to respect and deference against innkeepers who assert competing claims. In the process of making their way to London, Honour and Sophia stop at an inn where Honour demands a special menu, special standards of cleanliness, and the removal of the rabble congregated in the kitchen. After insulting the inn and the people operating it, Honour adds, “Sure you people that keep inns imagine your betters are like yourselves . . . I believe I know more of people of quality than such as you” (Tom Jones 480-1). Honour presents herself as an authority on people of quality and insinuates that she is also a “better.”

Fielding uses Honour to show that having some knowledge of people of quality does not make a servant a person of quality, as evidenced by Honour’s own impolite behavior, nor does it make her an expert on ruling class culture. Susan, the innkeeper’s maid, attacks Honour’s inappropriate social pretensions and uses the same argument against Honour that Honour uses against her superiors; namely, that lower servants are “as good flesh and blood” as upper servants or anyone else for that matter, yet Honour remains oblivious to her own social hypocrisy (Tom Jones 480).

Female servants’ rebellious sexuality not only presents a threat to middling class employers’ marital relationships as evidenced in the sexual competition between mistresses and servants. It also interferes with domestic productivity and commercial success in a pre-capitalist economy. Fielding’s middling class mistresses are paranoid that female servant promiscuity will tarnish the reputations of the public establishments that they own or operate. They are concerned that their inns will become known as
brothels, which would jeopardize their commercial success and their ability to advance further in society.

Fielding's construction of the innkeepers' identities in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* suggests that their personal identity is intrinsically tied to the reputation of their inns in the same way that a servant's identity is enmeshed with his or her master's. Fielding shows how the conflation of inn and identity in the minds' of innkeepers leads them to behave in ridiculous ways. This anxiety leads them to violate their servants and guests' privacy by aggressively policing their sexuality.

Servants are admonished for having sex because it undermines household efficiency and respectability. Grace, a maid at an inn, has sex with a puppeteer and consequently gets beaten by her mistress who chastises her for being low and lazy and turning the inn into a "bawdyhouse" (*Tom Jones* 569). Grace asks her mistress why her conduct is held to a higher standard than the ladies of quality who behave in similar fashion. Her question, which calls attention to the double standard, goes unanswered. This is in part because the sex lives of women of quality are a taboo subject, but also because the answer is obvious from the middling class mistress's pre-capitalist point of view. Ladies of quality do not have work to do. The "moral" that the mistress instills upon Grace is that it is a maid's primary duty to devote her time and energy to work rather than the pursuit of her own pleasure.

Recall that Nightingale also reprimanded his attendant for pursuing pleasure in his master's absence. But Nightingale was not concerned about whether or not his servant completed his work or besmirched his master's reputation, which are the overriding concerns of the middling class innkeeper. In contrast to the middling class, members of
the gentry are not concerned about the success of the domestic enterprise because their financial and social livelihoods do not depend on it. Nightingale was angry because his servant used his property without permission, which was an issue of authority and control. But in a pre-capitalist economy driven by self-interest, middling class innkeepers emphasize productivity and respect, two components crucial to their success.

The personal intimacy that characterizes the paternalistic relationship between the gentry and its servants is vanishing from the emerging middling class master/servant relationship. Grace’s mistress, the innkeeper, psychologically distances herself from the maid. Grace is not considered a part of the family. Nor is the maid enmeshed in her mistress’s personal business. The mistress, however, is involved in the maid’s, but not out of personal concern for Grace’s reputation, but out of concern for her inn’s reputation. For Fielding it is ludicrous for people to stake their reputations on their inns or on the behavior of their servants; however, in Richardson’s Grandison and in Austen’s novels, servants do become the guarantors of their superiors’ reputations, and they function as reliable signs of a master’s stewardship.

**Fielding and the Resolution of Class Conflict**

Fielding’s novels do not promote a rethinking of social hierarchy, at least not in the way that Richardson’s do. The broad social spectrum represented by the characters in Fielding’s works, including the prominence of servants, and the presence of egalitarian rhetoric has led a few critics to conclude that Fielding sympathized with the lower classes. But the majority of critics, myself included, find Fielding’s views on class to be traditional and conservative. Thompson explains how the conclusion of *Tom Jones*
"condenses Fielding's Tory myth of genealogical continuity and economic conservatism" and marks the "triumphant return of the paternalistic estate." 70 Paradise Hall returns to order under the guardianship of Tom and Sophia whose presence counters the socially destabilizing effects of individual self-determinism. Ultimately the master/servant relationship is stabilizing and paternalistic hierarchy is preserved. 71 Those servants who dutifully serve their social superiors benefit from Fielding's charitable economy, whereas those servants who challenge the paternalistic, patriarchal order are actively suppressed, banished, and thereby rendered invisible.

The disruptive class tension in Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones is located on the blurry social boundary separating the middling class from the servant class. The middling class's emerging pre-capitalist values are challenged by servants' similar, competing claims for status, autonomy, and respect, which is the source of class conflict, even though it is represented by Fielding as being a sexual conflict. The middling class's master/servant relationship is also beginning to shift from the paternalistic towards the contractual. There is less intimacy between servants and the middling class. Instead of servants being considered a part of the family, they are the labor that fuels the middling class's domestic enterprise as well as their social ascendency. Servants also are beginning to be viewed as guarantors of their middling class masters' reputation. Fielding is critical of the self-interest that guides the moral and social behavior of the middling class and servants; however, his treatment of servants is particularly harsh. He sees to it that servants are kept low both by the gentry and the middling class.

70 p. 130.
71 Richetti, "Representing An Under Class," p. 89.
Richardson’s and Austen’s novels also engage the issues of social identification and social classification that accompanied the formation and consolidation of the expanding middling class. In Pamela and Clarissa Richardson offers a serious critique of paternalistic model of master/servant relations, although he, like Fielding, reasserts it as the preferred model. However, in Grandison, Richardson abandons anachronistic paternalism and introduces a new contractual master/servant relationship that reflects the increasing influence of bourgeois ideology, and a domestic paradigm that later would be embraced by Austen.
Chapter Three: Richardson Redefines What it Means to Be a Master, a Mistress, and a Servant

Samuel Richardson represents an important hinge figure in my study of the trajectory of servant invisibility, which begins with Henry Fielding and ends with Jane Austen. All three authors were aware of the intense social dislocation that occurred as a result of the formation of the middling class in the eighteenth century. Richardson and Austen were absorbed with the business of trying to educate their readers on how to deal with this crisis in social class. All three novelists’ works reflect different attitudes towards domestic servants and ways of representing and addressing the problems that erupted between masters and servants. Richardson’s early novels, \textit{Pamela} (1740) and \textit{Clarissa} (1747), present the paternalistic model of master/servant relations, whereas \textit{Sir Charles Grandison} (1753) presents the emerging contractual model.

In contrast to Fielding’s complete allegiance to paternalism, Richardson’s \textit{Pamela} and \textit{Clarissa} offer a critique of the paternalistic model of master/servants relations. Richardson transfers his power as a cultural narrator to define to Pamela, a female domestic servant. She observes ruling class culture from an outsider’s perspective and recognizes the disparity that exists between those who have status and those who have character.\(^1\) She uses the power she derives from her virtue and her writing to address the problem of moral corruption among members of the ruling class and to redefine the criteria used to judge an individual’s worth.

\(^1\) This is similar to Fanny Price’s role in Austen’s \textit{Mansfield Park}. 
Pamela, the servant, succeeds in reforming her aristocratic master Mr. B; however, Mr. B reinscribes Pamela, his wife, with his traditional, patriarchal beliefs.\(^2\) The feisty sauce-box betrays the ideals of class and gender equality that she affirms in her verbal assaults on Mr. B and his value system. As Mrs. B she “eagerly embraces the mores of the society she condemns.”\(^3\) Despite the intense scrutiny Richardson levels at paternalistic masters, such as Mr. B and Lovelace, he reasserts paternalism as the preferential model at the conclusion of both novels, though he does so with less and less conviction. Richardson reaffirmed the paternalistic model because it reinforced the social mores of his audience. He shared his readers' investment in patriarchal authority and the existing class system, although he could imagine a more flexible social order that valued a person's virtue and mind as well as his or her birth.

In *Grandison* Richardson introduces an exemplary man of rank, wealth, virtue, and benevolence. Sir Charles Grandison essentially represents the best attributes of Pamela and Mr. B in one character.\(^4\) Richardson's new master resolves the threat of servant subversion through an innovative style of domestic management that reflects the influence of progressive individualism: control through kindness. The key tenets of this contractual master/servant relationship include: 1) acknowledging that servants are

---

\(^2\) Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* argues that the marriage plot is structured around a series of sexual encounters, which are designed to mask political conflicts between men and women. In her view women are empowered to redefine the domestic sphere on the basis of their moral authority, but women have no political power because they remain subject to their husbands' patriarchal domination. When Armstrong deems the domestic sphere one in which there are gender distinctions but no political distinctions, she completely ignores the social distinctions that continue to define the relations between the principals and their servants (*New York: Oxford UP*, 1987).


\(^4\) Some critics, such as Wolff, claim that Sir Charles is an archetype of paternalism. While that may apply to his relationships with his wife, sister, and surrogate daughter, it is not true of his relationship with servants.
individuals with needs and desires; 2) avoiding all forms of personal intimacy with servants; 3) accepting and encouraging servants’ desire to prosper and advance socially; and, 4) assuming responsibility for one’s actions. While servants’ autonomy and individuality are validated in Grandison, servants are beginning to be perceived as referential signs of their employers’ goodness and benevolence. They function metonymically as the guarantors of their masters and mistresses’ reputations.

Richardson’s Grandison also anticipates a problem that would accompany the exploding commercialism that occurred in the second half of the eighteenth-century. If men are busy in the public sphere making money, which then empowers them financially and socially to fulfill their increasing public obligations, then someone else must run the estate, the domestic enterprise. Richardson provided a radical solution to this problem. He transferred the supervision of the domestic sphere to the mistress. But this solution created a second dilemma. How can a mistress take responsibility for the management of the estate without becoming a maid or at least being perceived as having the status of a servant? The answer proposed in Grandison is to transfer the mistress’s domestic responsibilities to a housekeeper who requires minimal supervision. This move on Richardson’s part frees the mistress to function as a domestic angel.

Austen would not only embrace Grandison, as a novel of manners and morals, but she would also adopt Richardson’s new domestic configuration of power and the contractual model of master/servant relations. Austen, however, renders servants

---

5 Wolff’s book describes the significant influence of Puritanism on Richardson’s fiction, in particular the way in which Richardson invests money and power with a moral potential to do greater good, p. 177.

6 In Wolff’s conclusion to her book she touches briefly on the parallels between Richardson’s and Austen’s

pp. 190-4.
completely invisible in her works. Servants become referential in the struggle for power and status between the gentry and the middling class.

In this chapter I argue that Richardson explores what it means to be a servant, a master, and a mistress within the paternalistic model of master/servant relations in *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, and I show how the definitions associated with the paternalistic model of master/servant relations change in *Grandison* in response to the emerging bourgeois ideology of domesticity and the advent of the contractual master/servant relationship.

**Pamela Challenges the Conventional Definition of a Servant**

Pamela's shifting status has confused critics in their efforts to articulate Richardson's views on class. Those critics who argue that *Pamela* was not aimed at leveling class distinctions usually focus on the fact that Pamela represents an extreme case, one that challenges the conventional definition of what it meant to be a servant in the eighteenth-century. I, too, believe that Pamela is not only substantially different from other servants, but also that she operates as a "transcendental signifier," which blurs the distinctions between the categories of servant, sister, mistress, and wife. 7

---

7 In *The Rape of Clarissa: Writing, Sexuality, and Class Struggle in Samuel Richardson*, Terry Eagleton identifies *Pamela* as an agent of ideological change, one that promoted progressive bourgeois values as the emerging source of authority at the time of its publication, (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1982), p. 4. Christopher Flint, on the other hand, says that Richardson's political agenda was not all that progressive or radical: "Richardson was more concerned with the enfranchised than the disenfranchised," p. 496. See "The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in *Pamela*, or *Virtue Rewarded*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 29 (1989): 489-514. I agree that Richardson strictly limits radical egalitarianism by a) advocating a system of patriarchal control; b) raising Pamela's parents; and c) distinguishing between a man's ability to marry beneath his position and a woman's. Mr. B makes it clear to his sister that a man only
Richardson uses Pamela’s mutability to thematize the difficulty that people had with social identification and social classification in the eighteenth century as a result of the disruptive social changes that accompanied the formation of the middling class. Pamela’s shifting status wreaks enormous havoc within Mr. B’s household. No one, including Mr. B, the housekeepers, other servants, or Mr. B’s acquaintances, knows quite what to make of Pamela or how to treat this “half-girl half-lady, half-servant half-mistress.” Much of this semiotic chaos can be attributed to Lady B’s death, which causes everyone to lose his or her sense of place within the domestic sphere. In Lady B’s absence, her children fail to take responsibility for their words and deeds, and the burden falls upon their servants to remind them of their appropriate positions. Instead of taking advantage of this carnivalesque atmosphere by subverting authority, servants, Pamela in particular, function as moral pointers, reminding their superiors to resume their roles, roles that maintain the class and gender hierarchy. For example, when Mr. B does not behave as a true and honourable gentleman, Pamela tries to shame him into acting with the propriety and decency that becomes his place in the world: “Your honour knows you went too far for a master to a servant, or even to his equal” (Pamela 66). Pamela also

---

can raise a woman’s social status, but a woman cannot raise a man’s.

In contrast to critics such as Flint and Terry Castle, Richard Gooding argues that Pamela II is not an exercise in forgetting Pamela’s lowly origins. “The Politics of Pamela. Shamela. and of the Pamela Vogue,” p. 113. In his view, Pamela II revisits and extends Richardson’s criticism of “hereditary honour,” which is the subject of Pamela in Eighteenth-Century Fiction. 7.2 (1995), p. 114. He describes two camps of thought. Pamelaists ignore her inferior breeding, whereas, Anti-Pamelaists, such as Fielding, see her as a hypocrite. Terry Castle’s reading of Pamela, which is informed by Bakhtin’s work on masquerade, suggests that the prescribed social code is being subverted. See Maskerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1983), pp. 132, 134.


pleads with Lady Davers, Mr. B’s sister, to act as a woman of quality: “I would beg, said I, one favour of your ladyship, that if you would have me keep my distance, you will not forget your own degree” (Pamela 404). Even other household servants forget their proper places, and, consequently, lose their places. Everyone experiences slippage as a result of Pamela’s slippery status.

The identity crisis that Pamela undergoes as a servant in Mr. B’s household following her mistress’s death illustrates the on-going cultural struggle between the value systems of two competing classes, the aristocracy and the emerging middling class. Pamela is trying to resolve two distinctive “cultural models of identity.” 10 On the one hand, Pamela has been influenced by the aristocratic culture of the B household, which values rank, honor, accomplishments and learning. On the other hand, Pamela’s lowly parents taught her to appreciate hard work, virtue, and truth. Pamela laments the fact that her superior qualifications as a lady’s maid “will be of little service to me now: for to be sure it had been better for me to have been brought up to hard labour” (Pamela 112). The very qualifications and breeding that make her worthy of Mr. B’s attention contribute to her otherness as a servant. 11

What is it about Pamela that makes her substantially different from other servant girls? Why is she so slippery and difficult to classify or define? Pamela’s appearance and manners completely obscure her low birth. In contrast to Fielding’s maids who are

---

10 Flint, p. 490.
11 In “Pamela: Domestic Servitude,” Robert Folkenflik draws an analogy between institutional practices and Pamela’s incarceration at Lincolnshire. He interprets the combination of Pamela’s unusual education, the generous gifts she receives, and B’s re-naming of her as an attempt to “break down the sense of individuality” through “role dispossession” in the same way that institutions destroy a person’s identity. Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 5.3, (1993), pp. 255-7.
grotesque and whose emulation of their superiors is laughable, Richardson’s Pamela possesses the physical characteristics of high birth -- small hands and feet, a “fine face” and figure, all of which combine to subvert class-based assumptions about gentility (Pamela 75). She speaks French, sings and dances, stitches, calculates numbers, and reads and writes. While Pamela’s literacy would have been considered somewhat unusual for a servant in the eighteenth-century, the fact that she is given private time and space in which to write personal letters is highly unusual, though also necessary to serve the plot. The superior education Pamela received under Lady B’s tutelage as her lady-in-waiting creates a maid in her mistress’ image. Pamela also wears Lady B’s cast-off clothing, which further obscures class distinctions. The special bond between Pamela and Lady B went beyond the maid adopting the training and trappings of her mistress, as made clear by Lady B’s dying request that her son look after Pamela.12

When Mr. B attempts to honor his mother’s wish, he encounters all sorts of trouble in managing his personal and professional boundaries because the paternalistic model of master/servant relations is based on conflicting assumptions. One the one hand, paternalism views servants as a master’s property that may be disposed of however he pleases. On the other hand, paternalism considers servants as members of the family who warrant the master’s ‘parental’ protection. As a result of these conflicting messages and roles, Mr. B does not know whether he should treat Pamela as his servant, his sister, or a potential mistress. Mr. B’s confusion is exacerbated further by Pamela’s resistance to the conventions associated with her subordinate place in the social hierarchy. Her behavior is

---

12 I am indebted to Flint’s discussion of the ways in which Richardson’s novels complicate the relationship
inconsistent, and it thwarts his paternalistic expectations at every turn.\textsuperscript{13} He expects Pamela, the servant-girl, to be flattered by his attention. He expects Pamela, the sister, to trust him.\textsuperscript{14} He expects Pamela, the potential mistress, to accept his generous proposals. At one point early in the novel Mr. B tells Pamela that he no longer considers her his “servant” (\textit{Pamela} 115). What is Pamela if she is not his servant? There are no socially sanctioned categories to absorb her besides mistress or wife, and he rejects the one, and she rejects the other.\textsuperscript{15} Pamela sums up Mr. B’s confusion in a letter to her parents: “He said I was a strange girl; he knew not what to make of me” (\textit{Pamela} 70).

Each time Mr. B makes some type of sexual advance, Pamela rejects him and rebels against his authority as her master.\textsuperscript{16} Following one of his unsuccessful attempts to seduce Pamela, Mr. B falls back on his primary source of vested power, that which belongs to the master. He commands her to stay in the summerhouse when she would flee. When she refuses to obey, he asks: “Do you know whom you speak to?” To which she replies, “Well may I forget that I am a servant, when you forget what belongs to the master” (\textit{Pamela} 55). In other words, she uses his inappropriate behavior to justify her

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] Flint, p. 492.
\item[14] Mr. B is annoyed by Pamela’s reluctance to trust the sincerity of his marriage proposal: “You could not repose the least confidence in one whom you had known for years, and who, . . . in a manner had grown up with you” (\textit{Pamela} 203). Pamela completely rejects the idea of having been “brought up with him” (\textit{Pamela} 204). If patriarchy recognizes Pamela as Mrs. B’s daughter and Mr. B’s sister, then her marriage to Mr. B is incest. Lady Davers denounces Pamela as her “sister.” The element of sexuality does not complicate this issue for Lady Davers in the way that it does her brother. At one point she was sympathetic to Pamela’s plight as a woman, but when she learns that her brother might marry Pamela, Lady Davers responds as an aristocrat, someone of a superior class. She reminds her brother that they are from “no upstart family,” whereas Pamela is no better than dirt (\textit{Pamela} 293).
\item[16] Flint says that Mr. B’s interest in Pamela reflects a “long-standing obsession,” p. 494. Stallybrass and White discuss the master/servant relationship from a psychoanalytic view, in which case, Pamela is the object of Mr. B’s displaced desire for his mother, p. 150. \textit{The Politics and Poetics of Transgression}
insubordinate behavior. In contrast to Fielding’s chambermaids, Richardson’s Pamela does not consider her body or her virtue Mr. B’s property, and she will not be enticed or compelled to capitulate to his will. Pamela’s fierce protection of her body as personal property over which only she can rightfully claim possession and her assertion of moral autonomy reflect the influence of progressive individualism.¹⁷

Pamela argues strongly against Mr. B’s attempts to define her body and virtue as a commodity, and her outspokenness represents another sign of her difference. Instead of protecting her master’s reputation and privacy by concealing his moral indiscretions, Pamela deliberately exposes them, thereby breaking one of the most important rules of the paternalistic master/servant relationship. She publicizes Mr. B’s attacks on her virtue to her immediate family and Mrs. Jervis, despite the fact that she is expected to “hear, see, and say nothing” about her master’s conduct (Pamela 81). Mr. B is outraged by her lack of respect for his reputation and her tendency to be “free with his character” (Pamela 99). Full of reproach, he asks, “And so I am to be exposed, am I, . . . in my own house, and out of my house, to the whole world, by such a saucebox?” To which Pamela replies, “[I]t is not I that expose you, if I say nothing but the truth” (Pamela 62). She boldly implies that the mistake is not in the divulging of the behavior but in the behavior itself.

By not exercising enough discipline to deal with his feelings for Pamela privately, Mr. B has become susceptible to public criticism from Pamela and other members of the household. He threatens to dismiss her if she continues to “write the affairs of [his] family

---

¹⁷ In addition to withholding her body, Pamela also withholds her letters from Mr. B, which contain private information about her self. Pamela’s withholding of information represents another forms of her self-assertion. Recall that Fielding’s servants also withheld information from their masters in an effort to have
purely for an exercise to her pen and her invention” (*Pamela* 60). Pamela intensely scrutinizes the aristocracy’s moral denigration. Richardson uses her outspokenness to show how vulnerable the ruling class is to its servants who have knowledge of their private lives. The solution to this problem is simple in Richardson’s view. Members of the ruling class must act honorably instead of placing themselves in the dangerous and demeaning position of relying on their servants to protect their dignity by covering up scandalous conduct.

Pamela is not only outspoken, she is also lucid. Richardson empowers this maid with a degree of fluency that distinguishes her from other servants. He erases class-based differences between Pamela’s speech and her master’s in order to bolster his spokeswoman’s credibility, and by extension, his own authority as a writer. Pamela’s grasp of high discourse aligns her with “the most powerful socio-economic groups existing at the center of cultural power which gives [her] the authority to designate what is to be taken as high and low in society.”18 Her correctness and articulateness qualify her for superior rank in the same way that Fielding’s servants’ malapropisms signal their moral, intellectual, and social inferiority.19 In contrast to Fielding’s Honour, Pamela shows herself to be competent, critical and savvy in arguing points of difference with Mr. B. For example, he accuses her of having “made common talk of the matter, not considering my reputation, or your own.” In her own defense, she responds: “I made

---

18 Stallybrass and White, p.4.
common talk of it, sir! . . . I have nobody to talk to, hardly.” Mr. B scrutinizes her subtle manipulation of terms and responds: “Hardly! You little equivocator! What do you mean by hardly?” (Pamela 61). He quibbles with Pamela’s definition of “hardly” because he knows that she is corresponding with her parents and confiding in Mrs. Jervis.20 Three confidants may not seem like a large audience to Pamela, but from Mr. B’s perspective these three individuals pose a significant threat. Even though Pamela’s parents have no economic or social power, their principles influence their daughter’s decision-making. This presents a problem for Mr. B because the Andrewses lie beyond his immediate sphere of influence. Mrs. Jervis, on the other hand, poses a threat from within his own home. She not only influences the management of his estate, she also influences the social climate within his home; therefore, it is in Mr. B’s best interests to retain her loyalty and respect.

When the verbal exchanges between Pamela and Mr. B become emotionally charged, which tends to be the case when Pamela’s definitions threaten to prevail, Pamela either retreats or gets silenced. As Robbins suggests, “Pamela and Mr. B fight on equal terms,” but there comes a point at which “if the servant wins, she loses.” 21 When Pamela’s rhetorical superiority threatens to collapse her defense, she stands on technicalities to absolve herself and wisely uses Mr. B’s power to justify her return to her subordinate position, one marked by obedience and silence. For example, when Mr. B confronts her for confiding in Mrs. Jervis about the summerhouse incident, Pamela says, “Pray your honour . . . let me go down; for it is not for me to hold an argument with your

clearly superior to Mr. B’s, p. 367.
honour” (Pamela 61). Even though she has engaged in fierce, combative arguments that subverted her master’s authority on many prior occasions, Pamela assumes a position that is physically and verbally subordinate to Mr. B’s in order to protect herself.

**Paternalism’s Effort to Contain the Threat of Servant Subversion**

In Fielding’s novels servant subversion does not pose a serious threat to the gentry’s power because Fielding suppresses it. In Richardson’s Pamela, however, the threat of servant subversion is significant and consumes much of Mr. B’s attention. Pamela’s resistance to Mr. B inspires other servants to act subversively. As a result, many resources are required to combat Pamela’s individual opposition and to overthrow “the confederacy” of upper and lower servants who unite in support of her. Mr. Longman and Mrs. Jervis, the two highest ranking servants in Mr. B’s Bedfordshire estate, intervene on Pamela’s behalf to prevent her dismissal. The moral grounds of the servants’ opposition obscure their political subversion. When their master refuses to comply, they threaten to “become pleaders in a body” and to lead an insurrection (Pamela 106). An outraged Mr. B accuses Pamela of “creating a party of the whole house” (Pamela 97). The terms “confederacy,” “body,” and “party” connote an organized, political collective with shared values and goals. Furthermore, the term “pleaders” echoes “plebes.” Michael McKeon attributes the presence of these politicized terms to the increasing number of organized

---

20 Armstrong explains how Pamela struggles with Mr. B to control the terms of their relationship, p. 122.  
21 p. 82
societies and unions that formed in opposition to the dominant power structure in the eighteenth century. 22

Even though Richardson uses Pamela to launch his critique against dissolute paternalistic masters, Richardson does so with the intention of reforming Mr. B and the moral and social order that he represents -- not overturning it. This explains Richardson’s overriding concern with the consolidation of servant power and the threat it poses to aristocratic paternalism. The servants at B Hall continue to undermine Mr. B’s authority even in Pamela’s absence. Sheer desperation leads Mr. Longman and Mrs. Jervis, Mr. B’s two most loyal and trusted servants, to appeal to Lady Davers on Pamela’s behalf, and they get dismissed for it. The significance of Mr. B’s problems with servant insubordination and his struggle to retain power at B Hall are hinted at in his conversations with Pamela only after she accepts his marriage proposal, a point at which he can confidently anticipate the restoration of domestic order. In fact, Mr. B concedes that he must marry Pamela if for no other purpose than “to engage the respects of my family to myself” (Pamela 481). In other words, paternalistic authority is restored when women and servants are under the master’s absolute control.

Mr. B’s socially inclusive definition of “family” is evidence of his paternalistic value system. For example, he asks Mrs. Jervis if Pamela has told her things that might damage his reputation in her mind as well as “that of all the family” (Pamela 66). Pamela and other upper servants also use this inclusive definition. She informs her parents that she “had all the wishes and concerns of the family” (Pamela 97). In The Servant’s Hand

22 p. 369.
Robbins points out that Richardson also can be credited with introducing a more restrictive definition of “family” in the process of exploring the appropriateness of a relationship between Pamela and Mr. B. \(^{23}\) With respect to Mr. B’s seduction of Pamela, Lord Danford remarks: “He hurts no family by this” (Pamela 172). This more restrictive definition is a product of people’s anxiety about status and privacy. It creates a greater division between the nuclear family’s private sphere, the public spheres of the household and the marketplace.

Mr. B’s problems with servant subversion within his “family” occur on a macro scale, which translates into complete domestic chaos, whereas Clarissa’s Lovelace manages to retain enough control over his servants such that his problems exist on a micro scale and involve only a few specific individuals. Lovelace, for example, relies on servants to execute his various plots against the Harlowe family and against Clarissa in particular. As a result, he often finds himself in the uncomfortable and vulnerable position of having to negotiate with servants in order to achieve his goals.

Lovelace’s control over a plot against the Harlowes can be jeopardized by servants in three ways: guilt, arrogance, and greed. Some servants are reluctant to execute Lovelace’s orders because they feel the pinch of conscience. Others choose not to follow his precise orders because they believe themselves to be better plotters than their master. Lovelace’s third concern is that his servants will be persuaded to betray him by his adversaries’ promises of better rewards. In all three of these situations, Lovelace implores servants to act instead of think. He expends a considerable amount of energy and money

\(^{23}\) p. 148.
trying to manage the threat of servant subversion, and he is more skillful and successful at it than Mr. B, but that is partly because Clarissa never inspires the servants' loyalty in the way that Pamela does because Clarissa is a member of the ruling class and not a servant. The difficulty Mr. B and Lovelace have trying to retain control over the domestic sphere suggests that paternalistic masters need new strategies to effectively exercise authority over servants who are beginning to challenge the traditional moral and social order on an individual basis, as well as a collective body.

**Kindness: A New Approach to Containing Servant Subversion**

In contrast to Richardson’s earlier novels, *Grandison* contains no evidence of servant subversion, and in that respect, it anticipates the absence of servant-related domestic turmoil in Austen’s novels. Sir Charles and his associates are aware of the need to take precautions to protect their homes against the potential contamination posed by bad servants. One traditional method of containment is, of course, to hire good servants who are obedient and trustworthy. While those two qualities in a servant might be enough to satisfy Lovelace and Mr. B, whose primary goals are to maintain control over those they command, Sir Charles expects more of his servants and adopts methods that reflect the evolving contractual master/servant relationship. In *Grandison* Richardson introduces a new solution to the problem of servant subversion and resolves the tension associated with maintaining the social boundaries between the ruling class and its servants.

In contrast to Lovelace and Mr. B, who rely on bribes, threats, and violence to command servants to do their wills, Sir Charles controls servants through “kindness,” a
subtle form of psychological manipulation designed to align the servant class’s thinking with the ruling class’s thinking. Furthermore, in *Grandison* servants have come to be recognized as signs of their master’s virtue and power and arbiters of their master’s domestic governance. This new perspective is articulated clearly by Harriet Byron, the woman who becomes Sir Charles’ wife. She declares, “I should as soon choose to take my measures of the goodness of principals by their servants’ love of them, as by any other rule (*Grandison* 2.32).” In other words, even though Sir Charles is a member of the ruling class, he stakes his reputation on his servants’ manners and his servants’ good opinion of him. This marks a significant shift in master/servant relations. In the paternalistic master/servant relationship, as represented by Fielding’s works and Richardson’s early works, servants are not the guarantors of the gentry’s reputations or superiority; however, in Austen’s novels, servants are of utmost importance in this respect.

**Mr. B, Lovelace, and Sir Charles: A Change in Management Style**

What does it mean to be the master in Richardson’s novels? The answer to this question depends on which novel we consult for a definition because, as Terry Eagleton suggests, all of Richardson’s works obsessively concern themselves with the “fierce conflict over signs and meanings.” And, as I have noted, these signs and meanings shift over the time span between Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews* and Austen’s *Persuasion.*

---

24 Samuel Richardson’s *The History of Sir Charles Grandison.* Jocelyn Harris, ed., 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972). All references are to this text. Elizabeth Bennet makes a statement about Mrs. Reynolds, Darcy’s housekeeper at Pemberley, which is similar to Harriet’s.

Richardson's treatment of Sir Charles signals the fulcrum of the emerging bourgeois ideology that shaped the contractual master/servant relationship. In this section I compare and contrast the three masters' approaches to managing their households, focusing in particular on their relationships with the characters that fall under their domestic sovereignty, which obviously includes servants, but also includes wives and other family members. The key points of difference between the masters include the sources of their power, how that power is deployed and to what end, and who is to be held accountable for those actions.

As a result of Pamela's influence, Mr. B undergoes a moral reformation, which leads him to alter his understanding of what it means to be a good master, husband, brother, and member of the community. According to Christopher Flint, "Reading Pamela's words B confronts a text that disorients his cultural and psychological assumptions, challenges the coherence of his class values, perceptions and knowledge, and brings to a crisis his relationship with language." 26 Mr. B experiences the transformative power of Pamela's letters and becomes "a secular convert to the religion of Pamelaism," but we do not see his good intentions put into practice because the novel ends. 27 Lovelace, of course, is never redeemed. Sir Charles, however, represents the embodiment of Richardson's new definition. 28 He successfully assumes his position as a social and moral leader within the family, the community, and by extension, the kingdom.

26 p. 502
27 Folkenflik, p. 265. McKeon presents an insightful discussion of Pamela's power as a writer and the impact her writing has on Mr. B, her "ideal reader," p. 361.
28 I am borrowing from Betty Schellenberg's argument, which suggests that Pamela II "formalizes an exemplary model of social authority," and I am applying it to Sir Charles Grandison. See "Enclosing the Immovable: Structuring Social Authority in Pamela Part II," Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 4.1 (1991): 27-
Before identifying the characteristics that define Sir Charles’ exemplary, contractual approach to domestic stewardship, I first want to outline some of the features associated with masters such as Mr. B and Lovelace, who represent the archetypes of paternalism that are being interrogated and revised by Richardson.

Masters such as Mr. B and Lovelace derive their power from a combination of ancestry, the value of the estate, social status, reputation, and, of course, gender. They use this power to dominate and control others, primarily through physical or financial coercion. They tyrannize over members of their immediate families, women, and servants.\(^{29}\) They also manage to dominate members of the community, even though one would expect that their associates’ own claims to rank and fortune would entitle them to greater independence. Mr. B’s Lincolnshire neighbors, for example, are afraid to sacrifice their good relations with him in order to assist Pamela. One woman says she “don’t care to make herself enemies,” and a man refuses to “embroil [him]self with a man of Mr. B’s power and fortune” (Pamela 172-3).

Mr. B and Lovelace wield their power as a combination of “promises and threats,” to borrow Sarah Maza’s phrase.\(^{30}\) Shortly after his mother’s death, Mr. B showers Pamela with compliments, cash, and clothing in an effort to seduce her, but none of his bribes approach the value that she attaches to her virtue. When traditional methods prove ineffectual in defeating Pamela’s resistance, Mr. B shifts to verbal and physical abuse.\(^{31}\) Repeated failures in their attempts to woo Pamela and Clarissa lead Mr. B and Lovelace

\(^{29}\) Lovelace’s family fears him (Clarissa 50).
\(^{31}\) Flint, p. 491.
to devise increasingly desperate schemes, beginning with kidnapping and escalating to rape in Clarissa’s case. When threats fail to bring about the desired response in their female captives, Mr. B and Lovelace resort to physical violence, a method of combating insubordination that is also sanctioned by the paternalistic masters in Fielding’s novels.

Pamela’s rejection of Mr. B and her “rebuke of his high condition” are unexpected and intolerable to him. He is not used to having his power contested, and his battle with Pamela is primarily about power and not lust. Mr. B’s relentless attempts to seduce his servant become a test of his superior social, economic, sexual, and rhetorical power, and this becomes absolutely clear when he physically subdues Pamela in bed with the help of Mrs. Jewkes, but instead of raping her, he declares, “I must say one word to you, Pamela: it is this; you now see, that you are in my power!” (Pamela 242).  

Clarissa’s and Pamela’s steady resistance to their suitors’ powers of seduction distinguishes them from other disenfranchised women who were ruined with less resistance as a result of associating with these libertines. These masters are used to having their way with women. Both are recognized for their sexual prowess and have taken full advantage of the latitude granted to them on the basis of their class and gender, which sanctions their sexual behavior. In a letter to Joseph Leman, Lovelace proudly articulates the “Rake’s Creed,” yet staunchly defends himself against accusations of mistreating women (Clarissa 495). His reputation as a profligate rake is so well publicized that his tenants know to keep their daughters hidden from him. Mr. B is a bit more modest about

---

32 Mark Kinkeade-Weekes analyzes Mr. B’s failure to live up to his reputation as a rake in Samuel Richardson: Dramatic Novelist (New York: Cornell UP, 1973).
his sexual exploits than Lovelace, but he too has ruined many young, innocent girls, including Sally Godfrey. By clearly validating Clarissa’s and Pamela’s moral superiority to these men, Richardson prepares for the move he makes in *Grandison* that transfers the responsibility for maintaining the moral and social order of the domestic sphere to women.

Richardson also shows how the licentiousness of ruling class men, such as Mr. B and Lovelace, has larger social implications. He makes Mr. B the most powerful person in his community and shows how others emulate Mr. B’s sexual behavior, which then spreads his corrupting influence. Pamela expresses her disapproval of Squire Martin, one of Mr. B’s neighbors, who has had “three lyings-in in his house, in three months past; one by himself, one by his coachman, and one by his woodman; and yet he has turned neither of them away. Indeed, how can he, when they but follow his own example?” (*Pamela* 103). The Squire’s moral irresponsibility trickles down to the servants he employs who either ignore or fail to appreciate the negative consequences that attend such conduct, namely, children being born out of wedlock. While patriarchy deems the men’s sexual behavior acceptable, Richardson views the proliferation of illegitimate children as another source of social instability.

Mrs. Jervis disapproves of Mr. B’s immoral behavior and boldly speaks out against his attempts to seduce Pamela. She urges Mr. B to look elsewhere for “wicked ones,” and when he persists with his designs on Pamela, she tries to shame her master into leaving the maid alone: “I never could have thought, that the son of my dear, departed lady, could have so forfeited his honour, as to endeavor to destroy a virtue he ought to
protect” (*Pamela* 97). Once again Richardson uses a female servant, who is accorded some status and influence as Mr. B’s housekeeper, to operate as a moral and ethical reference point for her paternalistic master.

Richardson shows how paternalistic masters’ understood superiority is threatened by their own vicious behavior. Mr. B and Lovelace rely on their ability to dominate their personal servants as their means of intimidating and exercising control over Pamela and Clarissa, the two women they most wish to conquer. The masters routinely exploit domestic servants’ dependency and occasionally command them to do evil. Lovelace, however, far surpasses Mr. B when it comes to bribing and manipulating servants. At one point Lovelace brags, “I can talk familiarly to servants or to principals, when I have a mind to make it worth their while” (*Clarissa* 448). He compares servants to army soldiers who “do all the mischief; frequently without malice” (*Clarissa* 448). Will, for example, is not only delighted to manage one of Lovelace’s plots, but he feels empowered by his success.

Joseph Leman has a much larger role in helping Lovelace execute his revenge against the Harlowes, and he is motivated by money and the promise of being made the innkeeper of the Blue Boar. When Leman expresses some reluctance to assist his master, Lovelace is quick to remind him “not to judge for himself, when he had *positive* orders” (*Clarissa* 739). The interaction between Leman and Lovelace illustrates how paternalistic masters act on whim and expect their servants to obey. It also reinforces Fielding’s belief that bad servants are motivated by a mercenary desire to achieve middling class status and make money, but in Richardson’s novels, servants’ self-interest is usually aligned with
their wicked paternalistic masters who command them. In contrast, in Fielding’s fiction, servants pursue economic and social rewards at their masters’ expense.

In *Grandison* Richardson includes an incident involving vicious old-style paternalism to show its corrupting influence on servants whose behavior might otherwise be ethically correct under the guidance of a master such as Sir Charles. William Wilson, the servant who supervises the abduction of Harriet Byron, claims that he became “the tool of wicked masters” because he had no “place” for a year, no character to recommend him for employment, and no money (*Grandison* 1.176). His paternalistic masters not only exploited his dismal situation, they perpetuated it by keeping him “poor and necessitous,” and they motivated him to do despicable deeds with the lure of a monetary reward and the promise of being made a “gentleman” (*Grandison* 1.171, 1.173). Wilson articulates the dilemma that paternalism creates for individuals with conflicted consciences who do not know whether to do what they believe is right or do what they are told by those who are presumed to be right on the basis of their superior rank: “I could not say No, to an unlawful thing, when my principals commanded my assent” (*Grandison* 1.170).

Often the evil and violence perpetrated by servants in literature is a product of a master’s aggression, which complicates the issue of accountability. Is the master responsible for an evil deed he commands his servant to do, or is the servant responsible for the act because he or she could exercise independent moral judgment, at least theoretically, and refuse? In *Pamela* and *Clarissa* Richardson exposes the renegade lawlessness that characterizes the upper echelons of society. As masters, Lovelace and

---

34 Maza, p. 220.
Mr. B feel that they are accountable to no one. They imprison and molest women, and no one with any power or social leverage makes any effort to stop them, and they certainly would not allow their authority to be challenged by the servants under their command. Richardson feared that the moral degradation at the top of the social hierarchy, represented in figures such as Mr. B and Lovelace, was eroding the social fabric. One remedy for this problem, in Richardson’s view, was for everyone to take responsibility for his or her actions, whether master or servant. In fact, contrary to Fielding’s general attitude, which required servants to shoulder the burden of guilt and blame for their superiors, Richardson’s new model of domestic management transferred the greater share of social and moral responsibility onto the shoulders of the ruling class, which was also the case with Austen.

In Richardson’s old-style paternalistic model, servants take the blame for their master’s misconduct. Mr. B’s oppressive henchwoman, Mrs. Jewkes, vigilantly polices Pamela’s movements at Lincolnshire. She follows her master’s orders with absolute loyalty and obedience and leaves moral judgments to her superiors. Like Wilson, Mrs. Jewkes considers herself to be the mere agent of her master’s wishes: “Look-ye, said she, he is my master; and if he bids me do a thing that I can do, I think I ought to do it; and let him, who has power to command me, look to the lawfulness of it” (Pamela 147-8). Mrs. Jewkes clearly derives pleasure from her role as Pamela’s persecutor because no mention is made of any other reward or payout for her participation other than that of pleasing her master. She enjoys terrorizing her pretty prisoner and does not hold herself accountable

---

35 Similarly, Betty is “put over” Clarissa who is “confined like a prisoner” by her family (Clarissa 244).
for her own conduct, but then neither does Mr. B, Pamela’s persecutor in absentia. As Flint points out, Mrs. Jewkes’ enthusiastic participation in torturing Pamela relieves Mr. B from being deeply implicated in her criminal behavior, which makes it possible for Pamela and the reader to forgive and accept the reformed Mr. B later in the novel.36

In contrast to Mrs. Jewkes, John Arnold, one of Mr. B’s lower servants, receives an “inducement” to intercept Pamela’s letters to her parents, but he feels so burdened by guilt that he writes to Pamela telling her of his involvement (Pamela 158). Pamela pardons him and blames their master: “But if John deserves those names, what must that wicked master deserve, who set him to work? And who, not content to corrupt himself, endeavors to corrupt others” (Pamela 158). This statement, which exonerates the servant at the master’s expense, anticipates Richardson’s move in Grandison. However, this statement completely contradicts Pamela’s attitude toward Mrs. Jewkes, whom she reviled for her base usage of her, even though Mrs. Jewkes was also following her master’s orders. The only conceivable explanation for this change in Pamela’s attitude is the change in her relationship to Mr. B. As she prepares to become mistress of B Hall, Pamela is anxious to forgive wrongs in order to restore good relations within the household. Mr. B has already repented for his mistreatment of Pamela, so she can present him as an instructive example of what it means to behave in morally and socially responsible ways.

Mr. B and Lovelace are masters who derive their power from rank, fortune, and reputation rather than virtue. They are selfish, willful men who use their power to exploit

---

When Clarissa upbraids her brother for this demeaning treatment, he tells her that Betty “has orders to obey
their families, friends, women, and servants. They make promises and threats, use and abuse people, and they hold themselves accountable to no one -- not to their victims, not to God. However, after reading Pamela’s letters, Mr. B achieves self-mastery and moves closer to the Grandisonian ideal. As proof of his reformation, Mr. B says to Pamela, “But if I am master of myself, and my own resolution, I will not attempt to compel you to anything” (Pamela 244).

Sir Charles Grandison: Richardson’s Ideal Master

Following his reformation, Mr. B becomes an example to his neighbors of what is required to be a fine gentleman and a good master. But Sir Charles represents Richardson’s conception of the perfect master, which is precisely what leads Cynthia Wolff to criticize Sir Charles as being “too good, too judicious, too much the model of propriety and tact to be either likeable or believable.” In addition to possessing rank, wealth, and reputation, Sir Charles is virtuous, which is the key factor in Richardson’s new definition of the ideal master. He is heralded as an example to the world and commended for being, “The Domestic Man, the cheerful friend, the kind Master, the enlivening Companion, the polite neighbor, the tender Husband” (Grandison 3.281). The power of his example extends throughout the hierarchy of empire from king to prince to master to servant, as well as beyond the borders of England.

---

36 Wolff, p. 175. John Dussinger highlights a few of Sir Charles’ qualities as an exemplary master in “Masters and Servants: Political Discourse,” Eighteenth-Century Fiction, 5.3, (1993), p. 245. He examines quotations on good master/servant relations in Richardson’s A Collection of Moral Sentiments and demonstrates how the advice contained therein is often contradictory in that it promotes rules designed to
Like Pamela, Sir Charles is a morally static character whose thoughts, behavior, and relationships are guided by "disciplined, self-regulation." According to Betty Schellenberg's reading of *Pamela II*, the characters in that novel circle in "an admiring and imitative orbit" around Pamela, an observation that applies equally well to the members of Sir Charles' social circle. His opinions and conduct dominate the narrative, and they are never challenged, nor do they change. Sir Charles' treatment of Lady Clementina, a woman he wishes to make his wife, speaks to this point and provides a striking counter-example to Lovelace's and Mr. B's relationships with women.

Richardson's new master is neither wicked nor shameless in his treatment of women, even those who reject his proposals. Lady Clementina and Sir Charles are perfectly suited for one another, but her religious beliefs stand in their way of their future happiness. However, instead of acting on the impulses of obsessive sexuality of the sort which leads Lovelace and Mr. B to kidnap and coerce women, Sir Charles waits with "resignation and will" while Lady Clementina decides what she wants to do (*Grandison* 2.569).

Richardson's new master also refuses to exploit servants for the purpose of manipulating his love interest. Sir Charles does not enlist the help of Lady Clementina's maid as an agent in a plot or as his confidante: "I said nothing to Camilla, you may believe of what I could or could not do" (*Grandison* 2.178). The maid offers to provide him with private information about her mistress once Sir Charles leaves Italy and returns

---

39 p. 29
to England, but he refuses to take advantage of her offer, even though it would give him more control over the situation and allow him to be more persuasive in arguing against Lady Clementina’s rationale:

Camilla obligingly offered to acquaint me, from time to time, with what occurred; but I thought it was not right to accept of a servant’s intelligence out of the family she belonged to, unless someone authorized her to give it me . . . I thanked her; but said, that it might if discovered, lay her under some inconveniences which would grieve me for her sake (Grandison 2.218).

Sir Charles does not want to promote the continuation of anachronistic, paternalistic stratagems in which servants function as intelligence operatives who betray their employers’ trust. Despite his refusal of her assistance, Sir Charles is extremely appreciative of Camilla’s support and concern for her lady, so he makes her a present of a small ring, which he deems “a remembrance, not an acknowledgement” (Grandison 2.186). His stipulation that the gift is not an “acknowledgement” specifically communicates the idea that he does not want the ring to be interpreted by Camilla as a bribe or a reward for services rendered in the past or in the future. In the contractual model of master/servant relations, servants receive validation and praise without having to ask for it, which marks a distinct difference from the servants in Fielding’s novels who seek personal recognition and do not receive it.

Sir Charles inspires Camilla’s love and respect, and he is equally admired by his own domestics.⁴⁰ Harriet remarks:

⁴⁰ In Political Constructions: Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume and Burke
It was delightful to see the attention paid to him by the servants as they waited at table. They watched every look of his. I never saw love and reverence so agreeably mingled in servants’ faces in my life. And his commands were delivered to them with so much gentleness of voice and aspect, that one could not but conclude in the favor of both, that they were the best of servants to the best of masters (Grandison 2.229).

Harriet’s description of this interaction captures the ‘gentle command’ associated with the emerging contractual model of master/servant relations. Sir Charles’ relationship to his servants involves some degree of reciprocity between the two parties in terms of their professionalism and autonomy, especially given the balanced, parallel phrasing in “the best of servants to the best of masters.” Despite Harriet’s favorable impression of this domestic scene, it is important to note that Sir Charles is not gazing back at his servants with “love and reverence.” The communication, which carries with it the expectation of action, flows from the master to the servants. They have been taught to anticipate his needs and to read the signs of his disapprobation, classic signs of self-policing as described by Michel Foucault in Discipline & Punish.41 In fact, the servants’ powers of observation are so well honed that they practically have eliminated the need for speech. Sir Charles rarely has reason to break the silence of civility to issue commands.

This silence of civility in Sir Charles Grandison differs significantly from the silence expected of servants in Pamela. In Sir Charles Grandison the servants’ silence not only includes the injunction to keep quiet and not judge or challenge their master’s

(Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), Carol Kay discusses the significance of general opinion in Richardson’s works.
authority, as is the case in *Pamela*, but it also carries the additional prohibition of all non-productive speech. The goal of minimal dialogic interaction is positively constructed as "silent veneration" within the text, and it is likewise a defining feature of Austen's master/servant relationship; however, it strikes someone with a twentieth-century sensibility as somewhat sinister (*Grandison* 2.32). The power of Sir Charles' gaze and its complementary silence exponentially increases the social distance despite the close, physical proximity of master to servant at the dinner table.

Another example serves to illustrate this point. On the day of Sir Charles and Harriet's wedding the servants stand "at a distance all admiring, and blessing, and praying for their beloved young lady" (*Grandison* 3.223). In this case, the servants do not approach the bride; instead, they keep their spatial distance, which reflects the increasing social distance that attends Harriet's new role as Lady Grandison.\(^{42}\) And again, all of the warm emotional regard flows in one direction, from the servants to the mistress. These relationships, at least from Harriet's perspective, appear harmonious and intimate, but are they based on genuine mutual regard? Assuming that servants wished to preserve their livelihood and remain employed, the modern day skeptic wonders what choice servants had but to conform to their master's expectations?

Everyone, without exception, praises the servants' manners at Grandison Hall. Lord W observes, "They have the looks of men of ease: They know their duty, and need not a reminding look. A servant of yours, Sir Charles, looks as if he would one day make

---

\(^{41}\) See in particular Foucault's chapter on "Docile Bodies" (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), pp. 135-69.\(^{42}\) No mention is made of servants being present at Mr. B and Pamela's wedding; however, their marriage is cause for a celebration specifically hosted for the servants at Mr. B's expense. The servants receive gifts from the couple and have the opportunity to express their good wishes in person.
a figure as a master” (Grandison 2.353).43 Lord W’s statement clearly reflects the influence of the emerging bourgeois ideology, which posits that even those people of the lower orders are capable of prospering and advancing socially, becoming masters and mistresses, if they apply themselves and fulfill their personal and professional obligations. Richardson supported this progressive idea, whereas Fielding remained more skeptical of the lower orders and their qualifications for social promotion.

According to John Dussinger, “Richardson’s general doctrine is that good masters make good servants.” 44 What does Sir Charles do to manage his domestic enterprise and mold “good and sensible” servants? (Grandison 3.51). Sir Charles informs Lord W that the secret to domestic felicity is to lead by “Example” (Grandison 2.353). He explains:

I treat them, my Lord, as necessary parts of my family. I have no secrets, the keeping or disclosing of which might give them self-importance. I endeavor to set

---

43 Servants’ imitation of their masters’ conduct and demeanor was a highly contested subject in the eighteenth-century. Many thought it socially dangerous, a threat to hierarchy. If servants could be mistaken for their masters or mistresses, then it was feasible that they might eventually replace them as Pamela does Lady B. In “Servants and Semiotics: Reversible Signs, Capital Instability, and Defoe’s Logic of the Market,” Sandra Sherman discusses the paradoxical problem caused by signification in maintaining the social hierarchy and social harmony, Journal of English Literary History, 62.3, (1995): 551-73.

In contrast to the possibility of servants replacing their masters, Sir Charles plays the role of a domestic at dinner for Harriet’s amusement: “Sir Charles, with an air of gaiety that infinitely became him, took a napkin from the butler; and, putting it under his arm, . . . was the modestest servitor that ever waited at table” (Grandison 3.231-3). While this gesture is intended to show Sir Charles’ complete devotion to his new bride, it also demonstrates the arbitrariness of class and birth distinctions and the ease with which master/servant boundaries can be crossed. This role reversal results in an entirely different interpretation on Dussinger’s observation that “Richardson’s general doctrine is that good masters make good servants,” p. 240.

44 p. 240. According to Patty Seleski’s historical study of domestic servants and middle class household management, Richardson’s doctrine is representative of popular thinking at that time. Mistresses were called upon to set good examples for their servants. By contrast, bad mistresses, who produced or tolerated bad servants that resulted in chaotic households, were the targets of intense criticism. “Women, Work and Cultural Change in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century London,” Tim Harris, ed., Popular Culture in England 1500-1850 (MacMillan: London, 1995), pp. 159-62.
them no bad example. I am never angry with them but for wilful faults: If those are not habitual, I shame them into amendment, by gentle expostulation, and forgiveness. If they are not capable of a generous shame, and the faults grow habitual, I part with them; but with such kindness, as makes their fellow-servants blame them, and take warning (Grandison 2.353).

Sir Charles’ philosophy of domestic management, which represents the new contractual approach, can be distilled to three tenets: 1) do not give servants power; 2) reform their bad behavior by shaming them into submission; and 3) control them through kindness.45 In other words, masters such as Mr. B could avoid domestic chaos if they did not share personal information with their servants, which is a lesson that is also set forth in the works of Fielding and Austen. However, Richardson and Austen diverge from Fielding by suggesting that masters should avoid doing things that they would not want divulged. Richardson eliminates the corporal punishment and dismissals to which servants were subject under paternalism. In Grandison Richardson introduces a more flexible contractual system that includes a greater tolerance for misconduct and the possibility of moral reformation. Dussinger discusses Sir Charles’ use of psychological manipulation to influence servants’ behavior and their emotions about themselves and one another.46

While Sir Charles’ philosophy of domestic management may be an improvement over the paternalistic system, it hardly qualifies as the vision of a healthy “family.”47 When an

---

45 Dussinger explains how “kindness is invoked nervously to overcome the potential hazards of distance that privacy and arbitrary social privilege entail,” p. 242.
46 Mrs. Gardiner says the same thing of servants in Pride and Prejudice.
47 Sir Charles’ use of the term “family” is a lingering, nostalgic sign of the paternalistic model that does not reflect the reality of master/servant relations at Grandison Hall. As Seleski contends, the new domestic economy that replaces paternalism is a microcosm of the larger political economy and includes a conflicted
environment is created in which the servants blame their fellow servants, it means that their notions of good and bad behavior are aligned with those of the ruling class. Simply put -- the servants of Grandison Hall have been successfully indoctrinated into the emerging bourgeois ideology of domesticity.

A comparison of *Pamela* and *Grandison* indicates that the status accorded to wives of paternalistic masters is similar to the status of servants employed by contractual masters. Sir Charles’ prescription for reforming servant behavior is the same one that Pamela asks Mr. B to use in modifying her conduct as his wife, a similarity which “suggests powerfully that the good wife is in many ways the good servant.”

48 She wants to bring honor to Mr. B and to foster his “kind opinion,” so she pleads with him to judge and correct her “as often as he observed any part of my conduct to be such as he could not entirely approve” (*Pamela* 382). Pamela conforms to Mr. B’s paternalistic definition of an obedient and dutiful wife: “I have no will but yours” (*Pamela* 313). While Sir Charles does not possess Mr. B’s desire or power to completely define and control his wife Harriet, he does think of his servants as empty slates that await the improvement of his edifying example: “Generally speaking, a master may make of a servant what he pleases” (*Grandison* 2.354).

49 In other words, the paternalistic master has the power to define his wife and servants, whereas the contractual master has the power to define only his servants, and only with their consent.

---

48 Folkenflik, p. 268. Pamela rebelled against Mr. B’s authority as his servant, but she cannot afford to do so as his wife because she is doubly dependent upon him as her husband/master, and both she and Mr. B realize this.

49 p. 245.
Sir Charles' style of domestic governance abandons some old management practices associated with paternalism and introduces some new contractual ones. He absolutely opposes the custom of using vails to reward servants for courteous treatment. Courteous treatment is the standard in his home, and he expects his servants to understand that retaining his favorable opinion should be their chief concern: "Nobody . . . pays my servants but myself. They are good people and merit my favor" (Grandison 2.311). Mr. Reeves offers vails to one of Sir Charles' domestics and is surprised to be refused: "I would have given the honest man a handsome gratuity: But he so earnestly besought me to excuse him, declaring that he was under an obligation to the most generous of masters to decline all gifts" (Grandison 1.130). The fact that Sir Charles' servant dutifully complies with his master's wishes, even though the threat of having his disobedience exposed is negligible, suggests that the servant values his continued employment more than a token reward. The contractual system rewards evidence of a servant's character and merit with gratitude rather than social promotion or money. The ruling class validates servants' good behavior, which is behavior that conforms to the ruling class's expectations. Even though less emphasis is placed on material rewards, they are implied as by-products that attend good manners and morals.

Richardson's new master recognizes the autonomy of servants as well as their need to maintain personal relationships. Sir Charles and his wife Harriet believe it is important to give servants some private time to pursue their own interests and relationships. For example, Sir Charles allows his man Saunders to spend a few days with
friends in the neighborhood, which is an unusual privilege.\(^{50}\) In addition to being allowed

to visit friends and relatives, the servants employed by the Grandisons “generally have
time for themselves, an hour or two in a day,” the very sort of “amusement” for which
Fielding’s Nightingale attacks his attendant (Grandison 3.545). Harriet’s benevolence
leads her to direct Emily Jervois, Sir Charles’ charge, to allow her maid to go to bed.\(^{51}\)
She even offers to perform the maid’s duties herself to encourage Emily’s compliance.

In addition to providing servants with free time to maintain old relationships, the
Grandisons also are sympathetic to servants’ desire to marry.\(^{52}\) Harriet’s grandmother
predicts that one of the grandmother’s servants will leave because he recently married,
and she assumes that he and his bride will require more privacy and independence.\(^{53}\)
James, one of Harriet’s servants, leaves his position in London to return to his sweetheart
in the country. Harriet is disappointed that he chooses to leave, but she shares her
grandmother’s belief “that young people of small or no fortune should not be discouraged
from marrying: Who that could be of masters and mistresses would be servants? The
honest poor, as she has often said, are a very valuable part of creation” (Grandison
1.97).\(^{54}\) This quotation brings into sharper focus two points of contrast between Fielding
and Richardson. In Grandison the desire to be promoted out of service is applauded,

---

\(^{50}\) According to Folkenflik, alienating servants from their families and friends was one means of stripping
their identities, p. 256. According to Seleski, servants were denied contact with family and friends because
the ruling class was paranoid about the contamination that might occur as a result of exposure to “alien
influences,” p. 154. The publication of conduct manuals and the regulation of servants’ characters represent
the ruling class’ attempts to protect itself from hybridization, p. 159.

\(^{51}\) Dussinger, p. 246

\(^{52}\) Lovelace encourages Leman to take Betty Barnes as his wife but only because he hopes that she will make
Leman miserable for the rest of his life.

\(^{53}\) Seleski discusses the evolution of service from a short-term occupation for young adults to long-term
wage labor, p. 148.

\(^{54}\) These sentiments echo Honour’s and Slipslop’s speeches in Fielding’s novels.
which is not the case in Fielding’s novels. Richardson’s ruling class females validate the
innate worthiness of servants. They seem especially sympathetic to servants’ needs,
perhaps because Richardson understood that women identified with servants’ vulnerable
socio-economic position. In Fielding, even the virtuous Sophia Western offers no
approval of Honour’s egalitarian ideals, nor is she sympathetic to servants’ needs.

In Grandison servants are recognized as wage laborers, and their value or worth as
employees is based on character. Sir Charles and his wife also believe it is important to
compensate servants well for their work. In negotiating the terms of his employment,
Wilson asks Harriet for 40-50 shillings in wages. She considers that “pretty high” but
concedes that “wages to a good servant are not to be stood upon” (Grandison 1.97). In
other words, quality comes at a price.

Richardson’s new master is a godly man who respects his servants’ spirituality
and religious freedom, which reflects the author’s progressive move toward
individualism. In contrast to Sir Charles, Mr. B and Lovelace are not religious men, nor
do they encourage their servants’ religious beliefs. The chapel at Mr. B’s Lincolnshire
estate has been locked up for years and holds no interest to his servants. Mrs. Jewkes
confesses that she places Mr. B’s authority above God’s, which horrifies Pamela. Sir
Charles, on the other hand, encourages his servants’ religious faith and protects their
religious freedom: “Let my servants live but up to their own professions, and they shall be
indulged with all reasonable opportunities of pursuing the dictates of their own
consciences” (Grandison 2.532).

55 Dussinger, p. 245.
Sir Charles is especially adamant about not allowing his servants to be harassed to convert to Catholicism should he marry Lady Clementina. He becomes Richardson's spokesperson as a staunch defender of Protestantism: "I have in my travels been attended by Catholic servants. They never had reason to complain of want of kindness, even to indulgence, from me. We Protestants confine not salvation within the pale of our own church. Catholics do; and have therefore an argument for their zeal in endeavoring to make proselytes, that we have not. Hence, generally speaking, may a Catholic servant live more happily with a Protestant master, than a Protestant servant with a Catholic master" (Grandison 2.532). In other words, Protestant goodwill and charity have broad, public goals.

Richardson's thematic move from Mr. B to Sir Charles suggests that the men responsible for maintaining the "Natural Order," which structures families, communities, and kingdoms, must possess character and birth. His new code of behavior, which is promoted through characters such as Sir Charles and the reformed Mr. B, posits that a master's worth is to be measured not only in terms of rank and wealth, but also in terms of honesty, self-discipline, and virtue. New masters also must demonstrate the emerging bourgeois ideals of industry, action, and accountability. Finally, it is their duty to lead by example. While Richardson empowers masters with new methods to retain control over the domestic sphere, on the trajectory to Austen, power is transferred from master to mistress to housekeeper in order to free good men to focus on commercial interests, which in Richardson's mind, enables them to do more good.
The Negotiation of Domestic Power Between Masters and Mistresses

Sir Charles surrenders considerable control over his domestic affairs to his wife Harriet, and the transfer of power from master to mistress is seamless. Dussinger writes, "If the goodness of Sir Charles is registered by the cheerful obedience of his servants, the worthiness of Harriet as his wife depends on a similar talent in managing the women-servants in the house." Harriet has no difficulty living up to the standard set by her husband because the couple shares the same value system and management style. Harriet, like her consort, is an exemplary mistress "of so much ease, so much dignity, and so much condescension, that she is worshipped by all the servants; and it is observable, hardly ever was heard to direct twice the same thing to be done, or remembered" (Grandison 3.544). Emily Jervois observes the similarity in the behavior of Sir Charles and Harriet, as well as their servants' attitudes towards them: "I am very fond of being esteemed by servants, said she, from that very observation of my guardian's goodness, and his servants worthiness, as well as from what my maid tells me, all of them say of you. But you and my guardian are so much alike in every thing, that you seem to be born for one another" (Grandison 2.32). Her opinion is reinforced by Charlotte, Sir Charles' sister, who likewise informs Harriet "that the servants, throughout the house, adore [her]" (Grandison 2.32). This complete preoccupation with servants' opinions of their masters and mistresses suggests that servants had considerable power to influence the public's

---

56 p. 245
57 Mr. B provides for his illegitimate daughter's education, but his sister assumes the primary responsibility as the child's surrogate parent. Sir Charles, on the other hand, demonstrates more accountability by taking an active role in raising Emily, the girl under his guardianship.
opinion of their masters. Thus, it was important for employers to win their servants' favor.

Richardson's new master and mistress realize that the success of the domestic enterprise hinges on the morals and manners of their servants; therefore, Harriet tries to build positive working relationships with the housekeeper and staff for the good of all at Grandison Hall. She is better equipped than Pamela is to assume her new role as the mistress of an estate, but Harriet still has to adjust to the existing customs and culture of the Hall. She must be careful not to upset the domestic utopia that Sir Charles has created, which explains why she is quick to offer reassurance to the housekeeper, Mrs. Curzon: "You may depend upon everything that is in my power to make you happy and easy" (Grandison 3.271). Mrs. Curzon responds to this comment with "a respectful curtsey," a gesture that signals her inferiority and obsequiousness, yet Harriet is nevertheless suggesting that she must recognize and serve the housekeeper as the higher power. Richardson is not suppressing the fact that servants wield enormous power within the emerging bourgeois household.

Harriet knows that her unproven reputation as a mistress lies in Mrs. Curzon's hands. Therefore, Harriet defers to the housekeeper's judgment in making decisions. For example, Harriet tells Mrs. Curzon, "I should add to the number of female servants, only my Sally, of whose discretion I had no doubt. You must introduce me, said I, at a proper time, to the female servants. If you, Mrs. Curzon, approve of them, I shall make no changes" (Grandison 3.272). Harriet essentially proposes to keep things as they are with the exception of Sally, for whom she feels compelled to offer a character reference, as if
the mistress’ prerogative did not provide sufficient validation to appease the housekeeper. However, Harriet retains the ultimate power, the power of dismissal.

In contrast to Harriet’s deliberately passive, hands-off approach to her new position, Pamela actively “studies” how to be “useful” to Mr. B who retains control over the paternalistic estate (Pamela 299). As the soon-to-be mistress of B Hall, Pamela is instructed to follow Lady B’s former example and to master her husband’s “rules for the family order,” which are incredibly prescriptive, formal, and enumerated ad nauseum (Pamela 299). In Nancy Armstrong’s words, “All narrative conflict dissolves into catalogues of household duties.”\textsuperscript{58} The catalog includes rules on how to dress, how to behave to guests, how to treat her husband, how to raise children, etc. Pamela is told that one of her primary duties as mistress will be to manage servants, but her decisions are carefully monitored by Mr. B, and Pamela anxiously tries to predict his every wish rather than relying on her own judgment.

A comparison of Pamela and Grandison suggests that a woman’s social class greatly affects the ease with which she adapts to the role of mistress of an estate. In contrast to the lengthy lectures Pamela receives from Mr. B, Sir Charles barely discusses domestic management with Harriet except to touch briefly on the couple’s habits of dress, not just Harriet’s. How can this difference between the two couples’ marital negotiations be explained? First of all, Harriet is not of the servant class, so Sir Charles may safely assume that she is familiar with the responsibilities that fall to the mistress of a house. Second, Harriet’s experience as a woman of moderate fortune translates into more social

confidence, so she, for example, is not anxious about assuming her rightful position at the head of the table. Pamela, on the other hand, does not automatically inspire her husband’s confidence in her ability to supervise the operation of his household, nor does she have much self-confidence because she has entered an unfamiliar social context that disrupts her already conflicted sense of identity. Pamela refers to herself as an “unprofitable servant” and feels unworthy of her husband (Pamela 575). She fears her neighbors’ harsh judgment when she is presented by Mr. B as an object for ‘show and tell’. In an effort to cope with this situation, Pamela pours her insecurities into her journal: “I must still write on, till I become settled to the station to which I am so generously exalted” (Pamela 386). Richardson shows that taking on responsibilities for managing an estate is easier for women of the gentry and middling class than it is for servants; however, Richardson proves that it is not an impossible feat for exemplary working class women such as Pamela so long as they are carefully instructed by men.

The anxiety that accompanies Pamela’s struggle to adjust to her position as Mrs. B mirrors the larger cultural problems of social dislocation, identification, and classification between the middling class and the other classes that are attempting to define themselves in relationship to it. Richardson’s writing educates the public on how to get ahead and stay ahead in the same way that Pamela’s writing thus becomes a script through which she rehearses her new role and conforms to Mr. B’s definition of her as his wife. Despite her copious scripting, Pamela cannot break the habit of thinking of her

---

59 I disagree with Flint’s claim that Pamela “easily” adopts her new roles, p. 493.
60 This situation differs from the past in that Pamela once had the power to define herself and define Mr. B through writing. He acknowledges her power to define him: “You have given me a character, Pamela, and blame me not if I act up to it” (Pamela 248). At that point in the novel, Pamela did not fear being read and
husband as her “master” and referring to him as such. Guests at B Hall find this amusing, but they fail to see that Mr. B conflates the roles of husband and master. Flint correctly observes that Pamela seems doomed to live “the whole drama of assimilation and regeneration over and over again,” but I would add that with each iteration she has less control over the definition of her Self. 61 As a servant, Pamela assumed that if she became Mr. B’s consort rather than his wife, the result would be “a kind of self-annihilation.”62 In her words, she realized that “the fruits of being of consequence to him, might be to make me of none to myself, or anybody else” (Pamela 78). It is sad and ironic to observe that this total loss of Self describes her as Mr. B’s wife.

Grandison was not intended to serve as a conduct manual for mistresses because Richardson had already traversed that territory thirteen years earlier in Pamela. Instead he wrote Grandison, a conduct manual for emerging bourgeois masters who, in Richardson’s view, could accomplish more significant good deeds than the women married to them. But that is not to say that Richardson summarily dismissed women – quite the contrary. He essentially made the mistress the head of the household. But this created a new dilemma. How could he make the mistress the head of the household without turning her into a maid? The next section discusses how housekeepers provided the solution to Richardson’s dilemma.

judged. She, in fact, wanted to be judged because she was confident that the virtue and goodness captured in her self-presentation would clearly outshine her master’s.

61 Flint, p. 508. Folkenflik suggests that writing helps Pamela cope with instability, the threat of violence, and the dissolution of her identity, p. 10.

62 Flint, p. 510.
Richardson’s Housekeepers

The previous section examined the transfer of domestic power from master to mistress and the masters’ expectations of their wives as mistresses of their estates. In this section I return to Pamela and Grandison to demonstrate how the housekeeper’s role in Grandison’s domestic sphere changes significantly as does her relationship to her employers as a result of the shift from paternalism to a contractual master/servant relationship.63

Mrs. Jervis and Mrs. Jewkes supervise Mr. B’s paternalistic households. Their style of domestic management corresponds to Mr. B’s preferred top-down approach to household governance. Mrs. Jervis is praised for her good, orderly management of Mr. B’s Bedfordshire estate. She and Mr. Longman, the steward, discipline lower servants, and they are involved in the lower servants’ personal lives. In contrast to the successful Mrs. Jervis, Mrs. Jewkes does not manage accounts well, steals money, and sets a bad example for other servants by drinking and hurling insults at lower servants. Despite her many deficiencies in managing Mr. B’s other estate, she does an outstanding job for her master as Pamela’s jailor. Richardson uses the figure of Mrs. Jewkes to demonstrate the way in which paternalism allows horrible individuals to accrue status in the domestic hierarchy, a situation that has dangerous implications when extended to a powerful figure such as Mr. B and his influence within the larger social hierarchy.

63 Clarissa is dropping out of this section of my argument, since it does not include a prominent housekeeper. The two main characters are not masters or mistresses of estates. The opening portion of the novel is set at Harlowe Place, where Clarissa is the undutiful daughter rather than the mistress, and the second portion is set in Mrs. Sinclair’s House rather than M Hall, the estate Lovelace stands to inherit from his uncle.
In contrast to the housekeepers of Mr. B’s paternalistic estates, Mrs. Curzon has a contractual relationship with Sir Charles, and her job is restricted to overseeing the smooth operation of Grandison Hall. In the capable hands of Mrs. Curzon, the estate is a “paradise” of domestic order and harmony that is the envy of everyone who visits it (Grandison 3.285). Mrs. Curzon, like her superiors, delegates authority to her subordinates. In this particular domestic utopia, household labor is divided up such that lower servants’ duties are clearly distinguishable by job title. If servants work efficiently, Mrs. Curzon sees to it that servants have time for rest, relaxation, and relationships. They also have access to a library to improve their moral education; literacy constitutes another approach to behavior modification. The servants get charged a small penalty for mis-shelving books. This fiscal penalty for non-compliance represents yet another bourgeois practice in the growing effort to police servants’ behavior through non-violent means.

What is most shocking is that servants initiate the drawing up of “Laws” to regulate their own conduct, and by extension, to structure the domestic environment (Grandison 3.285).

The use of formal laws clearly reflects a culture that is beginning to rely more heavily on contracts to structure commercial and marital relationships. It also reflects the need to produce alternative forms of authority to regulate the household in the master’s absence. If the domestic sphere regulates itself through individuals’ adherence to “laws,” then the housekeeper and the mistress, who automatically possess less authority than the master on account of their gender, merely have to oversee it. In the particular

---

64 Armstrong situates her insightful discussion of Mr. B’s proposals to Pamela within a larger social context of increased use of contracts to restructure relationships – personal and professional, pp. 111-2. Folkenflik believes Armstrong’s reading of this scene is overly optimistic because Pamela is being coerced by Mr. B into a contractual relationship, p. 266.
case of the Grandison estate, the servants create laws to control the definitions of their occupations and status and to promote improvement from within their own ranks; however, this would not be possible if their needs and goals were not aligned with their bourgeois master’s.

The paternalistic relationship between the master and housekeeper is intimate and carries the assumptions of trust, loyalty, and absolute obedience. Mr. B’s housekeepers are enmeshed in his personal affairs, particularly in his relationship with Pamela. Mrs. Jervis serves as his surrogate mother, and Mrs. Jewkes serves as his warden.

Mrs. Jervis and Mr. B share a long-standing “family” history, and the quality and continuity of their relationship has inspired Mr. B’s trust in Mrs. Jervis as a maternal figure. Likewise, Mrs. Jervis holds Mr. B in high esteem and wishes to preserve his reputation as a “fine gentleman” with “a great deal of wit and sense” (Pamela 72). The housekeeper was once a gentlewoman herself, so she understands her master’s class-based assumptions, and he appreciates the breeding she possesses.

Mr. B, however, discovers that Mrs. Jervis has betrayed his personal trust by sharing the contents of their private conversations with Pamela: “You have not been so faithful to my secrets as I could have wished, and have laid me open to this girl” (Pamela 98). This offense, combined with the housekeeper’s interference in his attempts to seduce Pamela, leads Mr. B to consider dismissing Mrs. Jervis: “Since I know you, and you know me, so well, it will be difficult for us to live together for the future” (Pamela 97). He knows Mrs. Jervis to be a woman of principle, a woman his mother approved of no less, and the housekeeper’s knowledge of Mr. B’s private, inappropriate conduct makes it
uncomfortable for him to continue his personal or professional relationship with her. This reveals the danger of intimate relationships with servants in paternalistic households. Richardson cautions masters against permitting servants to know the details of their private, interior lives because it ultimately undermines the masters’ authority.

Mrs. Jervis functions as a surrogate mother to the entire staff at the B Hall, but she and Pamela develop an especially close relationship. They identify with one another based on their gender, occupation, class, and values. They refer to one another as “mother” and “daughter” (Pamela 49, 71). Mrs. Jervis approves of Pamela’s modesty and education and acts as the maid’s confidant and trusted advisor. Most importantly, she sympathizes with Pamela’s position as the target of Mr. B’s attention and seeks to protect the vulnerable child from his aggression. For example, when Mr. B leaps from the closet into Pamela’s bed, Mrs. Jervis throws herself in between them and declares, “You shan’t hurt this innocent; for I will lose my life in her defense” (Pamela 96). In this situation Mrs. Jervis’s response is guided by personal moral judgment instead of her professional obligation to her master. This demonstrates the tension between the old system’s expectation of absolute loyalty and obedience and the new system’s sanction of individual moral judgment.

The difficulty Mrs. Jervis has in managing her divided loyalty between Mr. B and Pamela is complicated further by her professional duty as the housekeeper both to protect and punish Pamela as a servant. As Pamela’s supervisor, Mrs. Jervis scolds the maid for spending so much time writing rather than attending to her duties. She reminds Pamela to mind her place and to behave respectfully to Mr. B because it is bad form to argue with
the master or to contradict his opinions. Pamela realizes that Mrs. Jervis "must oblige [Mr. B], and keep all his lawful commands" in order to keep her position, but she expects the housekeeper to defend her against her master's attacks regardless of the consequences *(Pamela 72)*. Pamela reassures her parents that she can rely on Mrs. Jervis' parental protection: "She is too good, and loves me too well" *(Pamela 72)*. Pamela is confident that the mother/daughter bond between her and the housekeeper exercises greater influence over Mrs. Jervis' judgment and behavior than the professional duty owed to Mr. B. The housekeeper's divided allegiance demonstrates the power of virtue to transform and triumph over old paternalistic assumptions.

Mr. B need not fear that his housekeeper in Lincolnshire, Mrs. Jewkes, will betray his interests in support of Pamela's or judge his conduct as improper. Mrs. Jewkes has an entirely different attitude about the legitimacy of Mr. B's claim to Pamela's virtue than her counterpart at B Hall. Mrs. Jewkes does not understand why Mr. B's sexual advances present a conflict for Pamela or anyone else for that matter. As far as she is concerned, Pamela is her master's property, which reflects paternalistic assumptions. She thinks it is perfectly reasonable for Mr. B to use sex to teach Pamela to know her duty. In fact, she goes so far as to restrain Pamela in bed so that Mr. B can rape her, and she instructs him not to "dilly-dally" *(Pamela 241)*. Mrs. Jewkes not only derives pleasure from watching Mr. B abuse Pamela, she also enjoys tormenting Pamela's psyche and abusing her physically and verbally. In contrast to Mrs. Jervis, who is torn between the obligations of paternalism and her individual moral conscience, Mrs. Jewkes' absolute loyalty to Mr. B
is guided by conventional, hierarchical notions of class and gender rather than independent moral judgment.

The contractual master/servant relationship introduced in *Grandison* is not friendly or familiar. There is no evidence of a personal relationship existing between Sir Charles and Mrs. Curzon, and she definitely has no role in his courtship of Harriet. Mrs. Curzon is introduced to her mistress by Sir Charles after the couple is married: “You will be happy in a mistress who is equally beloved and reverenced by all who have the honor of her countenance, if she approve of your service, and if you choose to continue with us” (*Grandison* 3.270). His language is formal and detached, and he defines how she is supposed to react to this transfer of power, more evidence of his psychological manipulation of servants. While Sir Charles hints that Harriet may decide not to continue employing Mrs. Curzon as the housekeeper of Grandison Hall, he ends his statement with an acknowledgement that it is also Mrs. Curzon’s choice as to whether or not she wants to remain with them, which truly reflects the contractual shift. Servants are viewed as individuals who exercise autonomous judgment, and they are wage laborers who may seek employment elsewhere.

Mr. B’s housekeepers’ rapport with their paternalistic master also characterizes their relationship with Pamela when she becomes their mistress. Upon Pamela’s return to Bedfordshire as Mrs. B, it becomes clear that she intends to nurture a close, familial relationship with Mrs. Jervis: “I have a thousand, thousand things to tell you. A whole week will be too little, every moment of it spent relating to you what has befallen me, to make you acquainted with it all. We shall be sweetly happy together, I make no doubt”
(Grandison 479). Even the evil Mrs. Jewkes undergoes a transformation and treats
Pamela with the deference she formerly reserved for her master. Furthermore, Pamela
imagines herself working in close conjunction with the housekeepers. She informs Mr. B
that with his approval she plans to “look into all such parts of the family management, as
may befit the mistress of it to inspect” (Pamela 299). In her view this includes, among
other things, keeping accounts and “assist[ing] the housekeeper” with jellies and linens
(Pamela 299).65 Pamela plans to rise early from bed in order to participate actively in the
“family” enterprise.

In contrast to Pamela and Mrs. Jervis, Harriet and Mrs. Curzon do not have such a
chummy, domestic partnership. Harriet transfers her power to her housekeeper who
independently manages Grandison Hall with little supervision. Harriet captures the
superiority of this housekeeper’s talents when she exclaims: “What do good people leave
to good people to do? Nothing!” (Grandison 3.285). In other words, a housekeeper’s
success is measured in terms of her ability to manage a house so well that the mistress is
left with nothing to do but stand back and observe the beauty and balance of the domestic
sphere and take the credit for it. Harriet’s use of the phrase “good people” to represent
masters/mistresses as well as their household staff equalizes the moral divide, but not the
social divide.

Harriet is pleased at the prospect of having “Nothing” to do, and her attitude
reflects the emerging bourgeois ideological construct of the home as a microcosm of the

65 I disagree with McKeon’s view that the conclusion of Pamela illustrates how “marriage becomes the
work of women, a realm of enforced leisure, passive consumption, and unpaid labor,” p. 373. I think
McKeon’s statement about women and marriage applies more accurately to Harriet’s role in Sir Charles
Grandison.
marketplace, one in which the division of labor increases efficiency and self-regulating laws reduce the need for visible, hands-on management. In short, the master's active presence is not required to sustain the domestic enterprise. The mistress who presides over this domestic economy transfers her authority to the housekeeper who supervises the servants' work so that the mistress can enjoy a leisurely existence. Harriet Grandison may be the first "domestic angel" in eighteenth-century British literature, but she is not the last. Austen's women of the gentry legitimize their class position precisely by distancing themselves from domestic work in this manner.
Chapter Four: The Paradox of Austen’s Invisible Servants

The psychological and social distance between master and servant that characterizes the emerging contractual relationship in Samuel Richardson’s *Grandison* becomes even more pronounced in Jane Austen’s novels. Austen manifests the increasing distance between master and servant in novels such as *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* by making servants invisible. Although literary critics, in particular Marxist critics, have discussed the absence of the lower classes in eighteenth-century novels and historical accounts of the period, I argue that domestic servants densely populate the early works of Henry Fielding and Richardson.¹ However, I agree with critics who conclude that servants do, indeed, seem to vanish altogether in Austen’s works, which were published at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Despite servants’ apparent invisibility in Austen’s novels, servants figure prominently in the contest between the gentry and the middling class for moral and social ascendancy. Servants were visible as signs of their superiors’ social class position, yet they were invisible as subjects.

Bruce Robbins alludes to the fact that even the “overly-conventionalized” domestics, who support the plot and serve as comic foils in the works of Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne, fade into the background in Austen’s novels.² He points out that her literary servants’ actions are restricted to “minimal interruptions, ringing

²p. 8
bells, carrying messages, and making inquiries.” Robbins is correct in observing that the servants’ responsibilities for the most part are limited to these most menial tasks, but attributing servants’ invisibility to the insignificance of their professional responsibilities within the narrative glosses over an important but subtle distinction that Robbins does not explore. In Austen’s novels, the narrator reports that bells have been rung, messages have been delivered, and inquiries have been made, but we rarely witness servants actually executing these various acts. In other words, Austen’s servants lose even the dubious status of “appendages.”

The increasing absence of servants in Austen and later Victorian novelists has been examined by Robbins and other critics. These critics suggest that many nineteenth-

---


4 In 1929, Lady Balfour published a piece in Cornhill Magazine called “The Servants in Jane Austen,” which is included in Ian Littlewood, ed., Jane Austen: Critical Assessments, vol. II (East Sussex: Helm Information, 1998). She essentially offers characterological readings of Austen’s novels from the servants’ perspectives. She imagines what the servants must have been thinking about themselves and those around them. For example, she wishes to know “. . . what Mrs. Hodges and Harry had to say” in response to Mrs. Elton’s criticism of their job performance. Lady Balfour’s class identity is revealed in her description of the servants as being “. . . admirable characters [who] move about silently and unobtrusively in the proper discharge of their duties,” pp. 10-11.

The definition-based arguments put forward by Terry, Todd, and Lady Balfour do not provide much insight into servants’ contributions to domesticity. I do not dispute their assertion that servants are present in Austen’s novels, but I want to problematize that presence by considering the weight of the ideological baggage that was being loaded onto the backs of domestic servants.

5 Robbins, p. 39

5 Robbins argues that “verbal confrontation [between masters and servants] diminishes in length, frequency, animation, and centrality” in the Victorian novel, p. 79. Terry notes that the servants’ behavior in Austen’s novels reflects nineteenth-century cultural norms in which “[s]ilence was the rule, in life as well as literature,” p. 106. The servants in eighteenth-century novels may not have provided an accurate representation of the proletariat to satisfy Marxists, but the novel still adopted a decorum of representation that reflected dominant cultural codes. Roland Barthes attacks the realist novel for this very reason.
century authors such as George Eliot and William Thackeray intentionally relegate servants to an obscure position in the narrative where their marginalized status is used to define and legitimize the middling class’s position as the emerging center of commercial, moral, and domestic order. This explanation has a lot of merit; however, the class-based agenda driving the erasure of servants from the novel is already clearly evident in Austen’s canon. In this chapter I complicate our understanding of servants’ invisibility in Austen and demonstrate that it is, in fact, a paradox. In order for servants to contribute positively to middling class identity formation, they had to be visible as signs of social status yet invisible as human subjects.

In addition to borrowing the emerging contractual model of master/servant relations set forth in Grandison, Austen also embraces Richardson’s paradigm of

---

6 Eric Hobsbawn points out that the best way for the middle class to distinguish itself from the laboring class was to put itself in a position to hire them, *Industry and Empire* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 85. In the “Interpreters of Jane Austen’s Social World,” historian David Spring discusses the inappropriateness of using the terms “middle class” or “bourgeoisie” to describe characters in Jane Austen’s novels, Janet Todd, ed., *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1983). He refers to the Coles and Eltons, for example, as “pseudo-gentry,” a phrase coined by Alan Everitt. In Spring’s view, members of the pseudo-gentry were non-landed professionals who sought to improve their class position through the acquisition of “positional goods,” pp. 55-61. He believes Austen’s novels “celebrate” this group’s values and its rise to a position of prominence, though he acknowledges that the pseudo-gentry did not reach its full potential until later in the nineteenth century, p. 63. Spring writes, “The pseudo-gentry, junior partners in Austen’s day, were by 1914 at least equal partners, on the way to becoming senior partners,” pp. 68-9.

It is not my intention to argue that Austen’s politics were either conservative or radical, but that question has been the subject of recent critical debate. For conservative readings of Austen’s works, see Marilyn Butler’s *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975) and Alistair Duckworth’s *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994). For more radical interpretations turn to Mary Poovey’s *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1984); Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1987); and Claudia Johnson’s *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1988).
domesticity. His paradigm shifts the management of a household from the master to the mistress to the housekeeper. In Richardson this shift is motivated by the need to free men of their domestic responsibilities so that they can participate more fully in the public sphere, and this transfer of domestic responsibility must be achieved without turning the mistress into a maid. Austen adopts this domestic paradigm, which simultaneously promotes the housekeeper as the primary manager of domestic production and transforms the mistress into a domestic angel, but she modifies it. In Austen the ability to structure or organize a household in this manner becomes a defining feature of class identity. It announces the fact that one possesses the financial means to support a life of leisure.

Austen invests servants with astonishing power as visible signs that establish and legitimize their superiors’ social class identity, a function takes on special significance for the rising middling class. In Austen’s novels members of the middling class wish to establish a social identity that resembles the landed gentry’s. To accomplish this goal, the middling class must employ numerous servants who hover about in conspicuous ways. This conspicuous presence of servants enables the middling class to separate itself from domestic production and to create the impression that it, too, is as leisurely as the gentry. In short, the servants in Austen must be visible as signs of their masters and mistresses’ structural power, yet servants must be invisible and anonymous as subjects.

To protect a vulnerable middling class, Austen jettisons servants-as-subjects to the margins of the narrative where they are not seen or heard. The middling class is beginning to assail the gentry’s stronghold of social and moral leadership, but in order to

---

legitimize the middling class’s competing claims and to herald itself as a worthy contributor to moral and social order, the middling class must distance itself sufficiently from the working class. Austen uses a variety of strategies to erase servants as subjects so that they do not threaten the identity of the middling class. She does not describe servants or name them. More importantly, she turns them into mere material objects, and she marginalizes their voices, bodies, and actions through passive verb constructions.

Despite servants’ diminishing presence as subjects, a certain class of servants gains significance as the guarantors of their superiors’ reputations as domestic managers in Austen’s novels, as is also the case in Richardson’s *Grandison*. Following Richardson’s example, Austen uses upper servants, especially housekeepers, as metonymic expressions of their superiors’ morality and manners. For example, in *Mansfield Park* the mistress/maid relationship between Mrs. Price and Rebecca becomes a vehicle for instructing readers on how not to manage a household. Austen also revisits Richardson’s *Pamela* in *Mansfield Park* by examining the domestic chaos that erupts when the social boundary between master/mistress and servant breaks down as a result of family members functioning as domestic servants, a break down that is the subject of this chapter’s final section.

**Servants: Objects of Conspicuous Consumption**

In “Jane Austen and the Consumer Revolution” Edward Copeland writes, “The industrial revolution and the French Revolution may lie at the far horizons of Jane Austen’s novels, but the consumer revolution, the extraordinary explosion of economic
energy that took place in Great Britain during her lifetime does not."8 Austen, he argues, presents this "new economy with positive enthusiasm, even admiration," and her works illustrate "the power of the economic metaphor to describe contemporary life."9 While I disagree with Copeland's claim that Austen embraced consumerism with unqualified approval, she does, indeed, use servants in her novels as signs of relative class position and as commodities of conspicuous consumption. In this section I explore how and why she accomplishes these tasks.

In the world of Austen's fiction, employing servants both reflects and displays a household's income and social standing. Simply being able to employ a servant is the first step towards attaining middling-class status. But beyond that, the number of servants, their gender, and their degree of specialization, as well as an employer's success in managing servants, signal both the employer's class position and his security in that position. In addition, a family's servant situation often signals whether the family is rising or falling in the social hierarchy.10

---

8 p. 77. Copeland attempts to calculate the actual cost in eighteenth-century British pounds of luxuries such as trips, carriages, and servants, "the basic signposts of income," and then he uses those figures to classify characters' social and economic status, p. 82. J. David Grey, ed., The Jane Austen Companion (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1986), pp. 77-92.

9 Copeland, p. 79. I find it difficult to support his view that "consumer luxuries carry with them no intrinsic associations with social unrest or moral failings," p. 87. My views are more closely aligned with Barbara Hardy's, who argues that "Jane Austen shows the unpleasant possibilities of becoming too attached to things [...] The people in her novels become restricted and even reified by living too much in the company of objects," A Reading of Jane Austen (New York: New York UP, 1976), p. 149.

10 In Servants, Bridget Hill explains that employing male servants instead of female servants was considered a symbol of one's economic power because male servants received higher wages, (London: Oxford UP, 1996), p. 32. See also Olwen Hufton's "Women, Work and Family" in Natalie Zemon Davis and Arlette Farge, eds., A History of Women, iii (1993), p. 20. Terry also provides evidence which suggests that male servants were "a mark of rank and wealth" because masters not only paid male domestics more, but also paid higher taxes on them than on female domestics, p. 107. Furthermore, employing a male French cook was considered the ultimate extravagance, Hill, p. 25; Hecht, p. 65; Terry also discusses the importance of cooks. She claims that only about 300-400 of the wealthiest families in England could afford such a cook in the eighteenth century. She also calls attention to Mrs. Bennet's sarcastic comment that Mr. Darcy must have "two or three French cooks at least," pp. 106-7.
When Austen’s characters experience a fall in social status, they become circumspect regarding the number, gender, and degree of specialization of the servants they employ. The opening pages of Sense and Sensibility introduce the Dashwoods, and Persuasion presents the Elliots, two families moving down the social ladder.\textsuperscript{11} When a family’s circumstances are reduced, as in these two cases, there are a couple obvious strategies to cut expenses: move to cheaper lodgings and dismiss servants. Upon Mr. Dashwood’s death, for example, his estate passes to his son, which leaves his widow and two stepdaughters without property or sufficient income to maintain their former lifestyle. While it is not clear how many servants the Dashwoods formerly employed, Elinor reduces the number to three, two women and a man, which is deemed a wise decision by the narrator (Sense and Sensibility 23).\textsuperscript{12} According to cultural historians, three servants appear to be the minimum number one could employ in order to maintain middling-class status.\textsuperscript{13} In the same novel, Mrs. Jennings speculates about Lucy Steele and Edward Ferrar’s domestic arrangements as a married couple, and she defines “living snug” as having “two maids and two men” (Sense and Sensibility 219). After Edward is disinherited by his mother and faces grim employment prospects as a clergyman, Mrs. Jennings modifies her vision of the couple’s situation, asserting that “they must get a stout girl of all works” (Sense and Sensibility 23).\textsuperscript{14} As her use of “stout” shows, the couple’s motivation for hiring a servant must now shift from constructing a comfortable

\textsuperscript{11}Handler and Segal suggest that the Dashwoods and Elliots “show that the value of independence cannot be reduced to economic terms.” These two families go to great lengths to retain some semblance of independence in spite of financial troubles, p. 51.


\textsuperscript{13}According to Davidoff and Hall, in the mid-nineteenth century, three or more servants distinguished upper middle class households from those of the lower middle class, p. 388.

\textsuperscript{14}Hill notes that female domestics were commonly hired to handle all chores in households which could afford only one or two servants, p. 32.
middling-class lifestyle and identity to sheer utility. Because the Ferrars can afford to employ only one servant, they must hire a non-trained, non-specialized servant. Mrs. Jennings suggests a "stout girl," someone who is young, strong, energetic, and capable of completing the tasks usually performed by both male and female servants, someone who can handle "all works."

*Persuasion* provides two more examples of the reduction in number of servants that indicates a family’s or an individual’s descent down the social ladder. Mrs. Smith, an acquaintance of Anne Elliot, has plummeted far below middling-class status and respectability.\(^{15}\) Despite the fact that Mrs. Smith cannot "even afford herself the comfort of a servant," Anne treats the penniless widow with respect, due to their longstanding friendship and the woman’s former status as the wife of a wealthy gentleman. Anne’s father and sister, however, refer to Mrs. Smith with contempt, and they are embarrassed by Anne’s public acquaintance with her (*Persuasion* 165).\(^{16}\) According to their criteria, having the means to employ at least one servant is recognized to be the cultural threshold for dignified living. In "Seen but not Heard: Servants in Jane Austen’s England," Judith Terry deems Mrs. Smith "an object of the utmost pity" and explains that "[t]o be without a servant is to be poor indeed."\(^{17}\)

Sir Walter and his daughter have no sympathy for Mrs. Smith, even though they are forced to endure a similar social indignity. As a result of Sir Walter Elliot’s financial

\(^{15}\) Duckworth contends that Harriet Smith represents the "final embodiment of a fate that haunts all [Austen] novels," a dismal fate for women of being left alone with no husband to support them, no money, no work, and no friends. p. 3. Copeland makes a similar argument about the fate of women in Jane Austen’s society, pp. 78-82. Handler and Segal specifically mention Mrs. Smith’s case, pointing out that she acts charitably to those socially less fortunate than she, even though she faces her own economic hardships. In doing so, she reasserts her identity as a gentlewoman, pp. 59-60.


\(^{17}\) Terry, p. 106.
mismanagement, he is forced to rent Kellynch Hall and move his family to Bath, where the lower cost of living will allow them to maintain some semblance of their former lifestyle and avoid some of the public scrutiny they direct at Mrs. Smith. Sir Walter would rather change his environment than change his spendthrift behavior, and residing in Bath allows him to do that. Because Bath is a vacation resort, it has a transient population and more ambiguous social boundaries, which makes it easier to obscure one’s class identity. People staying at such places do not share a common social context or history of associations. In Sir Walter’s case, traveling to a location where he is primarily in the company of strangers is somewhat liberating because it allows him to preserve the appearance of wealth and independence, which is his highest priority.

Women, in contrast to men, adjust to a change in lifestyle with resignation. Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, for example, are accustomed to having little or no control over their destinies because that was the social reality for nearly all women in the eighteenth century, but a man of Sir Walter’s rank and fortune is not so acquiescent. He is angered and distressed at the prospect of changing his domestic arrangements: “What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table -- contractions and restrictions everywhere. To live no longer with the decencies of even a private gentleman” (Persuasion 44). Sir Walter imagines the fall from nobility catapulting him past the gentry all the way down to a meager middling-class existence, one that does not include common “decencies,” namely, a house in town and servants to respond to his

---

18 According to Duckworth’s chapter entitled “The Estate Abandoned,” Persuasion represents the aristocracy’s decline. He claims that Austen “had lost faith in manners, that mode of public conduct which ideally exists as the outward and visible sign of an inward moral condition,” and he goes on to argue that Austen saw no possibility for social recuperation, p. 181.
every need. Austen has no sympathy for figures such as Sir Walter whose lack of self-
discipline leads to ruin.

In Austen's work, a rise in social position, as opposed to a fall, is also signaled by
a change in number of servants. In *Emma*, for example, we are told that Mr. Elton's
marriage to a woman who possesses wealth but no social rank results in an improvement
in his personal affairs "comprehending income, servants, and furniture" (197).\(^{19}\) Later in
the same novel, the narrator reports that the Coles' success in trade led them to "add to
their house, to their number of servants, to their expenses of every sort" (*Emma* 218).
This statement groups a home and servants within the category of "expenses," which are
visible economic benchmarks that confirm a family's rise in status.

Though Lucy Steele's prospects for improving her condition are not as grand as
Mr. Elton's, she takes pleasure in imagining her life as Edward Ferrar's wife and Colonel
Brandon's tenant. As such, Lucy plans to avail herself of Colonel Brandon's "servants,
his carriage, his cows and his poultry" (*Sense and Sensibility* 248). Her marriage to
Edward may not lead to the accumulation of beautiful plate and furnishings, but her
ability to exploit Colonel Brandon's servants will create the impression that her class
position has changed for the better.

Mr. Collins, a clergyman in *Pride and Prejudice*, anticipates an improvement in
his social position as the heir to Mr. Bennet's estate, but in the meantime, Mr. Collins
conflates his status with his patron's status in the same way that Fielding's Honour claims
her mistress Sophia Western's status and degree. As a clergyman dependent upon Lady
Catherine's patronage, Mr. Collins completely subjects himself in the most ridiculous

manner to the tyranny of his social superiors, issuing compliments and pointing out material and class advantages at every turn, as if his own rank and fortune were a reflection of Lady Catherine’s. Mr. Collins’ social aspirations and blind egotism lead him to be awed by grandeur, whereas other characters who are more secure in their social position expect the opulence and demonstrate their superiority by not appearing to be impressed by appearances.\textsuperscript{20} Elizabeth and the Lucases are invited to dinner at Lady Catherine’s Rosings estate, and prior to their departure Mr. Collins “was carefully instructing them in what they were to expect, that the sight of such rooms, so many servants, and so splendid a dinner might not wholly overpower them” (\textit{Pride and Prejudice} 195).\textsuperscript{21} His “minute” observations, which have a cumulative effect, reveal his non-discriminating taste.\textsuperscript{22}

Similarly, Mrs. Bennet is hyper-conscious of the need to establish social distinctions, though she fails to preserve them in her own conduct.\textsuperscript{23} She is deeply invested in creating a perception of life at Longbourne as one of ease and grandeur because she believes it will promote her daughters’ marital qualifications. Speaking to Bingley, a potential suitor for Jane, Mrs. Bennet contrasts her daughters’ situation to Charlotte Lucas’s: “For my part, Mr. Bingley, I always keep servants that can do their own work; my daughters are brought up differently” (\textit{Pride and Prejudice} 89). Of course Bingley is perfectly capable of making that observation without her assistance. The fact

\textsuperscript{20} McAleer, p. 74. In this instance, Elizabeth is the only one deemed “equal to the scene” upon meeting Lady Catherine.
\textsuperscript{22} Hardy, p. 152. See also Copeland, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{23} Hardy believes it is a mistake to draw correlations between a character’s class identification and his or her manners. She writes, “The comic criticism of class and rank is crossed and controlled by a sense of character. If we are in danger of supposing that Mrs. Bennet’s bad manners are accounted for by her low origin, we see Lady Catherine’s even greater offensiveness,” p. 127.
that Mrs. Bennet calls attention to domestic work, making what should be invisible visible, reflects her former lower-class upbringing and her failure to adopt the nonchalance required of the gentry. She also takes offense when Mr. Collins implies that the Bennet girls prepared the evening meal:24

The dinner too in its turn was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins, the excellence of its cookery was owing. But here he was set right by Mrs. Bennet, who assured him with some asperity that they were very well able to keep a good cook, and that her daughters had nothing to do in the kitchen (Pride and Prejudice 110).

Mrs. Bennet’s defensive reaction to Mr. Collins’ comment reveals the significant role servants played in establishing one’s legitimacy as part of the gentry.

Austen uses a particular technique to depict the position of servants in her characters’ world. She dehumanizes servants by including them in lists of desirable, inanimate commodities, thus reducing servants to the status of domestic mannequins. In a series composed primarily of inanimate objects, the term “servants” almost always appears in the middling position, indicative of servants’ relative value in relation to the other items. The use of the plural “servants” within these series also reduces them to an anonymous mass. This device serves the dual functions of making servants visible as signs of position and wealth and of making them inferior and invisible as human subjects.

Fielding’s novels contain a few lists of privileges and material objects cherished by the upper classes, but the lists do not include servants. Likewise, Richardson never

---

24 It is not entirely clear what motivates Mr. Collins’ comment. It may reflect his condescending, sexist attitude or it may be motivated by a genuine desire to bestow a compliment upon his cousins, both of whom he considers marriage prospects. In “The Comedy of Social Distinctions” McAleer focuses his discussion of this episode on Mrs. Bennet’s “defensive” reaction, Persuasions, p. 74.
embeds the term "servant" in a series of items. One particular instance in which he could have included servants in such a list if he had shared Austen’s attitude towards domestics occurs when Lord L is informed that “men of title, on your marriages, whether you like ostentation or not, must be ostentatious. Your equipages, houses, your furniture -- a certain increase in expense” (Grandison, 1.328).  

Richardson identified too closely with working class individuals to debase their humanity by commodifying them in the way that Austen does.

Austen’s usage is best illustrated by Sir Walter Elliot’s angry outburst -- “What! Every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, servants, horses, table -- contractions and restrictions everywhere” (Pride and Prejudice 44). The items that Sir Walter must forego move from the most public to the most private evidence of his wealth. “Journeys” abroad and extended stays in London were much-talked-about events in eighteenth-century society, and, furthermore, a substantial amount of money was required to relocate one’s household, finance two homes simultaneously, and host lavish parties as one was expected to do in town. It is logical for the term “servants” to be positioned between “journeys” and “table” in the middle of the series of terms because domestics were required for both public and private services. Their public function was to escort the family to social events around town, deliver messages, shop, and make

26 When the term “servant(s)” is included in lists of persons, which is a rare occurrence, it is positioned within the series of terms relative to the servant’s position in the social hierarchy -- generally last. For example, Isabella consults her watch, her brother’s, and then the servant’s (Northanger Abbey 188). In another example, “both Mrs. Allen and her maid declared [Catherine] looked quite as she should do,” (Northanger Abbey 7).
27 Copeland, p. 79.
entertaining possible in their master’s household. Servants’ private duties included smoothing the transition between two homes and waiting at table.

Mr. Elton’s improved position following his marriage is reflected in his “income, servants and furniture” (Emma 197). Considering this man’s overbearing class consciousness and the fact that he is someone who would rather socialize than work, the ranking of terms in the list seems appropriate, with increased income appearing first followed by the addition of more servants to reinforce his sense of superiority. As Mr. Knightley says, “The nature and simplicity of gentlemen and ladies, with their servants and furniture, I think is best observed by taking meals within doors” (Emma 351). In both quotations the terms “servants” and “furniture” are grouped syntactically in a balanced rhetorical construction, which implies that they are of equal value and serve a similar purpose: sheer utility, comfort, and spectacle. Metaphorically speaking, servants and furniture constitute an estate’s clothing, without which, according to Mr. Knightley, the “natural” legitimacy of one’s rank cannot be easily ascertained.

Even more telling is Lucy Steele’s plan to use Colonel Brandon’s “servants, his carriage, his cows and his poultry” (Sense and Sensibility 248). It is no surprise to discover that “servants” appears first on Lucy’s list given her “crude commercial interest.”28 Lucy’s priorities reflect “the defects of [her] education” and the time she devotes to “inferior society and frivolous pursuits” (Sense and Sensibility 118). Note that the items extend all the way down the hierarchy to barnyard animals, which is Austen’s way of saying that Lucy belongs on the farm.

---

28 Hardy, p. 146.
Austen’s descriptions of dinner parties illustrate many of the points made so far. The public performance of wealth associated with hosting dinner parties was particularly important for those attempting to climb the social ladder. As Davidoff and Hall explain, “Consumption is instrumental in forming and maintaining status, the ‘relational’ element of class, the continual claim and counter claim to recognition and legitimation.” The middling class wanted to emulate the gentry’s lifestyle, creating the illusion that it had accumulated enough money to avoid work.

Servants clearly constituted an integral part of these dinner parties, which were elaborate, highly orchestrated productions. In addition to their utility, domestic servants made it possible for the leisure class to demonstrate its superiority through conspicuous consumption and its ability to distance itself from domestic work. The description of Mrs. Ferrars’s dinner party in Sense and Sensibility speaks specifically to the point: “The dinner was a grand one, the servants were numerous, and everything bespoke the Mistress’s inclination for show, and the Master’s ability to support it” (Sense and Sensibility 197). The gender roles are clear and distinct. The desire to create a spectacle is attributed to the woman, whereas the economic resources to provide it rest

---

29 Davidoff and Hall, p. 30. Later in their study they write: “Many families, having increased incomes, were preoccupied with new patterns of consumption: what goods to buy, how much, how to display and care for them,” p. 320. See also, Copeland, p. 77.

30 Thorstein Veblen’s Theory of the Leisure Class suggests that wives and servants provided “the evidence” of a master’s wealth. Their attendance on their master’s person and in producing goods for him created an environment of leisure and conspicuous consumption, pp. 62-3. Robbins contends that Veblen “invites a post-humanist perspective on society and meaning,” and he adds that “[servants] are signs of the arbitrariness of signs. And in insisting on their status as signs, their distance from any natural dispensation, their subjection to human will or whim, servants inescapably extend the awareness of these things to the social hierarchy, of which they are also signs,” pp. 15-6. See also Handler and Segal, p. 52. Davidoff and Hall suggest that servants were hired to distance the middle class from the “degradation associated with manual tasks” such as housework, p. 22.

31 In Austen dinner parties provide an opportunity for the host to set up a comparison between his standard of living and that of his guests. The guest “consumes vicariously for his host at the same time that he is witness to the consumption of that excess of good things which his host is unable to dispose of single-handedly, and he is also made to witness his host’s facility in etiquette,” Veblen, p.75.
with the man. Even though Mrs. Ferrars and her daughter Fanny are considered greedy and selfish by Elinor and others, their desire to engage in conspicuous consumption is not openly attacked by the narrator, which suggests that Austen viewed this behavior as something that must be tolerated though not necessarily encouraged. Historically speaking, servants performed a significant amount of work both inside and outside of the house, and they created a perception of the middling class as being unproductive and living comfortably in the manner of their social superiors, and this carries over to Austen’s depictions of servants in literature.

One of the criteria used to judge a person’s successful assimilation into the upper echelons of social hierarchy is whether or not he or she understands the subtleties of servant management associated with hosting successful dinner parties. Some who aspired to middling-class status exceeded middling-class moderation and erred on the side of excess in their displays of conspicuous consumption; such was the Coles’ case in

---

32 Mistresses further contributed to the spectacle of conspicuous consumption through their cumbersome, decorative gowns. These gowns made it impossible for them to perform any type of physical activity or domestic work; consequently, they had to hire servants to do the work. Maza quips, “Comfort matters little when clothes are worn on behalf of someone else,” implying, and I would say correctly so that women were also objects of conspicuous consumption, p. 210. According to Davidoff and Hall, the mistress’s “association with non-productive, more decorous activities cut her off from validation of the external world even while religious, educational and moral experts extolled her new authority,” p. 391. They go on to suggest that this “sexual division of labour” allowed and sustained the “capitalist enterprise,” p. 13.

By extension, servant livery was basically another type of costume that functioned as a social marker. In Servants, Hill explains, “The employment of male servants -- preferably in livery -- went with a household’s need to display its wealth and status.” They were more visible than female domestics because they greeted guests at the door, traveled to other households to deliver messages, and completed errands. They had more contact with people in general; therefore, they were more significant signs of conspicuous consumption, pp. 30-1; see also, Veblen, p. 68; and Sarah Maza, Servants and Masters in Eighteenth Century France. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), p. 210. Terry enumerates cases in which servants’ livery is “associated with wealth, rank and large numbers of servants” in Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, p. 112. I also wish to mention the moment in Pride and Prejudice when Lady Catherine’s coach appears and the servants’ livery is not familiar to anyone in the Bennet household, perhaps foreshadowing Elizabeth’s rejection of the distinction Lady Catherine asserts between her class position and Elizabeth’s, p. 361.
Emma. As I mentioned earlier, the Coles were actively climbing Highbury’s social ladder, though their actions were not universally well received by Highbury’s “first set,” and in particular by Emma. The Coles’ attempt to penetrate the “first circles” of Highbury’s gentry is discouraged by Emma who comments that, “The Coles were very respectable in their way, but they ought to be taught that it was not for them to arrange the terms on which superior families would visit them” (Emma 218). The boldness that propels the Coles’ success in trade does not play so well in the drawing rooms of the landed gentry. They overstep social boundaries instead of easing into the established hierarchy of Highbury.

Despite her protest, Emma joins other members of the “first set” for a dinner party hosted by the Coles. The community members’ decision to attend the party shows that social boundaries are becoming more flexible to absorb the newly rich, but that is not to say that this process of negotiation is free of tension. The controversy generated by the Coles’ dinner invitation reveals the gentry and pseudo-gentry’s struggle to define the terms of their social interaction. Ultimately, Emma decides to attend the party because she does not want to be excluded. More importantly, she must be visible and part of the group in order to retain her position as Highbury’s highness and to exert her influence.

33 Davidoff and Hall, p. 21.
34 Beth Fowkes Tobin, in her article “The Moral and Political Economy of Emma,” deems Emma a snob who does not understand or appreciate the responsibility of stewardship that goes along owning property. Fortunately, in Tobin’s view, Mr. Knightley will guide Emma’s understanding of her proper role, Eighteenth-Century Fiction, vol. 2.3, (1990), pp. 229-254. For a brief discussion of the “fixed and relational” aspects of class in Emma, particularly with respect to the Coles, see Richard Handler and Daniel Segal’s, Jane Austen and the Fiction of Culture (Tucson: U Arizona P, 1990), pp. 53-8.
35 Spring notes that Austen does not use the vocabulary of class that became prevalent later in the nineteenth century (lower class, middle class, upper class, working class, etc.); instead, Austen’s novels contain terms such as “line,” “rank,” “sphere,” and “circle,” p. 55.
Even though there are many servants in attendance at the Coles’ dinner party, the narrator reports that there is still a “long, awkward interval between courses” (*Emma* 237). This observation suggests that the Coles, whose money was derived from trade, “a more liquid” and therefore less prestigious type of property, could afford to employ many servants. But their servants either had not been trained properly, a reflection of their master’s and mistress’s class climbing (since they may not have known the proper interval between courses), or the Coles’ servants had not received enough practice waiting at table because the family’s means to support an affair of this magnitude were relatively new. Austen uses the Coles to demonstrate that a family can have money and servants and still not successfully assimilate into the gentry. Inferior breeding is not easily obscured; therefore, those newly promoted in class would be well advised to emulate the more refined and inconspicuous manners of their superiors.

In this section, I explored how Austen uses servants to evoke the socioeconomic desires and constraints with which her middling-class characters dealt. The characters aspired to the leisure and sophisticated nonchalance of the gentry, but they had to learn how to exhibit their new and improved social position in a manner that was acceptable to their superiors. The socialization process could be slow and full of folly. At the same time, these characters needed to distinguish themselves clearly from the lower orders, both to validate their own rise to the middling class and pseudo-gentry and to mitigate the threat that assertive inferiors posed to their tenuous new positions. In the next section I examine a series of rhetorical techniques that Austen uses to keep servants in their proper places – denying them speech.

---

36 Davidoff and Hall, p. 20.
Servants and Their Speech

The previous section illustrates how Austen deploys servants as visible signs of social status, and in some cases she objectifies servants by explicitly equating them with inanimate, material objects. Here, I explore the techniques that Austen uses to make servants’ subjectivity and humanity invisible, by depriving servants of speech.

In Austen’s novels there is almost no communication of any sort between masters and servants, yet Austen is renowned for relying on conversation to reveal character. Indeed, her novels are said to “exemplify dialogic discourse,” an exchange that invites the participation of all voices and thus presents a “multiplicity of realities.”37 But not all voices are equally represented and not all opinions are represented as being of equal value. The narrator’s comments control our reading and interpretive process by insinuating whose voice is worthy of our trust and attention. In Austen the dialogic discourse does not extend all the way down the social hierarchy to include servants. The silence of her servants is striking, and their speeches are exceedingly noteworthy. Austen uses three rhetorical strategies to marginalize servants’ voices. She reports their dialogue as indirect speech, incorporates “disembodied speech,” and relies on passive constructions.

In Austen’s novels, the servants’ speeches, if one can call them such, generally take the form of indirect discourse, which creates distance and shifts attention away from

---

37 Handler and Segal, p. 135. Similarly, in Narrative Technique in the English Novel: Defoe to Austen, Ira Konigsberg explains that “[s]ocial relationships are defined through verbal communication,” (Hamden, CT; Archon Press, 1986), p. 222. Handler and Segal’s argument differs from Konigsberg’s in one important respect. They contend that no one point of view dominates the “multiplicity of realities” in Austen’s novels and that “any voice or perspective can call into question the completeness of any other,” p. 137, 10. In Handler and Segal’s view, communicative multiplicity cuts across all social boundaries, which both reflects and creates a mutable social hierarchy—all parties are ranked relative to one another, and different characters view their own ranks and evaluate others’ based on individual criteria. In other words, there is no “fixed” social stratification.
the words exchanged and focuses it instead on the main characters’ reactions to the information that servants provide. Konigsberg’s analysis of the mixture of dialogue and narrator’s comments in Austen’s novels reveals a pattern. The narrator usually provides a brief “general description of behavior and conversation” reported as indirect speech, which “[is] suddenly punctuated and given immediacy with a specific action or directly narrated speech.”38 Sense and Sensibility provides a case in point. Marianne quizzes a servant about a letter she is expecting from Willoughby:

Has no letter been left here for me since we went out?” said she to the footman who then entered with parcels. She was answered in the negative. “Are you quite sure of it?” she replied. “Are you certain that no servant, no porter has left any letter or note?” The man replied that none had (Sense and Sensibility 139).

In this instance, Marianne begins speaking before the footman has even entered the room, and she does not directly address or name the person to whom she is speaking. In the second sentence in the passage quoted above, the word “footman” is replaced with “man,” a more generic term that erases his occupation and renders the subject even more obscure, though still present. Austen could have substituted the servant’s proper name for “footman” at this point, which would have provided a concrete detail associated with the servant’s identity, but instead she uses the more abstract construction. Furthermore, it is important to recognize that the servant is present in body. His words, however, are filtered through the narrator: “She was answered in the negative” and “The man replied that none had.” The first statement privileges Marianne as the recipient of the action. The

38 p. 247.
second presents the narrator's summary of the servant's statement; however, it does preserve the "man" as the agent.

In the rare instances when servants' direct utterances are included in the narrative, Austen uses her second strategy, what I term "disembodied speech." In these cases, servants' bodies are not present, but their voices haunt the periphery: "A note was then brought in, and laid on the table. 'For me?,' cried Marianne, stepping boldly forward. 'No ma'am, for my mistress'" (Sense and Sensibility 143). We know that someone placed the letter on the table and responded to Marianne's question, but that someone's identity does not appear to matter because the passage focuses exclusively on Marianne's movements and reactions.

Sense and Sensibility illustrates the chaos that ensues when servants break the rules and become both visible and audible. When servants become fully present as subjects it disrupts the social order. Thomas, the Dashwoods' man-servant, returns from his business in Exeter and offers a "voluntary communication" that destroys the family's domestic tranquility (Sense and Sensibility 299). The Dashwoods certainly did not expect a disturbance of this magnitude to be communicated through a lowly servant. One can safely assume that Thomas is supposed to speak only when spoken to, since his message is described as a "voluntary communication." His revelation follows an errand upon which he "had been sent," i.e., commanded or ordered, which further underscores his subordinate position. Moreover, his "voluntary communication" occurs while he is in the process of waiting at table, another task that is emblematic of his servitude, when surely he should have been silent.
One feature of this unusual speech by a servant is that the revelation is couched in the language of deference: “I suppose you know, ma’am, that Mr. Ferrars is married” (Sense and Sensibility 299). Thomas’ statement implies that his mistress does know, a rhetorical gesture that grants her the privilege of knowing more than he knows on the mere basis of her superior class position, even though it is precisely Mrs. Dashwood’s class and gender which prevent her from knowing. In other words, since Thomas is the Dashwoods’ primary source of information, their link to the public sphere in which gossip is exchanged, one would expect him to assume that they are in fact ignorant of this bit of news, but if he were to do so, he would be thought presumptuous; therefore, he cedes the authority of knowing to his mistress.

Another feature of this unusual speech is that Thomas’s class identity as well as his anxiety at being the center of attention and the cause of so much distress registers in his vocabulary and sentence structure, which are noticeably different from the narrator’s and his mistress’s. This distinction between styles of discourse is unusual because Austen’s characters, including servants, share a common vocabulary and set of gestures with their masters and mistresses, and this shared language suggests that the distance that separates the social classes is narrowing.  

39 Like Mrs. Dashwood, Mrs. Bennet relies on the intelligence of servants because as a woman of rank she cannot make such personal inquiries. “Mrs. Bennet, through the assistance of servants, contrived to have the earliest tidings” of Mr. Bingley’s much anticipated return to the neighborhood (Pride and Prejudice 344).

40 David Skelton notes that Austen uses “similar styles of language” for all characters within a particular social environment, which tends to obscure class and gender distinctions. The English Novel (New Abbot: David & Charles, Ltd., 1977), p. 83. Robbins also points out that “class-based distinctions of dialect” do not surface in Roxana or Pamela, p. 79. The obscuring of class distinctions based on speech patterns may also reflect servant’s’ increasing emulation of their social superiors. Davidoff and Hall explain how servants’ “appearance, behavior and language reflected [the household’s] image . . . [and] too close imitation of middle class lifestyle could threaten fragile middle class status” p. 389.
Austen’s construction of Thomas’s speech, however, resembles Fielding’s approach to servant speech in that it is designed to call attention to the differences between characters of high and low birth. In this instance the narrator’s diction consists of polysyllabic words, mainly Greek and Latin derivatives, such as “intelligence,” “benefit” and “exertion,” and the rhetorical style contains Johnsonesque balances (Sense and Sensibility 300). In contrast, Thomas speaks in short sentences and phrases separated by dashes, which signal his inarticulateness and nervousness. His inferior education is marked by his incorrect use of tenses and subject/verb agreement: “I see Mr. Ferrars myself, ma’am, this morning in Exeter, and his lady too, Miss Steele as was. They was stopping in a chaise . . .” (Sense and Sensibility 300). When questioned, Thomas generally restricts his responses to the deferential “yes, ma’am” or “no, ma’am,” though he does elaborate when prodded, sometimes including irrelevant details which test Mrs. Dashwood’s patience in the same manner that Partridge frustrates his master in Tom Jones.41

Thomas’s speech also underscores class-based differences in the standards used to judge a person’s character. Thomas’s opinion of Lucy Steele differs from the Dashwoods’. He describes Lucy as “handsome,” “free spoken,” and “very civil behaved,” but his standards clearly are not aligned with those of the Dashwood women or the narrator, who think Lucy is vulgar (Sense and Sensibility 300). Thomas is fond of Lucy because she recognizes him and gives him attention and validation.

---

41This behavior is also reminiscent of Trim in Tristram Shandy. As I mentioned in my chapter on Fielding, servant speech is often marked by “torrential loquacity,” Maza, p. 233; Robbins, p. 70.
This scene also cautions readers against the impropriety of interacting with servants on familiar terms. Lucy initiates contact by calling out to Thomas in public from a stagecoach where, as in Fielding’s novels, social boundaries are more flexible. In doing so, Lucy creates a social context that invites Thomas’s participation -- more evidence of her garishness. As a result of Lucy’s solicitation, Thomas “made free to wish her joy” (Sense and Sensibility 300). He abandons the silence of servitude and feels “free” to express himself in public, and when he returns home to the more constrained space of the domestic sphere, he does something “voluntary.” One person’s failure to abide by class boundaries, in this case, Lucy’s, sets a chain of chaotic events in motion.

Thomas appears to be ignorant of the profound impact his “voluntary communication” will have on his audience of Dashwood women. He is pleased to be able to share some interesting gossip, but his disclosure causes Marianne to become so sick that she requires assistance and Elinor to become so disordered that she can neither think nor speak. The man-servant’s moment of celebrity is undercut by the narrator, who completely reduces the servant’s status by balancing “Thomas” and a “tablecloth” in the same phrase and then setting up both as objects of the same action: “Thomas and the tablecloth, now alike needless, were soon afterwards dismissed” (Sense and Sensibility 301). When servants do not conform to their prescribed roles, they get banished, which is reminiscent of Fielding’s treatment of them.

Austen’s third strategy is to use passive voice to erase servants completely as human subjects. In these instances Austen makes no effort to compensate for the absence of servants’ bodies by including their voices, as she does in the second strategy. The author’s use of passive voice is the most instrumental and most subtle in constructing
servants’ invisibility. The passive voice implicitly suggests that servants are “unworthy of mention” and shifts the emphasis entirely to the master as the recipient of service and attention.42

Passive constructions related to servants usually occur at transitional moments when characters are shown into or summoned from a room and when servants are used as conduits of information. For example, “An invitation to dinner was soon afterwards dispatched” (Pride and Prejudice 57). Not only do we not hear the order voiced directly, but it is the invitation that is dispatched and not the servant who carried it. At one point, the narrator mentions that “[t]he card tables were placed . . .” (Sense and Sensibility 121). Obviously servants had to move these card tables in and out of drawing rooms, perhaps even assemble them. In Emma a maid is specifically mentioned in the following quotation, but the state of Emma’s hair takes priority: “The hair was curled, and the maid sent away” (153). We can assume that the maid styled Emma’s hair, though that detail is somewhat ambiguous due to the consecutive passive constructions, but the fact that the maid was “sent away” is not ambiguous. The sentence is intentionally crafted in such a way as to emphasize Emma’s power to dominate her social subordinate. Finally, in Pride

42 Robbins notes that the “prevalence of passive voice” in Thackeray’s works creates a “ghostly comic sense of suppressed mechanism,” p. 126. In searching through Fielding’s novels, I could only find two instances in which he uses a passive construction that erases the servant as the agent of the action, and both had to do with serving tea (Amelia 66 528). An examination of Richardson’s Sir Charles Grandison reveals that he also occasionally uses passive constructions to describe tasks that servants complete. For example, “Chocolate was instantly brought for their master” (3.181). In this case, the quote emphasizes the recipient of the action — the master. The fact that it was “instantly brought” reflects the servants’ desire to please and their efficiency, which is aligned with middle class ideology. The inclusion of the personal possessive pronoun “their,” however, is a reminder that someone is performing the service. In other words, the servants are not totally erased (Grandison 1.254). Richardson’s use of the passive is offset by an even greater number of instances in which servants clearly are active participants in the narrative. For instance, “The servant came in with breakfast” or “Servants ran to them with cloaks” (Grandison 1.93, 3.419). It is also important to bear in mind that the invisibility of servants in Austen is created through an accumulation of various techniques, whereas the impact of this particular passive strategy is not so profound in Richardson and Fielding because the servants are not firmly pushed into the “symbolic background,” Robbins, p. 78.
and Prejudice, the narrator describes Lady Catherine as talking incessantly "till coffee came in" (198). This example is interesting for two reasons. The coffee seems to enter the room on its own accord without any assistance, and the "coffee," which we intuitively understand to include a servant who carries it and is prepared to serve it, silences Lady Catherine.

In summary, Austen employs a variety of rhetorical strategies to produce the paradox of servant invisibility, in which servants' bodies are conspicuously visible as objects, yet servants are simultaneously invisible as subjects. Servants' bodies, which are culturally recognized as signs of income and social position, are visible in order to legitimize and advertise their masters' ascendancy in the middling class, both to others in that class and to the gentry. But servants' subjectivity is made invisible, for at least two reasons. First is that the gentry, who have a long history of employing servants, are so accustomed to servants' presence that they take their servants for granted as they do their furniture. Someone newly promoted to the middling class tries to mimic the social nonchalance, however maladroitly. Second is that new arrivals to the middling class must work hard to enforce the distinction between their new social position and that of the laboring class, whose own aspirations may be seen as a chronic threat. One way to sharpen the distinction between classes is simply to deny that servants exist by acting as if they are both invisible and inaudible – effectively neutralizing the threat. If Austen's servants' identities were more fully constructed, if servants were seen and heard, they might threaten the tenuous status of the middling class.\footnote{Robbins, p. 78.} In the next section I examine
another device that Austen uses to depict a middling class that must defend its social boundary against the opposition of the working class.

Secrets, Silence and Servants

In Austen’s work, characters who understand upper-class society are not on intimate terms with their servants, and these characters’ behavior sets the example for all who aspire to equal positions. This social norm is designed to maintain the distinction between the employing classes and the working class. Preserving strong social boundaries requires physical and psychological distance, in particular the protection of one’s privacy. Of course it is difficult to keep one’s distance and guard one’s privacy in a household in which servants are constantly underfoot and conducting surveillance. In this section I show how different characters respond to this constraint. Austen’s novels demonstrate the significant consequences that occur when a person fails to follow this social norm of silence and secrecy.

In this context, both speaking about servants and speaking of personal affairs in the presence of servants are acts of social indiscretion. Robbins captures the seriousness of this blunder when he writes, “Speech that does not suspend, moderate, or freeze itself in the presence of servants, may be only one step from elopement” on Austen’s scale of social impropriety. Lydia, of course, demeans herself by committing both indiscretions in *Pride and Prejudice*. Lydia boldly interrupts Mr. Collins’s reading of a sermon with a comment directed to her mother regarding a servant’s possible dismissal. Lydia’s behavior is inappropriate for a number of reasons. First, she interrupts an older, male

---

44 p. 127.
guest, which shows a total disregard for prescribed gender roles. Moreover, her rejection of the moral edification associated with the sermon shows a lack of respect for the clergy and God’s word. Second, Lydia refers to the servant by his first name and knows of his private affairs, which reflects a paternalistic intimacy between the ruling class and its servants that is no longer acceptable. Third, she expresses the desire to learn more about the situation. The narrator reports that Lydia’s sisters, Elizabeth and Jane, scold her for being rude and “bid her hold her tongue” (Pride and Prejudice 113). Austen contrasts Elizabeth and Jane’s right line of conduct with their mother’s.

In addition to policing their own conduct when in the presence of servants, characters of high moral standing also exercise their social responsibility by cautioning others against becoming intimate with servants. Mr. Bennet fails to honor his social responsibility because he does not tell his wife to keep quiet in front of the servants. Lydia’s lack of discretion can be traced to her mother, Mrs. Bennet, who also demonstrates frequent lapses in moral judgment and social responsibility, especially in her interactions with servants. For example, she unthinkingly and indiscreetly publicizes her distress over Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, a lapse which causes Elizabeth and other members of the family great concern. As a result, the family must come up with a strategy for damage control. Their solution is to allow only one servant, Mrs. Hill, the housekeeper, into Mrs. Bennet’s presence “for they knew that [Mrs. Bennet] had not prudence enough to hold her tongue before the servants, while they waited at table, and judged it better that one only of the household, and one whom they could most trust, should comprehend all her fears and solicitude on the subject” (Pride and Prejudice 305). It is logical for Mrs. Hill to be selected as Mrs. Bennet’s chosen confidant since the two
women work together to create a comfortable and orderly household. However, as Terry points out, even “dear Hill’s” trust and judgment are qualified by the term “most.”

When Lydia returns to Longbourn as a married woman, her first impulse is to show off her wedding ring to Mrs. Hill and two maids, a move that further violates the social norm. Robbins offers an insightful discussion of the way in which Austen “uncharacteristically uses the Bennets’ servants to introduce and frame” the news of Lydia’s engagement. He describes how the focus shifts from issues of compatibility and property to one of jubilant celebration: “Austen’s romance structure, pushing against her class-bound ethics, gives partial but cordial support to the unrestrained circulation of words between the classes.” Robbins optimistically suggests that the servants’ “presence marks, elicits and solemnizes words that promise a community in which they might have a larger share.” Instead of viewing this exchange as one that raises the status of servants as subjects worthy of social inclusion, I would argue that Austen uses servants to frame the announcement of Lydia’s marriage to Wickham to forecast the drastic reduction of Lydia’s status. Her dependency upon her sisters for financial support at the conclusion of Pride and Prejudice rivals that of a servant.

When in the presence of servants, the proper course of action, in Austen’s view, is to maintain one’s composure at all times, and either to engage in superficial conversation or remain silent, a belief also evidenced in Richardson’s Grandison. Well-mannered people are rational and controlled at all times. In Pride and Prejudice the narrator

---

45 Terry, p. 108.
46 Davidoff and Hall explain that a mistress’s responsibilities, such as issuing orders to servants, placed them in a position to negotiate between their world and the world of their domestics, p. 395.
47 pp. 126-8. Terry also describes the moment in the text when Lydia’s marriage is announced as one of class harmony, p. 109.
48 p. 126-8
informs readers that “during dinner, Mr. Bennet scarcely spoke at all; but when the
servants were withdrawn, he thought it time to have some conversation with his guest”
(111). In *Mansfield Park* Fanny and Edmund refrain from discussing in front of a
housemaid his infatuation with Miss Crawford (224). Catherine Morland knows not to
cry in front of servants after being rebuked by Henry (*Northanger Abbey* 163). Servants
should not be witness to any emotional vulnerability.

At times, though, even a character of high moral standing and refined manners
who understands the risks associated with servant interactions has a pressing need that
seriously conflicts with the social norm, and in these mitigating circumstances, the norm
may be ignored, or at least carefully negotiated. Elizabeth Bennet, for example, generally
preserves the requisite social distance between herself and servants, but she demonstrates
an amusing lapse in judgment when she travels into the neighborhood surrounding
Pemberley. Elizabeth desperately wishes to know whether Mr. Darcy currently resides at
his estate, and this need for information leads her to commit an act of social impropriety.
The narrator reports that as Elizabeth prepared to go to bed, she asked the chambermaid
“whether Pemberley were not a very fine place, what was the name of its proprietor, and
with no little alarm, whether the family were down for the summer” (*Pride and Prejudice*
266).

49 We generally rejoin the narrative in Austen’s novels just as meals are finished, which makes sense
because most conversation between characters is precluded by the presence of servants. For examples, see
*Pride and Prejudice*, pp. 79, 81, 99; *Mansfield Park*, 87. Similarly the characters in Richardson’s *Sir
Charles Grandison* don’t speak freely when servants are present, which is perhaps a reflection of
Richardson’s increasing paranoia about servants threatening household stability. “At dinner the servants’
presence made discourse general” (2.657). Also, “[after] dinner, every attendant being dismissed, my Lord,
making me first see that nobody was listening in the passages began as follows . . .” (2.309). General
Jeronymo does not feel comfortable lamenting over his sister’s spiritual dilemma, in Camilla’s presence
(2.194).
To minimize that level of interaction between Elizabeth and the servant, Austen uses subtle narrative techniques. This exchange between Elizabeth and the maid takes place when Elizabeth is traveling in the countryside with her relatives. Travel, as evidenced earlier in my discussion, loosens the rules regulating social exchange between individuals of different classes. The conversation between two women also occurs at night when the two women are alone in a private domestic space, a bedchamber. Elizabeth is preparing for bed, so she would be stripped of clothing, the social trappings that make visible her superior class affiliation. All of these features create a context that invites Elizabeth’s more open, socially inclusive behavior. More importantly, this conversation is narrated in the third person and contains only reported speech rather than direct speech. We do not hear Elizabeth’s authentic “private inquiries” directed to the maid, nor do we hear the maid’s replies (Pride and Prejudice 266). Furthermore, the questions Elizabeth poses to the maid, though paraphrased by the narrator, require only one-word responses, not extended conversation. Austen’s narrative technique ultimately preserves the silence that defines the social boundaries separating the two women.

Elizabeth’s second question regarding the name of Pemberley’s proprietor can be construed as a test of the maid’s credibility. Obviously Elizabeth knows that Mr. Darcy owns Pemberley. On the other hand, it is also possible that Elizabeth is playing dumb to minimize the risk of exposure and to avoid the appearance of impropriety. The information Elizabeth gathers from the maid enables her to respond with “the proper air of indifference” to her aunt’s suggestion that they visit Pemberley (Pride and Prejudice 266). Upon Elizabeth’s arrival at the estate the following day, the narrator mentions Elizabeth’s persistent anxiety regarding the reliability of the maid’s information, but
Elizabeth cannot openly express her concern about Mr. Darcy’s presence because that would require acknowledging that she had spoken to the servant about Mr. Darcy’s whereabouts.

Austen’s novels explicitly and implicitly assert that the consequences of allowing servants to know of one’s interiority and private affairs can be serious. One reason is that servants in a household both gossip among themselves and, perhaps more dangerous, share information with domestics from other households, who may spread the gossip among other masters and still other servants. The narrator in *Emma* states that servants, children, and the poor are among “those who talk most” (332). This notion is borne out in *Pride and Prejudice*. When Elizabeth meets Jane for the first time after Lydia’s elopement with Wickham, she exclaims: “Oh! Jane, . . . was there a servant belonging to [the household], who did not know the whole story by the end of the day?” (*Pride and Prejudice* 308). When news of Lydia’s marriage arrives at Longbourne, it “quickly spread through the house; and with proportionate speed through the neighborhood” (*Pride and Prejudice* 323). Servants are part of a large social network, so news of impropriety has far reaching implications that are beyond the master’s control.

The consequences of servants’ knowing about a principal’s misconduct can be quite serious. For example, Colonel Brandon explains how his plans to elope with his cousin were ruined by a servant: “The treachery or folly, of my cousin’s servant maid betrayed us” (*Sense and Sensibility* 174). The servant’s act initiated a terrible chain of events, including the separation of Colonel Brandon and his cousin. She subsequently endured various abuses that left her diseased, destitute, and dead. Colonel Brandon’s use of the phrase “treachery or folly” does not clearly indicate whether the servant’s
indiscretion was intentional or accidental. While it is possible that Colonel Brandon is completely ignorant as to what motivated the servant’s breach of trust, it seems likely, given his strict moral code and paternal responsibility, that he chooses to withhold judgment because he realizes that he made the first and most serious mistake by considering elopement and his second in placing his trust in a servant. Thus, he has only himself to blame. Austen’s treatment of Brandon presents a striking contrast to Fielding’s 

Joseph Andrews and Tom Jones in which only women commit moral indiscretions and servants protect their mistresses’ dignity and bear the burden of guilt.

Another case in which a servant reveals an act of social impropriety on the part of her mistress occurs in Mansfield Park. Maria Rushworth’s adulterous affair with Henry Crawford is betrayed by a servant who reports it to her mistress: “The servant of Mrs. Rushworth, the mother, had exposure in her power, and, supported by her mistress, was not to be silenced” (Mansfield Park 437). As I explained in my discussion of Fielding’s works, servants derive power from their opportunities to conduct domestic surveillance and gather information about their master’s or mistress’s activities; however, it is difficult for servants to make strong accusations against their superiors because they have no social authority or power to speak, much less judge. It would be much easier for a person from the dominant power structure to attack and destroy a servant’s credibility than for a servant to successfully destroy the reputation of someone from the ruling class. As Robbins suggests, “Power [is] not so easily rocked by anyone’s verbal testimony.”

52 In contrast, Pride and Prejudice contains a servant who aids rather than exposes false love by helping Wickham seduce Miss Darcy and by harboring Wickham and Lydia after they elope, Robbins, p. 178.
53 p. 108.
In the works of Fielding, Richardson, and Austen, servants' testimony carries little weight with their superiors or magistrates. In this particular instance in *Mansfield Park*, the speaker suggests that the servant, acting on her own accord, would not have had enough power or credibility to bring down Maria if Mrs. Rushworth had not known the maid well and trusted her enough to defend her charges. Those who are concerned about Maria and her family's reputation view this servant as a "threat," yet they do not condemn the servant's act; instead, they are more offended by Maria and Henry's conduct. Miss Crawford, on the other hand, takes a different point of view, which demonstrates the range of the moral register. She views Maria and Henry's affair "only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure. The want of common discretion, of caution ... of putting herself in the power of a servant" (*Mansfield Park* 441). Maria is accustomed to thinking of servants as invisible non-entities, and she suffers for her complacency. She forgets that their domestic and social invisibility constitutes their power -- the power to make visible what should be hidden and to make public what should be private. As a result of Maria's failure to cancel the servant's power, Maria loses everything -- husband, home, social position, and her family's support.

In this section I examined how and why Austen's characters protect their social positions by preventing servants from knowing about their private affairs. In contrast to Fielding, Austen and Richardson hold ruling class characters accountable for their folly, rather than transferring the blame and shame to servants. In the next section I explore the roles of housekeepers, a class of servants who interact on more personal terms with their masters and mistresses than any other servants in Austen's novels.
Housekeepers: Retrospective Paternalism

Up to this point I have argued that in Austen’s canon domestic servants function as signs of relative class position and objects of conspicuous consumption and that they are essentially erased as human subjects through a combination of rhetorical strategies. However, there are a few notable exceptions to the general trend of servant invisibility, though exceptions are restricted to those servants who occupy the highest echelon of the servant hierarchy, namely housekeepers.\textsuperscript{54} Compared to Austen’s protagonists, these housekeepers barely qualify as developed subjects. But compared to the majority of servants, who are little more than specters haunting the margins of the page, the housekeepers are visible and significant. Terry has also observed that “housekeepers are the class of servant most often given lines, names, sometimes even a hint of character” in Austen’s novels.\textsuperscript{55}

The prominence of housekeepers in Austen can be traced to the paradigm of domesticity that Richardson presents in \textit{Grandison}. Richardson structures the domestic sphere such that authority is transferred from master to mistress to housekeeper. The housekeeper supervises the management of the estate, whose work is overseen by her mistress. This paradigm allows the mistress to function as a domestic angel, a woman of

\textsuperscript{54} Historically speaking, housekeepers and butlers in large households occupied special status at the top of the servant hierarchy, Terry, p. 106; Hecht, pp. 63-4. Earle’s discussion of Samuel Pepys diary also sets up a strict hierarchy, p. 226. In \textit{Sense and Sensibility}, Mrs. Jennings wonders whether Betty’s sister could successfully manage the transition from her position as housemaid to lady’s maid, which suggests that special distinctions were attached to these positions, p. 243. Hill, on the other hand, plays down the distinctions between various servants’ roles and claims that they were much more flexible in the eighteenth century: “... [W]e should view with immense caution any attempt to characterize servant-owning households -- whether large or small, rich or poor -- as necessarily tightly structured hierarchies in which a servant’s occupational label defined exactly the role he or she was to fill,” p. 171. See also pp. 22-3, 151.

\textsuperscript{55} Terry, p. 107. Nearly every servant mentioned in either Fielding’s or Richardson’s works is referred to by proper name, and the servants’ names are also familiar to many of the characters associated with the leisure class.
leisure. Another similarity between Austen and Richardson is that they both use housekeepers as metonyms of the master and the estate. Austen’s novels, however, depart from Richardson’s Grandison in their promotion of a retrospective paternalism. The rapport between the gentry-level master/mistress/housekeeper triad is more intimate in Austen than between the Grandisons and their housekeeper. This anachronistic paternalism reflects Austen’s allegiance to the gentry’s rank, honor, and civic responsibility, which serve as a primary stabilizing force in society.

Housekeepers function metonymically as extensions of the master as well as his estate’s history and culture. Housekeepers also reflect a master or mistress’s management style. But this metonymic quality takes on greater significance in Austen than it holds for Richardson because in Austen’s novels a character’s exterior personality or public self may not be aligned with his or her interior self, and in that respect Austen is more closely allied with Fielding. Because of the potential discrepancy that may exist between a character’s interior character and exterior manners, servants become an important source of information about their superiors. This raises the question of whether a servant can accurately assess his or her master’s character and whether or not a servant’s opinion can be trusted.

In Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park, some housekeepers function as guardians of an estate’s history, which reflects Austen’s retrospective paternalistic values. In Mr. Darcy’s absence, his housekeeper Mrs. Reynolds takes Elizabeth Bennet and the Gardiners on a tour of Pemberley. Mrs. Reynolds acts as a knowledgeable curator, describing the dimensions of the rooms, the cost of the furnishings, and identifying the
individuals featured in paintings that hang in the portrait gallery. She is a metonymic expression of her master’s exemplary stewardship and his estate’s culture.

In the case of the Sotherton estate in *Mansfield Park*, Mrs. Whitaker, the housekeeper, and her mistress, Mrs. Rusworth, are not aligned so closely, which signals a problem. Mrs. Rushworth’s claim to power and domestic authority is undercut in a number of ways by the narrator. For example, the housekeeper has had to educate her mistress about the Rushworth ancestors. The housekeeper assumes responsibility for preserving and transmitting the family’s legacy. She receives no explicit benefits from owning this information. It does not improve her position in the grand social hierarchy, but it does protect her position at the top of the domestic hierarchy. The housekeeper is indispensable because Mrs. Rushworth needs access to the housekeeper’s fund of knowledge to legitimize her position as mistress of Sotherton.\(^{56}\)

Mrs. Rushworth understands that she must learn the estate’s legacy to affirm her worthiness as Sotherton’s mistress: “Of pictures there were an abundance, and some few good, but the larger part were family portraits, no longer anything to anybody but Mrs. Rushworth, who had been at great pains to learn all that the housekeeper could teach, and was now almost equally well-qualified to shew the house” (*Mansfield Park* 113). The fact that Mrs. Rushworth is willing to endure “great pains” to master these facts suggests that she embraces her social responsibility as a mistress. However, the fact that she is “at great pains” also may be interpreted ironically, either hinting that Mrs. Rushworth lacks the capacity to learn quickly or that she has difficulty retaining her knowledge because

\(^{56}\) One could argue that Sotherton’s history is in fact Mrs. Whitaker’s “family” history, if one returns to an earlier, paternalistic, more socially inclusive definition of “family.” In *Servants*, Hill also discusses the “increasingly restricted” use of the term “family” with regard to servants, p. 91. See also Davidoff and Hall, pp. 31-3 and 389-90; Handler and Segal, p.33.
she is motivated to learn for the wrong reasons and has no genuine interest in the family’s
genealogy. Mrs. Rushworth’s competence as a guide is further undercut by the phrase
“almost equally well-qualified,” which is a disgrace. In Austen’s view, it would be
shameful for a servant to be more knowledgeable about a family than its descendants are.
Austen has complete confidence in Mr. Darcy’s stewardship, but Mrs. Rushworth’s
legacy as a mistress is much less certain.

It is not sufficient for Mrs. Rushworth to rehearse her knowledge of the estate’s
heritage to legitimize her position as mistress; she must perform that knowledge in
public. Again, Mrs. Rushworth’s ineptitude when compared to Mrs. Whitaker’s aptitude
is evidenced in the overly ambitious house tour Mrs. Rushworth conducts for guests. She
has them visit “many more rooms than could be supposed useful,” erring on the side of
excess, showing off for her guests (Mansfield Park 114). Mrs. Rushworth commits her
second blunder when she directs the group to enter the chapel from below, which she
knows to be improper, as indicated by her need to offer an apology in advance: “We are
coming to the chapel, which properly we ought to enter from above, and look down upon;
but as we are quite among friends, I will take you in this way, if you will excuse me”
(Mansfield Park 114). As a mature, ruling class, maternal figure, she ought to set an
example for the young people and demonstrate the proper respect for tradition; instead,
she chooses to “enter from below,” a decision that reflects her inferior sense of propriety
and honor. Mrs. Rushworth’s conduct reflects a combination of inexperience, ill-
breeding, and anxiety about her role as mistress.

In contrast to Mrs. Whitaker, who is guided by duty and tradition, Mrs.
Rushworth is guided by superficial appearances and the public performance of status.
When she describes the chapel, Mrs. Rushworth focuses on superficial features of the decor and how “handsome” it has been made since the days when “the pews were only wainscot” and “the linings and cushions of the pulpit and family seat were only purple cloth” (Mansfield Park 115). She mentions that the family has abandoned the practice of having church services in their home, which means that they spruced up the chapel to impress visitors on the house tour. Instead of using the chapel for its intended purpose, the Rushworths transformed it into another venue in which to display their wealth, a debasement of which Austen would not have approved.

Servants not only possess valuable information about the estate, they also possess information about their principals, information that is of interest and of value to others. For example, Elizabeth Bennet is consumed with curiosity about Mr. Darcy’s whereabouts, his family life, and his standing in the community. The question then becomes how can a young woman who is assumed to have no private knowledge of an individual make inquiries without creating the appearance of impropriety or raising suspicions? The answer is that she cannot if she conforms to protocol and avoids fostering an intimacy with servants.

Elizabeth is confronted with this problem on two different occasions. Recall that Elizabeth broke social protocol by inquiring about Mr. Darcy when alone with a chambermaid at an inn near his estate. At Pemberley, however, Elizabeth is in the company of her family and cannot risk raising suspicion by asking questions of Mr. Darcy’s housekeeper, Mrs. Reynolds. Therefore, Elizabeth defers to her uncle and waits for him to initiate conversation with the housekeeper. “Mr. Gardiner, whose manners were easy and pleasant, encouraged [Mrs. Reynolds’] communicativeness by his
questions and remarks” (*Pride and Prejudice* 269). Mr. Gardiner can carry this off successfully because he is older, male, and his social station as a middling class professional, is closer to the housekeeper’s than Elizabeth’s is.

The subsequent exchange that occurs between Mrs. Reynolds and Elizabeth indicates that they understand the politics of polite social interaction between servants and their social superiors. Like her master, the housekeeper abides by social protocol and is observant of class distinctions. Her conduct is guided by the notion that it is inappropriate for a servant to initiate conversation with someone who is socially superior. Mrs. Reynolds appears reluctant to address Elizabeth directly, despite Elizabeth’s friendly demeanor. After Mrs. Gardiner intimates that Elizabeth is acquainted with Mr. Darcy, Mrs. Reynolds asks, “Does that young lady know Mr. Darcy?” -- still conversing with Mrs. Gardiner rather than asking Elizabeth directly (*Pride and Prejudice* 269). Even though the question is put to her aunt, Elizabeth answers it, a social gesture that Mrs. Reynolds interprets as an invitation to speak to Elizabeth. In addressing Elizabeth, the housekeeper uses the formal “ma’am,” and she begins to sprinkle her speech with other verbal cues that signal respect and deference for her master’s friend.

Mrs. Reynolds essentially provides a character reference for Mr. Darcy, which presents an odd reversal of roles. Typically masters provided servants with letters of reference in order to help them secure positions in other households. Before venturing to express her opinion of Mr. Darcy, Mrs. Reynolds asks Elizabeth’s opinion, once again deferring to her social superior. But it is important to note that the housekeeper asks a

---

57 See Hill, pp. 91-2, 98-9; Hecht, pp. 83-4. Robbins refers to the character as a “‘labor passport,’ a means of policing the borders of reputable society by restricting the movements of class aliens,” p. 36. Fielding and Defoe tried to establish a regulated process whereby the information contained in characters would be verified and disseminated.
leading question that contains an implied answer: “And do you not think him a very handsome gentleman, Ma’am?” (Pride and Prejudice 269). This type of rhetorical gesture is commonly adopted by those who occupy a subordinate position and want their opinions validated but do not want to be assertive.\textsuperscript{58} Elizabeth’s response echoes Mrs. Reynolds’ language, “Yes, very handsome” (Pride and Prejudice 269). Mrs. Reynolds seems dissatisfied with Elizabeth’s half-hearted confirmation because she adds: “I am sure I know none so handsome” (Pride and Prejudice 269). Mrs. Reynolds gives Mr. Darcy a ringing endorsement, deeming him a devoted brother and a liberal master who has a good disposition.\textsuperscript{59}

This leads to an interesting question. Can a servant’s opinion be trusted? Austen’s thematization of the issue of servant credibility is more complicated than her predecessors’ representations of it. Fielding certainly felt that servants’ opinions could not be trusted. In his view servants adjusted their opinions to suit their own needs. Richardson’s Harriet Grandison, on the other hand, is quite convinced of servants’ veracity and sincerity. In fact, Richardson consistently locates “the truth” in servants, Pamela being the crowning example. Austen’s novels suggest that people of different classes have different ways of judging servants’ credibility.

Although Mrs. Reynolds provides a glowing character reference for her master, Elizabeth and the Gardiners view her opinion with some skepticism, but their skepticism

\textsuperscript{58} Robin Lakoff refers to this type of rhetorical construction as a “tag question.” In a discussion of cultural gender bias in language, she explains that a tag question “allows a speaker to avoid commitment, and thereby avoid conflict with the addressee.” In doing so, “speakers may also give the impression of not really being sure of themselves, or looking to the addressee for confirmation of their views,” “You Are What You Say,” MS magazine, July, (1974), p. 65.

\textsuperscript{59} Duckworth notes that Austen purposefully includes a variety of opinions in addition to Mrs. Reynolds’ in order to provide evidence of the housekeeper’s “family prejudice,” p. 123.
stems from different sources. Elizabeth has some first-hand knowledge of Mr. Darcy. Her uncertainty reflects the disparity between her conflicting impressions of Mr. Darcy's private and public persona and manners and the housekeeper's impressions of the man. When Elizabeth first learns that Mr. Darcy is considered a devoted brother and generous landlord and master, she is perplexed. "Can this be Mr. Darcy?" she asks herself (Pride and Prejudice 270). Elizabeth acknowledges that "[t]he commendation bestowed on [Mr. Darcy] by Mrs. Reynolds was of no trifling nature. What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?" (Pride and Prejudice 272). Elizabeth realizes that the housekeeper's commendation is based upon impressions that she has accumulated over a lifetime as a member of Mr. Darcy's paternalistic family. In contrast to her aunt and uncle, Elizabeth is also in a position to consider the servant's testimony within the context of other pieces of information, the most significant being Mr. Darcy's letter to her. The relative ease with which Elizabeth adopts the servant's point-of-view is not particularly surprising. Her favorable opinion of Mr. Darcy does not require a complete reversal of thinking because she was already somewhat predisposed to think highly of him. Handler and Segal contend that "Elizabeth's trust in a servant's judgment concerning the most serious social and ethical qualities of a master's character is an alter-cultural appreciation of the potential wisdom of social others." While this may be true, Elizabeth was not so trusting of the chambermaid's information, which is a function of Mrs. Reynolds being in many respects a near relation of Mr. Darcy's.

---

60 Elizabeth's question calls to mind the way in which conduct manuals instructed young women to base their judgment of a suitor's honor and decency on his treatment of his servants, his mother, and children. Duckworth refers to this event as the "second great recognition scene," p. 122. Handler and Segal agree and write, "Elizabeth's understanding of Darcy is altered by knowledge of his domestic relations," p. 81. 62 p. 82.
The Gardiners, on the other hand, remain skeptical of the housekeeper’s testimony for two reasons. First, they have been prejudiced against Mr. Darcy by various members of the Bennet family, including Elizabeth. More importantly, the Gardiners’ responses suggest that they are less trusting of a servant’s knowledge and ability to judge his or her master impartially. Mr. Gardiner, for instance, is “highly amused by the kind of family prejudice, to which he attributed [Mrs. Reynolds’] excessive commendation of her master” (Pride and Prejudice 270). The use of the phrase “family prejudice” is ironic considering that his opinion has been biased by Bennet family prejudice. Mrs. Gardiner shares her husband’s view, “But to be sure, the good lady who shewed us the house, did give him a most flaming character! I could hardly help laughing aloud sometimes. But he is a liberal master, I suppose, and that in the eyes of a servant comprehends every virtue” (Pride and Prejudice 278). Her comment reasserts the social distance between the middling class and the working class and returns the servant to the traditional comedic role.

According to Mrs. Gardiner, servants cannot evaluate information impartially, which reflects her middling class bias. In her opinion a servant’s assessment of his or her master’s character is not accurate or trustworthy because a servant’s opinion is based upon whether or not he or she benefits from a master’s generosity. Her attitude suggests that servants are self-serving and incapable of sound judgment, since they are totally dependent on their masters.63 Mrs. Gardiner diminishes the housekeeper’s credibility, reducing her to a source of amusement and entertainment, not someone who is to be

---

63 Terry also points to this scene to show that Mrs. Gardiner feels a “[s]ervant’s judgement . . . is governed exclusively by self-interest,” p. 108. She acknowledges that Austen’s judgment might not be quite as cynical as Mrs. Gardiner’s, but she senses that Austen felt a “cautious attitude” should be adopted when interacting with servants.
taken seriously.\textsuperscript{64} She condescendingly refers to Mrs. Reynolds as a “good lady,” which is a compliment of sorts, in that it recognizes the housekeeper’s pleasant demeanor; however, the absence of a proper name is a subtle sign that indicates the housekeeper is unworthy of being named.\textsuperscript{65} The Gardiners have not been acculturated to the paternalistic model of master/servants relations, and they are not comfortable with it because it blurs the social boundary that separates master from servant. In their case, the blurring of that boundary poses a serious threat to their middling class identity.

The experience of meeting Mr. Darcy forces the Gardiners to reconsider their stereotype of servants. Mrs. Reynolds’ credibility as a judge of character is soon tested when the Gardiners meet Mr. Darcy on the grounds of Pemberley, an encounter that confirms the housekeeper’s opinion. Mr. Darcy wins the Gardiners’ approval, “and they soon became sensible that the authority of a servant who had known him since he was four-years-old, and whose manners indicated respectability, was not to be hastily rejected” (\textit{Pride and Prejudice} 284). The Gardiners reconsider Mrs. Reynolds as a source of truth. Similarly, Mr. Darcy has to adjust his preconceptions of the Gardiners whose social station is far beneath his: “Darcy’s acceptance of Mr. Gardiner affirms the

\textsuperscript{64} Terry notes the “dismissive” tone of Mrs. Gardiner’s statement, p. 108.

\textsuperscript{65} Handler and Segal point out that “masters are distinguished from servants in conversation, and only masters are worthy of being named,” p. 120. When Mrs. Bennet mentions that servants are preparing Netherfield for their master’s arrival, her husband responds by asking, “What is \textit{his} name?” (\textit{Pride and Prejudice} 51, emphasis added). Generally speaking, “Family names have significance both as symbols of identity and prestige and as social exchange tokens,” Handler and Segal, p. 120. People such as Mr. Collins drop names in conversation or they proudly display the calling cards of people with whom they enjoy social or familial connections. In both instances the behavior is intended to publicize an intimacy with people of rank. Sir Walter Elliot, for example, places the viscountess’ calling cards “wherever they might be most visible,” (\textit{Persuasion} 31).
preeminence of the moral hierarchy, which encompasses them both, over the social
hierarchy which hitherto has separated them." 66

**Domestic Mismanagement in Mansfield Park**

Austen’s *Mansfield Park* revisits Richardson’s *Pamela* by illustrating the moral
and social chaos that erupts whenever people do not maintain proper distinctions between
master/servant, affectionate family/extended family, and public/private. In the case of
*Mansfield Park*, domestic mayhem arises primarily because family members function as
servants. When family members do the work of servants, it is a sign of bad domestic
management, and bad management, in Austen’s view, can be traced to a master or
mistress who possesses bad manners or bad morals.

*Mansfield Park* provides a stunning array of mistresses whose incompetence
surpasses even Mrs. Rushworth’s. Mrs. Price, for example, is obsessed with her “servant
problem” and the challenges of domestic production. Her sister Lady Bertram, on the
other hand, is completely unproductive and indolent. Mrs. Norris is the most organized
and the most abusive domestic manager of the three sisters, but she is not, in fact, the
mistress of a household. Austen is critical of all of these mistresses because they are so
absorbed with their own needs, goals, and problems that they ignore their family’s needs
and by extension their larger civic duty. Nowhere is breakdown in domestic order more
egregious and appalling than at the Price household in Portsmouth.

---

66 McAleer, p. 75. Duckworth also notes the contrast between the strained relationship of Mr. Bennet and
Mr. Darcy compared to the relationship between Mr. Darcy and Mr. Gardiner who immediately enjoy and
respect one another because they are both men of action and social responsibility, pp. 131-2.
When a lesser servant is visible in Austen’s novels, as is the case with Rebecca in the Price home, it usually indicates that the household hierarchy is dysfunctional. Rebecca’s visibility is a sign that proper hierarchical distinctions between master and servant are not being maintained. When Fanny arrives in Portsmouth she is greeted by Rebecca, a “trollopy-looking maid servant, seemingly in waiting for them at the door” (*Mansfield Park* 370). Even though Rebecca is stationed in the proper position to assist visitors, the word “seemingly” implies that her actions are not exactly aligned with her professional duty. She does not even welcome Fanny; instead, Rebecca “stept forward [. . . ] more intent on telling news than giving them any help” (*Mansfield Park* 370). This improper physical and verbal self-assertion on the part of a servant is indicative of Rebecca’s rebellious and insubordinate conduct. Rebecca not only “step[s] forward” for the wrong reason, but she then speaks, hastily informing William that “[t]he Thrush is gone out of harbour, please Sir . . .” (*Mansfield Park* 370). She not only initiates conversation with her superiors, but her speech contains errors of grammar and usage that point to her inferior education and social etiquette. However, even more revealing is the position of the phrase “[p]lease Sir,” which trails at the end of her statement. This verbal cue, which is a sign of the politeness and respect accorded to a servant’s superiors, is an afterthought to Rebecca, and this syntactical inversion points to the social inversion that exists between master and servant in the Price home.

In contrast to the reported speech and passive constructions that Austen uses to erase servants as subjects in her other novels, a different set of rhetorical strategies are employed by Austen to construct Rebecca’s visibility and to emphasize its offensiveness in *Mansfield Park*. The passages that pertain to Rebecca are loaded with personal
pronouns and strong, active verbs. For instance, "See if Rebecca has put the water on; and tell her to bring in the tea things as soon as she can" (*Mansfield Park* 372). Rebecca’s prominence in the narrative also can be attributed to the unusual frequency with which her proper name appears in the portion of the novel devoted to Fanny’s trip to Portsmouth. Servants are almost never mentioned by name in Austen’s novels, yet Rebecca’s proper name is mentioned 20 times by the narrator, Mrs. Price, or Fanny, who grumble about Rebecca or complain directly to Rebecca.

The narrative dwells extensively on Rebecca’s shortcomings to underscore the severity of Mrs. Price’s servant problem. In Fanny’s opinion, “Rebecca’s cookery and Rebecca’s waiting rank foremost among household deficiencies” (*Mansfield Park* 399). In fact, Fanny chooses to forego the meals Rebecca prepares and serves on filthy dishes. Furthermore, Rebecca does not do the things she is told to do when she is told to do them. In addition to being lazy, she is gossipy, loud-mouthed, and boldly displays a “flower in her hat,” which is considered to be in poor taste for a woman of the servant class because it draws attention to her person, making visible what should be invisible (*Mansfield Park* 400).67

Rebecca’s inappropriate visibility and her deficiencies as a servant, however, point to a more significant problem in Austen’s view, her mistress’s household mismanagement.68 In *The Improvement of the Estate* Duckworth describes the Price family’s Portsmouth home as a “scene of squalor and social disorder.”69 It is no small

---

67 Davidoff and Hall discuss the inappropriateness of this gesture, p. 392.
68 Terry claims that Mrs. Price’s preoccupation with her servant problem is “a telltale sign of poor management,” p. 110. For a description of emerging middle class roles and values assigned to women, which include household management, see Davidoff and Hall, pp. 18, 27.
69 p. 77.
coincidence that the bell Mrs. Price generally would use to summon the servants is broken.\textsuperscript{70} The broken bell is symbolic of the breakdown in the chain of command and the blurring of social boundaries in the Price household.

Because the Prices' servants do not work efficiently or do their work to their mistress's satisfaction, Mrs. Price and her daughters have to perform the work of maids, which is an obvious and visible sign of mismanagement. Betsey, the youngest member of the Price family, delivers messages, which is a task that servants usually perform. Betsey's older sister Susan is expected to pitch in and complete the tasks that Rebecca neglects to do such as tending the fire and serving tea. Mrs. Price mends her son's uniform because Rebecca has failed to do it. Every woman in the home is busy except for Rebecca. Mrs. Price not only performs domestic drudgery, but she also devotes much of her mental and emotional energy to "domestic grievances -- the shocking character of all Portsmouth servants, of whom she believed her own two to be the very worst" (\textit{Mansfield Park} 378).\textsuperscript{71} Austen uses the figure of Mrs. Price to show how physically, mentally, and emotionally draining it is for a mistress to manage a home when she does not possess the proper values and manners.

Mrs. Price's incompetence as a mistress carries over to her role as a mother. Her attention is taken up entirely with nagging her servants and doing a good portion of their work; as a result, she neglects her parental responsibilities.\textsuperscript{72} Because Mrs. Price is busy trying to salvage the domestic enterprise, little Betsey spends much of her time in the

\textsuperscript{70} Bell chimes were necessary because servants often resided in a distant part of the home, which constitutes a form of social and spatial banishment.
\textsuperscript{71} Davidoff and Hall describe the problem of employing servants and the high turnover rate, p. 389. See also Maza, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{72} Duckworth charges Lady Bertram and Mrs. Price with "gross parental indolence," p. 60.
company of servants, dangerous in Austen’s view because that sort of class-mixing increases the likelihood that Betsey will be socialized into a value system that is inferior even to Mrs. Price’s. In addition to neglecting her parental responsibilities with regard to her youngest daughter, Mrs. Price “had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny,” her oldest daughter (*Mansfield Park* 382). Furthermore, Mrs. Price’s neglect of family concerns and her poor manners are evident in her failure to inquire immediately about her extended family at Mansfield Park. Instead, she is consumed with her own problems supervising servants: “The Bertrams were all forgotten in detailing the faults of Rebecca” (*Mansfield Park* 378). When Mrs. Price finally does ask Fanny how her sister, Lady Bertram, is doing, her inquiry is solely motivated by her desire to learn how her sister manages servants.

Austen’s treatment of Mrs. Price suggests that Austen was unsympathetic to mistresses who proved incapable of reforming bad servants. Mrs. Price sabotages her own domestic authority, an authority that she is automatically granted as the mistress, by interacting with servants on familiar terms, tolerating their lack of industry, and not enforcing household rules with any consistency. The narrator criticizes Mrs. Price for being “always behindhand and lamenting it, without altering her ways; wishing to be an economist, without contrivance or regularity; dissatisfied with her servants, without skill to make them better, and whether helping, or reprimanding, or indulging them, without any power of engaging their respect” (*Mansfield Park* 382). These charges of mismanagement indicate that Mrs. Price lacks the authority to command her servants, the self-discipline to set a good example, and the talent and skill to engage their deference. Austen’s moral economy assigns the greater share of blame for this “scene of domestic
squalor” to Mrs. Price rather than to Rebecca. In Austen’s view there is no excuse for a mistress to be doing her maid’s work.

While it is wrong for a mistress to assume the role and responsibilities of her maid, it is equally remiss of a mistress to ignore her duty to manage the domestic sphere. In contrast to Mrs. Price, who is overly active, Lady Bertram errs in the opposite direction. She essentially abdicates her role as mistress of Mansfield Park and allows her sister, Mrs. Norris, to supplant her as the supervisor of the family’s servants. In Austen’s view a mistress whose life is completely devoted to leisure is as foolish, immature, and destructive as a mistress who is willing to serve as a maid.

Mrs. Norris is a domestic figure situated between the two extremes of Mrs. Price and Lady Bertram. In contrast to both of her sisters, Mrs. Norris does possess the ability to manage a household, and she craves domestic power; therefore, she creates a role for herself as the pseudo-mistress/housekeeper of Mansfield Park. This turns out to be problematic for a number of reasons. First of all, Mrs. Norris is a near relation to the family, which makes her part of the family but not part of the affectionate, nuclear family. Secondly, she lives on the Park’s property but does not reside in the main house. Despite her attempts to fill the void created by Lady Bertram’s negligence, Mrs. Norris’s intrusion in the domestic affairs at Mansfield Park brings about additional turmoil because it is not her place to assume a position of sovereignty in a relation’s house.

Mrs. Norris possesses the organizational skills to manage servants effectively, but she lacks the power to govern because she is neither a housekeeper nor a mistress. Despite the fact that Sir Thomas Bertram employs a housekeeper, a steward, and a butler,

---

73 p. 77.
Mrs. Norris looks for ways to be useful. In the process of carving out a space for herself within the servant hierarchy, she antagonizes the legitimate members of the staff. For instance, Mrs. Norris is “cross because the housekeeper would have her own way with supper” (*Mansfield Park* 273). She gets annoyed when the butler announces the news of Sir Thomas’s return from Antigua because it precludes her opportunity to issue “troublesome directions” to the cook or “injunctions of dispatch” to the footman (*Mansfield Park* 196). Mrs. Norris disputes the orders Baddley receives from Sir Thomas to fetch Fanny:

“‘You mean me, Baddley, I am sure; Sir Thomas wanted me, not Miss Price.’ But Baddeley was stout. ‘No, Ma’am, it is Miss Price.’ And there was a half-smile in his words which meant, ‘I do not think you would answer the purpose at all’”

(*Mansfield Park* 324).

Baddly’s “half-smile” directed at Mrs. Norris is “the single occasion in the novels in which criticism is leveled by a servant at his betters,” and one that is clearly justified in Austen’s view. 74 Mrs. Norris’s usefulness translates into unwelcome interference for members of the household staff, who find ways to circumvent her orders. Austen’s treatment of Mrs. Norris shows that it is a mistake for people to assume positions of leadership when they have no authority because they have no real control over the situation.

Mrs. Norris’s behavior as a pseudo-housekeeper diminishes what little middling status she does possess as a non-servant and near-relation to the Bertrams. For example, during the visit to Sotherton, she betrays her lower-class origins and initiates

---

74 Terry, p. 110.
inappropriate class-mixing by choosing to fraternize with the housekeeper and gardener rather than time spent with their mistress, Mrs. Rushworth. Mrs. Norris’s choice of companions elicits her niece’s criticism. Julia is embarrassed by the fact that “her tiresome aunt was dancing about with the housekeeper,” fostering an intimacy with a servant (*Mansfield Park* 128).

Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Whitaker, the housekeeper at Sotherton, feel a kinship with one another based on their shared domestic concerns and pleasures. Upon the Bertram party’s departure, Mrs. Norris is pleased to report that “good old Mrs. Whitaker” insisted on giving her some cheese and pheasant eggs, and she proceeds to delineate the similarities in their philosophy of household management, including the impropriety of serving wine at second table to lower servants, which might reduce their industry, as well as the inappropriateness of servant girls wearing white dresses, which would be impractical and conceal their positions as domestics (*Mansfield Park* 132). Both housekeepers discourage servants’ emulation of their superiors’ behavior because it threatens to close the narrow gap that separates Mrs. Norris and Mrs. Whitaker from the lower servants.

In addition to oppressing those beneath her in social class, Mrs. Norris’s deep-seated class resentment leads her to criticize those above her in class. As the poor widow of a clergyman, she depends upon the Bertrams’ generous support to maintain a middling

---

75 Davidoff and Hall’s discussion of appropriate attire for servants mentions that female servants were not usually permitted to wear white gowns, flowers and other finery, p. 392. Terry’s discussion of servant attire focuses on livery but also includes this reference to Rebecca’s white gown in *Mansfield Park*. She notes that white gowns were “reserved to the upper classes,” p. 112. We rarely see servants asserting themselves or imitating their masters. *Persuasion*, provides one of the few examples. Mrs. Musgrove and her daughter-in-law squabble about their servants’ “fine dressing,” but their irritation seems to stem more from their individual differences of opinion regarding how to manage a household rather than concern over policing class boundaries (112).
class lifestyle. She dislikes being dependent upon her relations, yet she must conceal her contempt. As a result, her anger gets displaced onto others whose status exceeds her own. Mrs. Norris rails against Mrs. Grant (her successor in the Parsonage) who pays her cook the same wages as the cook earns at Mansfield Park, stocks her pantry full of butter and eggs, and presents herself as a “fine lady.” Mrs. Norris is so disturbed by what she perceives to be her neighbor’s bold class climbing that she inquires into Mrs. Grant’s background and learns that Mrs. Grant has never “had more than five thousand pounds” (Mansfield Park 65). Mrs. Norris’s problematic status as non-mistress/non-housekeeper at Mansfield Park negatively impacts all of her relationships and unleashes all sorts of wickedness.

Under Mrs. Norris’s stewardship, Mansfield Park undergoes an alarming breakdown in domestic order that rivals the chaos of the Price household. Her interference in the management of the estate and in private family matters leads to a variety of moral and social indiscretions, including Tom’s theatricals, Julia’s marriage to an actor, and Maria’s adultery and subsequent exile from the family. These detrimental effects underscore the importance of conforming to one’s proper position and maintaining personal and professional boundaries, lessons that Mrs. Norris ignores. Since Mrs. Norris cannot commandeer the servants that Sir Thomas employs to her satisfaction, she acquires her own servant to whom she delegates the labor-intensive portion of her work in order to devote more attention to the “executive part” of managing the household (Mansfield Park 186). How does Mrs. Norris accomplish this? She socializes Fanny Price, her niece, into servitude.

---

76 Duckworth, p. 79.
Fanny's Services

Austen's *Mansfield Park* reveals how poor young women without prospects, such as Fanny Price, were vulnerable to their own family's exploitation as servants in the eighteenth century.\(^77\) The narrator of *Millenium Hall* laments the "wretched fate of those women, who from scantiness of fortune, and pride of family, are reduced to become dependent, and to bear all the insolence of wealth from such as will receive them into their families; there, though in some measure voluntary slaves, yet suffer all the evils of servitude, and are, I believe, the most unhappy part of creation" (Scott 64). This is Fanny Price's miserable fate. In contrast to Richardson's Pamela, a servant who is transformed into a fine lady, Fanny is socialized down the social hierarchy and transformed into an obsequious and invisible servant. The author thematizes Fanny's socialization into servitude, raising the issue to the level of the plot, and she deploys Fanny-the-servant, as Richardson uses Pamela, to expose the ruling class's moral and social deficiencies. Ultimately Austen sides with Richardson and asserts the importance of intrinsic virtue over social status in *Mansfield Park*.

Like Mrs. Norris, Fanny occupies an ambiguous position in relation to the Bertrams. She is a member of the Bertram family, a blood relative, but in many respects the entire family treats her as if she were one of its domestics. Even before Fanny arrives at Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris discuss the necessity of preserving the distance between Fanny and her cousins in order to contain the threat of contamination associated with class intermingling. They agree that the "right line of conduct" must

\(^77\) Hill's chapter "Kin as Servants" explains how there are many more instances of family as servants in literature than there is historical evidence, pp. 115-27. See also Fairchilds, pp. 5, 8.
structure their interactions with Fanny; otherwise, she might forget that “she is not a Miss Bertram” (*Mansfield Park* 47).

There is no danger of Fanny’s forgetting that she is not a Miss Bertram. However, Fanny does seem to forget that she is a cousin and not a servant. The move from Portsmouth to the unfamiliar surroundings of Mansfield Park causes Fanny to experience an identity crisis similar to Pamela’s in Richardson’s novel. Fanny’s early days at Mansfield Park are characterized by feelings of dislocation, fear, and alienation. According to the narrator, Fanny is “disheartened by Lady Bertram’s silence, awed by Sir Thomas’s grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris’s admonition” (*Mansfield Park* 51). A vulnerable, uneducated, lonely girl is socialized into a docile, invisible servant. Fanny loses her visibility and struggles to maintain her values in the face of intense opposition and domination during her stay at Mansfield Park.

Fanny’s lowly servant-like status is represented in spatial and social terms. Her inferior social position relative to the Bertrams’ is reflected within the architectural space of Mansfield Park.78 In an effort to separate the Bertram girls from Fanny, Mrs. Norris proposes that Fanny reside in the attic, in the space “near Miss Lee [the governess], and not far from the girls, and close by the housemaids” (*Mansfield Park* 46). In other words, Fanny is situated in closest proximity to servants. Banished to the attic where she is not even to enjoy the comfort of a fire, Fanny is hidden from the view of the family and their guests. She can be politely neglected, rendered invisible to the family, without it being interpreted as a direct affront to Fanny or bad manners to outsiders. Fanny’s separation

78 According to Handler and Segal, “Social place is intimately linked to physical place, since social status is a function of the ownership of property,” p. 32. Servants’ invisibility is related to their absence from family living spaces, Hill, pp. 40-1; Davidoff and Hall, pp. 390 and 377; Maza, p. 254. The creation of separate rooms for servants within homes was designed to prevent dangerous class mixing.
from the Bertrams extends beyond the physical confines of her living quarters. She is not permitted to participate in the leisure activities and social engagements that fill her cousins’ calendars. And Mrs. Norris nearly succeeds in keeping Fanny from joining the party of young people traveling to the Rushworth’s estate, arguing that Fanny’s attendance would be “unceremonious” and “disrespectful” to their hostess (*Mansfield Park* 108). After all, servant girls do not go on social outings.

Austen uses Fanny to illustrate the physical abuse to which servants were subject. Because Fanny is “handy” and “useful,” Mrs. Norris fills the girl’s time with the work of servants -- delivering messages, cutting patterns, trimming rose hedges, and trudging back and forth across the Park on errands (*Mansfield Park* 65). On one unbearably hot day, Fanny becomes ill working outdoors, and Edmund accuses Mrs. Norris of abusing the girl. Speaking in her own defense, Mrs. Norris declares that she neglected to notice that Fanny was suffering because she was busy communicating Lady Bertram’s wishes to the steward; she thus implies that Lady Bertram’s concerns take priority over Fanny’s health and well-being.

In addition to physical abuse, Fanny endures emotional abuse. Mrs. Norris seldom passes up the opportunity to criticize Fanny’s performance and to remind her that she is unworthy and undeserving of the Bertrams’ charity. She berates Fanny in the presence of all her cousins and their friends: “I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her -- very ungrateful, indeed, considering who and what she is” (*Mansfield Park* 170). Fanny tiptoes around the house trying to be invisible and sidestep the insults aimed at her from all sides, including the servants who feel intellectually and socially superior to her: “Miss Lee wondered at Fanny’s ignorance,
and the maid servants sneered at her clothes” (*Mansfield Park* 51). In contrast to these women and the Bertram girls, Edmund does not judge Fanny so harshly, but he does take it upon himself to correct her thoughts and opinions, which is another form of emotional abuse.

Under the influence of Mrs. Norris’s oppressive socialization process, Fanny adopts the conduct and manners of a domestic servant. She is quiet, cautious, and discrete. She hardly ever speaks unless spoken to, and she knows she is not to talk while working. Fanny is so invisible that although Sir Thomas feels certain that he has seen Fanny dance at one time or another, he cannot recall a particular instance. Fanny makes no significant impression on anyone in the Bertram family: “She alone was sad and insignificant; she had no share in anything; she might stay or go; . . . without being seen or missed” (*Mansfield Park* 180). Fanny’s invisibility is not restricted to Mansfield Park. It extends in all directions, including her childhood home in Portsmouth, where upon her arrival she is immediately made into a servant like all of the other women in the house. Both parents ignore Fanny. In spite of William’s attempts to elicit his father’s interest, Mr. Price “seemed very much inclined to forget her again” (*Mansfield Park* 374). Fanny, like all good servants in Austen’s novels, fades into the background like the draperies hanging in the drawing room.

Austen intentionally reminds readers of Fanny’s existence and the fact that the girl is not really a servant. The narrator, for example, takes the initiative to bring Fanny forward by inserting a rhetorical question to ensure that the girl is not forgotten: “And Fanny, what was she doing and thinking all this while? [. . .] Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called upon to speak their opinions than Fanny” (*Mansfield Park*
81). Fanny’s former identity as a sister/daughter/non-servant also becomes temporarily visible upon William’s arrival at Mansfield Park. She momentarily abandons the emotional repression and self-abnegation that attend her servant role at Mansfield Park: “The first minutes of exquisite feeling had no interruption and no witnesses, unless the servants chiefly intent upon opening the proper doors could be called such” (*Mansfield Park* 242-3). The sharp contrast between Fanny’s outpouring of joy and the servants’ complete restraint reminds us that servants also have families and emotions, even though the narrator represents the servants as non-entities. As Handler and Segal suggest, the narrator puts the reader in a position to “imagine what the scene might look like to servants who must suppress all signs of human feeling.”79 In this instance the servants are privy to Fanny’s feelings, but members of the Bertram family are not.

Fanny’s invisible servant status, combined with her astute powers of observation and her ability to float freely in and out of private domestic spaces, gives her a special vantage point from which to view and judge the family’s conduct. She enjoys a more comprehensive understanding of the roles and relationships of the residents and visitors of Mansfield Park because she has more freedom than an ordinary servant. As a marginalized member of the family, Fanny observes stolen glances and is privy to conversations that probably would not occur in the presence of real domestic servants. For example, during the Sotherton outing Fanny watches as Maria and Henry sneak off to sequester themselves in a remote area where they can flirt with one another. They are aware that Fanny can overhear their conversation, which is loaded with inappropriate innuendo, yet they assume that she will not report their conduct to anyone.

79 p. 115. Terry characterizes the servants in this scene as “non-witnesses, non-people,” p. 105.
Fanny’s ambiguous status confuses members of the Bertram family, who usually treat her as a servant but occasionally treat her as a family member depending on their most immediate needs. Under normal circumstances, a servant’s observations of scandalous behavior of the sort in which Maria and Henry engage would be a liability because servants with private information about their principals could threaten to expose them publicly. But in this particular case, that threat is neutralized in Henry and Maria’s view because Fanny is a near relation. As a relative, she is perceived to be less of a threat to the family’s dignity and social position than a typical domestic servant. The family relies on her loyalty and discretion, even though they treat her like a servant. From the family’s perspective, Fanny cannot afford to betray those to whom she is so completely beholden. Fanny stands to lose too much if she were to expose the Bertrams’ moral failings or secrets. They would force her into exile in Portsmouth.

Fanny consistently acts according to principle and functions as the benchmark against which other characters’ morality and conduct are judged. In that respect, Fanny operates as the moral center of Mansfield Park, a role that parallels Pamela’s role in Richardson’s novel. Maria and Henry underestimate Fanny’s compulsion to do what is morally right, even if it is at her own expense, and it is no surprise that they misjudge her character because they do not possess Fanny’s sense of social propriety or moral conviction. Fanny demonstrates her steadfast commitment to her principles when she resists being seduced by Henry Crawford and refuses to be dominated by her uncle’s mercenary social aspirations. Guided by her principles, Fanny reports her observations of Henry and Maria’s inappropriate contact to Edmund, but he does not listen. After all,
servants are not heard. Figuratively speaking, Maria and Henry do not see Fanny, and Edmund does not hear her, but readers do.

Fanny becomes visible to the Bertram family only when Sir Thomas, the family patriarch, sponsors her moral and social ascendency within the household. She then becomes the primary object of the paternalistic gaze: “It was impossible for her not to be more looked at, more thought of and attended to” in her cousins’ absence (Mansfield Park 219). Sir Thomas also orders that Fanny have a fire in her room, and he chooses her to open the annual ball at Mansfield Park. Lady Bertram, following her husband’s example, sees to it that Fanny receives extra visits from Mrs. Chapman, Lady Bertram’s lady-in-waiting. Fanny also becomes visible as the erotic object of Henry Crawford’s gaze. He informs his sister of a visible change in Fanny’s appearance, “When we talked of [Fanny] last night, you none of you was sensible of the wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks in the last six weeks” (Mansfield Park 239). As Fanny’s visibility increases, people seek her out for guidance and stability, everyone, that is, except for Mrs. Norris.

Mrs. Norris disapproves of her niece’s increasing prominence because she finds herself competing against Fanny for domestic power and the family’s attention. In an effort to keep Fanny humble and subservient, Mrs. Norris continues to debase the girl: “Remember, wherever you are you must be the lowest and the last” (Mansfield Park 232). But Mrs. Norris fails to keep Fanny low. The increasing visibility that attends Fanny’s rise in the second half of the novel signals her transformation from servant to daughter and affirms her power to reform the ruling class.
Fanny’s marriage to Edmund ushers in a new value system that restores order to Mansfield Park at the conclusion of the novel. This new value system represents a combination of Fanny’s moral individualism and industry and the couple’s shared commitment to traditions of rank, paternalistic responsibility, and religion. As the guardians of the estate, Fanny and Edmund promote the maintenance of social and familial distinctions, individual accountability, and public charity.

The disorder and tension that formerly characterized the situation at Mansfield Park under Mrs. Norris’s governance reflects the state of affairs in eighteenth-century English society. People were struggling to define their class identity and to classify the increasing numbers of persons who did not fit into traditional categories of social stratification. The solution Austen proposes in *Mansfield Park* to resolve the confusion and tension associated with the crisis of social identification and classification requires a combination of the two predominant value systems, those of the gentry and the middling class.

**Rhetorical Control as a Form of Social Control**

It is reasonable to assume that the emerging middling class experienced significant, two-sided opposition from above and below as it attempted to fortify its position within the existing social hierarchy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. But there is very little if any evidence in Austen’s fiction to support such a claim. The servants in her novels certainly do not exert any overt pressure on their
middling class or gentry masters. Some might argue that there is no opposition or sign of servant subversion because the distance between the middling class and the servant class in Austen's social hierarchy appears to be so great that spanning it seems utterly inconceivable.

I, however, contend that Austen's use of rhetorical strategies that turn servants into commodities of conspicuous consumption and erase servants as subjects reflects a desire to protect and bolster the fragile identity and status of the emerging middling class. According to Maza, "The increasing physical and psychological segregation between master and servant within the domestic sphere was but one expression of the pangs of fear and self-consciousness that accompanied the birth of middle class consciousness in Europe." By rendering servants invisible, Austen not only avoids exploring issues of exploitation and class conflict, but she also protects a vulnerable middling class that is in the process of defining its values and its relationship to other classes, a value system in which Austen discerned considerable merit.

---

80 Davidoff and Hall argue that there were no signs of turbulence for the middle class from above or below, but in the late eighteenth century the emerging middle class "was criss-crossed by differences of interest and riven with internal dissension," p. 23. They argue that paternalism prevailed: "Wives, children, servants, labourers, all could be described in the language of paternalism as the dependent children of their father, their master" p. 21.
81 Davidoff and Hall, p. 22.
82 p. 335
Bibliography


Dussinger, John A. "Masters and Servants: Political Discourse in Richardson’s A Collection of Moral Sentiments."


Flint, Christopher. "The Anxiety of Affluence: Family and Class (Dis)order in Pamela."


---. “Country Inn Yard at Election Time: A Problem in Interpretation.” *English Satire*


Schellenberg, Betty A. "Enclosing the Immovable: Structuring Social Authority in

Seleski, Patty. “Women, Work and Cultural Change in Eighteenth- and Early
Nineteenth-Century London.” *Popular Culture in England, c. 1500-1850.* Ed. Tim

Sherman, Sandra. “Servants and Semiotics: Reversible Signs, Capital Instability, and


Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression.* Ithaca:


Stone, Lawrence. *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800.* New York:


Terry, Judith. “Seen but Not Heard: Servants in Jane Austen’s England.” *Persuasions:

Thompson, E. P. “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?”
*Social History* 3 (1978): 133-65.


