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Natália Batista Benetti

"Netherfield Park is let at last": representations of the English country house in Jane Austen's fiction

Rio de Janeiro
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Tese apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Doutora, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Estudos de Literatura.

Orientadora: Prof.ª Dra Ana Lucia de Souza Henriques

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DEDICATÓRIA

À mamãe, meu primeiro e eterno lar; minha casa.

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For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty.

Gaston Bachelard

The stately homes of England,
How beautiful they stand!
Amidst their tall ancestral trees,
O'er all the pleasant land.
The deer across their greensward bound
Thro' shade and sunny gleam,
And the swan glides past them with the sound
Of some rejoicing stream.

Felicia Hemans

The English country house is certainly an icon of British culture.

Julian Fellowes

Even when the customs have gone, the houses remain.

Mark Girouard

Ah! There is nothing like staying at home, for real comfort.

Jane Austen

ABSTRACT

BENETTI, Natália Batista. *"Netherfield Park is let at last"*: representations of the English country house in Jane Austen's fiction. 2023. 200 f. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2023.

Ever since its emergence in the Middle Ages to its revival in the twenty-first century, the English country house has been associated with a sense of nationhood. Indeed, it has been considered a quintessential symbol of English tradition, for it is the space in which part of the most intrinsic of English customs originated, were developed and perpetuated. As we analyse Jane Austen's works, we observe that the stately home lies at the core of her narratives, for it is possible to notice that landed property itselfplays a key role in her stories. Therefore, the general aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of the grand rural mansion in the writer's six complete novels: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and *Persuasion* (1817). It is well known that around this power residence, Austen mobilises the plight of the women of her time as well as the issues of class that are characteristic of her writings. In light of that, it is also important to analyse how characters interact, and are "constructed" and "deconstructed" through the house. Furthermore, it is necessary to examine how this baronial mansion does not so much function as the basis of the lifestyle of the landed gentry portrayed by Austen as it works as an expression of cultural, socio-economic and political power in her oeuvre.

Keywords: Austenian fiction. Custom and tradition. House. English country house.

RESUMO

BENETTI, Natália Batista. *"Netherfield Park is let at last*": representações da grande mansão senhorial inglesa na ficção de Jane Austen. 2023. 200 f. Tese (Doutorado em Letras) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2023.

Desde o seu surgimento na Idade Média até o seu reflorescimento no século XXI, a grande casa de campo tem sido considerada um ícone da tradição inglesa, visto que é o espaço em que muitos dos mais peculiares costumes da nação originaram-se, desenvolveram-se e perpetuaram-se. Ao analisarmos a obra de Jane Austen, observamos que essa imponente construção se encontra no centro de suas narrativas, afinal nota-se que a propriedade de terra em si desempenha um papel fundamental em suas histórias. Isto posto, o principal objetivo desta tese é investigar o papel da mansão senhorial nos seis romances completos da escritora: *RazãoeSensibilidade* (1811), *Orgulho e Preconceito*(1813),*Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817) e *Persuasão*(1817). Sabe-se que as questões referentes aos conflitos de classe social e à condição das mulheres, tão inerentes à ficção austeniana, giram em torno da casa. À luz disso, pretende-se analisar também como as personagens interagem, se "fazem" e se "desfazem", através dela. Para mais, faz-se necessário verificar como essa grande propriedade funciona não só como ponto de partida para o estilo de vida da pequena aristocracia rural retratada por Austen, mas também como uma expressão de poder cultural, político e socioeconômico na obra da autora.

Palavras-chave: Ficção austeniana. Costume e tradição. Casa. Mansão senhorial inglesa.

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INTRODUCTION

> With all the chances against her of house, hall, place, park, court, and cottage, Northanger turned up an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant.
> Jane Austen, ***Northanger Abbey***

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that the English country house is a vital part of Austen's fiction. When we analyse the writer's works, we have the impression that the stately home lies at the core of her narratives. An adjacent cottage, a drawing room with a pianoforte, grounds, gardens, woods, a library, countless rooms, promenades and dinner parties are inherent to the small universe delineated in her texts. In an interview entitled "The Role of the Country House in Jane Austen" [1], British scholar Lauren Nixon has commented on the importance of the grand rural mansion in Austenian fiction and states that "country houses in Jane Austen are very important because what she is writing about is a very domestic space, and what she is interested in is the domestic life that takes place within the country house" (NIXON, 2015). Moreover, Nixon has argued that "the country house is the expression of the person who resides within it, who presides over it, and who runs it (NIXON, 2015)".

Apart from that, the landed estate per se raises significant matters which are extremely valuable to the social criticism that pervades them. Around this power residence, Austen mobilises the plight of the women of her time as well as the issues of class that are characteristic of her writings. It is thus through the house that characters interact, and are constructed and deconstructed. As Welsh critic Raymond Williams affirms, in the novelist's oeuvre, properties represent "a direct preoccupation with estates incomes and social position, which are seen as indispensable elements of all the relationships that are projected and formed" (WILLIAMS, 1995, p. 236-237). Ever since its emergence in the Middle Ages to its revival in the twenty-first century, the manor house has been deeply associated with English social, cultural and economic history, since for many centuries, it was at the heart of rural life. Corroborating this, in his travel memoir *English Hours*, Henry James has claimed that:

[1]Published by the School of English of the University of Sheffield. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoezZeya8f4>. Accessed on: 14/12/2022.

> Of all the great things that the English have invented and made part of the credit of the national character, the most perfect, the most characteristic, the only one they have mastered completely in all its details, so that it becomes a compendious illustration of their social genius and their manners, is the well-appointed, well-administered, well-filled country house (JAMES, 2011, p. 154).

Jane Austen, one of the early women authors in British literature, was born in 1775. Daughter of a rector, she was usually surrounded by family and neighbours, who constituted her social circle. Considering that she lived at a time when the monarchy and the nobility were still extremely relevant, the author grew up amongst the landed aristocracy, even though she did not really belong to them. It is this class of people, whom Austen knew so well, that is portrayed in her works. Indeed, from the end of the eighteenth century to the turn of the nineteenth, England was to suffer a massive transition from a country society to an industrial one. Nevertheless, the young writer inhabited an area of the nation that was still essentially rural. In *The Country and the City*, Raymond Williams reiterates thatthe social history of the families of English landowners are "quite central and structural in Jane Austen's novels" (WILLIAMS, 2016, p. 162). Because the Austenian world is the world of the rural gentry, it is impossible to dissociate the landowning class from land and vice-versa.Given that the country house was the main statement of this kind of social order, which was deeply concerned with rules and good principles, it can only be of utmost importance in the novels. A great reason for that is the fact that human behaviour and moral conduct are the cardinal points in Austen's canon.

In the 1700s, too, the modern novel arose as a new genre, presenting an inescapably domestic character since it was mostly directed to the growing bourgeoisie. Bearing in mind that this recent literary form was somehow a reflection of middle-class standards, it often had bourgeois characters and their everyday life as their main subjects. Based on this, it has been argued that "from the beginning the house and the novel are interconnected, for the eighteenth-century [...] was also the great age of the English house" (TRISTRAM apud MEZEI; BRIGANTI, 2002, p. 838). Apart from an unfinished text, an epistolary novella and the *Juvenilia*, which comprises her first works, Austen wrote six complete novels: *Sense andSensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1817) and *Persuasion* (1817). Even though these narratives were published at the beginning of the 19th century, most of them were created at the end of the eighteenth, hence they are typical of a period that is also known as the Regency Era (1795–1837).

In each and every one of these novels, the gentry and the lesser gentry of Austen's fictional world revolve around the country house. Basically, the stately home is so relevant to the microcosm depicted in the texts that two of these narratives have been named after the houses, (i.e.*Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*). Considering that the very stratified group of people that gives life to these narratives are deeply guided by a specific set of values – a rigid hierarchy, ancestral homes, nobility ranks, ancient roots, wealth, morality and social status – the estate inevitably brings up, in slightly different ways, very strong social, cultural, political and economic issues. Taking into account that in an era of rural society, land indicates permanence and affluence, it is precisely land that confers the power the small aristocracy holds. As Raymond Williams (2016, p. 85) asserts, the "true history of the English countryside has been centred throughout in the problems of property in land, and in the consequent social and working relationships."

The authors of a book entitled *Creating Paradise:* The Building of the English Country House 1660-1880explain what a country house is: "A large, old house with numerous outbuildings, surrounded by gardens and park, the main residence, at least historically, of a sizeable landed estate – a statement of exclusiveness and authority, of expense and status" (MACKLEY; WILSON, 2000, p. 5). All of these elements are found in the referred novels. To begin with, all the respectable and luxurious residences in Austen have names. In *Pride and Prejudice,* we find Netherfield Park, Pemberley House and Rosings Park; in *Sense and Sensibility*, the great houses are called Norland Park and Barton Park; in *Persuasion*, Kellynch Hall and Uppercross Hall; in *Emma*, Hartfield and Donwell Abbey. And as we have seen, in *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, the main houses are the ones mentioned in the titles, but in the former narrative, we also come across a stately home called Sotherton Court.

At the very beginning of *Sense and Sensibility*, we are exposed to the tough reality women had to face when it came to the family estate. According to the customs of the time, it was primarily men who could succeed to a property. In the novel, it is possible to see a very strong sort of attachment between the household – comprised of Mrs Dashwood and her daughters Elinor, Marianne, and Margaret – and the manor house. Upon the death of the patriarch of the family, the girls' brother from a previous marriage and his wife claim their position as master and mistress of Norland Park, in Sussex. Consequently, the Dashwood women are forced to bid farewell to the place where they have spent a great many years of their lives. To make things worse, they move to a cottage and try to adapt to a different lifestyle, living at the mercy of a wealthy relative, who is the owner of the colossal Barton

Park, that is, themain residence on the premises. Initially, the departure from Norland is very painful to this family of females only, for as Gaston Bachelard points out, the mansion was not only a most beloved home, but it also represented their "first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 4).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet fears for her children for, similarly to the situation of the Dashwoods in *Sense and Sensibility*, they cannot inherit the house they live in. Thus, on the very first page of the narrative, the matriarch marvels at the splendid news that Netherfield Park, the great mansion in the village nearby, has been hired by the Bingleys, a family of nouveaux riches from the north of England. Besides approaching the connection between property, in the form of manor houses, and a good marriage, the text also brings to light, in a subtle way, some of the economic changes of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: the emergent bourgeoisie represented by the Bingleys in contrast to the landed aristocracy – which was to lose its strength only a few decades later – represented by Mr Darcy, the hero. Concerning this, it has been argued that:

> We are introduced to Netherfield Park in the very first lines, as Mrs Bennet informs her bored husband that **'Netherfield Park is let atlast'** by the rich young man Mr Bingley. Netherfield Park is significant not so much for the description of the house and grounds as for the circumstances surrounding it. We learn that Mr Bingley has rented Netherfield because he does not have an estate of his own, not for lack of money but because his father's fortune had been made in trade and he was not a member of the landed elite (PAGE, 2013, p. 100, my emphasis).

In *Mansfield Park,* the protagonist Fanny Price is given the chance to quit her impoverished family home at the age of ten to be brought up with her uncle, aunts and cousins at Mansfield, whose grandeur at first astonishes her. One of the several issues connected with the Mansfield estate in the narrative is the sense of place this great property imparts to Fanny. Initially, the manor represents a world which she clearly does not belong to, and where she is somehow treated as an outcast, for she inhabits a cold attic room located in a part of the mansion where the servants stay. The main reason for that is that Sir Thomas Bertram, Fanny's uncle and master of the house, does not want her to be raised in the same way as his daughters; for due to their different backgrounds, he thinks they can never be equals. Moreover, another striking theme approached in the novel is that of the British Empire, which is slightly alluded to due to the fact that Sir Thomas possesses a plantation in the West Indies. It is this very colonial estate in Antigua that provides the sustenance of the family at Mansfield Park.

In *Emma*, the heroine, Emma Woodhouse is a wealthy and snobbish young woman who lives with her widowed father. Differently from her other Austenian counterparts, Emma

seems to be quite satisfied with her privileged life and comfortable abode, which she will inherit after Mr Woodhouse dies. As she knows she will hardly face any kind of instability in the future, at the beginning of the novel, Emma does not care about getting married. From the outset, we are aware that because of its splendour, Hartfield is one of the most important houses in the village of Highbury, where the Woodhouses are first in consequence, second only to Mr George Knightley, the owner of the ancient Donwell Abbey. The protagonist knows that her family's social position enables them to mingle with the best of the society which they belong to. However, Donwell Abbey makes her recognise that the Knightleys are even more noble and respectable than the Woodhouses. Hence, the abbey is probably the only thing in the novel that makes Emma feel slightly less important than she is.

In *Persuasion,* Sir Walter Elliot, the master of Kellynch Hall, is a vain lord who is utterly proud of his baronetcy. This irresponsible and extravagant nobleman undergoes financial difficulties and feels compelled to rent the estate that has been in his family for so many generations to a man of inferior rank. At first, his lawyer's suggestion to let the property strikes at the very heart of Sir Walter's being. When he finds out he will no longer be able to keep up with the standards of such a house, he prefers to rent a smaller place in Bath. Some years before that, his child Anne, the heroine, had been persuaded to break off her engagement to a naval officer because he was poor and had a low social status. Ironically, Admiral Croft, his brother-in-law, becomes Sir Walter's tenant. Besides that, Kellynch will be passed down to William Elliot, a distant relation who will come into the property solely because he is Sir Walter's closest male heir.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the prodigy house plays a slightly different role if we compare it to the other five books. As a matter of fact, the novel is but a biting satire on the Gothic texts that were in vogue at the time Austen wrote her narratives. When the young and naive heroine Catherine Morland is invited by General Tilney to visit the abbey, she is absolutely mesmerised with the idea of being a guest at such an age-old manor. However, much to her disappointment, once she arrives there, she finds out it is far more modern than she could expect. Since the general is a very greedy and materialistic man, he has renovated the home of his forefathers in such a way that Catherine can barely notice signs of the original building:

> Hearing about the abbey for the first time, the impressionable Catherine - who has read Mrs Radcliffe's sensational *The Mysteries of Udolpho* [...] - longs for, and half-expects to see, a stupendous Gothic pile, complete with haunted passageways and the relics of murdered maidens. Sorely is she disappointed (CASTLE, 1998, p. ix).

As it can be seen, in each one of the aforementioned texts, the stately home functions as a leading factor.Based on that, the general aim of this research is to analyse the importance of the English country house in Austen and examine how this kind of property is specifically depicted in her six complete novels.This thesis is structured in two chapters. In chapter 1, subdivided into 2 parts, I will not only introduce the manor house and draw an outline on its origins and evolution throughout the centuries, but also mention how the house is inevitably attached to matters of money, inheritance, class mobility and, first and foremost, social status. The discussion carried out in section 1.1 sheds a light on how the grand estate comes to prominence during the Regency Era, considering the cultural, social and architectural transformations it goes through ever since it appears, in the Norman period. As G.E. Mingay suggests, still in the Middle Ages, lowland England already presented a few established communities with their manor houses and "hierarchy of manorial officials, farmers and cottagers" (MINGAY, 2002, p. 24). Some of the sources used to write this first part wereTrevor Yorke's *The English Country House:* Explained (2012), *The Medieval English Landscape,1000–1540*,published by Graeme J. White (2012), and the 2016 edition of Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973).

Part 1.2 constitutes an investigation of how property, money and inheritance are strictly connected to prestige and reputation in Austen's fictional world, which is a reflection of Georgian England. Throughout this second part, we shall explore the strong social, political and economic issues that the English country house brings up, such as: primogeniture, entail and male and female inheritance of family estates; the acquisition of these majestic properties by the nouveaux riches, which outlines the rise of an emergent class; marriage as a means of social mobility; the clash between the old traditional order and a new changing social system; the exploitation of the colonies of the British Empire serving as a means of funding for these stately homes, and the decline of the ancient nobility with the impending removal of noble households from their traditional country houses, amongst other things. The main theoretical texts that contributed to this second section were *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (2011), *Law, Land and Family:* Aristocratic Inheritance in England, 1300 to 1800, written by Elieen Spring (1993), and George M. Trevelyan's *English Social History:* A Survey of Six Centuries(1948).

Chapter 2 comprises a more cultural analysis of the English country house in the texts as the aim of this final part is to observe how the grand rural mansion serves to shape the lives of those who circulate in and out of them, defining manners. This examination is divided into three different subdivisions. Section 2.1 explores aspects of the inside and the outside of some

of the estates mentioned in the novels, considering that these are the spaces where both ordinary and more special events take place. By doing so, we may get a glimpse of house and grounds in order to understand the dimensions of social life in Austen's Georgian England, both indoors and outdoors. The most crucial themes approached in this part are: the new internal layout of the 18th-century stately home; the relevance of the public rooms described in the narratives; the appearance of separate outbuildings and detached wings to accommodate servants; the integration between house and gardens; the improvement of estates and their grounds in contrast to the preservation of the traditional landscape of the English countryside, and the contact with nature and the importance of the outdoors to the development of very private and special moments in the lives of specific characters, amongst others. Some of the most valuable sources used to conduct this first section were: The 2019 edition of Alistair Duckworth's *The Improvement of the Estate*, originally published in 1972, *A Wealth of Buildings:* Volume II, written by Richard Barras (2016), and the 1994 edition of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*(1957).

The subsequent section is about the indispensable role servants play in the maintenance of the mansion house. In the novels, it is clear that at a time when manual labour was regarded as degrading, not having any servants was considered an insult not only to the most prosperous but also to some of the least affluent of Austenian households. As during the Regency, English society was still extremely stratified and the servants of the power houses were also ranked according to a strict hierarchy, we believe that exploring the several different positions domestic servants occupied during the Regency will help us comprehend their roles in the fictional homes. First and foremost, in this brief part, we will analyse how employees validate the social status of the great landowners delineated in the texts. Some of the theoretical texts that contributed to formulate section 2.2 were *Up and Down Stairs:* The History of the Country House Servant, written by Jeremy Musson (2009), *English Society in the 18th Century*, by Roy Porter(1991), and Deirdre Le Faye's *Jane Austen:* The World of Her Novels (2002).

The last section emphasises the relevance of the dinner party, the most exclusive of the several pastimes the manor house could offer. Before all else, it is necessary to understand how this kind of entertainment is closely associated with the eating habits of the landed aristocracy, including the timing of meals, precedence rules and a rigorous code of etiquette. Aside from that, we start section 2.3 investigating how food is a significant element in the novels. After that, we carry out an analysis of the main dinner-party scenes found in the texts, considering that they are crucial to the development of each storyline. Moreover, it focuses on

the fact that the sociability fostered by these dinner engagements is strictly connected to serious matters of economic, social and cultural capital. The main works used as source material for this final part were Daniel Pool's *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* (1993), the companion *Jane Austen in Context*, edited by Janet Todd (2005), and Pierre Bourdieu's article "The Forms of Capital" (1986).

Therefore, investigating how the English country house works as an expression of cultural, socio-economic and political power in Austen's six complete novels is what propels us into this thesis.

1 INTRODUCING THE ENGLISH COUNTRY HOUSE: DEFINING SOCIAL STATUS

1.1 The originsand the rise of thegrand rural mansion: brief considerations

> The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where for many generations they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance.
> Jane Austen, ***Sense and Sensibility***

In order to understand the relevance of the English country house in Austen's fiction, it is necessary to briefly map the socio-historical context in which this kind of construction was established and given prestige. Nevertheless, it is relevant to point out that it is not within the scope of this thesis to conduct an in-depth architectural investigation of the referred building.Much has been discussed that as an "enduring symbol of England, the country house and its surrounding landscape have been instrumental to the promulgation of heritage culture" (GUEDON-DECONCINI, 2008, p. 3). Ever since its emergence in the late Middle Ages to its revival in the 21st century, the grand rural mansion has been associated with a sense of nationhood, for it is thestarting point for some of the most common habits of the English way of life.In *The English Country House:* Explained, Trevor Yorke defines the country house as he mentions the cultural grandiosity it is possible to find inside this kind of dwelling.The expert claims that most of its furniture and decorative objects, many of them real works of art, were probablyaccumulated by generations of a family throughout the centuries. Besides pointing out the lineage of the owners, Yorke also calls attention to the servants that ran this large house, amongst other things:

> The English country house is an imposing record of aristocratic wealth, innovative architecture and fashionable interior design; a glorious museum of world art and

> personal history bottled up in one unique building. More than this, it reflects the whims of its owners, their family's ancestry, and the lives of the countless staff who helped develop and run the house, its gardens and estate. It also highlights periods of cultural isolation when owners stuck with [...] domestic historic styles, in contrast to times when the minds of the ruling classes were enlightened by wonders from the Ancient World, or exotic forms from the far corners of the globe (YORKE, 2012, p. 5).

Several names spring to mind whenever we think of this great rural mansion. In fact, 'country house' functions as a hypernym, an umbrella term, for what can also be called a Castle, a Hall, a Manor, an Abbey, a Grange, a Palace, a Court, a Park, and even a House. All these different hyponyms are associated not only with the origins of this historic building but also with the customs and traditions of the English clergy and aristocracy through the ages. As she comments on domestic architecture in Austen, Claire Lamont remarks that although the writer does not give an accurate account of the origins of the houses she depicts, these different names per se convey information on their size, style, history, amongst other things:

> A sensitivity to different types of house is typical of Austen's age (...) Austen's list indicates the variety of house types which her characters might experience, a variety which expresses the settled nature of the English counties in which her novels are set. [...]**The different names for house types reflect differences in origin, size and function.** They are also in Austen's novels the opportunity for satire on social anxiety or pretension. Mary Crawford is glad to be assured that Mansfield Park justifies its name with a real park five miles round'(1:5). Sir William Lucas celebrates his knighthood by moving to a house in the country 'denominated from that period Lucas Lodge' *(P&P,* 1:5) (LAMONT, 2005, p. 225, my emphasis).

To start with, it is possible to assert that regardless of its name, every country house is a'estate', for the estate itself is "the foundation upon which all country houses were built" (YORKE, 2012, p. 107). Trevor Yorke claims that for many centuries, estates were self-sufficient since they supplied their owners with nearly everything they might need. Apart from that, the author suggests that a great deal of these properties can be traced back to the Anglo-Norman period, when they inevitably presented medieval influences:

> These estates are most likely to have been formed in the general reorganisation of land ownership which took place after the Norman Conquest, although some estate boundaries can date back much further. During the feudal medieval period the majority of them operated as manors, run by the lord [...], from a castle or principal house (manor house). **The estates would comprise a demesne, land on which the produce grown was for the lord's table only** [...] The remainder of the fields were used by the villagers, with decisions on how it would be farmed made at the manor house which, **in addition to its role as local court house and close proximity to the parish church, made it the centre of the community** (YORKE, 2012, p.107-108, my emphasis).

Therefore, in the Middle Ages, a 'manor' was the main residence on a piece of land; the home where the lord and his family lived and where the most serious decisions regarding the estate were made. Daniel Pool (1993, p. 195) remarks that the name is obviously "suggestive of a

rather grand social status as well as a lineage dating back to Norman times, when the manorial system originated." The main difference between a 'castle' and a palace or a manor house is that castles were fortified to protect both the highborn family that owned them and an entire community against external invasions. For the record, in the 15th and 16th centuries, most courts were referred to as 'palaces'. A 'hall' means that the house was constructed around a great central hall. As a matter of fact, the word goes back to Anglo-Saxon England, as it can be seen in *Beowulf,* an epic poem of the eighth century. It has been further discussed that:

> The word 'hall' "in the name of the dwelling meant that the house had centered on a great hall for entertainment dining and ceremonial living on a grand escale, as in feudal times. The term thus connoted both a certain grandeur [...] and the sort of ancient architecture likely to be associated with an old, august family (POOL, 1993, p. 195).

A 'grange' is no different from a manor house, except for the etymology of the word, which alludes even more to the land per se, for its original meaning is "farmhouse." This kind of construction was mainly attached to large convents. A 'court' refers both to the administrative centre of a realm and to the place where the monarch and the royal household reside, especially in the Late Medieval Period. Besides, it also means that the residence was built around a courtyard. The usage of the term 'house' to refer to large rural mansions "reflects a period when residential comfort was increasingly of concern, and the period of naming things 'castle,' 'abbey,' or 'manor' was long past (p. 195). An 'abbey'is originallyan enormous church with several buildings that belonged to the clergy in medieval or early modern England. At last, a 'park' refers not only to the estate itself, but also to its grounds and landscape. According to Pool:

> Originally, a park was an area which the king permitted a large landowner to enclose for the sake of chasing deer. Park came to mean a closed-in area, often landscaped with trees and lawn to present a pleasing and aesthetically appropriate picture. Both Mansfield Park and the park belonging to Sir Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House* are the property of baronets, and having a park certainly connoted gentlemanly status; [...] It advertised that you had both the means to withdraw otherwise productive land from cultivation for purely esthetic appreciation and the leisure time to enjoy it (POOL, 1993, p. 196).

In view of the vast nomenclature of the English country house and the several layers of meaning this hypernym may present in the six novels considered here, it is necessary to take an overview of how this kind of residence evolved from its beginning to Jane Austen's time. In light of the aforementioned considerations, it is common fact that the manors of Austen's time are reminiscent of the power houses present in medievalEngland since "for many centuries the ownership of land was not just the main but the only sure basis of power" (GIROUARD, 1980, p.2). During the Regency, they had already evolved considerably

through the different periods the country went through. Austen was so conscious of the development of these houses that in*Mansfield Park*, she portrays it in a passage in which Fanny Price visits Sotherton Court, Mr Rushworth's recently inherited Elizabethan estate. At first, the heroine – who was often restricted and unaccustomed to leave Mansfield – gets impressed by the grandiosity and the history of the place, displayed inside the mansion:

> Fanny, to whom everything was almost as interesting as it was new, attended with unaffected earnestness to all that Mrs Rushworth could relate of the family in former times, its rise and grandeur, [...] delighted to connect anything with history already known, or warm her imagination with scenes of the past (AUSTEN, 1994, p.86).

It is clear that although the furniture is 'in the taste of fifty years back,' at a certain period in history, the late owners of the house did not skimp on money to renovate it, for most of the rooms present high-end materials like marble, mahogany, and gold coating, amongst other things. Deirdre Le Faye states that since "mahogany was not imported in any quantities until the early eighteenth century, this reference to its use at an earlier date could be taken to indicate that the Rushworths of that time were sufficiently rich to be able to purchase this rare new luxury wood" (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 239)

At some point on their tour of the grounds, the party is informed that they will have to access the chapel from above. As they enter the place – Fanny, who is a devotee of good customs and tradition – is surprised by how modern it actually is. Since there is no sign of any of the things the protagonist had expected to see in the church, her cousin Edmund and Mr Rushworth's mother, the mistress of the mansion, try to explain that the private chapel actually was an improvement of past ones:

> You forget, Fanny, how lately all this has been built, and for how confined a purpose, compared with the old chapels of castles and monasteries. It was only for the private use of the family. [...] This chapel was fitted up as you see it, in James the Second's time. [...] Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many; but the late Mr Rushworth left it off (AUSTEN, 1994, p.87).

Disappointed, Fanny replies:

> It is a pity, cried Fanny, that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine! (p. 87-88).

Despite the opulence of Sotherton, the landscape around it does not do it much justice. Therefore, Mr Rushworth is thinking of ways to improve it as well. Indeed, the heir of the house complains a lot about it when he shows it to his guests, including his fiancée, Maria. Consequently, it is important to mention that:

> Sotherton Court in Mansfield Park [...] 'is a large, regular, brick building - heavy, but respectable looking, and has many good rooms'. Most of the visit to Sotherton in the novel is concerned with the garden, which is in a formal style inviting improvement. The interior is similarly old-fashioned, being full of furniture 'in the taste of fifty years back' and family portraits that only Mrs Rushworth cares about (MP, 1:9). Mavis Batey has pointed out that some of the details of Sotherton are drawn from Stoneleigh Abbey in Warwickshire, which Austen visited in 1806. Whatever its features its new mistress, Maria Rushworth, disregards it in favour of her real choice, a house in Wimpole Street, London (LAMONT, 2005, p. 227).

Based on that, it is possible to see that Sotherton Court is old-fashioned, for it dates back to the early 17th century. It is precisely because of it, and the outdated furniture, that the manor looks uninteresting to the friends whocall upon Mrs Rushworth and her son. Differently from the abbeys portrayed in other novels, for example, Sotherton peculiarly lacks the prestige characteristic of age-old mansions. As in Austenian fiction, it is common to see associations between character and house, the dullness of the estate and its great need of renovation allude to the blandness of its master, the foolish Mr Rushworth.

As it has been previously mentioned, in the Late Middle Ages (1216–1485), stately farmhouses were mostly called castles or halls. In the Tudor period (1485–1603), they were also called palaces. Curiously, the word ‘castle’ itself is a French word derived from the Latin ‘castellum’. The hillforts of the Iron Age and the military forts built during the Roman Conquest were transformed into fortresses, that is, castles, during the Norman period. Ben Johnson, historian and contributor to the *Historic UK* magazine[2], claims that:

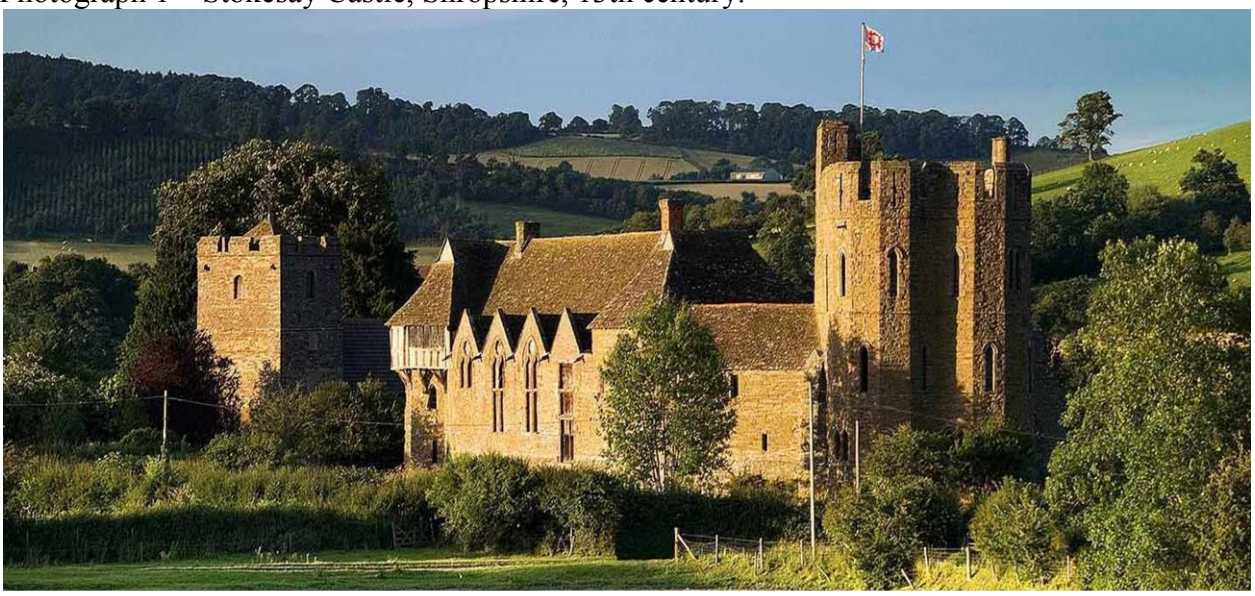
> The arrival of the Normans in 1066 led to a new age of castle construction. Initially the sites chosen were in the towns and centres of population. Later castles often reused the ancient hill fort sites, as their situations in the landscape were still as relevant for the Normans as for the Iron Age peoples. The Normans also saw the merit of controlling the Roman road network which were still the main routes through the countryside [...] The first Norman castles were motte-and-bailey castles, a wooden or stone keep set on an artificial mound called a motte, surrounded by an enclosed courtyard or bailey [...] These fortifications were relatively easy and fast to construct. [...] Some stone built motte-and-bailey castles have survived intact; examples include the Tower of London and Windsor Castle [...] From the 14th century onwards, castles began to combine their defensive role with that of a fine residence or palace.

In the book *The Medieval English Landscape*, Graeme J. White states that: “The twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed the intensification of farming and settlement, the expansion of cultivated areas, and the proliferation of new commercial centres – all tending to increase the

[2] Written by Ben Johnson on 06/09/2015 and displayed in the online history magazine *Historic UK*. Article found at: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryMagazine/DestinationsUK/History-of-Castles/>. Last accessed on 24/02/21.

incomes of lords able to spend on [...] domestic, fortified or ecclesiastical buildings" (WHITE, 2012, p. 20). Back then, castles and halls usually belonged to monarchs and lords. It is relevant to point out that castles were not only designed to be a military stronghold, but also to function as "a court of justice, a command centre of the feudal economy, anda residence for a royal or aristocratic household" (BARRAS, 2016, p. 119). It is also interesting to bear in mind that it was through the castles that the Normans managed to overpower the English.

Photograph 1 – Stokesay Castle, Shropshire, 13th century.



A fortified manor house from the late 13th century – originally built by Laurence of Ludlow, a wealthy wool merchant –which has been preserved through the centuries. It is also comprised of a medieval tower and a 17th-century gatehouse. According to an article from the *English Heritage* website, "its military appearance is superficial – it couldn't have withstood a serious siege" (ENGLISH HERITAGE, 2022).

© English Heritage, 2022. Available at: https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/stokesay-castle/history-and-stories/. Accessed on 07/12/2022.

At the time of the Conquest, the construction of castles ensured that the Norman lords would be in control of the land. Hence, ever since its beginning, the great English mansion has served as an instrument for class division and maintenance of power:

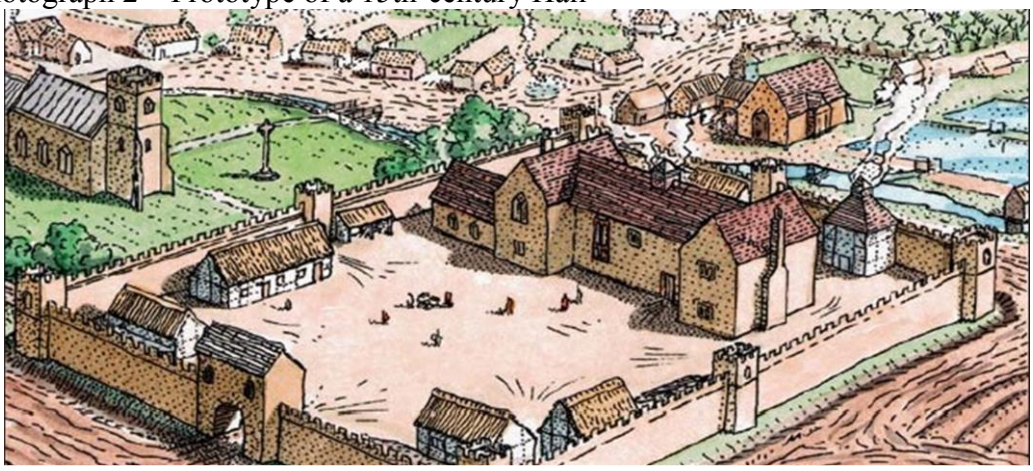
> Castle-building reflected the distribution of power and wealth acrossthe feudal hierarchy. The king was by far the most important builder,responsible for major castles in every part of the country. The richestand most powerful barons constructed several castles in different partsof their fiefdom, and moved their households regularly between them.Many more barons were confined to one castle, while the poorer baronscould not afford to construct a castle at all. The competition betweenking and barons, and between baron and baron, was to a considerableextent played out through the number and size of the castles that they controlled (BARRAS, 2016, p. 120).

In the High Middle Ages (1066–1216), the Church also had a major share of the land and it was common to see members of the clergy in control of granges. Those at the top of the ecclesiastical pyramid were responsible for administrating these manors and their tenants, managing and conducting arable and pastoral farming. As for the lord, he was a military leader who was supposed to be a knight, that is to say, a man highly skilled with horses and swords, used to going on constant journeys and welcoming as many guests as he could receive. He had a large household, including the servants and his military officers, who were treated as some sort of extended family. Thus, not only was the lord expected to be a kind upright nobleman, but he also had to throw feasts as to amuse his visitors in the 'great hall':

> For time out of mind, any English residence of pretension had been entered through a chamber of exceptional size that was covered by an open timber roof and warmed by a central hearth. These were the spaces where, by long tradition, the entire household was fed and public festivities took place (GOODALL, 2020. Available at: <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/the-great-hall-at-hampton-court-the-building-that-brings-the-visitor-closer-to-the-world-of-henry-viii-than-any-other-219593>. Accessed on 27 dez. 2022).

At this golden age of chivalry, at least three-quarters of the master's income were spent on supplies of food and drink, and to accommodate all these people, he could only possess a very large home. Therefore, "by the 15th century castles and manor houses had been expanded to form the basis of what we would term a country house" (YORKE, 2012, p.9).

Photograph 2 – Prototype of a 15th-century Hall



"On our first visit to the imaginary Exemplar Hall the date is 1400 and, after passing by low, timber-framed cottages and a few two-storey houses, you come to the imposing crenellated walls surrounding this manor house. As you turn in and pass under the gatehouse you enter a courtyard surrounded by an array of buildings, with household staff busy crossing between them. The old hall is in front of you, recognisable by its large window and louvre in the roof" (YORKE, 2012, p. 14).

As it could be seen in the previous picture, the proto-mansions of the 14th and 15th centuries, also known as courtyard houses or Halls, were often constructed on a large courtyard, facing several buildings and outbuildings. That's why still at Austen's time, many of the houses were called 'halls', such as Kellynch Hall, Sir Walter Elliot's ancestral estate in *Persuasion*. The dwellings of this period were built by local craftsmen with stones, and although the Romans had already brought bricks to the island, after their departure, the latter was only introduced again in the Late Middle Ages, "when it became a fashionable material for the finest buildings in the eastern counties" (p. 10).

In the Tudor period (1485–1603), the façade of the houses was not given great importance since castles and Halls had utterly domestic, administrative and military purposes. It was common to find majestic gatehouses and open courtyards in them, which were part of the legacyof the castles from the High Middle Ages. These opulent gatehouses now served mainly to display the manorial lord's fortune and power, for the role of castles was changing from that of major defensible structures and seat of the government to the "unfortified country houses which were coming to be built" (WHITE, 2012, p. 15).

Photograph 3 – The gatehouse of Hampton Court Palace, Richmond, 16th century.

Majestic gatehouse at the entrance to Henry VIII's favourite home. The towers and pointed archways are inherent to the buildings of the period. Considering that it is made out of brick, still a very expensive material at the time, it is possible to notice how expensive and extravagant the construction was.

© Hampton Court Palace, 2022. Available at: https://www.visitlondon.com/things-to-do/place/427279-hampton-court-palace. Retrieved 07/12/22.

There was also a major change concerning the importance and layout of the great hall, as Richard Barras points out:

> It was where the lord consulted his advisers, commanded his retainers, and entertained his guests. In the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, the great hall had been a self-contained wooden structure, surrounded by subsidiary buildings. Under the Normans, the great hall was initially integrated into the masonry structure of the castle keep. However, over time, it became the practice to build separate halls within the curtain wall, in proximity to other domestic buildings [...] It was employed by medieval monasteries to arrange their religious and domestic buildings around a cloister. It was chosen as a practical and convenient layout by a wide range of secular public institutions such as hospitals, colleges, and even inns. These established models provided the inspiration for the introduction of courtyard plans in buildings designed primarily for private residential use (BARRAS, 2016, p. 248 – 249).

In light of that, it is evident that through the ages, the great hall, which was the central point of entertainment in the Middle Ages, evolved considerably. Nonetheless, it still played a key role in the structure of the country house.

With the depopulation occasioned by the Black Death (1346–1353) and the decline of communal farming, up until the sixteenth century, there were alterations in the farming system:

> There was a widespread switch from arable to less labour-intensive pastoral farming – with sheep-rearing particularly significant – and the progressive enclosure of many open arable fields, as holdings became consolidated and landlords and tenants alike sought the opportunity to farm independently (WHITE, 2012, p. 21).

These agriculturalmodifications and the need for a more individualistic and independent way of living triggered a gradual need for privacy. Partly because of that, it is possible to notice that from the late fourteenth century onwards, things began to change not only in relation to the economy but also in terms of housing. During the English Renaissance (1485–1620), a lot of cultural, religious and political events happening in the country inevitably contributed to considerable transformations in the English landscape. Renaissance itself brought about a boom in new architectural styles.

Furthermore, since Henry VIII split with the Catholic Church, in 1534, and became the Head of the Church of England, monasteries started to die out. With their imminent extinction, parishes could be found all over the country in the Late Middle Ages. In general, the end of abbeys, priories and convents enabled the emergence of the local parsonages and private chapels that would be intrinsically related to the manor house. After the Dissolution of Monasteries (1536–1541), it is estimated that by the late 16th century, almost three quarters of the Church land had already been sold by the Crown. G.E. Mingay (2002, p. 124) affirms that

"the old monastic buildings, former granges and bartons, offered attractive possibilities for conversion to private residences, or at least suitable sites and ready supplies of building materials." Even though many of these properties were demolished to pave the way for more modern country mansions, many others remained and were renovated, which explains the fact that both in *Northanger Abbey* and in *Emma,* the grandest and oldest houses have ecclesiastical roots. Austen not only highlights the traditional primacy of this kind of construction, but also briefly refers to the Dissolution when heroine Catherine Morland faces the prospect of visiting Northanger:

> With all the chances against her of house, hall, place, park, court, and cottage, Northanger turned up an abbey, and she was to be its inhabitant. [...] It was wonderful that her friends should seem so little elated by the possession of such a home; that the consciousness of it should be so meekly born. The power of early habit only could account for it. A distinction to which they had been born gave no pride. Their superiority of abode was no more to them than their superiority of person. [...]**[S]he was hardly more assured than before, of Northanger Abbey having been a richly-endowed convent at the time of the Reformation, of its having fallen into the hands of an ancestor of the Tilneys on its dissolution**(AUSTEN, 1998, p. 110-111, my emphasis).

It is interesting to note that Catherine does not understand a lot about the origins of the building, consequently she tries to make sense of it according to the Gothic novels she is obsessed with. Much to her disappointment, although the house still presents Gothic characteristics, it is more modern than the heroine could have thought:

> An abbey! Yes, it was delightful to be really in an abbey! But she doubted, as she looked round the room, whether anything within her observation would have given her the consciousness. The furniture was in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste. The fireplace, where she had expected the ample width and ponderous carving of former times, was contracted to a Rumford,[3] with slabs of plain though handsome marble, and ornaments over it of the prettiest English china. The windows, to which she looked with peculiar dependence, from having heard the General talk of his preserving them in their Gothic formwith reverential care, were yet less what her fancy had portrayed. To be sure, **the pointed arch was preserved**—the form of them was Gothic—they might be even casements—but every pane was so large, so clear, so light! To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt, and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 128, my emphasis).

Nevertheless, she is somehow comforted by the fact that some of the rooms she sees look into the court, which, in ancient times, had been surrounded by the cloister:

> Large as was the building, she had already visited the greatest part; though, on being told that, with the addition of the kitchen, the six or seven rooms she had now seen surrounded three sides of the court, she could scarcely believe it, or overcome the suspicion of there being many chambers secreted. It was some relief, however, that they were to return to the rooms in common use, by passing through a few of less

[3] "A Rumford: a fireplace of the latest and best type, named after its designer Count von Rumford (1753-1814)." Information found in the "Explanatory Notes" section of the 1998 Oxford World's Classics volume *Jane Austen: Northanger Abbey, Lady Susan, The Watsons* and *Sanditon*, printed in the UK by Oxford University Press.

> importance, looking into the court, which, with occasional passages, not wholly unintricate, connected the different sides; **and she was further soothed in her progress by being told that she was treading what had once been a cloister, having traces of cells pointed out** (p. 146).

Photograph 4 – Forde Abbey, Somerset, 12th century.

A 900-year-old Cistercian monastery that remained almost intact until the 17th century, when a few changes were made in order to turn it into a private home. However, its Great Hall, the cloisters and some other rooms have been preserved throughout the ages.

© Clive Nichols for *Country Life* Magazine. 2018. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/nature/country-lifes-best-instagram-posts-2018-wondrous-nature-spectacular-architecture-men-red-trousers-190384. Accessed on 19/12/22.

The beginning of the Early Modern Era (around 1500) coincided with many other changes in the territory, such as: "the religious changes initiated by the Reformation, the secularization of landownership following the dissolution of the monasteries and the governmental changes occasioned by shifts in the balance of power between crown, council and House of Commons" (WHITE, 2012, p.15). As the urge for more privacy for the quintessential lord and his household grew, and with the rise of a more sedentary lifestyle, the layout of the great country mansions of the 16th century was progressively changing until the 18th:

> The open hall, with a scattering of lesser buildings which was common in the 13th century, had evolved by the 16th into a main house composed of a number of rooms, with service buildings and lodgings physically attached to it. The increasing size of the household also demanded more rooms, with the senior servants of the lord often receiving their own private lodgings. In many open sites where there were no existing military structures, the main building which was usually an open hall with private rooms at one end (the solar) and service rooms at the other would stand on one side of the main courtyard facing the gatehouse. A chapel and, in some cases,

> further private chambers, would run along the side nearest the lord's end of the hall, with guest and household accommodation [...], stables and a free-standing kitchen (due to the fire risk it posed) making up the rest of the complex (YORKE, 2012, p. 10-11).

According to Yorke,it is possible to notice that the manor houseof the 16th century saw the end of the open halls that were characteristic of constructions of previous centuries. The communal way of life shared by manorial lords, his tenants and the community was indeed coming to an end and "with its passing went much incentive to a lord to maintain an effective manorial administration. [...] The weakening of manorial ties facilitated the depopulation of weaker rural settlements" (WHITE, 2012, p. 238). As there was no longer the need to maintain two or three dwellings anymore, proprietors began to invest even more in their great houses, prioritising quality rather than quantity.

Peasants' fleeing the country and concentrating more and more in towns was another factor that contributed to a more domestic lifestyle, since the most important halls and manors from 200 hundred years back were no longer legally responsible for local administration. Nevertheless, as it has been previously explained, until the eighteenth century, the greatest part of the land continued to be concentrated in the hands of the most powerful aristocratic families in the country. Raymond Williams asserts that the landowning class that ruled the English countryside, "with their ancient or ancient-seeming titles and houses offered the illusion of a society determined by obligations and traditional relations between social orders" (WILLIAMS, 2016, p. 85-86).

In terms of architecture, it is relevant to bear in mind that there have always been slight differences from the manors in the Midlands and in the north and those in the south and east of the country. Little by little, the irregular medieval framings of the houses were evolving into more complex ones. By the fourteenth century, it was not yet uncommon to find the family crest near the front windows or above their doorway. Windows also evolved a great deal from the late 13th to the 15th centuries. Glass was so expensive a material that families used to take their window frames along when they moved out. It was only in the 16th century that windows became more accessible. Before that, only in the greatest rooms was it possible to find more opulent kinds of windows, similar to those found in monasteries. Actually, most of them were "simple and square-headed, with vertical supports called mullions and in taller versions with a horizontal bar called a transom" (YORKE, 2012, p.11). From the sixteenth century onwards, glass was used in oriels and bay windows.[4] This glass

[4] "The oriel by the 16th century usually refers to a projecting window from an upper storey [...] A bay window is one which rests on the ground and runs up more than one storey of the house" (YORKE, 2012, p.12).

was often decorated with symbols that accounted for the history of the families that possessed the country home. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Collins comments on the great number and high cost of the windows at Rosings, the palatial estate of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, his patroness:

> Elizabeth saw much to be pleased with, though she could not be in such raptures as Mr Collins expected the scene to inspire, and was but slightly affected by his enumeration of the windows in front of the house, and his relation of what the glazing altogether had originally cost Sir Lewis de Bourgh (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 137).

In the Elizabethan Era (1558–1603), the outside of the country houses started to arouse interest, for at that time their façades were made to impress. Since glass was more abundant and affordable, it was the material chosen to adorn the front of the houses, with their numerous and sumptuous tall large windows. Elizabethan architecture was still very much inspired by the English Gothic past. Brick was also becoming a more and more accessible material. Its diffusion triggered a new era of construction after almost a thousand years of stone building.In the sixteenth century, it was already possible to see country mansions of the most different and unique styles.

Photograph 5 – Burton Agnes Hall, East Yorkshire, early 17th century.

Originally a Norman manor, this Elizabethan house was renovated according to the Tudor Renaissance style. It is relevant to notice that the dwelling was rebuilt with brick, which had only recently been back in the country.

Due to the Classical influence of the period, proprietors were very much interested in symmetry, making use of columns and pediments (which were not always as well applied as those in Italy), and even a horizontal trim, also known as 'entablature' all over the building (YORKE, 2012, p. 17). More and more, gatehouses were being substituted by impressive entrances featuring arches and also heraldic symbols. Tudor arches, often pointed and made of stone or timber, gave way to the straight entrances found after the Jacobean Age (1603-1625), a period when:

> [I]n interior work there is considerable simple Tudor paneling and an occasional use of Perpendicular vaulting forms. Doorways, fireplaces, and the like are usually framed with classical forms, and both outside and inside there is a wide use of terms, pilasters, S-scrolls, and the type of pierced, flat ornament known as strapwork. Jacobean furniture pieces are usually of oak and are notable for their heavy forms and bulbous legs. It was during the Jacobean period, however, that the designer Inigo Jones introduced the first fully realized Renaissance classical style of architecture into England with his design of the Banqueting House, Whitehall (1619–22). Jones's style was based on the theories and works of Andrea Palladio, and Palladianism subsequently became a widely adopted architectural style in England.[5]

The gatehouses that were preserved for a few centuries – and also the towers and any other elements that alluded to the strongholds of the Middle Ages – indicated, above all things, the owners' age-old lineage. In spite of the small impact of Renaissance in England, it is possible to conclude that the movement had a considerable effect on Elizabethan and Jacobean properties. The influence of Classical architecture, however, would only reach its apex in the country by the late seventeenth century, at the time of the English Civil War (1642–1651).

It is interesting to notice that after the 16th century, the ancient aristocracy that had always been in possession of these monumental homes – such as the castles, the palaces and the manor houses – started to fall into decline. In this sense, the Civil War was important because it brought about a revolution that affected the hierarchy of the landowning families. That is best explained by the fact that after the war was over, Charles I (1625-1649), the then monarch, was executed, and for about 10 years, the country was ruled by a bourgeois government also known as the Commonwealth. With the collapse of the feudal power of this ancient nobility, a new social class was on the rise, that of the landed gentry:

> The more enterprising among the gentry families were able to augment their wealth [...] by purchases of land from crown and aristocracy at favourable prices [...] [I]t has been argued that the most important political effect of the English revolution was a shift of power *within* the gentry class, rather than a shift from aristocracy to the gentry as a whole. [...] It is highly unlikely that one of the great titled families of the time would have accepted their more modest gentry neighbours as their social

[5]Written by Britannica, the Editors of Encyclopaedia."Jacobean age". Article from 29/03/2012 found at <https://www.britannica.com/art/Jacobean-age>.Last accessed on 11/03/21.

> equals, even if they embraced the same farming practices (BARRAS, 2016, p. 242 – 243, italics in the original).

As we could see at the beginning of this chapter, the emergence of this new class of proprietors – the gentry – is of great relevance due to the fact that it is tightly connected with the stately homes of Jane Austen's world. These lesser gentry were mostly formed by prosperous yeomen, merchants, courtiers, lawyers and other successful professionals who were offered peerages by the Court.

Owners were discovering the importance of galleries and drawing rooms at the beginning of the sixteenth century. These big rooms, usually located on the first floor of the manor, substituted the great halls of previous centuries. As time passed by, domestic individualism enabled a separation between the areas destined for entertainment and the dwellers' private chambers. Mark Girouard affirms that the "traditional great hall declined in importance, becoming the entrance hall, while a separate great chamber on the first floor became the ceremonial pivot of the whole house" (GIROUARD apud BARRAS, 2016, p. 251). In the 17th century, the estate itself was no longer the only thing that concerned the well-off. They started to value the landscape and the surroundings of their residences, and grounds began to matter in such a way that a hundred years later, they were indispensable components of the English country house: "Aesthetic preoccupations with the external appearance of the housedemanded that the design embraced the complete ensemble of house,garden, and park" (PLATT apud BARRAS, 2016, p. 252). Still at this time, local craftsmen were being replaced by skilled architects who would travel all over Europe to bring and introduce new techniques to their state-of-the-art constructions.

It was in the 18th century that this monumentalbuilding of medieval origins reached its maturity stage. Hence, it is not surprising that it was the great age of the grand English estate. The gentry were making more money than ever after having successfully adapted to the agricultural revolution. As a consequence of this adaptation, they were exercising their power over a capitalist economy although they did not consider themselves capitalists. Therefore, they had even more resources to invest not only in the improvement of their prodigy houses, but also in land itself, for it was their most valuable asset. With the beginning of industrialization, the landed elite also purchased fine residences in London, where they would spend their urban season. The wealthier they became, the more they spent on the extravagant lifestyle they led in their rural mansions throughout the century:

> In these country houses, great and small, life was lived at its fullest. The zeal for estate management and agricultural improvement took the squire out on his horse at all hours of the day, and the ladies at home were as usefully employed, organizing

> and providing for their large households, and themselves busy with the needle or in the preserving-room. For weeks and months together large parties of visitors were entertained with much eating and drinking, with field sports, with music and literature, with cards and dice which sometimes brought ruin to host or guest. It was usual now for a country house to have a library proportioned to its size, filled with leather-bound volumes stamped with the family crest (TREVELYAN, 1948, p. 408).

As a means to avoid the return of the Old Catholic faith in the country, in 1714, the English Crown was passed to a prince of German descent, who turned out to be King George I (1714–1727). Curiously enough, three other Georges of the same Hanoverian dynasty succeeded him, including King George IV (1820–1830). The latter acceded to the throne as Prince Regent in 1811, for his father was mentally ill and considered unfit to rule. Thus, as of 1714, the eighteenth century in the isle was regarded as the Georgian Era and the beginning of the following century – that is, the 9-year span in which the prince reigned – is particularly called the Regency. Nonetheless, due to its distinctive architectural, political and cultural achievements, the Regency may also allude to the period from 1795 to 1837.

Since Austen was born in 1775, her novels are inevitably set in Regency England, whose houses were known as Georgian houses. In the countryside, at this time, the great rural mansions of previous centuries were being rebuilt and remodelled, inside and outside, not only to accommodate larger groups of people, but also to exhibit the items owners collected on their grand tour of Europe and to fit into the dominant Georgian style:

> For many a young gentleman the climax of his education would have been the Grand Tour, a journey primarily to Italy to soak up the architectural and cultural wonders of the Classical Age and invariably buy up and cart half of it back with him! [...] The main expense for this class was building a country house. A need for increased space, often to store all the artwork and sculpture shipped back from the Continent, and the demands of socialising were usually enough motivation. There was also the desire to impress guests with their refined taste for classical style but with the most modern of fittings behind the antique appearance. This resulted in large-scale rebuilding of thousands of country houses (most were refaced or extended; fewer were built completely from scratch due to the huge costs involved). The estate that it commanded came under the same scrutiny as landscapes were altered to mirror those of the classical world. They also provided a base for the new sports of foxhunting and shooting, in the process sweeping communities aside and breaking the traditional bond between manor house and manor (YORKE, 2016, p. 15-16).

In view of the previous excerpt, it is undeniable that there was, at the time, an urge for Classical architecture. G.M. Trevelyan highlights some of these aspects, giving us the impression that the Georgian country houses of the 18th century were pastiches that mixed the different interior and exterior styles from different ages. The renowned historian also corroborates the fact that much of what was chosen by the owners of the houses at the time was indeed influenced by their Grand Tour of Europe:

> [T]he mansions which the Eighteenth Century folk built for their own habitation were for the most part sound Georgian, sometimes with touches of the classical, such as porticos and pediments, which could however be made to blend not unnaturally with the Georgian style, itself of Renaissance origin. The more pretentious were in the Palladian or some other style that the owner had observed on his Italian tour (TREVELYAN, 1948, p. 407-408).

The beginning of the century was characterised by a Palladian revival, to the detriment of the Baroque found in the palaces of previous decades. The quintessential neo-Palladian façade was comprised of tall rectangular windows, a rusticated *piano nobile*[6] and a central portico, consisting of a triangular pediment supported on columns, and which "acted as an enormous storm porch marking the main entrance to the house which was reached up a grand staircase from below" (YORKE, 2012, p. 35). The country mansions of this period were also known as English villas due to the Palladian villa form they were strictly adhering to. Neo-Palladianism lasted for over 4 decades and was briefly replaced by a Late Baroque variation, also known as the Rococo style.

Photograph 6 – Chatsworth House, Derbyshire. Typical mid-17th to 18th-century manor.

Even though the building was purchased in the 16th century, it was completely renovated at the end of the 1600s. At the time, all fronts of the house were rebuilt. By the18th century, it was already a mix of different styles. During the period, its park and gardens were landscaped by a famous architect to have a more romantic layout, and the interior of the property was decorated with Palladian furniture and neoclassical sculptures.

© Chatsworth House Trust. Available at: https://www.chatsworth.org/visit-chatsworth/chatsworth-estate/house/. Accessed on 19/12/22.

[6]"Main floor of a Renaissance building. In the typical palazzo, or palace, erected by an Italian prince of the Renaissance, the main reception rooms were in an upper story, usually the story immediately above the basement or ground floor. [...] The term is also used in reference to the main floors of similarly constructed buildings of the English Palladian style of the 18th century." Found at: <https://www.britannica.com/technology/piano-nobile>. Last accessed on 29/03/21.

In the mid 18th century, the love of symmetry started to fade as the new architectural movement was no longer influenced by Renaissance or Italian Classicism, but rather by a Neoclassical aesthetic. This new movement was based upon the architecture of the Ancient Greek and Latin cultures. In the 1760s, one of the most renowned architects in charge of the design of neoclassical mansions was Robert Adam, an expert in ancient buildings. Therefore, Adam, and many other professionals, now had even more freedom to mix different styles in the construction and renovation of these large rural properties. More than ever, it was also possible to find a miscellany of objects and themes of different periods and origins pervading the interior decoration of these later Georgian houses:

> The *piano nobile* was eliminated by setting the main rooms at ground level; theemphasis on the central bays was toned down, for example replacing theportico with a semi-circular arched entrance; surfaces became plainer and flatter, with ornamental reliefs replaced by incised linear decoration; elaborate roofs with a cornice, dormers, and cupolas were replaced by an extra half storey. Strict symmetry was abandoned, as blocks of irregular plan were fronted with facades of differing design. Internal layouts were made more flexible, with rooms of varying shape arranged to facilitate circulation around the house. The choice of cultural influences became ever more exotic, with Gothic, Indian, Chinese, and Egyptian motifs added to the core classical corpus (BARRAS, 2016, p. 69, italics in the original).

Still during the century, apart from the Neoclassical, there were also Greek and Picturesque Revivals which culminated in the Gothic revisiting of the Regency era. Given that the neoclassical houses alluded to the buildings of the Ancient World, stone returned as the main material used to cover up the former brick layers. In light of all that, in the late Georgian period – the time when Austen was creating her oeuvre – it was possible to find houses of the most unique styles, featuring the age-old hall, an impressive entrance with Classical columns, seventeenth-century service rooms set in the basement, shallow arches above rectangular windows, panels, swags, castellated Gothic elements, formal gardens, amongst other things. It is relevant to mention that the service areas had always been detached from the private areas of the house, set either in the basement or in separate blocks of buildings found in courtyards sited at the back of the dwelling. Nonetheless, as it reigned for almost 50 years during the great age of the English country house, many experts regard the neo-Palladian style as the trademark of rural mansion design.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, in a particular moment, Elizabeth Bennet has the opportunity to visit Pemberley, Mr Darcy's monumental country home and the most famous rural mansion of all six novels. Even though there is no reference to the historical context in which the house was built, the fact that it was made of stone hints at its century-old origins. Claire Lamont

suggests that it "has been taken to be Elizabethan or Jacobean on account of its having a gallery, a long upstairs room in which it was common to hang pictures. [...] Whatever its age, Pemberley is experienced by the heroine as an eighteenth-century house whose windows allow proper appreciation of the landscape outside" (LAMONT, 2005, p. 227). Moreover, it also makes an allusion to the ancient lineage of the family that has possessed the referred estate for so many years:

> They gradually ascended for half a mile, and then found themselves at the top of a considerable eminence, where the wood ceased, and the eye was instantly caught by Pemberley House, situated on the opposite side of a valley, into which the road with some abruptness wound. It was a large, handsome stone building, standing well on rising ground, and backed by a ridge of high woody hills; and in front, a stream of some natural importance was swelled into greater, but without any artificial appearance(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 206).

Pemberley House is so magnificently built in an area where nature could not have been more favourable that as they talk about their friend's impressive estate, Caroline and Charles Bingley acknowledge it is indeed a very noble place. When Caroline Bingley argues that her brother should try to build his own dwelling by mirroring the style of Pemberley, Charles replies: "Upon my word, Caroline, I should think it more possible to get Pemberley by purchase than by imitation" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34).In view of all that, it is possible to assert that different styles of great country houses are described in Austen's novels, for as it has been seen throughout this chapter, most of the houses found in the 1800s were the result of centuries of transformations and renovations. This explains the fact that, still in *Pride and Prejudice*, Netherfield, the dwelling Mr Bingley rents near the Bennets, is both called 'Netherfield Park' and 'Netherfield House'. Daniel Pool reiterates that:

> Partly this was because an estate or house might have multiple architectural and social features, and it was also because, depending on one's point of view, the same dwelling was notable either for its social-political function, i.e., a manor house that embodied social and political dominion, or for an architectural characteristic, such as a large hall or a big central court (POOL, 1993, p. 196).

In view of what has been discussed throughout this section, it is also crucial to mention that the heroines of the novels, though, do not tend to inhabit the old houses. Even Hartfield – the estate where Emma, Austen's richest protagonist lives – is described as 'modern and well-built'. Lamont supports the idea that the writer's "modern houses are somewhere between the grandeur of the Palladian and what, in the case of lesser houses, we have come to call Georgian" (LAMONT, 2005, p. 228). However, we may infer that the older the properties, the more traditional the families that owned them were.

1.2 **Property, money and inheritance**

> Jane and Elizabeth attempted to explain to her the nature of an entail. They had often attempted it before, but it was a subject on which Mrs Bennet was beyond the reach of reason; and she continued to rail bitterly against the cruelty of settling an estate away from a family of five daughters, in favour of a man whom nobody cared about.
> Jane Austen, ***Pride and Prejudice***

As we discussed in the previous chapter, properties lie at the core of Austenian fiction, for in all her novels, she exceptionally portrayed a small world concerned with matters of money, inheritance and social mobility. Even though many of her contemporary critics judged her to be mainly focused on talking about marriage – and labelled her work as mere drawing-room fiction – the author was very much interested in what was going on in Georgian England in a political, social and economic dimension. The imminent Industrial Revolution, the consolidation of the British Empire and the rise of the bourgeoisie after the French Revolution brought about enormous changes that would affect the country in many different ways. A brief glimpse into at least one of her books makes us realise that the writer had no difficulty in capturing all this, although these transformations are depicted in a very subtle way and meant to be read in between the lines. According to Austen scholar Edward Copeland, her narrative not only seeks to convey women's condition and their relationship with money, but, especially in the later works, it also aims to "move through an examination of the economy as measure of **social morality**, as agent of **social disruption**, as source of **national identity**" (COPELAND, 2011, p. 128, my emphasis). Therefore, these three pillars shall serve as the base for what will be discussed in the next few pages.

First and foremost, the capability to approach the intricacies of money and morality is perhaps what makes Austen a genius at social commentary, for in her novels, these two

elements overlap one another. Indeed, when it comes to the writer's narratives, it is hard to dissociate property and family from land and economy. As historians Frances and Joseph Gies(2010, p. 16) point out in the book *Marriage and the Family in the Middle Ages*:"At the pinnacle of ancient, medieval, and early modern society, the wealthy aristocratic landholding family functioned as a managerial unit, and its control and exploitation of property were related to its household structure and inheritance customs."

Taking that into account, it is impossible not to think of the masterful opening lines of *Pride and Prejudice,* which have become one of the most famous quotations in the history of English literature: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (AUSTEN, 2007, p.3). With a lot of ambiguity, right at the beginning, we may notice the satirical tone and sharp criticism that characterise the text. Despite the necessity that the rich young men of the time have to find themselves a wife, what is at stake in this first passage is quite the opposite: because of their financial situation and limited means to work and provide for themselves, women were far more in want of eligible suitors than the other way round.

This fragment corroborates the fact that, to a certain extent, Jane Austen analyses the state of affairs of the country as she tackles the social morality that is embedded in the landed elite. It is not surprising that P&P[7] is regarded by many as a state-of-the-nation novel. Because the novelist ironically opens it discussing marriage arrangements, income and family law, the impression we have is that most of the issues related to the political economics of the period are put into this piece of writing. Although P&P, in particular, seems to represent a fictional investigation into Georgian financial order, all her texts function as a response to the national economy, given that:

> Throughout Jane Austen's adult life, the British economy was a disaster, and that the years of Austen's writing career were punctuated by a series of economic crises, including a doubling of consumer prices, an unprecedented national debt, four waves of recession, two banking crises, the debasement of coins, a major economic crash and a depression [...] It is certainly worth noting that, due to the Napoleonic Wars, the national debt seemed to be spiraling out of control at precisely the same time Jane Austen was writing her novels (CRAIG, 2010, p. 12-13).

Once again, it is important to bring to light that Austen's position per se contributed enormously to her acute depiction of the upper classes. We may not forget that she circulated amongst the wealthy; however she did not quite belong to them. As we know, her father, Reverend George Austen, was a breadwinner himself. Consequently, she knew only too well

[7] Henceforth, the title *Pride and Prejudice* will be replaced by its initials.

how the gentry lived, as well as she was aware of the customs and limitations faced by the middle classes. Regarding that, Copeland (2011, p. 128) further explains:

> Jane Austen does not write as a member of the landed gentry, or as a representative of the proprietors of such piles as Pemberley, Netherfield, [...], Kellynch Hall or any other of the imagined great houses of her novels, but as a member of [...] the 'pseudo-gentry': that is, a group of upper professional families living in the country – clergymen or barristers, for example, or officers in the army and navy, retired rentiers, great merchants – allied by kinship and social ties, and by social aspirations as well, to their landed gentry neighbours, but different in an essential economic condition: they do not themselves have the power and wealth invested in the ownership of land, but depend upon earned incomes. Nevertheless, they are gentry of a sort [...] The consequence of such aspirations, however, presents this class with a twofold economic burden: first, of course, the need to pay for the necessary markers of their genteel appearance; and, second, the need to soften the inherent weakness of their economic position - with the loss of the breadwinner, there is the loss of his income as well. This essential economic fact attaches itself firmly to Jane Austen's fiction and to her life.

Originallyentitled *First Impressions*, P&P revolves around the impending social deprivation Elizabeth Bennet and her four other sisters will suffer. The Bennet girls were brought up in a pseudo-gentry household whose property comes with strings attached. Since their parents, Mr and Mrs Bennet did not have a son, not any of them will be able to inherit Longbourn, the family home. Instead, it will be passed down to their closest male relative, who is a distant cousin. As it was common at the time, estates could be transmitted through the right of primogeniture and through entail. In English common law, "an entail restricted the heirs to whom property could be transmitted, usually with formulations that provided estates would descend to eldest or only sons, or, if the deceased had no living sons, to his closest male relative" (MARKLEY, 2013, p. 84). Most of the time, inheritance was entailed on men as a means to secure the family their age-old houses and titles. Hence, as critic Robert Markley suggests, a great deal of properties was passed on through patrilineal ancestry, that is, through male descent lines. In *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew*, Daniel Pool affirms that this custom came from Norman times and it was of utmost importance to preserve land, which for so many centuries was the basis of English economy:

> [T]he overriding concern of the great landed families who dominatedEnglish life was to maintain their influence and affluence downthrough the years by transmitting their enormous landed estatesintact, generation after generation, to their descendants. A way todo this had, in fact, been found, and it had two elements. The firstwas the right of primogeniture, which meant that all the land in eachgeneration was left to the eldest son instead of its being dividedamong all the children. The second was entail, which meant thatsufficient restrictions were put on what could be *done* to the estateby that eldest son to ensure that when he died *his* eldest son in turnwould inherit the estate intact [...] The idea was for the estate (in the sense ofland) to pass to one person so that it wouldn't be split up, with thegreat country house and the family name for which it was thematerial basis thereby becoming separated from each other (POOL, 1993, p. 90).

Still concerning P&P, to make matters worse, Mr Bennet cannot afford to provide his children with good dowries, which made a huge difference in marriage settlements in the 18th century. Due to the unpredictability of the girls'lives, what we see in the narrative is the sheer distress of a mother and her urge to marry her daughters offso that they may have a safe future.As their estate is entailed and their father does not make enough money to give them, only by marriage can Elizabeth and her sisters acquire land, the main source of income of the period.Unfortunately, as Pool points out, women could not come into their fathers' houses because once they got married, the property – and the family name associated with it – would be passed down to their husbands. Besides, male succession was a guarantee that the family line did not eventually disappear (POOL, 1993, p. 90).

Judging by the biting irony behind herfiction, we may realise how unfair this socio-economic order was in Austen's view. The writer makes it very clear as she approaches the trials and tribulations the Dashwood girls face right in the opening chapter of *Sense and Sensiblity*[8], which according to Thomas Keymer (2011, p. 35-36) is a novel about: "Exploitation, and exploitation in a variety of senses, emotional and social as well as economic. Strict patrilineal inheritance leaves Elinor and Marianne financially vulnerable, and the attrition is compounded by their brother's evil wife, who tips them into genteel poverty." This rigid kind of settlement is similar to the one underlying the Bennet estate because it is also concentrated in the hands of men.

The property situation in S&S slightly differs from P&P because in the former novel, a will reinforces and ensures patrilineal inheritance. When their father dies, the widow,the protagonists Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, and their younger sister Margaret,are nearly destitute and obliged to see their well-to-do half-brother install himself in their long-established home of Norland Park. In his death bed, the patriarch of the house had attempted to ask his son to support his sisters once he died. Mr Henry Dashwood knew there was nothing he could do to prevent the girls from losing the estate. Furthermore, he was not rich himself and had saved only a little. The reason why he managed to reside in such a majestic house was that its owner, his uncle, was a single gentleman. Henry thus was his collateral heir:

> The family of Dashwood had been long settled in Sussex. Their estate was large, and their residence was at Norland Park, in the centre of their property, where for many generations they had lived in so respectable a manner as to engage the general good opinion of their surrounding acquaintance. The late owner of this estate was a single man, who lived to a very advanced age, and who for many years of his life had a

[8]Henceforth, the title *Sense and Sensibility* will be replaced by its initials.

> constant companion and housekeeper in his sister. [...] to supply her loss, he invited and received into his house the family of his nephew, Mr Henry Dashwood, the legal inheritor of the Norland estate, and the person to whom he intended to bequeath it (AUSTEN, 2007, p.1).

John Dashwood, the son from Henry's previous marriage, is well-off because his mother left him a very large fortune upon her death. Apart from that, his wife Fanny also comes from a very rich family. However, we are informed that as they spent time together, the referred great-uncle,who was the true owner of Norland Park, grew very fond of John's little boy and decided to transmit the estate to him. Unnecessarily, the old man chose to perpetuate primogeniture instead of thinking of his less privileged unmarried nieces:

> To him, therefore, the succession to the Norland estate was not so really important as to his sisters; [...] Their mother had nothing, and their father only seven thousand pounds in his own disposal [...] The old gentleman died; his will was read, and like almost every will, gave as much disappointment as pleasure. He was neither so unjust, nor so ungrateful, as to leave his estate from his nephew; but he left it to him on such terms as destroyed half the value of the bequest. Mr Dashwood had wished for it more for the sake of his wife and daughters than for himself or his son; but to his son and his son's son, a child of four years old, it was secured, in such a way, as to leave to himself no power of providing for those who were most dear to him, and who most needed a provision, by any charge on the estate, or by any sale of its valuable woods (AUSTEN, 2007, p.2).

Therefore, the harsh condition of the Dashwood girls after their father's death can be seen as an acute comment on the severe laws of inheritance of the time. It also demonstrates that in that period, women should be provided for once they lost their husbands, especially because as far as money and property were concerned, it was not possible to trust in verbal promises:

> While the Dashwood women completely relied upon Mr. Dashwood's income in life, they were all left impoverished at his death. [...] His dying words to John revealed how he was trapped by the law surrounding his own life estate which could not reach to his own wife and daughters. In this illustration, Austen teaches that spouses have an obligation to each other in life and in death. In life, the law calls this marital support, sustenance, or maintenance that allows "one to live in the degree of comfort to which one is accustomed." In death, this support is called a spousal elective share, which generally insures that spouses can never be completely disinherited or left unsupported as a surviving spouse. [...] Mrs Henry Dashwood had not even the option to elect for a spousal share because all her husband ever possessed was a life estate in Norland which ended upon his death (KOHM; AKERS, 2020, p. 16).

Scholars Kohm and Akers assert that Mr Henry Dashwood's control of his baronial mansion ended when he died, for although he had had the right to live in the house, it never really belonged to him. Through the sisters' deprivation, Austen perfectly shows that even though John Dashwood does not really need to reside in Norland Park, in a world where manor houses mean absolutely everything, he and his greedy wife, who was not born into the landed gentry, would never give it up.

Moreover, from beginning to end, the sardonic tone of the text lies precisely in John's unwillingness to assist his own kin. Aside from Fanny's dowry and the money inherited from his mother, John also starts profiting a great deal from the Norland estate, which he has just succeeded to. It is not by chance that a bit before the conclusion of the narrative, when they are all staying in London, he consents to his wife's wishes to have two unimportant acquaintances over rather than accommodate Elinor and Marianne. Besides failing in giving them financial support, he does not help his half-sisters to find a place to stay. John Dashwood's behaviour serves to emphasise the injustices of the inheritance system in Regency England and to prove what a risky thing it was to be left at the mercy of a relative; in this case, a very close one. It is mainly their distant relations and friends who help Elinor and Marianne Dashwood throughout the story. In fact, John's materialistic and ambitious nature is even more evident later in the narrative, when he is so keen to improve his estate that he implies to Elinor he cannot spare any money. According to him, there is so much to be done to his grounds that he can think of nothing else. As she hears it, Elinor is mortified by his avarice:

> [H]owever, there is still a great deal to be done. There is not a stone laid of Fanny's green-house, and nothing but the plan of the flower-garden marked out.
>
> [...]
>
> Elinor kept her concern and her censure to herself; and was very thankful that Marianne was not present, to share the provocation (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 170).

Similarly, in *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot only has a life tenancy of Kellynch Hall. As he had three daughters and no son, and the house must be passed down together with his baronetcy, none of the girls will be able to have a share of their ancestral estate. In this case, a distant cousin, also known as William Elliot, will succeed to the property, which is inevitably attached to rank. Right on the first page of the novel, we come across Sir Walter's entry in his favourite piece of writing, the Baronetage Book. Despitenot being a genuine noble rank, a baronet was the highest title amongst the gentry. Taking that into consideration, from the outset, we learn that Sir Walter is obsessed with his social position. The entry reads:

> **ELLIOT OF KELLYNCH HALL**. Walter Elliot, born March 1, 1760, married, July 15, 1784, Elizabeth, daughter of James Stevenson, Esq of South Park, in the country of Glouscester; by which lady (who died 1800) he has issue Elizabeth, born in June 1, 1785; Anne, born August 9, 1787; a still-born son, Nov. 5,1789; Mary, born Nov. 20, 1791.
>
> Principal seat, Kellynch Hall, in the county of Somerset,' and Sir Walter's handwriting again in this finale: '**Heir presumptive, William Walter Elliot**, Esqu., great grandson of the second Sir Walter (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 3, my emphasis).

To begin with, the words ‘heir presumptive’ draw our attention to the kind of heir Mr William Walter Elliot is. In contrast to an ‘heir apparent’, the term refers to a provisional heir, and it is quite common as regards European monarchies and the nobility in general. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, there are two types of heirs:

> One who succeeds to the *property* of a person dying without a will or who is legally entitled to succeed by right of descent or relationship. In most jurisdictions, statutes of descent determine transfer of title to property if there is no will naming the legatee. In *English common law*, originally an heir was one who inherited real estate [...]One may be either heir apparent or heir presumptive during the lifetime of the property holder. The heir apparent is one whose right to inherit is indefeasible as long as he or she outlives the property holder. The heir presumptive is one whose right may be defeated by the birth of a nearer heir.[9]

As it has been explained, William Elliot is an heir-to-be, and he will only possess the house if Sir Walter does not have any son. It is important to stress that although a baronet was neither a peer nor a knight, the baronetcy was hereditary, and thus, if the property connected with the title were passed through the female line, eventually, it would no longer be under the Elliot name. Given that, at the beginning of the text, Sir Walter is a widower and his three daughters are already grown women, it is unlikely that he will have a male heir. Based on this, for a long time, the patriarch wished to marry his eldest and favourite girl off, Miss Elizabeth Elliot, to her cousin, not only to benefit his nuclear family, but also to secure the home of his forefathers: “She had, while a very young girl, as soon as she had known him to be, in the event of her having no brother, the future baronet, meant to marry him; and her father had always meant that she should” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 6).

However, much to Elizabeth and Sir Walter’s disappointment, in the past, Mr Elliot did not wish to marry the young lady, who has been mistress of Kellynch ever since the death of her mother. As he was far more interested in money than in coming into the title and the mansion, William Elliotinitially preferred to wed a rich woman of humble origins:

> Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth. [...] This very awkward history of Mr Elliot, was still, after an interval of several years, felt with anger by Elizabeth, who had liked the man for himself, and still more for being her father’s heir, and whose family pride could see only in him a proper match for Sir Walter Elliot’s eldest daughter (p. 6-7).

The previous excerpt shows that in the past, Mr Elliot was supposed to inherit the property, the rank and a wife, i.e. his distant cousin, whom he rejected regardless of her social value. Since he is, above all things, her father’s heir, William Elliot was considered the most suitable

[9] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "heir". Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/heir>. Accessed on 28/12/ 2021.

match for Elizabeth.As we may notice, kinship, lineage and inheritance are themes that are deeply explored in Austen's oeuvre. Even for the most oblivious readers, a brief glimpse of her texts confirms that in 18th and early 19th-century England, it is the eldest son who often inherits the family home. Hence, when it comes to second and younger sons and, above all women, the situation is still a bit more complicated. In a book entitled *Law, Land and Family*, legal historian Eileen Spring declares:

> From beginning to end, then, landowner's legal history is much to beseen as the effort to overcome the common law rights of daughters. Itwas heiresses who threatened to divide estates. It was heiresses whoserights threatened to leave titles bare of land. It was heiresses whowould alter the name tags associated with estates. And heiresses wereno remote possibility. From the entail, to the use, to the strictsettlement, what landowners were above all seeking was a means ofdealing with the problem that female inheritance posed (SPRING, 1993, p. 35).

In view of that, we may affirm that in P&P, Elizabeth Bennet's position, for example, is by no means better than that of the Dashwoods (S&S) or the Elliots (*Persuasion*). As much as Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are humiliated when they see their selfish half-brother get hold of their house, so is Elizabeth. In fact, the heroine is held up to ridicule when her mother tries to marry her off to a buffoon like Mr Collinsjust because he is the legal inheritor of their property. In fact, we are informed that the distant cousin had already had the intention of visiting the family to propose to one of the girls.He genuinely thought such an offer would soften the fact that he was to succeed to the house: "This was his plan of amends – of atonement – for inheriting their father's estate; and he thought it an excellent one, full of eligibility and suitableness, and excessively generous and disinterested on his own part" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 61-62).

As he comes to stay with the Bennets, MrCollinshears the news that although Jane, the eldest daughter,is practically engaged, Elizabeth is available. In this specific scene, the narrative is drenched with mockery, for we are informed that despite his previous intention of marrying Jane, the relative will now propose to the heroine: "Mr Collins had only to change from Jane to Elizabeth – and it was soon done – done while Mrs Bennet was stirring the fire. Elizabeth, equally next to Jane in birth and beauty, succeeded her of course" (p. 62). This excerpt highlights the objectification of the women of the time through the characters of Jane and Elizabeth Bennet. This was clearly triggered by their financial circumstances, which was strictly connected to Longbourn, their home. In fact, Mr Collins believeshe is doing the Bennets a huge favour by asking one of the girls to marry him. He knows quite well that the estate is lessa source of dignity, as it has been in the family for ages, than it is a matter of

sheer importance to their survival. Robert Markley sums it up as he comments that the Bennets' entail has a double function in the story:

> [T]he Longbourn state defines Elizabeth and Jane as a gentleman's daughters, and therefore deserving partners for wealthy men like Bingley and Darcy; and yet because it will pass out of his immediate family after their father's death, it also symbolises the temporal and generational instability of inherited wealth and, as significantly, the precarious position of women in a contractual society when all the contracts are written by men (MARKLEY, 2013, p. 85).

In light of that, it is important to stress that even though the Bennets do not really live in a manor house, their property settlement is extremely relevant to the plot of P&P, considering that it is the impending loss of her home that impels Mrs Bennet to see her daughters wed the wealthy owners of grand country estates.

Differently from the Bennet girls and the Dashwood sisters, a few women in Georgian England had the privilege to come into the family home. These ladies were also known as heiresses-at-law. According to the *CollinsEnglish Dictionary*, an heir-at-law is: "a person who *inherits*, or has a right of *inheritance* in, the real property of one who has died without leaving a *valid* will."[10]Since land was the main source of wealth in Regency England, the possession of properties was precisely the thing that made women most powerful. It also enabled them to choose a husband from the wide range of suitors that were mainly interested in their fortunes. Indeed, heiresses were the main target of junior brothers. Ever since the High Middle Ages, the common law rulesensured that when there were no sons in the household, one or more daughters were the heirs to their fathers.Eileen Spring traces it back to a time when wills did not exist:

> Where there was no son, the daughter was heir, her succession ensured because the principle of heritability of land had been established while the feudal system of land tenure gave no right of estamentary disposition. In other words, wills of land being then impossible, the common law heir succeeded to whatever land his or her father died in possession of (SPRING, 1993, p. 12).

Nonetheless, throughout the centuries, English landowners sought to reduce female inheritance as much as they could. As we have already seen, strict settlement was one of the means they found to cut women off from landed succession and deprive them of their rights. Since the eldest son would be the sole inheritor of any goods, whereas daughters would divide them equally, it is evident that the law favoured men to the detriment of women. Sadly, although a collateral inheritor – that is a nephew, an uncle or a male cousin – would not naturally prevail over the daughter, entails contributed to neglect female heirs. As it has been suggested:

[10]Available at:<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/heir-at-law>. Retrieved 24/09/2021.

> All the strict settlements made before 1740 that have survived in two county record offices have been analyzed as to their heirship policy [...] The fact of note, of course, is that more than three-quarters (78 percent) of them rejected the daughter in favor of the collateral male (1993, p. 17).

Thisexplainswhy Mr Bennet cannot not protect his children in P&P. The choice of patrilineal inheritance has not been made by him, but rather by his ancestors, and there is not much he can do to change it. If he had a male heir, when his son came of age, he, and only him, could break the strict settlement, as it is explained in the narrative: "When first Mr. Bennet had married, economy was held to be perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a son. The son was to join in cutting off the entail, as soon as he should be of age, and the widow and younger children would by that means be provided for" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 256).

Still in P&P,Lady Catherine de Bourgh – the snobbish aunt of Mr Darcy, the hero – stands out as representative of a minority of wealthy and illustrious upper-class widows. Unlike the Bennet girls, Lady Catherine has every right to live in the sumptuous Rosings Park, left to her by her late husband Sir Lewis de Bourgh. As the estate is not entailed, upon the death of Lady Catherine, Miss Anne, the couple's only daughter, is to inherit the house and her father's fortune. The medieval laws of inheritance made sure that at least a third of the husband's real property belonged to the widow. This spousal share was also known as a 'dower'. If they wanted, husbands could bequeath an even larger share of their properties to their wives or leave them some financial assistance, which was called 'jointure.' A wife's life provision was often related to the amount of money given by her parents in her marriage settlement, best known as 'dowry' or 'portion.' As Sir Hrothgar J. Habakkuk states:

> But there were important changes of substance in marriage settlements (...) The most significant of these was the change in the relation between the size of the portion or dowry which the wife brought with her from her father, and the size of the jointure, the annual income which her husband settled on her to provide for her in case she survived him. The size of the provision which a man made for his wife's possible widowhood was naturally dependent on the amount of money she brought into the family (...) In marriage settlements made in the early eighteenth century the portions are normally substantially larger, in relation to the jointures, than in settlements made a century earlier (HABAKKUK, 1950, p. 20-21).

A dower was often more valuable than a jointure and rarely was a woman granted both benefits. It was more likely to happen if the late husband had possessed more than one property, for example. Like the heiress Miss Anne de Bourgh, the children of a widow would have to wait up to the time of their mother's death as to come into their inheritance. Regarding women of high station, dowagers in particular, when their husbands died, most of them were merely resuming the land that had originally been theirs (SPRING, 1993, p. 39-41). This is probably the case of Lady Catherine, a widow-cum-heiress herself, considering

that her father was an Earl. It is interesting to notice that her 'Lady' title does not come from her husband's rank, but rather from her own origins. If the husband only had a life tenancy of the estate – like Mr Henry Dashwood, who was allowed to inhabit the house but not inherit it – it was vital that he made provision for his wife. That's why Mr Bennet and Mr Dashwood could not pass their properties down to their spouses. Unfortunately for the Dashwood widow, her husband could only leave her a few thousand pounds and household belongings. JackieMijares states that settlements involving the dower and the jointure likely to be destined to a widow were discussed before a marriage took place, and all negotiations regarding the welfare of the bride were included in marriage contracts:

> A widow's fiscal well-being depended largely on financial agreements made many years earlier. [...] Before a wedding took place, representatives of both families would meet to draw up "marriage articles"— settlement documents detailing the amount of dowry to be provided by the bride's parents, specifying when and how payable; maintenance for the couple until the groom would come into his inheritance, if he was not already independent; jointure provisions for his wife if left a widow; and marriage portions for children yet to be born. [...] In a culture of primogeniture, entailment, and strict settlements, a woman could not depend on a husband's regard alone to guarantee her financial solvency, because a man's ability to provide for his widow and children could be severely impeded by the terms of his inheritance, as Austen so vividly fleshes out in the Dashwoods and Bennets (MIJARES, 2017. *Available at* <https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol38no1/mijares/>*).*

When Elizabeth Bennet and the Collinses pay a visit to Rosings, it is not striking that the well-to-do widow criticises the fact that Elizabeth's home is under strict tenure: "'Your father's estate is entailed on Mr Collins, I think. For your sake,' turning to Charlotte, 'I am glad of it; but otherwise I see no occasion for entailing estates from the female line. – It was not thought necessary in Sir Lewis de Bourgh's family'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p.139). Ironically, the widow is quite aware that a single woman's fortune is no longer hers once she gets married. Nevertheless, Lady Catherine conforms to that social order since her main goal in life is to marry the sickly Anne to her equally rich nephew. As it has been claimed: "Lady Catherine [...], despite her criticism of male succession, destines her estate and her daughter for Darcy. It is typical of Austen's thought-provoking playfulness to put radical remarks into the mouth of a thoroughly conservative character quite as liable to misuse power as any man" (JONES, 2005, p. 271). Such an alliance would also ensure the marriage of the two long-established estates of Rosings and Pemberley. Therefore, it would contribute to the permanence of her family's ancestral land, name and status.

Chris Jones declares that the "only remnant of the 'dower' system of the previous century was the dower-house[11] on the estate where the dowager might spend her declining years unless, like Mrs Rushworth, she preferred the amenities of a fashionable town (where her jointure might attract renewed amorous attentions)" (JONES, 2005, p. 271-272). In *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Rushworth is a 'well-meaning, civil, prosing, pompous woman,' who happens to be the widow of a knight. She rarely has anything important to say or do, and her main concern in life is her son James. She is so financially independent that prior to James and Maria Bertram's wedding, she has the means to take her servants along and move to Bath, so that Sotherton Court would be free for the couple:

> Mrs. Rushworth was quite ready to retire, and make way for the fortunate young woman whom her dear son had selected; and very early in November removed herself, her maid, her footman, and her chariot, with true dowager propriety, to Bath, there to parade over the wonders of Sotherton in her evening parties; enjoying them as thoroughly, perhaps, in the animation of a card-table, as she had ever done on the spot; and before the middle of the same month the ceremony had taken place which gave Sotherton another mistress (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 204).

The dowager's urge to move out of Sotherton may be interpreted as a means to avoid the humiliation of assuming a lower position within her own family circle, since she would no longer be the lady of the mansion house. A similar situation occurs in S&S when Fanny, John Dashwood's wife, arrives in Norland Park: "Mrs John Dashwood now installed herself mistress of Norland; and her mother and sisters-in-law were degraded to the condition of visitors" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 5). However, whereas Mrs Rushworth could afford to reside in town, Mrs Dashwood went to live in her cousin's cottage, for there was no dower-house she could resort to.

The Dashwood widow's removal from Norland Park upon the death of her husband reflects the somewhat demeaning condition this 'family of females only' find themselves in when they are forced to move to a minor house. In fact, shifting from a manor to a cottage represents a significant change in the lifestyle of a household that is used to living in the quintessence of rural aristocracy, that is, the grand country estate. Sick and tired of her daughter-in-law's insinuations, Mrs Dashwood takes up her cousin's kind home offer and decides to live in what seems to be 'merely a cottage', which, at first, was 'not a plan which brought any charm to her fancy.' Before the girls even consider moving, their sister-in-

[11] "A dower house is usually a moderately large house available for use by the widow of the estate-owner. The widow, often known as the "dowager", usually moves into the dower house from the larger family house on the death of her husband if the heir is married [...] The new heir occupies the now vacated principal house." Found at: <https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/info/500310/historical_buildings_and_landmarks/6930/historical_buildings_and_landmarks/3>. Retrieved 20/12/2021.

lawdeclares that their sophisticated articles are too extravagant for any place they might reside in a near future. As they accept the distant relative's proposal and their furniture is sent to Devonshire, the greedy Fanny still thinks their goods no longer suit them, for it is implicit that as soon as they leave Norland Park, the Dashwood women are no longer a family of consequence: "Mrs John Dashwood saw the packages depart with a sigh; she could not help feeling it hard that as Mrs Dashwood's income would be so trifling in comparison with their own, she should have any handsome article of furniture" (p. 18).

A similar situation occurs in *Persuasion*, since Mary, the youngest sister of heroine Anne Elliot, moves from Kellynch Hall to Uppercross Cottage when she marries Charles Musgrove. As the daughter of a baronet, Mary was accustomed to seeing guests being invited to dinner parties and other special events at her father's home, but now she is the one who must find her entertainment at Uppercross Hall, the residence of her in-laws, located a quarter of a mile from Mary and Charles's living. Throughout the entire novel, Uppercross Hall is referred to as the Great House, and the fact that the great house is actually called 'the Great House' brings to light the social hierarchy between the two families who live on the premises. Imbued with the Elliot pride, the conceited Mary resents not having the precedence over Mrs Musgrove when she dines at Uppercross:

> Again; it was Mary's complaint, that Mrs Musgrove was very apt not to give her the precedence that was her due, when they dined at **the Great House** with other families;and she did not see any reason why she was to be considered so much at home as to **lose her place**. And one day Anne was walking with only the Musgroves, one of them after talking of rank, people of rank, and jealousy of rank, said: 'I have no scruple of observing to you, how nonsensical some persons are about their place [...] but I wish anybody could give Mary a hint that it would be a great deal better is she were not so very tenacious, especially if she would not be always putting herself forward to take place of mamma. Nobody doubts her right to have precedence of mamma, but it would be more becoming in her not to be always insisting on it' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34-35, my emphasis).

Considering that the residents of the Great House are now actually her family, it is extremely arrogant of Mary to request precedence over her mother-in-law. As if she were oblivious to her father's financial circumstances and eviction from the Elliot estate, Mary still thinks she is superior to the Musgroves because she is an aristocrat. However, she no longer lives in a mansion house herself, and until her husband inherits Uppercross Hall, she can only be the mistress of his cottage:

> Being the eldest male child, Charles is the heir to Uppercross, but while his father is still alive, Charles does not get to enjoy the benefits of his place, and he still comes second in the hierarchy of the Musgrove family. Mary, a baronet's daughter, is not happy to come second wherever she is, and she does not mind creating awkward situations to claim her position as first, even if she is first only to join a dinner party. [...] Mary need not insist upon these rules, as they were amongst family, and the fact

> that she did speaks of a desperation to maintain and mark her position, even if she married below herself when it comes to rank. [...] As much as she insists on her precedence over Mrs Musgrove, there is no denying that **the big house in Uppercross is not yet hers, she is the lady of the cottage, not of the large property** (SIMIONATO, 2016, p. 67-69, my emphasis).

Mary's urge for rank and her necessity to claim her position amidst the Musgroves is also depicted as soon as Anne arrives for her long stay at the cottage. As the two sisters plan on leaving the house and going on a walk, Mary asks the protagonist if she would like to visit Uppercross Hall, because, to her mind, their not coming to see Anne is almost an offence: "'Where shall we go?' said she, when they were ready. 'I suppose you will not like to call at the Great House before they have been to see you?'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 29). When Anne affirms she would not stand on the slightest ceremony with a family she knows so well, Mary replies: "Oh! But they ought to call upon you as soon as possible. They ought to feel what is due to you as *my* sister" (p. 29-30).

Likewise, Fanny Price, the impoverished protagonist of *Mansfield Park*, is slightly demeaned when her cousins decide to act out *Lovers' Vows*[12]as to pass the time, and she is seen as a very suitable 'lady of the cottage'. Even though Fanny lives amongst her relatives in her uncle's luxurious estate, she is an outcast from the outset, and her inferior position as a foster child becomes more evident when she is amongst the other young women around her. In this crucial part of the narrative, the Bertram children and their wealthy friends, Mary and Henry Crawford, decide to set up the referred play at Mansfield. Since Fanny makes it clear she will not participate in the theatricals, the other youngsters start choosing the parts they are most comfortable with. The role of 'Cottager's wife' is initially offered to one of the heroine's spoilt female cousins, Julia Bertram. Interested in the rakish Henry Crawford, who says her 'features are not tragic features', Julia feels slighted when it is suggested that her sister Maria be the protagonist and she play the more inferior character: "She had better do the old countrywoman: the Cottager's wife; you had, indeed, Julia. Cottager's wife is a very pretty part, I assure you. The old lady relieves the high-flown benevolence of her husband with a good deal of spirit. You shall be Cottager's wife" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 137). When 'the honourable John Yates' – a friend of Tom Bertram's and the person who proposed the theatre in the first place – hears this, he immediately retorts:

> '**Cottager's wife**!' cried Mr Yates. 'What are you talking of? **The most trivial, paltry, insignificant part**; the merest commonplace; not a tolerable speech in the whole. Your sister do that! It is an **insult** to propose it. **At Ecclesford the governess**

[12]*Lovers' Vows* is a 1798 English version of August Von Kotzebue's German play *Das Kind der Liebe* (1780), whose title literally means "Love Child". The adaptation into English was written by Elizabeth Inchbald, and it has seduction, adultery, sex outside marriage, illegitimate birth and classism as its main themes.

> **was to have done it**. We all agreed that it could not be offered to anybody else (p. 137, my emphasis).

By affirming that, on a previous occasion, when this same play was performed in another residence called Ecclesford, it was the governess who had to play the Cottager's wife, Mr Yates stresses the insignificance of such a position. In fact, to him, the mere idea of Julia Bertram's taking the part is completely absurd. Surprisingly, as the young lady turns it down, Tom Bertram – the manager of the theatricals – demands that Fanny act it out:

> '**Fanny**', cried Tom Bertram, from the other table, [...], '**we want your services'**. Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand; for the habit of employing her in that way was not yet overcome [...] 'Oh! We do not want to disturb you from your seat. We do not want your *present* services. We shall only want you in our play. **You must be Cottager's wife**' (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 148-149).

Tom's suggestion that Fanny should be Cottager's wife inevitably draws a parallel between Fanny and the governess at Ecclesford, hinting at the heroine's servitude and station in life, a small detail that cannot go unnoticed when it comes to a writer whose pen was drenched with irony such as Jane Austen. As we read the text, it is clear that the author uses this metalinguistic strategy of play within the play as to mirror the characters of the novel. Jocelyn Harris (2011, p. 52) reiterates that "Auten's theatrical trope unreels her novel's plot from the characters' reactions to one another", and most importantly, the actor-manager:

> Tom falls back on typecasting his inexperienced actors by appearance and status: Yates must therefore play the Baron because he is the tallest, Rushworth Count Cassel because he is a landowner, Mary Amelia because of her 'small, light, girlish, skipping figure', Edmund Anhalt because he will be a clergyman, and **Fanny** that 'very proper, little old woman' **the Cottager's wife, because Tom thinks her a 'creepmouse'** (HARRIS, 2011, p. 48, my emphasis).

Since it is undeniable that fiction and reality converge during the rehearsal of the play, and also in its aftermath, it is implicit that for Tom Bertram, the role of Cottager's wife would fit Fanny like a glove due to her humble background and her very own lesser position within the family. As she turns down the offer, though, it is Mrs Grant, wife of the cleric who resides at Mansfield Parsonage, who takes the part. Curiously, the possibility of Fanny's acceptance of the role not only alludes to the Ecclesford governess, but also to Mrs Grant. Ironically, Fanny does end up living in a cottage when she marries Edmund, who also becomes a clergyman, at the end of the novel.

Other aspects related to the aforementioned concept of jointure are also highlighted in S&S, for the sweet friendly Mrs Jennings(part of the protagonists' circle of acquaintances) is a widow whose husband made money from trade and left her a good income.In a conversation between Elinor and her brother John, the latter suggests that their friendship with the old lady

could be materially advantageous to Marianne and her. Nevertheless, Elinor's reply makes us understand that a widow's provision (paid annually) could be transmitted to her descendants:

> Her inviting you to town is certainly a vast thing in your favour; and, indeed, it speaks altogether so great a regard for you, that in all probability when she dies you will not be forgotten. She must have a great deal to leave. 'Nothing at all, I should rather suppose; for she has only her **jointure**, which will descend to her children' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 171, my emphasis).

In the novel, Mrs Jennings is a free independent woman who can move around as she pleases, besides being able to invite friends, such as the heroines, to stay with her at her house in the city. Even though she is not as powerful and noble as Lady Catherine de Bourgh, Mrs Jennings has a joie de vivre about her, for she is always cheerful and eager to please the young ladies in her social milieu with her company and the little things she can offer them. When the Dashwood girls and their chaperone reach the capital, we come to know that apart from being a local resident of one of the nicest areas in London, the widow makes sure they are treated in the best way possible in her abode: "The house was handsome and handsomely fitted up, and the young ladies were immediately put in possession of a very comfortable apartment" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 119). Unlike other widowed characters – like *Emma*'s sedentary Mr Woodhouse, for instance – Mrs Jennings is an active woman who is often keen to have fun and marry people off. Furthermore, her amiable generous nature and striking independence account for the fact that she not only embodies "the comfortable estate of womanhood" in Austen, but she is, too, a great representative of this special class of autonomous female characters, as Mijares notes (2017,https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol38no1/mijares/):

> A widow held a unique place among women in Austen's England. A widow's legal standing and resulting independence gave Austen license to use her widowed characters, including Mrs. Jennings, to convey a degree of feminine authority and freedom that would not be appropriate in married women. [...] Whether a woman was left richer or poorer, one tradeoff for losing one's husband was regaining one's self according to the law. No longer submissive to a husband, a widow could operate outside the patriarchal structure, and exert her own authority – a woman's authority. Austen uses this womanly authority to great effect in the gregarious, kindly Mrs. Jennings.

The cold-hearted and controlling 'Mrs Ferrars of Park Street' is another great example of powerful rich widows in S&S. It is only a little before the end of the narrative, during their urban season with Mrs Jennings, that the main female characters become acquainted with hero Edward Ferrars's mother,

> a little, thin woman, upright, even to formality, in her figure, and serious, even to sourness, in her aspect. Her complexion was sallow; and her features small, without beauty, and naturally without expression; but a lucky contraction of the brow had rescued her countenance from the disgrace of insipidity, by giving it the strong characters of pride and ill nature (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 175).

Despite that, Mrs Ferrars is constantly mentioned throughout the text, especially when Edward's marriage and professional prospects are discussed. From the start, we find out that the widow is John Dashwood's mother-in-law. Besides, it is implicit that Fanny's selfishness and love of money have to do with the way she was brought up by the matriarch. When Fanny talks to John about her mother's expenses, we realise that as soon as Mrs Ferrars lost her husband, she became in charge of her household's finances and arrangements, making the most important decisions and ruling her children as she wished. It is also implied that the Ferrarses are a rich family from London, but the origin of their fortune is unknown.

In the first chapters of the novel, Edward Ferrars falls in love with Elinor Dashwood as he comes to visit his sister in Norland Park. Due to his low spirits and uneasiness, Elinor understands he will not be able to marry her. It is evident that in spite of being the eldest son, the old lady's dominance over him is so astonishing that the shy and diffident Edward is always in fear of his mother and cannot make his own choices in life:

> He is very far from being independent. What his mother really is we cannot know; but, from Fanny's occasional mention of her conduct and opinions, we have never been disposed to think her amiable; and I am very much mistaken, if Edward is not himself aware that there would be many difficulties in his way, if he were to wish to marry a woman who had not either a great fortune or high rank [...] She knew that his mother neither behaved to him so as to make his home comfortable at present, nor to give him any assurance that he might form a home for himself, without strictly attending to her views for his aggrandisement (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 15-16).

Mrs Ferrars's expectations for her son included pursuing a career in law or in the military forces, instead of turning him into a landowner, as was the custom for eldest male heirs. That is best explained by the fact that although the family has an estate in Norfolk, they do not seem to be much a part of the tradition of landownership. Edward is so dependent on his mother that he cannot even claim his own rights. Indeed, throughout the novel, it is clear that if he does not marry a wealthy heiress, Mrs Ferrars will not pass the property to him. The arrogant widow is so autonomous that when she hears of Edward's engagement to the poor Lucy Steele, she inverts the inheritance order, depriving the hero of his rightful position and making his snobbish younger brother, Robert, her heir, as John Dashwood informs Elinor:

> [H]is mother has determined, with a very natural kind of spirit, to settle *that* estate upon Robert immediately, which might have been Edward's on proper conditions. I left her this morning with her lawyer, talking over the business. [...] 'Can anything be more galling to the spirit of a man,' continued John, 'than to see his younger brother in possession of an estate which might have been his own? Poor Edward! I feel for him sincerely' (2007, p. 202).

Even though Mrs Ferrars is but a small character, she plays an important part in Austenian fiction, for she is a widow who, in a minor scale, has the power to reshape male-

descent inheritance in her family. Thatis probably possible because, in this case, ancestral land and nobility are not attached to one another; inheritance thus is not tied to birthright. Margaret Doody comments on how Edward's mother benefits from the absence of primogeniture:

> Mr. Ferrars's property is not tied up for the eldest son; Mrs. Ferrars possesses not only the property with its income, but also the disposal of it. [...] How did Mrs. Ferrars gain such control? This widow's entire control over property signals that this family, though exceedingly wealthy, is not highborn. Their wealth has little to do with ownership of land. [...] There is no home estate. There is an estate in Norfolk that Mrs. Ferrars *might* give to Edward if he should marry to her liking; this, however, is not a family home but something more like an incidental investment, an acquisition rather than an inheritance. The Ferrars money must have derived originally from trade and commerce, and then from shrewd investments. Fanny Ferrars in marrying the heir of an estate is marrying up – no matter how substantial her dowry (DOODY, 2016, p. 267).

In a major scale, though, we may affirm that this evil conceited widow has a secondary yet significant role in that context, for, somehow, she attacks the patriarchy when she tries to adjust inheritance in what was supposed to be a patrilineal property.

In *Emma,* Austen portrays her only female protagonist who happens to be an heiress-at-law. Because of that, in all six novels, she is the only heroine who is not concerned about losing her residence. Emma Woodhouse – 'handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and a happy disposition' – is a self-deluded young ladywho exerts a lot of influence over the people around her. As Mr Woodhouse is a widower and her elder sister has already got married, Emma has been the mistress of Hartfield since she was twelve years old. As Mr Knightley, the hero, affirms, she has been the mistress of her house and of the little world she lives in. (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 28). Due to her high position in society, the spoilt heiress is the most powerful woman in her neighbourhood, for she seems to have the entire village of Highbury at her feet: "Highbury, the large and populous village almost amounting to a town, to which Hartfield, in spite of its separate lawn, and shrubberies, and name, did really belong, afforded her no equals. The Woodhouses were first in consequence there. All looked up to them" (2007, p. 3).Since *Emma* enables us to thoroughly discuss the connection between social status and inheritance and the country house, in the next few paragraphs, we will further concentrate our attention on it.

As everything in the small town revolves around the heroine's house, somehow this stately home is the heart of that microcosm of English society. The fact that Hartfield is the locus of her village reminds us of the communal role of the halls and courts of the High Middle Ages. Moreover, Emma's inclination to lead also alludes to their respective medieval manorial lords, for it is the one novel in Austen's canon that best depicts a close-knit

community. In parallel with the owners of the proto-mansions of ancient times, the protagonist's sovereignty over Highbury is validated by, and because of, the estate. Being mistress of her home allows her to have a domestic existence, which propels the leading lady into interfering with other people's lives. Nevertheless, above all things, it is the estate itself that confers on her the power to stand out in the neighbourhood. Concerning that, Brent Chamberlain argues: "In *Emma*, it really is the house, the spatial framework, within whichEmma's agency is enacted [...] This outwardly expanding agency clearly is evident in her matchmaking,but it begins as a function of spatial agency, within her 'mansion'"(CHAMBERLAIN, 2014, p. 84-85).

Given that her valetudinarian father is extremely indulgent towards her, Emma is used to acting as she pleases, and, as mentioned, one of her favourite pastimes is to play matchmaker for her acquaintances. What seems to be quite an inoffensive gesture, in fact, ends up becoming a dangerous game dictated by the social hierarchy that was ingrained in the gentry. As Juliet McMaster suggests, "the novel's heroine is one who specializes in social discrimination, and makes prompt though often inaccurate judgements about the social station of the people around her" (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 114). Miss Woodhouse's matchmaking makes us realise, from the start, how very conscious she is of her own privileged situation.

Curiously, Emma has arranged the marriage of her housekeeper and is determined to find Harriet Smith, 'the natural daughter of somebody', a proper suitor, but the idea of getting married herself does not even cross her mind. She knows perfectly well that she lives in one of the finest residences of the village and in her manor house, she has all the comfort she could ever ask for. A great example of that is a chat she has with Harriet about marriage in the first chapters of the novel, in which the former asks her if she would not like to settle down herself. The rich heiress replies, resolutely:

> I have none of the usual inducements of women to marry. Were I to fall in love, indeed, it would be a different thing; but I never have been in love; it is not my way, or my nature; and I do not think I ever shall. And, without love, I am sure I should be a fool to change such a situation as mine. Fortune I do not want; employment I do not want; consequence I do not want: I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield; and never, never could I expect to be so truly beloved and important; so always first and always right in any man's eyes as I am in my father's (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 67).

After hearing this, her friend argues that if Emma does not get married, she will probably end up like an old maid, which to Harriet is a most dreadful scenario. Emma, who is quite aware of her advantages in life, declares that a "single woman with a very narrow income must be a ridiculous, disagreeable old maid! The proper sport of boys and girls; but a single woman of good fortune is always respectable, and may be as sensible and pleasant as anybody else!"

(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 68).Apart from equally dividing Hartfield with her sister when Mr Woodhouse dies, she also has a personal fortune of £30,000 at her disposal, an enormous sum of money that could turn into an impressive dowry. Thus, whereas all the other female protagonists are somehow financially vulnerable and on the brink of being displaced, Emma is full of herself as she does not need to worry about marriage, money, social standing and, above all things, having a place to live. This is reiterated by Alistair Duckworth as he asserts:

> [H]er inheritance of £30,000 makes her a *bona fide* heiress in Jane Austen's financial scale – she differs from all Austen previous heroines in having no sense of insecurity, social or otherwise. At the centre of a world apparently unendangered by any possibility of discontinuity, Emma's boundaries are where she wishes to place them (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 148).

The first thing Emma does is to persuade the naive Harriet to turn down Robert Martin's proposal. Even though Harriet tells her Mr Martin leads a very comfortable life, Emma dissuades her from marrying him because she knows he is a tenant at the Abbey-Mill Farm, located on Mr Knightley's land. In spite of not knowing Mr Martin's character at all, Emma immediately suggests that her dear friend could do better, for even the slightest connection with a farmer like him might be humiliating to her:

> A young farmer, whether on horseback or on foot, is the very last sort of person to raise my curiosity. The yeomanry are precisely the order of people with whom I feel I can have nothing to do. [...] 'I wish you may not get into a scrape, Harriet, whenever he does marry – I mean, as to being acquainted with his wife; [...] The misfortune of your birth ought to make you particularly careful as to your associates. There can be no doubt of your being a gentleman's daughter, and you must support your claim to that station by everything within your own power, or there will be plenty of people who would take pleasure in degrading you' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 21 – 22).

Despite the minor appearance a yeoman like Mr Martin makes, his role is extremely important to the story in that it exposes the heroine's deeply rooted prejudice againsthis social position and her controversial views on class distinctions. She knows nothing about Harriet's birth, only that she is apparently an orphan raised at a boarding school nearby, but immediately assumes she will be marrying down if she accepts the young man's offer. Moreover, the very fact that he is the only farmer in theoeuvre may be seen as a means to give voice to a group of people who were certainly not a minority, and whose labour was the base for the English economy at the time. Because *Emma* is a narrative centred on a community, it makes room for a character that represents a farmstead in a world that is not just composed of manor houses, parishes and adjacent cottages. On the contrary, like many other farms around the country, Mr Martin is inhabitant of a place whose main activity sustains grand estates, such as Mr Knightley's ancient and aristocratic Donwell Abbey. His portrayal also indicates that although

the writer seemed very much concerned with the gentry, the lower working classes were not out of her sight. To corroborate that, Jones asserts:

> The landed aristocracy and gentry were linked with the commercial activity that raised the rent of their holdings but also produced alternative centres of society and sources of social distinction. [...] Highbury, part of the vast estate owned by George Knightley, is a less extreme instance of the modern integration of commercial, professional and agricultural enterprise. Emma is old-fashioned and defensive in her snobbish rejection of the Coles' social claims and her dismissal of Robert Martin as a 'yeoman', traditionally the highest among the non-gentry but landed ranks, is particularly wide of the mark. A substantial tenant co-operating with an improving landlord, Martin would probably have the long lease and capital to make his tenure secure and justify Knightley's epithet 'gentleman farmer' (JONES, 2005, p. 273-274).

Besides Mr Martin, William Larkins is another minor working-class character depicted in the text. As with theyeoman, the presence of Mr Knightley's bailiff serves to emphasise that the hero is in essence a landowner, delineated as the perfect English gentleman. In contrast with Mr Woodhouse, for instance, whose wealth came from other sources and whose 'landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable,' George Knightley actually lives out of the land. As an ideal landlord, he not only cares about the income that comes from his property but he also has responsibilities for his tenants and employees, whom he relies on. This sense of duty can be seen in the way Mr Knightley tries to protect Robert Martin from Emma's attacks and in his tight relationship with William.

In a particular moment, the landowner refers to William Larkins when he talks about the abbey's records of money, which only reinforces his role as a squire in a village that was still fundamentally dependent on agriculture: "Oh, yes! I must be there; I could not refuse;and I will keep as much awake as I can; but I would rather be at home, lookingover William Larkins's week's account; much rather, I confess" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 206). Donwell Abbey is not as modern as Hartfield, for Mr Knightley does not seem to care much about renovating the home of his forefathers, with its 'old neglect of prospect,' as he is concerned with land improvement. This is illustrated in a conversation he has with his younger brother:

> As a magistrate, he had generally some point oflaw to consult John about, or, at least, some curious anecdote to give; and as afarmer, as keeping in hand the home-farm at Donwell, he had to tell what everyfield was to bear next year, and to give all such local information as could notfail of being interesting to a brother, whose home it had equally been the longestpart of his life, and whose attachments were strong. The plan of a drain, thechange of a fence, the felling of a tree, and the destination of every acre forwheat, turnips, or spring corn, was entered into with as much equality of interestby John as his cooler manners rendered possible (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 79).

The very fact that George Knightley has a tenant farmer like Robert Martin indicates that his fields are enclosed. With her usual subtlety, Austen touches on the Enclosure Acts in

the UK and the inevitable changes in the countryside, once again approaching the political and socio-economic affairs of her time. As it has been previously discussed, in the Middle Ages, lowland England already presented a few established communities with their manor houses and "hierarchy of manorial officials, farmers and cottagers" (MINGAY, 2002, p. 24).It is common fact that large tracts of land have, since then, always been in the hands of those who occupy the top of the pyramid of rural society and who, in *Emma*, are represented by George Knightley's landed family. In *English Social History*, Trevelyan claims that ever "since the Restoration there had been a rapidly increasing movement to accumulate land in large compact estates" and "the magnates of the realm [...] owned a much larger [...] acreage of England in 1760" (TREVELYAN, 1948, p. 380–381).

These magnates were, in fact, the great landowners who ended up profiting the most with the transformations that the English countryside would undergo, and above all, with the agricultural revolution. Trevelyan remarks that in the period between 1760 and 1820, private Acts of Parliament (the aforementioned Enclosure Acts) were passed imposing the enclosure of the common fields and the consequent improvement of the land, which only contributed to strengthen the power of the landed elite. With the enclosed fields, the peasantry had to fit in a new economic and social order. More than ever, large landowners were consolidating their estates and by 1820, "the open fields had already turned into the chessboard pattern of fenced fields which has ever since been the hall-mark of the English landscape" (TREVELYAN, 1948, p. 379). A great representative of this class of wealthy gentlemen who were extremely eager to consolidate their great rural mansions isthe greedy John Dashwood from S&S. Another landowner-cum-farmer himself, John tells Elinor of his progress in Norland Park:

> The **enclosure of Norland Common**, now carrying on, is a most serious drain. And then I have made a little purchase within this half-year – East Kingham Farm, you must remember the place, where old Gibson used to live. The land was so very desirable for me in every respect, so immediately adjoining my own property, that I felt it my duty to buy it (AUSTEN, 2007, 168-170, my emphasis).

Enclosures are also part of the romantic landscape of *Persuasion*, as the heroine Anne Elliot walks through the fields on her way to the modest ancient estate of Winthrop:

> Winthrop, however, or its environs – for young men are, sometimes to be met with, strolling about near home – was their destination; and after another half mile of gradual ascent through **large enclosures**, where the ploughs at work, and the fresh made path spoke the farmer counteracting the sweets of poetical despondence, and meaning to have spring again, they gained the summit of the most considerable hill, which parted Uppercross andWinthrop, and soon commanded a full view of the latter, at the foot of the hill on the other side. Winthrop, without beauty and without dignity, was stretched before them; an indifferent house, standing low, and hemmed in by the barns and buildings of a farm-yard (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 65, my emphasis).

Still regarding *Emma*, throughout the narrative, we see that Mr Knightley pays frequent calls on the Woodhouses. However, it is only when Emma visits his monastic home, located a mile away from Highbury, that the self-important heroine becomes aware of her very own consequence. Despite knowing she is the richest woman in the village,Emma gets completely impressed as she beholds the grandeur of Donwell Abbey, which is a much larger, older and more imposing estate than Hartfield:

> She felt all the honest pride and complacency which her alliance with the present and future proprietor could fairly warrant, as she viewed the respectable size and style of the building [...] its ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, of which the Abbey, with all the old neglect of prospect, had scarcely a sight - and its abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up. The house was larger than Hartfield, and totally unlike it [...]It was just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was; Emma felt an increasing respect for it, as the residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 289).

As she compares both houses, Emma acknowledges that the Knightleys are even more noble and respectable than the Woodhouses. Therefore, Donwell is one of the few things in the novel that makes Emma feel slightly less prominent than she is. The abbey's enormous size, its historical background and the fact that it has been in George's family since the Tudor period makes the protagonist realise he is above her station. Apart from that, Knightley's refusal to renovate the house (and not the land) itself symbolises the maintenance of the old aristocratic order. In contrast, the modernity of Hartfield, whose owner lives off investments, represents the new order embodied in the pseudo-gentry. Duckworth affirms that in Austen, much like in the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, there is also strong criticism of the materialistic selfish or even incompetent landowner (epitomised by *Northanger Abbey's* General Tilney and *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot, for example). Nonetheless – as the expert points out in *The Improvement of the Estate* – it is presented in a different way:

> [A]ppearing either in the form of a rational/progressive or a traditional/moral argument. In this context, Austen seems to me to belong to the latter camp; and to the considerable extent that Mr Knightley is represented as an exemplary landowner he provides [...] Austen's conservative response to the landlord question (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. xvi).

In fact, General Tilney is so concerned with money and material possessions that he ends up becoming an extremely extravagant landowner, whose modifications significantly change the traditional aspect of his ancient property.In a more positive way, it is implicit that Mr Knightley's connection with the land validates the 'true gentility' of the squire, for his way of living as a gentleman farmer is part of his heritage. It is not by chance that Donwell typifies the quintessential English estate. In light of that, it has been suggested that:

> Donwell Abbey in *Emma*, with its low and sheltered situation, 'old neglect of prospect,' irregular house, ample gardens andabundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashionnor extravagance had rooted up', is the most chauvinistic expressionof her social ideal. From Donwell's grounds, the Abbey-Mill farmcan be seen: it is 'a sweet view... English verdure, English culture, English comfort'(*E,* 3:6). Mr Knightley takes his Christian name from England's saint, and his surname implies traditional valuesgoing back to feudal times. But, while he keeps improvements outof his gardens, he pursues them in his fields; like his tenant farmer,Robert Martin, he reads the Agricultural Reports, and with hisbrother discusses questions of drainage and crop-rotation. Donwellcombines commitment to a traditional community (Knightleyconsults his neighbours before moving a path) with agricultural improvement (DUCKWORTH, 2005, p. 284).

In another episode, Donwell Abbey is in the core of Emma's controversial thoughts and feelings again. As she is almost certain that Mr Knightley is going to wed Jane Fairfax, the heroine mistakes him for his grand house as she is unaware she is actually in love with the hero. Because of that, when she hears rumours of a relationship between the hero and Miss Fairfax, Emma feels deeply distressed. As Mr Knightley is a single gentleman and his younger brother John is married to the heroine's sister, Emma blames the association on the fact that her nephew Henry would no longer be the heir to the abbey:

> Mr Knightley! Mr Knightley must not marry! You would not have little Henry cut out from Donwell? Oh no, no; Henry must have Donwell. I cannot at all consent to Mr Knightley's marrying [...] I could not bear to have Henry supplanted. Mr Knightley marry! No, I have never had such an idea, and I cannot adopt it now (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 178).

By mistaking Knightley for Donwell Abbey, Emma demonstrates how the gentleman is so inherently connected with his property, or rather, more than just connected, his being represented by the abbey shows that Donwell is Knightley and Knightley is Donwell. Like Elizabeth Bennet during her visit to Pemberley, Emma's fear of not having a part in the house, in fact, means she is afraid of losing its owner. So much so that when Mr Knightley proposes to her, Emma does not at all care about her nephew's interests:

> It is remarkable, that Emma, in the many, very many, points of view in which she was now beginning to consider Donwell Abbey, was never struck with any sense of injury to her nephew Henry, whose rights as heir-expectant had formerly been so tenaciously regarded. Think she must of the possible difference to the poor little boy; and yet she only gave herself a saucy conscious smile about it, and found amusement in detecting the real cause of that violent dislike of Mr. Knightley's marrying Jane Fairfax, or anybody else (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 360-361).

Emma's realisation that she utterly misjudged people through her matchmaking only comes long after she tries to pair Harriet Smith off with Mr Elton, the local vicar. When the clergyman tells her he is not interested in Harriet, but in Emma herself, the heroine gets completely shocked. Indeed, she is so proud of being an heiress-at-law that she finds Mr Elton most arrogant and insolent for having proposed to her:

> Perhaps it was not fair to expect him to feel how very much he was her inferior in talent, and all the elegancies of mind. The very want of such equality might prevent his perception of it; but he must know that in fortune and consequence she was greatly his superior. **He must know that the Woodhouses had been settled for several generations at Hartfield, the younger branch of a very ancient family, and that the Eltons were nobody**. The landed property of Hartfield certainly was inconsiderable, being but a sort of notch in the Donwell Abbey estate, to which all the rest of Highbury belonged; but their fortune, from other sources, was such as to make them scarcely secondary to Donwell Abbey itself, in every other kind of consequence; and the Woodhouses had long held a high place in the consideration of the neighbourhood which Mr. Elton had first entered not two years ago, to make his way as he could, without any alliances but in trade, or anything to recommend him to notice but his situation and his civility (2007, p. 108, my emphasis).

Besides thinking the vicar was very bold to have even considered forming an alliance with her (due to their different backgrounds), Emma is astonished when he says he has never had the intention of marrying Harriet whatsoever. As he affirms he is neither 'so much at a loss' nor so desperate to be married as to propose to Harriet Smith, somehow Emma notices the money-driven and conceited Mr Elton was mainly interested in her fortune. Indeed, later in the narrative, he shows up in Hartfield after a long absence only to reveal he has married a Miss Hawkins and her £10,000. Mr Elton is the typical social climber of Austenian fiction, but Emma is quite clever as regards her inheritance.

In *Mansfield Park*, antagonist Mary Crawford is another wealthy heiress who, just like Emma, is perfectly conscious of her position as one of the few beautiful independent well-off young women around. Mary and her brother Henry are Mrs Grant's half-siblings. The latter, being the wife of the Reverend Dr Grant, lives in the Mansfield parsonage, located a bit less than a mile away from the manor house that characterises the novel. When brother and sister come for a long stay at the parsonage, we find out they have been raised by their uncle, a rich and brutal admiral, and aunt in London and that Miss Crawford has a great deal of money:

> Such was the state of affairs in the month of July; and Fanny had just reached her eighteenth year, when the society of the village received an addition in the brother and sister of Mrs Grant, a Mr and Miss Crawford, the children of her mother by a second marriage. **They were young people of fortune. The son had a good estate in Norfolk, the daughter twenty thousand pounds.** [...] The arrival, therefore, of a sister whom she had always loved, and now hoped to retain with her as long as she remained single, was highly agreeable; and her chief anxiety was lest Mansfield should not satisfy the habits of a young woman who had been mostly used to London (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 39, my emphasis).

Although it is not mentioned whether or not Miss Crawford will have a share of the house of Hill Street, where she was brought up, her dowry can certainly make for a good marriage. For the record, followingthe siblings' arrival, Mrs Grant presents them with information about the young inhabitants of the Park. As it was expected, their sister shows them the prospects of Henry marrying the single Miss Julia Bertram and Mary forming an

attachment to Tom, for ‘the eldest son of a baronet was not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds.’ As soon as she hears it, the apparently charismatic Mary immediately considers the possibility of bonding with the heir to the Mansfield estate:

> She acknowledged, however, that the Mr. Bertrams were very fine young men, that two such young men were not oftenseentogether even in London, and that their manners, particularly those of the eldest, were very good. *He* had been much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred; **and indeed, his being the eldest was another strong claim**. She had felt an early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest best.She knew it was her way (1994, p. 47, my emphasis, italics in the original).

Evidently, Mary aims to get married due to the social and financial advantages she could obtain from it, but she has controversial views on marriage itself. Because of her aunt’s unhappy relationship with the admiral, at first she affirms matrimony is a mere transaction where people are bound to deceive each other. A few chapters later in the narrative, she says she would ‘have everybody marry if they can do it properly.’ In spite of initially thinking Tom Bertram would be a very appropriate husband for her, and if she married him, she’d be marrying well, Miss Crawford gets interested in his younger brother – Edmund, the hero – and vice versa. However, in Georgian England, second sons like Edmund had few options when it came to choosing a profession. This is corroborated in the narrative when Miss Crawford implies that ‘there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son’ and Edmund tells her that in being an exception, he must find a way to earn a living. Hence, by picking Edmund, Mary would be giving up on the status that came with being the wife of a future baronet. Once again, we may see a special emphasis on the unfair system of inheritance that is based on primogeniture, for birthright gives the elder son prestige over his junior brother, who is often despised. As Juliet McMaster argues:

> One might suppose that the siblings in a single family would be almost by definition of the same rank. But even here there are marked differences in status, not only between sons and daughters, but also between one son and another. A younger son like [...] Edmund Bertram,who has his living to earn, is sympathetically treated, and becomes a suitable partner for the heroine.Mary Crawford has every intention of marrying an *elder* brother, and is so discontented with herself for falling in love with Edmund by mistake (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 115-116, italics in the original).

Ironically enough, not once but twice does Austen give life to a male protagonist that is a second son.

Given that younger brothers would not be able to inherit the family property, they could only join the army or the navy, pursue a career in Law and become a politician or, as was the custom, join the clergy as to be responsible for a parish church and live on tithes in a decent cottage or parsonage with their family. Le Faye (2002, p. 46) also argues that a great deal of the younger sons of the gentry and of the aristocracy went to the West Indies to work

on plantations and make fortunes. On top of all that, there was also the hope of marrying a rich heiress. David Selwyn remarks that:

> Younger sons of gentlemen, who could not expect to inherit an estate, had to be found a profession. Of the ones open to them the army was the least likely to provide an adequate income. [...] Wealthy officers, whether in the regular army or in the militia, are rare in Jane Austen; [...] A career in the navy was, particularly in time of war, far more likely to enable a young man to make his fortune. [...] The profession most in evidence in Jane Austen's novels is the church; there are clergymen in each of her books, and in three of them the heroine marries one. [...] To young men without private resources the law and medicine both offered secure, and to a certain extent respectable, prospects; in each, however, there were marked social distinctions between the different branches of practice. [...] The same was very often true of the medical profession (SELWYN, 2011, p. 149-154).

In P&P, Colonel Fitzwilliam – Mr Darcy's cousin and the second son of an earl – pursues a military career in order to make a living. Although he seems to be delighted with Elizabeth Bennet whilst she is staying at Mr Collins's house, he explains to the heroine that he cannot afford to marry for love: "I may suffer from want of money. Younger sons cannot marry where they like" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 158). In a very ironic way, Elizabeth retorts: "**Unless where they like women of fortune, which I think they very often do**. [...] And pray, what is the usual price of an earl's younger son? Unless the elder brother is very sickly, I suppose you would not ask above fifty thousand pounds" (p. 158, my emphasis).

Back in *Mansfield Park*, Miss Crawford has such dissatisfaction with her feelings for Edmund Bertram that she is astonished to discover he is going to be ordained. In fact, the anti-heroine tries to persuade him not to do it several times. In the first one, for instance, she can barely hide her indignation:

> Miss Crawford's countenance, as Julia spoke, might have amused a disinterested observer. She looked almost aghast under the new idea she was receiving. Fanny pitied her. 'How distressed she will be at what she said just now,' passed across her mind. 'Ordained!' said Miss Crawford; '**what, are you to be a clergyman?**' 'Yes; I shall take orders soon after my father's return – probably at Christmas' (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 90, my emphasis).

In another scene, the unreserved Mary tells him to pursue the law instead: "'I am just as much surprised now as I was at first that you should intend to take orders. You really are fit for something better. Come, do change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law'" (1994, p. 95). Miss Crawford is literally affirming that being a clergyman is neither an important nor a profitable career, even though most junior brothers coming from rich families were well-educated gentlemen. The lead character in *Mansfield Park*, like other Austenian heroes, for instance, is an Oxford graduate. Besides, it is implicit that when an aristocratic younger son like Edmund decides to be ordained, he is somehow resigning his position within his social class, for the Church cannot grant him visibility or status: "For what is to be done in the

church? Men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 93). By suggesting he chooses the law, the metropolitan antagonist is also attacking the core beliefs and values of a man who was raised in a mansion set in the countryside: "When Mary Crawford urges Edmund to 'go into the law,' she probably hopes he would become a London barrister, the more distinguished branch of the legal profession [...] Austen's sympathies are clearly with Edmund in his defence of his choice [...] as the more honourable calling (MCMASTER, 2011, p.118).

Disappointed, Miss Crawford tells Edmund to pursue a career in politics and suggests he 'should go into the army years ago.' Despite his father being a Member of Parliament, the junior brother also refuses it and gives her a wry answer: "I believe I must wait till there is an especial assembly for the representation of younger sons who have little to live on" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 216). Near the end of the text, Mary finds out the careless Tom Bertram has fallen off a horse and got severely ill. The incident serves to reveal her materialistic values and self-centred nature as she wishes Tom dead so that Edmund may succeed to the title and to his father's properties. In view of that, it has been suggested that income serves as the 'leading economic trope' of the narrative, for the yearly interest on Mary's dowry alone would be higher than the money Edmund would make in the Church. Thus, morally speaking, Miss Crawford's potential choice of Edmund is one of the most crucial questions in the plot:

> Mary must decide whether she is willing to marry the man she loves, Edmund Bertram, on their potential married income of £1,700 a year (his moderate-to-good clergyman's income of £700 a year, plus an additional £1,000 a year from the 5 per cent interest on her £20,000 fortune), or to try for better stakes in the London market. In any pseudo-gentry accounting, £1,700 a year is a strikingly good income for a clergyman, *handsome*, but it is not good enough for Mary, who wants a house in town and the income to go with it. In the end, she wants this more than she wants Edmund (COPELAND, 2011, p. 135, italics in the original).

Given that she is unwilling to give up on her lifestyle, along with the possibility of marrying into rank and property, the vain antagonist of Austen's ordination novel proves she is no less mercenary than Mr Elton, the vicar of *Emma*.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Henry Tilney, the leading male character, is another junior brother who has to find employment and make a living. Differently from the soon-to-be-ordained Edmund, though, from the beginning, we learn that Henry has already been ordained a reverend. When Catherine Morland stays at his father's abbey, she discovers Mr Tilney has his very own parsonage. As they chat, Henry tells the heroine that he spends half of his time in Northanger and the rest of it at his private residence, situated in a nearby village: "Northanger is not more than half my home; I have an establishment at my own house in

Woodston, which is nearly twenty miles from my father's, and some of my time is necessarily spent there" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 124). In an earlier conversation, General Tilney tells Catherine that although he only has two younger children and thus could well provide for the both of them (for the Tilneys come from a long line of distinguished wealthy landowners), he acknowledges work is vital to any young man, regardless of whether or not he is going to inherit a fortune. Hence, it is possible to infer that although Henry did not really need to have a profession, his father wanted him to find an occupation in life, in addition to marrying a rich heiress. That's why when the general discovers Catherine is not as rich as he had thought, the seventeen-year-old protagonist is obliged to leave Northanger Abbey in a hurry and by herself in a public carriage. Before that, the controlling parent also explains he built the parsonage, located on another one of his pieces of land, for his younger son's sake:

> It is a family living, Miss Morland; and the property in the place being chiefly my own, you may believe I take care that it shall not be a bad one. Did Henry's income depend solely on this living, he would not be ill-provided for. Perhaps it may seem odd, that with only two younger children, I should think any profession necessary for him; and certainly there are moments when we could all wish him disengaged from every tie of business. But though I may not exactly make converts of you young ladies, I am sure your father, Miss Morland, would agree with me in thinking it expedient to give every young man some employment. The money is nothing, it is not an object, but **employment is the thing**. Even Frederick, my eldest son, you see, who will perhaps inherit as considerable a landed property as any private man in the county, has his **profession**(AUSTEN, 1998, p. 139-140, my emphasis).

Luckily, junior brothers who chose the Church like Henry Tilney could be nominated by their landowning fathers. As a matter of fact, the only reason why Edmund Bertram did not possess a living at the Mansfield parish was that Sir Thomas had to sell the house in order to pay off Tom's debts. This is corroborated by Chris Jones as she discusses the main privileges of landlords in the 18th century: "Owning advowsons, the right to appoint clergymen to their own parishes, they cemented the bond between church and state, the spirit of religion and the spirit of a gentleman" (JONES, 2005, p. 269). By depicting two younger sons as the heroes of two of her novels, Austen takes an opportunity to highlight the recklessness and idleness that was characteristic of most of the well-off male heirs of her time. Edward Ferrars, the elder-turned-to-second son ofS&S,complains of the meaningless life he leads without any pursuit or profession to engage his time:

> It has been, and is, and probably will always be a heavy misfortune to me, that I have had no necessary business to engage me, no profession to give me employment, or afford me anything like independence. But unfortunately my own nicety, and the nicety of my friends, have made me what I am, an idle, helpless being. We never could agree in our choice of a profession. I always preferred the church, as I still do. But that was not smart enough for my family. They recommended the army. That was a great deal too smart for me. The law was allowed to be genteel enough; many young men, who had chambers in the Temple, made a very good appearance in the first circles, and drove about town in very

> knowing gigs. But I had no inclination for the law, even in this less abstruse study of it, which my family approved. As for the navy, it had fashion on its side, but I was too old when the subject was first started to enter it – and, at length, as **there was no necessity for my having any profession at all**, as I might be as dashing and expensive without a red coat on my back as with one, idleness was pronounced on the whole to be most advantageous and honourable, and a young man of eighteen is not in general so earnestly bent on being busy as to resist the solicitations of his friends to do nothing. I was therefore entered at Oxford and have been properly idle ever since (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 77, my emphasis).

As it has been seen, in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney makes sure both of his boys busy themselves with work, eldest son included. Nonetheless, throughout the narrative, Captain Frederick Tilney, future master of the abbey, proves to be fickle, wicked and, according to his brother Henry, a 'lively and perhaps a thoughtless young man' who flirts with an engaged girl with no intention of marrying her whatsoever. Despite his job, he is pretty lazy when he is at his family home, rendering the general vexed at his rising very late in the morning during heroine Catherine Morland's stay as a visitor. In *Mansfield Park*, Tom Bertram is the complete opposite of the principled Edmund. Reckless and extravagant, Tom is a wastrel who is constantly away from home, amusing himself, travelling and drinking. Because of his debts, the heir apparent harms his brother's financial and professional plans. Tom never contributes to the management of the estate that is in trust for him and nearly dies at the end of the novel because of his carelessness.

Owing to his bad behaviour, some scholars believe that Tom Bertram is actually the personification of the Prince Regent (George IV), who was extremely self-indulgent and a lavish spender. As a matter of fact, the Regency started in 1811, the year Jane Austen is thought to have begun writing the referred novel. Bearing that in mind, it is possible to infer that Frederick Tilney and Tom Bertram are representatives of a group of people Austen utterly despise, for in all the novels, she demonstrates birth is not equal to good breeding. In her narratives, to be a respectable landlord is to have a sense of duty not just towards his land and manor but also towards his servants and the community. Irresponsibility and extravagance are two things the writer often draws attention to as the traits an ideal landowner cannot possess.

It is well-known that most of the baronial houses of the time were supported by the profits that came from land. Still in *Mansfield Park*, the main source of income of Sir Thomas Bertram is not strictly related to the national economy. Right in the first chapters of the book, we discover that apart from farming the Mansfield estate, Sir Thomas also has a plantation in Antigua. In a conversation between Mrs Norris, his sister-in-law, and Mrs Bertram, the former talks about the meagre profits of the Caribbean property: "Why, you know, Sir Thomas's

means will be rather straitened if the Antigua estate is to make such poor returns" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 29). Bearing in mind that the Regency was a period of economic instability, it is not surprising that the landed nobility resorted to their foreign resources. In fact, it has been claimed that at the time "Jane Austen was writing many English families had similarinvestments in the West Indies, because ever since the early seventeenth centuryyounger sons had gone out there to try to make their fortunes" (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 235).Throughout the narrative, it is clear that the Bertrams have a luxurious way of life, especially because of the number of servants they employ. Hence, the money coming from Sir Thomas's estate in Antigua is of utmost importance to provide for his family back in England and to maintain their social status. A lot of critics think this is one of, if not the, most polemical subjects in the novels, considering that in *Mansfield Park*, the English country house is financed by the exploitation of the slave plantations of the most profitable of British colonies. Deidre Le Faye (2002, p. 234) affirms that the baronet's financial loss could be explained by the restrictions on the slave trade, for the "Parliament passed a bill abolishing the slave trade in March 1807 that would come into full effect in May 1808."

As things do not go well, in September 1807, Sir Thomas goes off on a long journey to the West Indies as to solve the problems on his estate. A year later, he comes home to his wife and children bearing good news. On this occasion, heroine Fanny Price tells Edmund Bertram that she has asked her uncle about the labour force in the Caribbean: "Did you not hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 199). Fanny's inquiry does not go any further than her mere report, but Austen's subtle approach to slavery may be interpreted as a comment on the damages of colonialism. Since most part of the action in the story is set at Mansfield, it has been discussed that in the narrative, the mansion house represents England, rendering *Mansfield Park* a state-of-the-nation novel. Given that whilst Sir Thomas is in the West Indies, things at home get really complicated, we may infer the text does seem to mirror the relation between the country and its overseas colonies. In fact, when Sir Thomas is away in Antigua, his spoilt daughters also misbehave, flirting with Henry Crawford, in spite of the fact that the eldest is already engaged. Lady Bertram, his idle wife, does not see anything, and if his second son, Edmund, does not take care of the affairs of the mansion, they will all be in the hands of Mrs Norris. Hardly does Sir Thomas know that his evil sister-in-law is constantly sponging off his estate.

In view of the economic aid that derives from the plantation in the West Indies, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said affirms that: "Jane Austen sees the legitimacy of Sir Thomas Bertram's overseas properties as a natural extension of the calm, the order, the

beauties of Mansfield Park, one central estate validating the economically supportive role of the peripheral other" (SAID, 1994, p. 79). Indeed, if the most important estate in the novel represents England, according to what Said asserts, the country validates the financial support that comes from the Caribbean estate. Even though the writer is said to be mainly concerned with the daily life of the gentry, bringing up slavery issues indicates a transnational examination of the economy as a means to assess social morality, for it evokes the practises of the British Empire.

Of all six novels, *Persuasion* is perhaps the one in which social disruption serves as a driving force behind one of Austen's most serious texts as its setting accounts for the political and economic nature of the plot:

> AsAusten wrote her final completed novel, England was experiencing the worse financial crisis of Austen's life, one of the worst economic depressions in British history, and the beginning of England's 'Bleak Age.' Wartime prosperity, easy credit, and anunregulated banking system conspired to create the economic disaster, but theinevitable consequences of personal foolishness and collective greed took the countryby surprise. Given the time during which the novel was written and the timeframeassigned to the story, the author and her original readers shared a secret, one that*Persuasion*'s characters cannot possibly know, that the England the characters inhabitis about to economically implode (CRAIG, 2010, p. 221).

Right in the beginning, it is evident that Sir Walter Elliot, father to Elizabeth, Anne and Mary, takes a lot of pride in his title and high social position, and is one of the Austenian characters that are mostly concerned with gradations of rank. Ironically enough, the narrative starts with the owner of Kellynch Hall reading his particulars in the Baronetage Book, one of his most treasured pastimes. In the early 19th century, these age-old class distinctions are still valued, although the professional classes are beginning to overshadow the elite that will almost disappear a hundred years later.

In spite of that, we are informed that due to his and his eldest daughter's extravagant lifestyle, Sir Walter Elliot has incurred a lot of debts and, therefore, has no longer been able to live within his means. As Sir Walter and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Elliot, try to reduce expenses, they realise it is not possible to carry on living in their ancestral home without compromising their dignity and comforts, which to them is unacceptable. Their lawyer, called Mr Stephen, could not agree more on Sir Walter's decision to quit the house, arguing that the Elliots would be respected wherever they settled and that it "did not appear to him that Sir Walter could materially alter his style of living in a house which had such a character of hospitality and ancient dignity to support" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 10). After the decision is made, the baronet chooses to leave the neighbourhood, not so much because it would be hard to see other people inhabit his estate as it would be shameful to rent a property in the place the

Elliots had always resided. Mr Stephen is not even allowed to advertise the mansion, for letting the house is meant to be a 'profound secret; not to be breathed beyond their own circle.' Instead of London, Elizabeth and her father prefer to move to Bath, where they would still be regarded as people of consequence without having to exceed their income.

Even though knights and baronets had the highest titles amongst the gentry, they were not part of the nobility. However, from the outset, it is possible to notice that Sir Walter is a vain and conceited baronet who finds almost everyone that belongs to a lower social class unworthy of being associated with him. This is the reason why the patriarch thought his heir presumptive would be his eldest girl's equal. For the record, Sir Walter regrets his youngest child's choice of Charles Musgrove for a husband as he is inferior to her in birth. Hence, his only hope is that Elizabeth might form a better alliance, for "Mary had merely connected herself with an old country family of respectability and large fortune, and had therefore *given* all the honour, and received none" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 5). That being said, it is clear that what is at stake in the novel is this aristocrat's major preoccupation with social status despite the fact that he can no longer afford to live up to his own standards.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Penny Gay (2011, p. 63) mentions that in this specific narrative, "Austen makes creative use of her close acquaintance with Navy culture [...] *Persuasion* is firmly anchored in the world of contemporary politics: although the action takes place during a period of peace (June 1814–February 1815), when the naval officers are on shore leave." Since navy men were making fortunes from the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815),[13] Sir Walter's lawyer advises him to let the house to a rich admiral, for he is sure that a naval officer would make an excellent tenant. When Anne, the baronet's middle daughter and protagonist of the story, hears it, she immediately emphasises how important military men are for the country and implies they are virtuous in that they struggle for their own survival: "'The navy, I think, who have done so much for us, have at least an equal claim with any other set of men, for all the comforts and all the privileges which any home can give. Sailors work hard enough for their comforts, we must all allow'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 14). Sir Walter disdainfully replies he would not like to have any friend of his belonging to the naval force because it is the "means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of" (2007, p. 15).

[13]At the time of the final victory over France at the Battle of Waterloo (1815), the Royal Navy was the most powerful naval force in the world. Besides, it had already contributed to the consolidation of the British Empire across the seas. Austen started writing *Persuasion* in August 1815. It was posthumously published in 1817, only two years after the outcome of the Napoleonic Wars. When, in the narrative, Mr Stephen tells Sir Walter Elliot that 'this peace will be turning all our rich navy officers ashore', he is possibly referring to the period of almost one year between Napoleon's being exiled on Elba (1814) and Waterloo.

As they set to rent Kellynch Hall to a wealthy Admiral Croft, Sir Walter is glad to simultaneously have a tenant that is more distinguished than a mere commoner and still be able to feel more illustrious than him: “An admiral speaks his own consequence, and, at the same time can never make a baronet look small. In all their dealings and intercourse, Sir Walter Elliot must ever have the precedence” (p. 19).

Apart from overvaluing precedence and ranks, it is also clear that Sir Walter cares a lot about his looks, for he considers ‘the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy.’ It is not surprising that he has very little regard for his youngest daughters, the hypochondriac and snobbish Mary and the sensible Anne, because unlike Elizabeth, they have not inherited his beauty. Instead of appreciating the down-to-earthiness of his middle daughter, the company of his grandchildren or focusing on what really matters (like the management of his estate, the well-being of his servants, amongst other things), Sir Walter Elliot is rather foolish and superficial.That’s why Austen unmercifully condemns his behaviour from the start. When Admiral Croft moves to Kellynch, he is astonished to see that whereas the house needs repairs, Sir Walter’s enormous looking-glasses can be found all over his dressing room. The mirrors represent the self-importance of the baronet, who continues to be extremely narcissistic at a moment when he can no longer keep up appearances. In the introduction to a recent edition of the book, Elaine Jordan argues that besides ‘persuasion’:

> ‘Importance’ is another key word in the novel, and signifies someone worth knowing, worth making an alliance with, in the social hierarchies of the time. Anne herself has a different idea of ‘importance’ from that of her snobbish father, Sir Walter, and elder sister, Elizabeth, and the action of the novel affirms the importance of a rather different set of characters and values, especially those associated with the navy (JORDAN, 2007, p. v-vi).

A few scenes later, we find out that Admiral Croft has a brother-in-law who had been formerly attached to Anne Elliot a little more than 7 years before the Crofts let the mansion. Presently back in England with a fortune of £25,000, Captain Frederick Wentworth then was just a promising young commander living in his brother’s clerical home in the neighbourhood, who had neither money nor situation in life. Despite that, the heroine fell deeply in love with him, but her father took a dim view of the relationship and Lady Russell – her godmother and a widow that was also concerned with money and social position – persuaded her to break off the engagement, for as Sir Walter mentioned, it would be a ‘very degrading alliance.’ Worried about Anne’s future stability, Lady Russell gives her financial advice when she tells her goddaughter not to marry the commander because he had nothing to rely on and his success in the Navy was uncertain:

> Anne Elliot, with all her claims of birth, beauty, and mind, to throw herself away at nineteen– involve herself at nineteen in an engagement with a young man, who had nothing but himself to recommend him, and no hopes of attaining affluence but in the chances of a most uncertain profession, and no connections to secure even his farther rise in that profession – would be, indeed, a throwing away, which she grieved to think of! Anne Elliot, so young; known to so few, to be snatched off by a stranger without alliance or fortune; or rather sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence!(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 20).

When Mr Shepherd fixes the date for the Crofts to visit Kellynch and see if they want to live there, he tries to mention the admiral's connection with Mr Wentworth. After all, he had resided very close to the Elliots. Nonetheless, he does not succeed in his attempt to please Sir Walter, who once again looks down on the captain's origins. As he mistakes the captain for his elder brother, the curate of Monkford, the baronet says Wentworth was nobody, 'quite unconnected.'

During his stay in Bath, Sir Walter reads in the paper that his distant cousins, the Dowager Viscountess Dalrymple and her daughter, have come from Ireland to spend the season in town. Even though he had not had any contact with Lady Dalrymple in a long time, and it was almost certain that their relationship had ended, the baronet spares no efforts to renew their acquaintance, for it was a matter of great honour to have such a connection. The upright Anne Elliot is ashamed of his extreme flattery towards the viscountess and her child, because, in her view, the ladies are so insipid, they would be mediocre if not for their high rank. Sir Walter's deference to his patrician cousins stresses the significance of precedence at a moment in which distinction still meant a good deal but, through Austen's lenses, was deemed unnecessary, foolish and shallow:

> Anne had never seen her father and sister before in contact with **nobility**, and she mustacknowledge herself disappointed. She had hoped better things from their high ideas of their own situation in life, and was reduced to form a wish which she had never foreseen; a wish that they had more pride; for 'our cousins Lady Dalrymple and Miss Carteret;' 'our cousins, the Dalrymples,' sounded in her ears all day long (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 114-115, my emphasis).

In light of that, we may infer that Sir Walter Elliot's comic behaviour sets the ironic spirit of the text, which deeply focuses on the absurdity of social conventions in a period when the nation is about to suffer a major economic crisis that will affect landed aristocrats like him. The baronet's constant mockery at the professional classes represented by the navy officers, his egocentrism and obsession with social status is seen as preposterous, in that he cannot even control his own finances, cannot manage his estate or profit from his piece of land, and he cannot live frugally at a time when people cannot dare to overspend. Sir Walter is, indeed, almost described as a dandy. Roger Sales points out that, much like *Mansfield Park*'s Tom

Bertram, “Sir Walter would have been recognizable to Austen’s original readers as the mirror-image of the Prince Regent, a vain, selfish,middle-aged, debt-ridden fop who had been unable to produce a son and heir” (SALES apud CRAIG, 2010, p. 237). To make things worse, as it has been the custom since the Middle Ages, his title is intrinsically associated with his property. Therefore, his stupid extravagance not only expels him from his house but also deprives him of what preserves and perpetuates his ancient lineage, for it is the estate of Kellynch Hall that validates his social position:

> We need not, however, go to a contemporary conduct book toillustrate Sir Walter's irresponsibility. In terms of Jane Austen'sown previous attitudes to the estate, Sir Walter's agreement to rentKellynch is tantamount to his rejecting an entire cultural heritage,for though his house under his trusteeship can hardly have been a center of traditional order, the intrinsic value of his inheritance isindicated in its " valuable pictures" (18) and its "precious rooms and furniture" (47) (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 187).

In the end of the novel, Anne Elliot reunites with the hero, Captain Wentworth. A little before that, she realises Mr William Elliot, her father’s presumptive heir, is interested in her. The protagonist initially missed Kellynch when she had to leave the house for Admiral Croft to inhabit it. During her father and sister’s long season in Bath, Anne is of no fixed abode, moving from house to house throughout the narrative. Nevertheless, in spite of her need of a home, she dismisses any possibility of marrying Mr Elliot, although she knows the connection would restore the dignity of a woman of high birth like her. Instead of conforming to the traditional social standards of her class, she refuses to marry into old money as to become a sailor’s wife: “Anne marries Wentworth and thus joins the active, hard-working and prosperous pseudo-gentry rank she has learned to admire, a class of people who work for their living and know how to live within their means, as opposed to her father, the ‘spendthrift baronet’” (COPELAND, 2011, p. 139).

Despite his snobbery and prejudice against a man he had previously called a ‘nobody,’ on the occasion of Anne’s wedding, Sir Walter is not even able to give his daughter the dowry that was due to her:

> Captain Wentworth, with five-and-twenty thousand pounds, and as high in his profession as merit and activity could place him, was **no longer nobody**. He was now esteemed quite worthy to address the daughter of a foolish, spendthrift baronet, who had not had any principle or sense enough to maintain himself in the situation in which Providence had placed him, and who could give his daughter at present but a small part of the share of ten thousand pounds which must be hers hereafter (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 195, my emphasis).

Consequently, it is undeniable that Anne Elliot is better off when she chooses to assimilate into a class of people that, regardless of titles or estates, are far more honourable than her father, the worst of all fathers in Austen’s oeuvre. Mr William Elliot is no different from Sir

Walter, considering that his true mischievous, frivolous and materialistic character is eventually revealed to Anne. Both Elliot men demonstrate that in spite of their social standing, they have no substance. The baronet, with his delusions of grandeur, inevitably represents the rot of an ancient regime whose heads do not contribute much for the national economy as they think of their own interests and personal wealth. His failure to face reality and to secure his manor house hints at the impendingfall of the landed aristocracy, something Austen could well foresee. Anne's not being able to receive all the money her mother had left her at once indicates that it is now more promising to rely on the pseudo-gentry prosperity. It is as if "Austen has single-handedly revised the economic priorities of her society: a higher credit line for the pseudo-gentry Wentworths, and a lower one for the baronet Elliots" (COPELAND, 2011, p. 140). In contrast to the obnoxious aristocrats, Admiral Croft, with his tenderness, and Captain Wentworth, with his determination, prove to be the gentlemanly gentlemen of the navy.

Considering that land means permanence, Anne's choice of a husband who could not offer her an estate not only alludes to the vulnerability of the political economics of England, but also to the unpredictability of her future life. The heroine's unsteady lifestyle as the wife of a sailor is highlighted in the very last lines of the novel, as Austen explains that the fear of an imminent war is the only thing that can affect her marital happiness:

> Anne was tenderness itself, and she had the full worth of it in Captain Wentworth's affection. His profession was all that could ever make her friends wish that tenderness less, the dread of a future war all that could dim her sunshine. She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 198-199).

Since, depending on the state of affairs of the country, her husband can be sent to sea at anytime, living in a grand rural mansion is not necessary for the couple, because they cannot settle downin one specific place. However, Anne's marriage to Frederick Wentworth suggests, above all things, that it is possible to be happy at uncertain times.

Similarly to Admiral Croft, in *Pride and Prejudice*, another character rents a magnificent mansion house in Hertfordshire, where protagonist Elizabeth Bennet and her family live. As Mrs Bennet remarks: "'My dear Mr Bennet,' [...] 'have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?' [...] Mrs Long says that Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 4). Throughout the text, we learn that the young man from the north is called Charles Bingley and that his father had acquired a fortune from trade. Considering that an estate was the main guarantee of social status, more and more the nouveaux riches wanted to rent and buy these baronial houses. In

the narrative, it is clear that Charles's father did not manage to buy an estate whilst he was alive, something he really wished to do. Hence, Mr Bingley's renting Netherfield Park means he is buying his way into the landed aristocracy: Bingley, then, in a leisurely manner, is shopping; by renting Netherfield manor, he is trying out country gentlemanhood. Once he marries Jane, he does buy an estate in a county near Derbyshire (3:19:427); so the 'next generation' will be correspondingly a step up in the social hierarchy (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 120).

Even though traders represented new money, Charles Bingley's two sisters are extremely conceited and proud, and often demean the Bennet girls with their cruel comments on their appearance and manners. Mr Bingley assimilates into the country gentry through his association with Mr Darcy, his best friend and owner of an ancestral house that earns him an enormous sum of money per annum. Due to the connection with families of high rank like the Darcys, the ladies feel entitled 'to think well of themselves' and humiliate others, a kind of behaviour that Jane Austen utterly disapproves regarding social mobility. Caroline Bingley, Charles's younger sibling, is so obsessed with landed status that at some point she suggests her brother either buys Pemberley or builds a house that is exactly like Darcy's stately home:

> 'Charles, when you *build* your house, I wish it may be half as delightful as Pemberley.' 'I wish it may.' 'But I would really advise you to make your purchase in that neighbourhood, and take Pemberley for **akind of model**. There is not a finer county in England than Derbyshire.' 'With all my heart; I will buy Pemberley itself if Darcy will sell it' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34, italics in the original, my emphasis).

Desperate to marry into old money, the utterly proud Miss Bingley does everything in her power to catch the hero's attentions. Apart from that, she hopes Charles will give up on his beloved Jane Bennet, a middle-class young woman, and eventually marry Georgiana, Darcy's sister. In possibly marrying the Darcys, the wealthy Bingleys would be marrying into the ancient system of inherited income. Fortunately, unlike his sister, Charles Bingley does not care only about social status, which makes the assimilation of one class into another more natural and positive.

Alistair Duckworth affirms that as an unmarried woman and daughter of a clergyman, Austen:

> [W]rote about homes she would never be mistress of – Kellynch Hall, Mansfield Park, Sotherton Court, Pemberley, Donwell Abbey – and created heroines who, through good marriages, find comfortable domestic establishments. Three of them – Catherine Morland, Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price – find accommodations in parsonages, a destiny, I suppose Jane Austen would have found congenial. Another three – Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet, Emma Woodhouse – become mistresses of estates varying from the modest to the most magnificent (DUCKWORTH, 1985, p. 71-72).

Indeed, it is relevant to mention that two of Austen's heroines (Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet from *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*, successively) marry true country gentlemen, whose estates have been in their families for generations, and who actually have land-based fortunes. Elizabeth comes from a middle-class background, hence she marries above her station. Emma is a wealthy heiress who resides in her father's landed estate, which has been associated with her lineage for a long time, but Mr Woodhouse lives off investments. Regarding wealth and property, Mr Knightley seems to be Emma's equal, but the fact that he inhabits an abbey that has belonged to his family for ages renders him even more prominent than her. Since Mr Knightley's income is unknown, Mr Darcy is considered the greatest catch in all six novels. Nonetheless, when the hero first proposes to Elizabeth, he shocks her. First and foremost, Elizabeth Bennet is very surprised to see a snobbish man of high rank make her an offer of marriage. Secondly, he insults her as he mentions that his feelings for the protagonist make him turn a blind eye to the inferiority of her birth and the lack of propriety of her family. Therefore, Elizabeth's refusal to marry him means her dignity is more valuable to her than the stately Pemberley House and his £10,000 a year.

One leading lady in particular, Elinor Dashwood from S&S, is a woman of distinction who loses nearly everything upon the death of her father. She has social value but does not have wealth. Elinor weds Edward Ferrars, a pseudo-gentry clergyman that was brought up in a very rich household based in London, whose source of money is unknown. The lack of a proper family estate signifies that the Ferrarses are not highborn. Elinor's sister, Marianne Dashwood, ends up marrying Colonel Brandon, owner of the modest estate of Delaford, left to him upon the death of his elder brother. It is in the Delaford Parsonage that Elinor and Edward live after they get married.

Two other heroines (Fanny Price and Catherine Morland from *Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*,consecutively) marry clergymen who are second sons from very important families. Edmund Bertram is the younger son of a rich baronet who also has properties in the West Indies. Henry Tilney is the second son of the General Tilney of Northanger Abbey, whose ancestors date back to the Dissolution of Monasteries (1536–1541). In terms of social status, both of them marry up, because Fanny comes from a lower middle-class household and Catherine is the daughter of a reverend. Economically speaking, Elinor, Fanny and Catherine will live quite comfortably but never be rich. Of all female protagonists, *Persuasion*'s Anne Elliot is the only woman who forms a matrimonial alliance with a man that comes from a very different background. Captain Frederick Wentworth was neither born rich or prestigious, nor does he have a family estate. In marrying him, Anne is theoretically marrying down due to her

social standing, for she is, after all, a baronet's daughter. However, considering that Sir Walter Elliot has spent almost all his money and that Wentworth works for a living, besides having made a considerable fortune from war, their marriage cannot be seen as disadvantageous. Furthermore, we ought to acknowledge that by choosing a suitor from the professional classes, Austen's most mature heroine takes a more progressive step towards marriage.

As a woman who belonged to the pseudo-gentry, Austen knew it was important to be economical. That's why the extravagance with which a few owners run their stately homes is widely condemned in her narratives. Besides, these landlords must have a sense of duty and responsibility for those who depend on their landed incomes. Since in the novels, it is clear that high birth does not confer worth, only in *Emma* and in P&P do we find – in Mr Knightley and Mr Darcy, respectively – respectable landowners who manage their mansion houses properly, who care about the well-being of their servants and treat others without a sense of superiority. In the other four texts, the great landlords are faulty, given that according to their own particularities, they can be considered arrogant, mercenary, spendthrift and/or self-centred.

General Tilney (*Northanger Abbey*), Sir Thomas Bertram (*Mansfield Park*), John Dashwood (S&S) and Sir Walter Elliot (*Persuasion*), the masters of the country mansions that are at the core of each story, are all morally culpable and do not govern their estates in the paternalistic way Austen approves of. Because of the laws of primogeniture and the entails on male-line descendants, the referred landowners are no more than trustees, after all, most of them have little control of the properties they inhabit and are merely investing their efforts, time and money in the houses they will pass down to their future heirs. As Duckworth (2019, p. 59) mentions, the "estate as a structure in time is valid only if it is actively supported by the individual." Moreover, it is relevant to stress that the richest of the gentry characters portrayed in the narratives are not at the top of the pyramid of Georgian society. Above them are the great aristocrats, that is, members of the nobility who have long possessed enormous acres of land and whose annual incomes are higher than £50,000 a year.

As it has been seen throughout this section, in Austen's England, money, inheritance, and even marriage were all connected with property. Because land is indicative of permanence, it was through the large ancestral homes that a family's gentility was perpetuated. Since the estate was the uppermost symbol of social status, it was precisely the estate that defined andvalidated someone's social value.

2 **LIFE IN AUSTENIAN STATELY HOMES: DEFINING MANNERS**

2.1 **Understanding the ways of existence inside and outside the houses**

> She must own that she was tired of seeing great houses; after going over so many, she really had no pleasure in fine carpets or satin curtains. [...] What are young men to rocks and mountains?
> Jane Austen,***Pride and Prejudice***

A great many scholars and critics have been disappointed by the fact that Austen not only provides her readers with little information on the age of the grand country estates mentioned in the novels, but also gives very brief descriptions of the interior of these stately homes. It has been argued that since she belonged to the lesser gentry, the manors she portrays may have been inspired by the visits she paid to some of the great estates of her time. Since the writer did not inhabit any of these houses, in the texts, we see more vivid accounts of how her cottages, vicarages, some town houses and smaller dwellings look on the inside. When she does comment on the domestic architecture of her rural mansions, it is often to make remarks about the improvement of these estates, like in *Mansfield Park*, in the aforementioned scene in which Fanny Price is mortified by how modern the chapel of Sotherton Court actually is. Considering that the large country houses foster Austen's social criticism, in most of the cases, the remodelling of these palatial buildings – as well as the lack of it – reveals important aspects of the situation and the character of their owners. As he discusses the architectural setting of Austenian fiction, Nikolaus Pevsner reiterates that:

> If you want descriptions as circumstantial and as evocative as [*Sybil*][14], you must not go to Jane Austen's novels and not only because *Sybil* came out twenty-seven years

[14]*Sybil, or The Two Nations* is an 1845 novel written by English novelist and politician Benjamin Disraeli. The narrative focuses on the gross imbalance between the poor and the aristocracy in Victorian England, since it depicts the story of a gentleman who falls in love with Sybil, the daughter of one of the leaders of the workers' movement. Throughout the text, Disraeli contrasts the terrible living conditions of the working classes with the

> after her death, but also because [...] she is without exception vague, when it comes to describing buildings. Moreover, the lack of interest in anything but people which explains this vagueness applies to her letters as much as her novels. But inspite of this contrast between precision in dialogue and imprecision in the description of setting there is enough to be got out of the novels for anyone eager to know what life was lived by the narrow range of classes which Jane Austen knew well and which she wisely confined herself to (PEVSNER, 1968, p. 404).

Given that Austen is deeply interested in people, it is impossible to explain how her characters behave without talking about their ordinary life, which inevitably revolves around the house, both internally and externally. Concerning this, in the *Poetics of Space*, Bachelard affirms that "our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 4). Despite the scarcity found in her canon, the writer's illustrations give us an idea of an existence that is associated with the quietness of the countryside at a time when the community and the Church still play a key role in the routine of that small part of the English population. Besides, as Claire Lamont points out:

> While we might agree that Austen does not offer much description, and certainly few set-piece descriptions, she does in the course of her scenes reveal aspects of the interior of the houses in which they take place. The interior organisation of a house is explicitly described in Austen's novels only when the heroine moves to a new home or visits a house for the first time (LAMONT, 2005, p. 229).

Therefore, throughout this chapter, it is necessary to investigate aspects of the inside and outside of some of the grand rural mansions mentioned in the narratives, bearing in mind that these are the spaces where both ordinary and more special events take place. In order to do that, we shall compare and contrast the novels as to find the similarities and dissimilarities between them, for some of these details appear more frequently in some texts than in others. Above all things, it is imperative that we get a glimpse of house and grounds to understand the dimensions of social life in Austen's Georgian England, both indoors and outdoors.

Considering their medieval origins, it has been previously mentioned that through the ages, the outward and inward appearance of the houses differed quite a lot from one another, resulting in a mixture of different styles. As Trevor Yorke (2012, p. 64) explains, whereas on the outside, country houses were just improved, inside they could receive an extreme makeover. According to him, an Elizabethan house, for example, "might still retain its original façade despite some new trimmings and the odd extension but inside the rooms could be a medley of later Baroque, Rococo, Neo Classical or Victorian Gothic styles." Because of their transformations century after century, and the particular taste of each generation of

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luxurious lifestyle of the elite, and raises questions such as the right for all men to vote, regardless of their social position.

proprietors, every manor was unique in its own way. It is important to keep in mind, though, that "Austen's modern houses are somewhere between the grandeur of the Palladian – Lady Catherine de Bourgh's house, Rosings, is 'a handsome modern building' (P&P, 2:5) – and what, in the case of lesser houses, we have come to call Georgian" (LAMONT, 2005, p. 228).

Due to the landowners' long seasons in London, in the eighteenth century, the inner structure of the rural mansions was changing so that these houses would become an amusement centre for the leisure class. The new pattern prioritised the public rooms (those where distinguished guests would stay and the ones visitors could see) rather than the private chambers of the estates:

> Elevations and plans remained symmetrical, but the internal layout became more relaxed. Instead of a set of private apartments stretching away from the central hall and saloon, there emerged a preference for a circuit of interconnecting reception rooms surrounding the hall, facilitating the free circulation of guests. The status of the saloon was downgraded, and a separate dining room became the most important room in the house. Treasured works of art and fine furniture were distributed along the parade of communal rooms for maximum effect. As people spent more time in the communal rooms, and the size of house parties increased, apartments tended to shrink in size but increase in number (BARRAS, 2016, p. 53-54).

Photograph 7 – The Landscape Room.Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

Display of a state room connected with other public rooms through its passageway. Austen's modern mansions follow this interior layout, that is, they are *en suite*, with one room leading into the other (LAMONT, 2005, p. 232). The Landscape Room gives access to the family chapel, also located on the *piano nobile*of the house.

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In light of that, it is relevant to stress that in Austen's narratives, only very few characters have exclusive rooms of their own, since the writer depicts public rooms far more than private ones. Indeed, it has been suggested that her stories present:

> **[I]ntense representations of living in the public rooms of fairly large houses**. The rooms referred to, and their relationships, are clearly portrayed in the course of the narrative but the rest of the house is only vaguely indicated - we are not told the number of bedrooms or the extent of the offices'. We experience a house as family and social life is lived in it, not as an architectural whole [...] Austen's 'modern' houses differ in size, but they share some features**. Their public rooms are on the ground floor and their bedrooms are upstairs; the public rooms are segregated (in that they do not lead anywhere else) and they go off a hall from which the main staircase of the house rises.** Austen's modern houses all share the interior characteristic of having public rooms on the ground floor, which reflects the late eighteenth-century change whereby the social parts of a house came to dominate at the expense of the private and anticipates the conventions of the bourgeois house with which we are still familiar (LAMONT, 2005, p. 230-232, my emphasis).

Even though each estate was peculiar to its owners, by the time the novels were being published, most manors were internally divided into two sections: the main body, where the family was concentrated, and the secondary body, mostly destined to the staff. This is very well illustrated by the structure of Holkham Hall, an 18th-century Neo-palladian house whose internal layout is regarded as one of the finest Palladian interiors in England. The impressive mansion was built after the old Elizabethan manor that existed on the site was demolished:

Photograph 8 – Aerial image of Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

Aerial image of the central block and the four flanking wings of Holkham Hall. The six-columned portico is located near the south-facing façade of the building. The 'Family Wing' is to the south-west and the 'Chapel Wing' is to the south-east of the portico. Both the 'Guest Wing' and the 'Kitchen Wing', to the east, are close to the north-facing façade.

© John Fielding. Available at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/john_fielding/51853271492_. Accessed on 20/09/2022.

This aerial image of the building shows us the external disposition of the central body of the house and its four detached wings. However, it is crucial that we analyse the ground plan of Holkham Hall as to have a better idea of the disposition of these wings and understand how their association with the main part of the residence contribute to the division between the public and private rooms:

Photograph 9 – Ground Plan of Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

© PEVSNER; WILSON apud BARRAS, 2016, p. 51.

In view of the ground plan above, the opulent entrance hall, presented as ‘Stone Hall’, is actually called ‘the Marble Hall’, since it is constructed from alabaster. It is possible to notice that the most important rooms of the house, that is, the grand state rooms (saloon, dining-

room, drawing-room, and sculpture and landscape galleries) are all placed on the *piano nobile*, around the entrance hall and surrounding two courtywards, thus forming the central part of the building. As we may notice, all the state rooms have a direct connection. On each side of this central block, lie the referred four identical wings, or blocks, that are linked to the main part of the house by minor two-storey wings.

Photograph 10 – The Marble Hall.Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

The entrance hall of Holkham Hall, that is the Marble Hall, is the central range between the core of the house and its four detached wings. It is the entrance hall that leads to all the interconnected state rooms around it.

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As it can be seen, one of the wings is called the 'Family Wing', situated across from the 'Guest Wing', both of them located to the west of the central block. The south-east block is called the 'Chapel Wing' and the north east one is called the 'Kitchen Wing.' The library is within the Family Wing, taking up a great part of the first floor of the south-west block. We may observe that the private bedchambers of the Holkham household are sited in the Family Wing, whereas the other guest rooms are in the Guest Wing. The Kitchen Wing, where thestaff stayed, is placed far away from the areas where the family and their guests usually circulated, which granted them more privacy inside the residence. As a matter of fact, G.E. Mingay asserts that in the nineteenth century, there was a clear separation between the gentlemen's, the ladies' and the servants' parts of the house:

> Some of the larger of the new nineteenth-century homes were incredibly comprehensive in their design, with a gentleman's wing centred on the library and a ladies' wing centred on the drawing-room, nurseries for the children, separate staircases for family and servants, even separate stairs for gentlemen and ladies. The servants' quarters and domestic offices were tucked away out of sight at the back, often in ill-lit and damp basements, though elaborately provided with separate rooms for the brushing of clothes and shoes, for polishing the silver and ironing the newspapers (MINGAY, 2002, p. 120).

In the chief area of a 19th-century manor, it was common to find a breakfast room, a saloon (still found in Palladian houses; often sited behind the hall, and between the dining room and the drawing room) and a dining room, located near the kitchen so that meals would come to the table hot. With time, the separate dining room became a central room in these rural mansions. The saloon was meant for entertainment and was usually located behind the entrance hall:

> This great room was regarded as essential in 18th-century houses and would be as tall as the hall [...] As one of the great showrooms, the architect could make use of its grand scale and produce round or double-cubed spaces with alcoves, apses, imposing coffered or domed ceilings and shallow bowed windows looking out across the gardens (YORKE, 2012, p. 81).

Photograph 11 – The Saloon at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

At Austen's time, the saloon, which for many centuries was the main reception room at any country mansions, starts to be downgraded. At Holkham Hall, it is still a display of opulence. The paintings on its walls are from the 1750s.

© Will Pryce/Country Life Picture Library. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/the-creation-of-holkham-hall-247166. Retrieved 26/09/2022.

Indeed, on the aforementioned ground plan of Holkham Hall, the saloon (7) is located right behind the entrance hall, and it is adjacent to the drawing room (6). Due to its huge size, Holkham has two dining rooms, the North Dining Room (2) and the South Dining Room (8), which is smaller than the first one. Startingly, both are quite distant from the Kitchen Wing.

Behind the bigger courtyard, near the east pavillions, two particular apartments catch our attention, that is, the Green Estate Bedroom (10) and the North State Bedroom (13). Due to their distinct position, we may infer that these chambers have a special significance; otherwise they would not have been placed in the central block of the house. As they are considered state bedrooms, it is not by chance that these chambers surround the other state rooms. As regards the description displayed on the Holkam website, the Green State Bedroom is the most important bedroom in the Hall, for it has received kings, queens and the nobility, in general (HOLKHAM, 2022. https://www.holkham.co.uk/visit/the-hall/.Accessed on 17/09/2022).Although none of Austen's proprietors receive any noble guests, this piece of information is extremely relevant, considering that Sir Thomas Bertram of Mansfield Park is an MP (Member of Parliament). Therefore, although it is not mentioned, influential landowners like Sir Thomas were likely to welcome important visitors. Holkham's Green State Bedroom has its walls covered with 17th-century Flemish tapestries whose panels represent the four continents: Asia, America, Africa and Europe.

Photograph 12 – The Green State Bedroom.Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

The most important bedchamber in the house, the Green State Bedroom was the room where kings, queens and other members of the nobility would sleep. As it is characteristic of the early 18th century, its pieces of furniture are arranged up against the sides of the room, and a huge carpet is laid in its centre. Sometimes, carpets matched the design of the ceilings. The huge size of the room catches our attention.

© Holkham Hall. Available at: https://www.holkham.co.uk/visit/the-hall/.Accessed on 24/09/2022.

The room is furnished with a number of sofas, armchairs, bed tables, a desk and, first and foremost, a fireplace. The tapestries account for the necessity to plaster the walls as a means to reduce fire risks, a custom that dates back to the Restoration. Trevor Yorke affirms that by the mid 18th century:

> Fabrics like silk damasks and leather were used as wall coverings and usually pinned to wooden battens to fix them in place. Wallpapers were first introduced from China in the 17th century though they were not glued to the surface as modern versions are. Flock paper made from left-over wool sprinkled on glued pattern areas of the paper featured in some 18th-century houses while French papers, with exotic scenes or simulated fabric patterns, were still popular into the Victorian period. In later Georgian houses, principal rooms could feature arched recesses or curved alcoves for a statue or have completely round rooms with a dome above based on examples from the Ancient World. Pairs or rows of columns could also be introduced for added grandeur and to control the proportions of a room (YORKE, 2012, p. 66-67).

Furthermore, in the Georgian period, whereas most floors were either constructed with marble or stone, others were made out of wood boards, and then covered with enormous carpets that were often laid in the centre of the rooms. Le Faye also comments on these grand state rooms, suggesting that:

> There might well also be specific rooms set aside for use during the winter or the summer months. Even if royalty were no longer expected to call, the state rooms were always large and lavishly decorated, intended to display the owner's wealth when he entertained all his friends and neighbours. **It was accepted that these huge rooms, while beautiful to behold, would be exceedingly impractical** — echoing, draughty, impossible to light or heat adequately — **and the owner and his family would have their own suites of smaller rooms for the purposes of everyday living** (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 127, my emphasis).

In view of the fireplace of Holkham's Green State Bedroom, it is relevant to mention that by the late 16th century, fireplaces were indispensable in most rooms, nevertheless coal was only widely available by the 19th century. At the time, six-panelled doors made out of carved mahogany or oak were in vogue. Besides, staircases were an utmost symbol of status and their balusters and posts were often decorated with coats of arms (YORKE, 2012, p. 69-73).

Since coal was still extremely expensive at Austen's time, wood had to be burnt frequently so that rooms were kept warm and there was enough fire for cooking. Even though the wealthiest households would find plenty of wood on their estate land, in general, it was very cold inside the houses, especially during harsh winters. This is depicted in *Mansfield Park*, for at the moment heroine Fanny Price starts living with her rich relatives at the mansion, she is accommodated in a cold little attic, often described as 'the white attic', near the nurseries. From the beginning, it is clear that there is no fire in Fanny's sleeping room. When she grows up, she starts spending more time in her old school-room downstairs,

renamed the ‘East Room’, which little by little becomes her study. It is in the East Room that Fanny keeps her books, plants and the gifts she is given. Nonetheless, as soon as her evil Aunt Norris, who is constantly bullying her, learns that Fanny will officially make use of the room, she forbids any fire in it: “[A]nd Mrs Norris, having **stipulated for there never being a fire in it on Fanny’s account**, was tolerably resigned to her having the use of what nobody else wanted, though the terms in which she sometimes spoke of the indulgence seemed to imply that it was the best room in the house” (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 154).

In her and Sir Thomas Bertram’s urge to make a distinction between Fanny and her cousins – especially the girls, Julia and Maria Bertram, who were almost her age – Mrs Norris prevents the young protagonist from having the comfort of a fire, which to her is a luxury Fanny is not allowed to have. The lack of a fire in both of the rooms she occupies is vital to the development of the narrative because it stresses Fanny’s marginal position within a household that is often gathered together around the fire in the drawing room. Bittersweetly, Austen informs us that whilst ‘there was a gleam of sunshine,’ it was possible for Fanny to stay in the East Room: “The aspect was so favourable that even without a fire it was habitable in many an early spring and late autumn morning to such a willing mind as Fanny’s; and while there was a gleam of sunshine she hoped not to be driven from it entirely, even when winter came” (p. 154).

The irony, though, lies in the fact that regardless of the low temperatures, the heroine does not have many other options, for her very own room, in the attic, is too small for her to do anything in it, and she can have no freedom in the common areas of the house. It is only much later in the novel that Sir Thomas, in unusually entering Fanny’s East Room, realises how cold it is inside it:

> She was all attention, however, in placing a chair for him, and trying to appear honoured; and, in her agitation, had quite overlooked the deficiencies of her apartment, till he, stopping short as he entered, said, with much surprise, ‘**Why have you no fire to-day?**’
>
> There was snow on the ground, and she was sitting in a shawl. She hesitated.
>
> "I am not cold, sir: I never sit here long at this time of year."
>
> ‘**But you have a fire in general?**’
>
> ‘**No, sir**.’
>
> ‘How comes this about? Here must be some mistake. I understood that you had the use of this room by way of making you perfectly comfortable. In your bedchamber I know you *cannot* have a fire. Here is some great misapprehension which must be rectified. It is highly unfit for you to sit, be it only half an hour a day, without a fire. You are not strong. **You are chilly**. Your aunt cannot be aware of this’ (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 314, my emphasis, italics in the original).

Disconcerted by the situation of the room, he orders his servants to light a fire for Fanny. Afterwards, when the young lady enters her study, she is amazed to see her own room is warm, after so many years without knowing this sort of comfort:

> She was struck, quite struck, when, on returning from her walk and going into the East room again, the first thing which caught her eye was a fire lighted and burning. **A fire! It seemed too much**; just at that time to be giving her such an indulgence was exciting even painful gratitude. She wondered that Sir Thomas could have leisure to think of such a trifle again; **but she soon found, from the voluntary information of the housemaid, who came in to attend it, that so it was to be every day**. Sir Thomas had given orders for it (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 325, my emphasis).

In fact, Fanny, at first, cannot believe she has been treated with an indulgence only her cousins have been accostumed to. In a more symbolic way, noticing the lack of a fire in his niece's apartment, and then making sure the room is lit, highlights the change in Sir Thomas's behaviour towards the protagonist. The strict uncle, who initially affirmed Fanny and his daughters could never be equals, now starts to have real affections for her. In truth, the fire in her apartment is a token of his unexpected kindness. Apart from that, close to the end of the novel, when Fanny spends some time at her mother's cramped house in Portsmouth, she and her younger sister Susan find themselves in a room without a fire. The episode not only reminds her of the East room, but also makes her feel homesick:

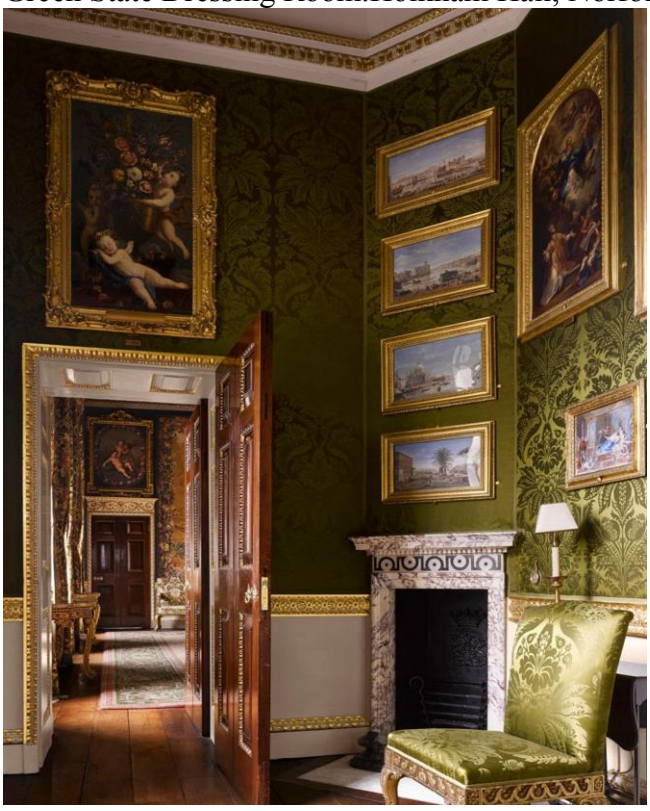
> By sitting together upstairs, they avoided a great deal of the disturbance of the house; Fanny had peace, and Susan learned to think it no misfortune to be quietly employed. **They sat without a fire; but that was a privation familiar even to Fanny,and she suffered the less because reminded by it of the East room** (p. 404, my emphasis).

Still concerning the bedchambers and the new internal divisions of 18th-century country houses, it is important to add that the old bedchambers paved the way for bedrooms, in the upstairs, and dressing rooms, also known as 'cabinets' or 'boudoirs' in their feminine versions. A boudoir was a "private sitting room where the lady could sew or read in increasing luxury. As bedchambers moved upstairs and became the conventional bedroom, the male cabinets next to them were known simply as dressing rooms" (YORKE, 2012, p. 83). In the novels, of all male characters, the one who seems to be mostly attached to a dressing room is the 'dressy' Sir Walter Elliot, due to the huge number of mirrors he had put in his personal cabinet before he rented Kellynch Hall to Admiral Croft, who corroborates:

> I have done very little besides sending away some of the large looking-glasses from my dressing-room, which was your father's. A very good man, and very much the gentleman I am sure; but I should think Miss Elliot, [...], I should think he must be rather a dressy man for his time of life. Such a number of looking-glasses! Oh Lord! There was no getting away from one's self **(**AUSTEN, 2007, p. 98).

Apart from that, in S&S, John Dashwood, brother to protagonists Elinor and Marianne, is portrayed in his town-house dressing room during his London season. On the occasion, as he tries to catch up with his tasks as landlord of Norland Park, his wife Fanny invades the room in order to givehim some bad news: “She fell into violent hysterics immediately, with such screams as reached your brother’s ears, as **he was sitting in his own dressing-room down stairs**, thinking about writing a letter to his steward in the country” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 194, my emphasis).

Photograph 13 – The Green State Dressing Room.Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.



Display of the Green State Dressing Room connected with its bedchamber through its passageway. This room also follows the *en-suite* layout that was typical of the period. According to John Goodall, in his article for *Country Life* magazine, this “intimate space is hung with paintings collected on the Grand Tour.”(GOODALL, 2022. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/the-creation-of-holkham-hall-247166).

Besides the badchambers and their adjoining dressing rooms, the main body of most rural mansions was also comprised of a library, a chapel, the galleries, and a banqueting hall in the older houses. Mark Girouard affirms that a “library stocked with books, a cabinet full of curiosities, and a gallery adorned with paintings were the necessary accoutrements of the

cultured aristocrat" (GIROUARD apud BARRAS, 2016, p. 50). Usually, the main purpose of sculpture and landscape galleries was to display ancestral portraits. In P&P, when Elizabeth Bennet visits Pemberley with her aunt and uncle, they see miniatures of Mr Wickham, the rogue of the narrative, and Mr Darcy over the mantelpiece, in the dining-parlour. As Elizabeth and her aunt talk about the paintings, Mrs Reynolds – the housekeeper, who is displaying the house to them – makes reference to a proper gallery located in an upper storey of the house, where Elizabeth can observe a larger painting of the hero:

> 'I have heard much of your master's fine person,' said Mrs Gardiner, looking at the picture; 'it is a handsome face. But, Lizzy, you can tell us whether it is like it or not.' 'And do not you think him a very handsome gentleman, Ma'am?' 'Yes, very handsome.' 'I am sure *I* know none so handsome; but in the **gallery upstairs** you will see a finer, larger picture of him than this. This room was my late master's favourite room, and these miniatures are just as they used to be then. He was very fond of them' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 208, my emphasis).

In the referred novel, it is evident that the library, too, was a fundamental element of the rural mansion, for it was one of the most spectacular rooms in the English country house. Daniel Pool claims that it served as some sort of study or office, a place that was more appropriate to conduct business than a gentleman's dressing room: "The mistress of the house would have a boudoir for her correspondence and the handling of the household affairs; for an equivalent purpose a man would have a library or study (typically, a country gentleman would receive his tenants or keeper here)" (POOL, 1993, p. 191). However, not until the 17th century did the library come to life. Before libraries appeared, books were kept in glass cabinets and also inside the closets of a cultured gentleman. It was only after literature rose to prominence that the necessity to display books in state rooms emerged:

> In the Georgian period, collecting books was a fashion inspired by na intellectual thirst for art and politics.Thus, **the importance of literature elevated the library to a state room**, increasingly used by all the family as a place for letter-writing, playing cards or as a meeting place for guests (YORKE, 2012, p. 85, my emphasis).

Although the Bennets do not live in an opulent rural mansion, it is in his library that Mr Bennet has his refuge, for he spends a great part of his time inside it: "In his library he had been always sure of leisure and tranquillity: and though prepared, as he told Elizabeth, to meet with folly and conceit in every other room of the house, he was used to be free from them there" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 62). Whenever his daughters want to talk to him, they often find Mr Bennet in his favourite corner of the Longbourn estate. In a scene in which Mrs Bennet annoys the patriarch because of Elizabeth's refusal to marry her cousin, Mr Bennet replies: ´My dear', [...] 'I have two small favours to request. First, that you will allow me the free use

of my understanding on the present occasion; and secondly, of **my room**. I shall be glad to have **the library to myself** as soon as may be' (p. 97, my emphasis).

According to Bachelard (1994, p. 30), "in the house itself, in the family sitting-room, a dreamer of refuges dreams of a hut, of a nest, or of nooks and corners in which he would like to hide away, like an animal in its hole." As it has been discussed, the library had the status of a public room. Nevertheless, when it comes to Mr Bennet, what was commonly regarded as a state room turned out to be a private chamber, for in the library, he could find the privacy most of his contemporaries would encounter in their dressing rooms. The Bennet library also emphasises the question of domestic space in the novel. Because he is the only man amidst a lot of women, Mr Bennet has the necessity to have a place of his own in such a female household: "But in most hut dreams we hope to live elsewhere, far from the over-crowded house [...] We flee in thought in search of a real refuge" (BACHELARD, 1994, p. 31).

Although Austen does not provide us with many details of the room, we are informed that the Bennet library contains a writing-table, and that it is located on the ground floor. In an article written for *Country Life* magazine, John Martin Robson gives us a glimpse of how the library looked like in the early nineteenth century:

> The library was — together with the drawing room and dining room — one of the three principal living interiors in the English Regency country house. It was an informal room, comfortably furnished and suited for the entertainment of a house party. [...]In this period, libraries also came to be distinctively furnished for comfort and for educated pastimes. They contained writing tables, sofa tables, reading tables, folio cabinets, bookstands, games tables and circular central tables on which to display folio books and albums of prints and engravings. They also sported a varied range of upholstered seat furniture — sofas, couches, armchairs, library chairs, ottomans — which were often arranged informally in freestanding groups in the middle of the room or around the fireplace (ROBINSON, 2021. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/regency-libraries-the-development-of-a-new-kind-of-living-room-222829).

Given that Longbourn is not a very big estate, Mr Bennet and his numerous family find themselves under the pressure of confinement. However, the library is an exception, for whereas the girls' father has his very own room, they do not have a safe haven to escape to. Austen scholar Lisa Hopkins reiterates that the library is, indeed, the centre of Mr Bennet's existence:

> The constraints of domestic space certainly press heavily on the female characters of *Pride and Prejudice*, but men may feel them too. [...] It is this sense of confinement within a particular environment that Charlotte Brontë objected to in *Pride and Prejudice*, but for Austen's admirers it is one of her strengths that she makes us so aware of the restraints that circumscribe her characters' lives. She uses rooms as metaphors to do this. [...] The breakfast-room is a space dear and familiar to Lydia, and she is clearly not surprised to find it being used as a reception room rather than simply to eat breakfast in. It is a sign of the Bennets' less affluent circumstances that their rooms need to be used for multiple purposes, but there is an exception: the library. [...] For Mr. Bennet, however, the library is the center of his

> existence, and it is a source of discomfort that Mr. Collins, as a man and a guest, is licensed to follow him there. [...] He is the only person in the house who could guarantee solitude in this way; for the others, there is no room to which they could go and be sure of peace (HOPKINS, 2020. Available at: https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol-41-no-1/hopkins/).

Elizabeth's father not only writes when he is in his room, but also receives male visitors, such as Mr Bingley (his eldest child's suitor) and Mr Collins (his distant cousin). On a very important occasion, when Mr Darcy proposes to Elizabeth for the second time, the heroine is summoned to the library itself to see if her father gives her his consent:

> In the evening, soon after Mr Bennet withdrew to the library, she saw Mr Darcy rise also and follow him, and her agitation on seeing it was extreme [...], and she sat in misery till Mr Darcy appeared again, when, looking at him, she was a little relieved by his smile. In a few minutes he approached the table where she was sitting with Kitty; and, while pretending to admire her work said in a whisper, 'Go to your father, **he wants you in the library**.' She was gone directly (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 314, my emphasis).

Photograph 14 – The Long Library.Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

One of three libraries of the Hall, together with the 'Manuscript Library' and the 'Classical Library. All of them are located in the 'Family Wing'. The long library, though, is the largest one, taking up an anormous area of the block, hence the name the 'Long Library.' The picture draws special attention to the disposition of furniture in the room. The many sofas and small tables are scattered around the library, which was a new trend in the 18th century.

© Holkham Hall. Available at: https://www.theenglishhome.co.uk/palladian-treasure-holkham-hall/.Accessed on 17/06/2022.

Bearing in mind that by the nineteenth century, just a bit more than half of lower-class men could actually read, Mr Bennet's library had quite an impact on the education and upbringing of his daughters. The fact that their father spends most of his time amongst his books influences the girls to read, which inevitably affects their personalities as cultured well-bred young women in spite of their pseudo-gentry rank. Elizabeth and Mary, the youngest child, are the two sisters who spend a great part of their time on books. Whereas the bookish and moral Mary, 'a young lady of deep reflection,' cannot practically deal with her real life because of her literary immersions, Elizabeth is opinionated enough to turn Mr Darcy down at the time of his first proposal. In an even more incisive manner, she avoids the scathing attack of Darcy's snobbish aunt by affirming that he may be a gentleman but, she, too, is a 'gentleman's daughter'.

In one particular scene, the protagonist visits Netherfield, the nearby mansion rented by Mr Bingley. Since Jane Bennet has become ill with a cold, Elizabeth is invited to stay at Netherfield Park as to nurse her sister. After dinner, she sees the whole party formed by Charles Bingley's family and Mr Darcy trying to amuse themselves. Elizabeth shocks Bingley's sisters as she decides to read rather than play cards. When Charles kindly offers to lend Lizzy all that his library affords, he discloses an important detail about the archive stored in the library of his recently rented mansion: "And I wish my collection were larger for your benefit and my own credit; but I am an idle fellow, and though I have not many, I have more than I ever looked into" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34). The moment that Caroline, Mr Bingley's ambitious sister, hears the conversation, she compares the books her father left them with the library at Pemberley:

> 'I am astonished,' said Miss Bingley, 'that my father should have left so small a collection of books. What a delightful library you have at Pemberley, Mr Darcy!' 'It ought to be good,' he replied, 'it has been the work of many generations.' 'And then you have added so much to it yourself, you are always buying books.' 'I cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these' (p. 34).

Miss Bingley's comments on Darcy's library highlights the importance of a substantial library in a family estate. In between the lines, by contrasting her catalogue with the one found in the hero's ancestral residence, Caroline Bingley suggests that the library is intrinsically connected with tradition and good breeding, rather than just money. In fact, having a library was a matter of social value. As her father was a trader who became financially successful, it is implicit that it was he who started acquiring books in the family, otherwise they would not have such a small collection. On the other hand, Darcy's great variety of books is due to the work and interest of his forefathers. Besides, as it has been mentioned:

> When Mr. Darcy says that he "cannot comprehend the neglect of a family library in such days as these" (2:38), he is not only asserting his belief in the importance of the age's literature but also implicitly declaring that the high cost of books does not concern him. For readers who did not own great estates and who had incomes much smaller than £10,000 a year, however, the high cost of books was important (ERICKSON, 1999, p. 577).

Even though Caroline is richer than heroine Elizabeth Bennet, we may affirm Elizabeth has been more influenced by her home library than Miss Bingley was. The latter, by the way, acknowledges the prestige of a grand collection of books, but she does not really enjoy reading:

> Miss Bingley's attention was quite as much engaged in watching Mr Darcy's progress through *his* book, as in reading her own [...] At length, quite exhausted by the attempt to be amused with her own book, which she had only chosen because it was the second volume of his, she gave a great yawn and said, 'How pleasant it is to spend an evening in this way! **I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading!How much sooner one tires of anything than of a book!When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library**.' No one made any reply. She then yawned again, threw aside her book, and cast her eyes round the room in quest for some amusement (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 50).

Based on that, it is under false pretences that Caroline affirms there is no better entertainment than books. She understands how significant a good library is, and she wishes to have a magnificent one, but because of her reputation. For a splendid collection of books, displayed in a luxurious room, could somehow counterbalance the fact that the Bingleys did not possess a traditional landed estate. Moreover,in the aforementioned episode, it is implicit that Caroline only fetches a book to impress Mr Darcy, giving him the idea that she is an interesting and accomplished young lady.However, it is, indeed, Elizabeth's cultivated mind that attracts Mr Darcy in the first place, to the detriment of Miss Bingley. Therefore, in this sense, the library also serves as a metaphor to explain that the "quality of humanity is to be judged by moral and humane standards, Austen suggests, not by social status" (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 120).

Still regarding the relevance of the referred room, in *Northanger Abbey*, the bookish Catherine Morland comes across an impressive library during her first tour of the abbey:

> [T]hey proceeded into the library, an apartment, in its way, of equal magnificence, exhibiting a collection of books, on which an humble man might have looked with pride. Catherine heard, admired, and wondered with more genuine feeling than before gathered all that she could from this storehouse of knowledge, by running over the titles of half a shelf, and was ready to proceed (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 146).

As landlord of the ancient Donwell abbey, George Knightley, the leading man of *Emma*, also has a library to dedicate his time to: "Why should he marry?—He is as happy as possible by himself; with his farm, and his sheep, and his library, and all the parish to manage; and he is

extremely fond of his brother's children. He has no occasion to marry, either to fill up his time or his heart" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 178).

In S&S, protagonist Marianne Dashwood is an avid reader who has 'the knack of finding her way in every house to the library.' When she visits the Palmers (relatives of Mrs Jennings, Marianne and her sister's chaperone and friend), for instance, the first thing she does is to go to the library and fetch herself a book. Even though it is clear that Marianne completely ignores protocol by entering the referred library without asking, this brief episode corroborates the fact that in most manors of the period, the library was, indeed, a public room. Before Marianne and Elinor's father died, the Dashwood siblings resided in the grand estate of Norland Park, where Marianne was raised amongst a wide range of books, some of which she brings along to Barton cottage, her more modest new home, located in the grounds of Barton Park: "I have formed my plan, and am determined to enter on a course of serious study. Our own library is too well known to me, to be resorted to for any thing beyond mere amusement" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 265).

Since she has already read all the items in her own library, Marianne considers borrowing books from the neighbours who live in the manors nearby, implying that it was mandatory for great houses to have a significant library: "But there are many works well worth reading at the Park; and there are others of more modern production which I know I can borrow of Colonel Brandon" (p. 265). Concerning this, Lee Erickson (1990, p. 577) affirms that Marianne has no need to have a book subscription, which was common at the time, because she had access to the private libraries of the wealthy landowners in her own social circle. In a conversation with Marianne, her Oxford graduate friend Edward Ferrars suggests she is so fond of reading that she would spend all her money on books: "'You are very right in supposing how my money would be spent – some of it, at least – my loose cash would certainly be employed in improving my collection of music and books.' 'And the bulk of your fortune would be laid out in annuities on the authors or their heirs'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 69).

In *Persuasion*, libraries are rarely mentioned, but as soon as Sir Walter decides to rent Kellynch Hall and move to Bath, protagonist Anne has got to make a list of her father's book collection and send it to his new residence: "I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. [...] I have had all my own little concerns to arrange, books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack, from not having understood in time what was intended as to the wagons" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 29). In *Mansfield Park*, heroine Fanny Price spends a few weeks away from her uncle's mansion, where she had been living ever since she was a teenager, and where she had great contact with the books found in the

Bertrams' library. When she stays in Portsmouth, Fanny decides to rent books as to pass the time, given that the comparison with the Mansfield collection is inevitable:

> [S]he often heaved a sigh at the remembrance of all her books ad boxes, and various comforts there. [...] Fanny found it impossible not to try for books again. There were none in her father's house; but wealth is luxurious and daring, and some of hers found its way to a **circulating library**. She became a subscriber; amazed at being anything *in propria persona*, amazed at her own doings in every way, to be a renter, a chuser of books! (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 404, my emphasis, italics in the original).

In P&P, when Mr Collins visits the Bennets, he fetches a book that seems to have come from a circulating library, which suggests that apart from Mr Bennet's library catalogue, the family also had a book subscription, for in Georgian England, a three-volume novel, for example, was very expensive and would cost nearly $100 in today's economy:

> Mr Bennet was glad to take his guest to the drawing-room again, and, when tea was over, glad to invite him to read aloud to the ladies. Mr Collins readily assented, and a book was produced; but on beholding it, (for every thing announced it to be from a **circulating library**,) he started back, and begging pardon, protested that he never read novels. Kitty stared at him, and Lydia exclaimed. Other books were produced, and after some deliberation he chose Fordyce's Sermons (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 59, my emphasis).

In an article on Austen and the circulating library, it has been discussed that circulating libraries were found in towns and they were mainly based on the subscriptions of novels, which contributed to reduce the high costs of book purchases:

> [T]he circulating libraries made reading fashionable when books were very expensive. By 1800, most copies of a novel's edition were sold to the libraries, which were flourishing businesses to be found in every major English city and town, and which promoted the sale of books during a period when their price rose relative to the cost of living. The libraries created a market for the publishers' product and encouraged readers to read more by charging them an annual subscription fee that would entitle them to check out a specified number of volumes at one time. The very existence of the libraries, though, reflected the relatively low marginal utility of rereading novels for contemporary readers, the general view that novel reading was a luxury, and the social subordination of reading to the concerns of everyday life. An investigation of the history of circulating libraries and a contextual analysis of the references made to the libraries in Austen's works and letters will reveal the underlying economy of novel reading, buying, and selling during the early nineteenth century (ERICKSON, 1999, p. 573-574).

Meals coud also be served in minor rooms. During her stay at Northanger Abbey, one day Catherine Morland wakes up to an elegant breakfast in the abbey's breakfast-parlour: "She got away as soon as she could from a room in which her conduct produced such unpleasant reflections, and found her way with all speed to the breakfast-parlour, as it had been pointed out to her by Miss Tilney the evening before" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 138). In *Persuasion*, Admiral Croft, Sir Walter Elliot's tenant, mentions a chimney in the breakfast room in Kellynch Hall:

> The next time you write to your good father, Miss Elliot, pray give him my compliments and Mrs Croft's, and say that we are settled here quite to our liking,

> and have no fault at all to find with the place. The **breakfast-room** chimney smokes a little, I grant you, but it is only when the wind is due north and blows hard, which may not happen three times a winter. And take it altogether, now that we have been into most of the houses hereabouts and can judge, there is not one that we like better than this (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 98, my emphasis).

Still inP&P, as soon as Elizabeth decides to spend the night at Netherfield, a servant is sent off to her home to "acquaint the family with her stay, and bring back a supply of clothes" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 32). After that, the hostesses go get dressed, probably in their boudoirs, and an hour and a half later, at half past six, Elizabeth and all the other guests, Mr Darcy included, are summoned to have dinner. Instead of mentioning a dining room, Austen makes a reference to a 'dining-parlour,' which gives an idea of a smaller and more private room:

> Great chambers and banqueting halls became too excessive for everyday meals, so a parlour would have been provided for the family. Parlour comes from the French verb*parler*,meaning 'to speak', which reflectsits other role as somewhere to hold private conversation. [...] Larger houses may have had more than one, perhaps a great and little parlour, while in 18th and 19th-century houses these private family rooms were often called morning or breakfast rooms, with the parlour becoming a common feature in middle-class housing (YORKE, 2012, p. 79).

Photograph 15 – Nineteenth-century dining room. Waddesdon Manor, Buckinghamshire.

In this lavish dining room of Waddesdon Manor, a 19tn-century country house built in a Neo-Renaissance style, the table seems to be laid for a formal banquet. Darren Clanford (2018), from *Material Source* magazine, argues that the room "was inspired by Louis XIV's state apartments at Versailles. The food was as complicated as the decorations."

After they leave the dining-parlour and have coffee, the heroine minds Jane in one of the private upstairs chambers of the mansion. Afterwards, as she descends again, Elizabeth sees everybody playing cards in the drawing room:

> With a renewal of tenderness, however, they repaired to her room on leaving the dining-parlour, and sat with her till summoned to coffee. She was still very poorly, and Elizabeth would not quit her at all, till late in the evening, when she had the comfort of seeing her asleep, and when it appeared to her rather right than pleasant that she should go downstairs herself. On entering the drawing-room she found the whole party at loo[15], and was immediately invited to join them (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 33-34, my emphasis).

The drawing room, the ancient withdrawing room of medieval origin, still was the most important space in the house. In an article written for *Country Life* magazine, architectural historian Jeremy Musson comments on the crucial role of the drawing room in the English country house at the end of the 1800s and beginning of the following century:

> By the time Austen was writing, the drawing room of a country house was often symmetrically paired with the dining room to either side of a hall. This arrangement, besides establishing the familiar symmetry of neo-Classical domestic planning, physically expressed the two poles around which the social life of a house revolved: the dining room was dedicated to formal meals and the drawing room was for receiving visitors, entertainment and the service of tea and coffee following a meal. Both were functional spaces, centred on a substantial fireplace to provide warmth, with tall windows for daylight and fine prospects. But drawing rooms received the best of the fine art, furniture, textiles and upholstery (MUSSON, 2020. Available at:<https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/history-country-house-drawing-room-63348>).

Around this time, there was a separation between the use of the dining room and the drawing room. After meals, the gentlemen remained in the dining room to drink, smoke and discuss politics, whereas the ladies withdrew to the adjacent room as to have tea, coffee, play the piano, talk and entertain themselves. This granted this iconic room a feminine feature as the territory, also known as the 'realm of the lady of the house,' was usually decorated to women's taste. It was ornamented with mirrors, small card tables, musical instruments, a few paintings and curtains, which contributed to render it more informal than the other public rooms. Its walls were covered with dainty fabrics and, in the Georgian period, it was common to find sofas and chairs around the room. At that moment, it was fashionable to attach pelmets[16] to the top of curtains.

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[15] In the notes section of the 2007 Wordsworth Classics edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, Ian Littlewood explains that a loo is "a round card-game played by a varying number of players" (LITTLEWOOD, 2007, p. 327).

[16] According to the *Collins Cobuild Dictionary*, a pelmet is a "long, narrow piece of wood or fabric which is fitted at the top of a window for decoration and to hide the curtain rail." Accessed on: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/pt/dictionary/english/pelmet>. Retrieved 05/04/2022.

It was not rare for men to accompany the ladies to the drawing room, which was, above all things, a refined and comfortable place meant for interaction and display. Indeed, as it had a more feminine role in English culture (especially because English gentlemen needed to gather together as to discuss Parliament matters and the state of affairs of the country), the drawing room is considered the quintessence of the English country house:

> The persistence of the habit of ladies withdrawing through the 19th century was much discussed by authors on architecture as well as etiquette. In House Architecture (1880), the architect J. J. Stevenson commented on the drawing room's historic use as a retiring room for ladies. He pointedly added: 'With us this is still its use, in accordance with our custom, which Continental nations consider barbarous.' But it was more than this. As well as being the ladies' sitting room and a reception room for callers, Stevenson thought it 'takes the position of the hall of old houses as the place for evening entertainments, for dancing, music and receptions' (MUSSON, 2020. Available at: <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/history-country-house-drawing-room-63348>).

Photograph 16 – Late-eighteenth-century drawing room. Newby Hall, Yorkshire.

18th-century drawing room furnished with several armchairs and sofas and decorated with refined tapestry and art panels on the walls.

© Paul Barker/Country Life Picture Library. Available at: https://www.countrylife.co.uk/architecture/history-country-house-drawing-room-63348. Accessed on 05/04/2022.

As an illustration of the grandiosity of the referred room, in *Northanger Abbey*, when she surveys the house, Catherine Morland is mesmerised by the splendour of its drawing room, only used in very special occasions:

> They set forward; and, with a grandeur of air, a dignified step, which caught the eye, but could not shake the doubts of the well-readCatherine, he led the way across the

> hall, through the common drawing-room and one useless ante-chamber, into a room magnificent both in size and furniture – the real drawing-room, used only with company of consequence. It was very noble – very grand – very charming! (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 145, my emphasis).

Of all the novels, *Mansfield Park* is the one in which the drawing room is mostly portrayed because it is the place where the greatest part of the actions in the novel happen. Besides, Mrs Bertram, the lady of the house, is extremely indolent, and is always sitting on the sofa with her pug on her lap and protagonist Fanny Price by her side. Hence, the drawing room is definitely her territory: "Fanny had scarcely passed the solemn-looking servants, when Lady Bertram came from the drawing-room to meet her; came with no indolent step; and falling on her neck, said 'Dear Fanny! Now I shall be comfortable'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 452). Indeed, the drawing room at Mansfield functions as a stage for some of the most important events in the narrative. Since it is a very domestic novel, and the greatest part of the characters stay at the house most of the time, it is not surprising that it is in the drawing-room that the most important conversations and discussions of the family are held. When Fanny comes to the house, for instance, it is in the drawing room that the first reports of her are given:

> A mean opinion of her abilities was not confined to them. Fanny could read, work, and write, but she had been taught nothing more; and as her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid, and for the first two or three weeks were continually bringing some fresh report of it into the drawing-room (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 16, my emphasis).

When Tom Bertram and his friend suggest that the youngsters put on a play at Mansfield, in Sir Thomas's absence, Edmund, the hero, claims that the master of the house would disapprove of it. By no means do they think of performing the play in the drawing room. In fact, Edmund Bertram worries about keeping the house in good condition: "'If you are resolved on acting,' [...], 'I must hope it will be in a very small and quiet way; and I think a theatre ought not to be attempted. It would be taking liberties with my father's house in his absence which could not be justified'" (p.130). His elder brother Tom replies that they can use the billiard room:

> "'His house shall not be hurt. I have quite as great an interest in being careful of his house as you can have; and as to such alterations as I was suggesting just now, such as moving a bookcase, or unlocking a door, or even as using the billiard-room for the space of a week without using billiards in it, you might just as well suppose he would object to our sitting more in this room, and less in the breakfast-room, than we did before he went away, or to my sister's pianoforte being moved from one side of the room to the other. Absolute nonsense!'"(p.130).

However, despite Tom's promise that the house would not be damaged, it was in the drawing room that they assembled to read their parts aloud and rehearse for the play:

> But the concerns of the theatre were suspended only for nahour or two: there was still a great deal to be settled;and the spirits of evening giving fresh courage, Tom,

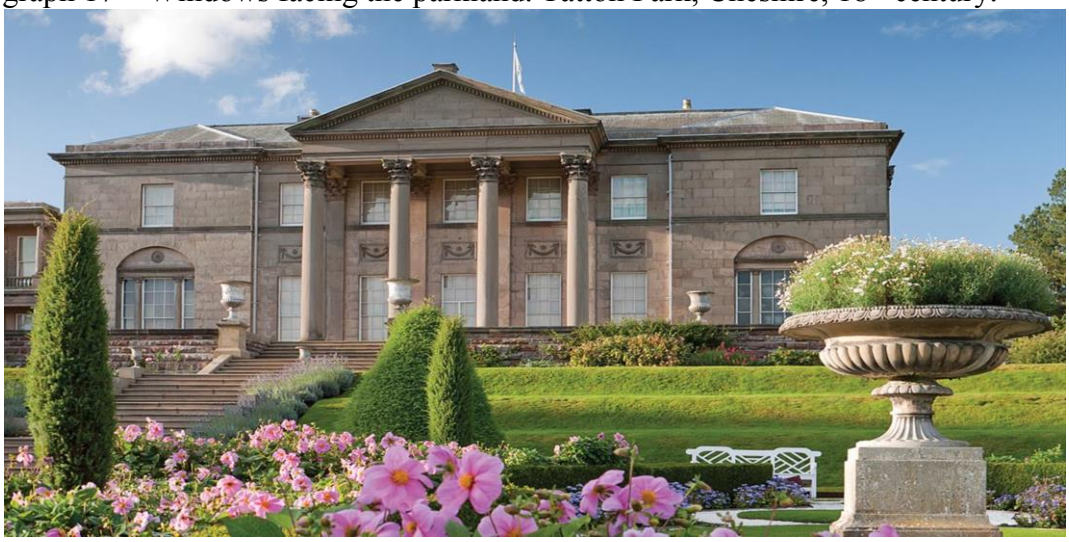
> Maria,and Mr. Yates, soon after their being **reassembledin the drawing-room,** seated themselves in committeeat a separate table, with the play open before them,and were just getting deep in the subject when a mostwelcome interruption was given by the entrance of Mr. and Miss Crawford, who, late and dark and dirty as it was,could not help coming, and were received with the most gratefuljoy (p.146, my emphasis).

Surprisingly, when Sir Thomas comes back from his long stay in the West Indies, it is in the drawing room that the entire household must gather together as to welcome him: "The case admitted no difference of opinion: they must go to the drawing-room directly" (AUSTEN, 1994, p.176-177). Fanny Price – the heroine, who does not feel like a proper member of the family – is out of her element as she faces the prospect of entering the referred room to appear before her uncle:

> Too soon did she find herself at the drawing-room door; and after pausing a moment for what she knew would not come, for a courage which the outside of no door had ever supplied to her, she turned the lock in desperation, and the lights of the drawing-room, and all the collected family, were before her (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 178, my emphasis).

Another relevant aspect worth being mentionedwas thePicturesque movement, an aesthetic ideal which emerged in the late 18th century and was a major influence on the interior and, particularly, the exterior design of the country home, in that the gardens had to integrate with the house.

Photograph 17 – Windows facing the parkland. Tatton Park, Cheshire, 18th century.



The façade of a neo-classical mansion that was remodelled in the 19th century with its lower rooms integrated with the gardens.

© Visit Chester. Available at: https://www.visitcheshire.com/things-to-do/tatton-park-p141211. Accessed on 15/04/2022.

Regarding this, Richard Barras comments that:

> There was a desire for interior and exterior spaces to flow into one another, satisfying a yearning to commune even more closely with nature. This required that all the living rooms be brought down to the ground floor and opened up to the gardens, leaving only the bedrooms on the upper floors. Rooms became more specialized in function, with breakfast rooms, billiard rooms, and music rooms among those added to the mix. Living rooms of various sizes and aspects were arranged to enjoy changing views at different times of the day. Asymmetry and irregularity became the norm for layout and design (BARRAS, 2016, p. 54).

This new concept came about as an attempt to appreciate nature in its wild form. According to Encyclopaedia *Britannica*, the referred movement was characterised by:

> [A]preoccupation with the pictorial values of architecture and landscape in combination with each other. Enthusiasm for the picturesque evolved partly as a reaction against the earlier 18th-century trend of Neoclassicism, with its emphasis on formality, proportion, order, and exactitude. The term picturesque originally denoted a landscape scene that looked as if it came out of a painting [...] In England, the picturesque was defined in a long controversy between Sir Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight as an aesthetic quality existing between the sublime (*i.e.*, awe-inspiring) and the beautiful (*i.e.*, serene), and one marked by pleasing variety, irregularity, asymmetry, and interesting textures. For example, medieval ruins in a natural landscape were thought to be quintessentially picturesque. The picturesque never evolved into a coherent theory, but various works of architecture and landscape gardening display its influence, particularly in an emphasis on the relation between buildings and their natural or landscaped setting (BRITANNICA, 2013. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/picturesque>).

Based on that, it is undeniable that the communion with nature is an important motif in the novels, for gardens, flower gardens, woods, avenues and even green-houses constantly appear in them. Apart from the necessity to blend house and garden, in Regency England, country house inhabitants were becoming deeply concerned with the wider landscape surrounding a landed estate. However, when we closely analyse the narratives, we come to understand that Austen does not entirely approve of renovations that may considerably affect the old natural style of the rural countryside. During this period, landscape was considerably changing. Consequently, in view of the texts, we may infer the author knew that in order to have a landscaped setting, there must be human intervention. This is best portrayed in *Mansfield Park,* at the moment the Bertrams and their friends start a conversation in the dining-parlour about the unfavourable situation of Sotherton Court, the Elizabethan manor that is home to Mr Rushworth, who is presently engaged to Miss Maria Bertram.

As previously mentioned, though old, the enormous house that has just been inherited has a large number of rooms, and its interiors, furnished in the ‘taste of fifty years back,’ were equipped with “shining floors, solid mahogany, rich damask, marble, gilding, and carving, each handsome in its way” (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 85). Nonetheless, it presents a huge natural disadvantage: in the past, the building was badly set in the lowest spots of the park where it is located. When he first brings up the subject of Sotherton to the Mansfield party, the wealthy

and silly Rushworth shocks everyone by saying that the manor looks like a 'dismal old prison' and he does not know what to do with it. Edmund Bertram supports his ideas of improvement by affirming that the situation of the estate is really disadvantageous:

> It is **ill placed**. It stands in one of the lowest spots of the park; in that respect, unfavourable for improvement. But the woods are fine, and there is a stream, which I dare say, might be made a good deal of. Mr. Rushworth is quite right, I think, in meaning to give it a modern dress, and I have no doubt that it will be all done extremely well (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 56-57, my emphasis).

Inspired by the improvements his friend Mr Smith has just made in his country seat, Rushworth declares he is inclined to hire an architect to alter the landscape surrounding his abode. The young man is so keen to improve its grounds that he wishes to contact none other than Humphry Repton[17](1752–1818), one of the most renowned English gardeners of the 18th century: "Smith's place is the admiration of all the country: and it was a mere nothing before Repton took it in hand. I think I shall have Repton" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 55). As Richard Barras (2016, p. 72) points out, "interest had grown in the 'picturesque' possibilities created by siting the country house within a natural landscape." The expert also explains that "the essence of Picturesque architecture was that a 'natural' house should sit within the 'natural' landscape, reflecting the character of the setting through its irregular grouping and broken skyline" (p. 73).

In spite of this, the remarks about Repton are ironic because, as it has been mentioned, Austen is not an advocate of a radical landscape improvement that may bring about any artificial sense of beauty, given that nature still is a vital part of her world. Alistair Duckworth claims that the writer's anti-improvement feelings may somehow be associated with a 'Burkean defense of a cultural heritage', for when woods, avenues, villages and roads are altered and relocated, so is the community:

> [I]t is likely that Jane Austen's own experience would have led her to a dislike of the drastic alterations to landscape which frequently attended Brownian or Reptonian improvements. [...] If Edmund Burke in his political prose following the French Revolution could use the imagery of excessive estate improvements to illustrate the horrors of the revolution, we need not be surprised that **Jane Austen should suggest in the adoption of Reptonian methods dangerous consequences for the continuity of a culture** (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 44-45).

[17]A successor to the great English landscape architect Capability Brown (1715–1783), Repton designed the landscape of the most magnificent of country houses of the time, including Tatton Park, the Royal Pavilion and Kensington Gardens. According to the Encyclopaedia *Britannica*, the architect "advocated a gradual transition between house and grounds by means of terraces, balustrades, and steps. He was influenced by the Picturesque movement, which admired wild landscapes." Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/landscape-architecture>. Retrieved 15/08/22.

Indeed, to make way for the wide private open parks that were in vogue in the 18th century, it was necessary to turn over the fields and remove entire villages. Therefore, a lot of people had to be displaced, which led them to move to towns and seek employment.

Photograph 18 – The picturesque garden of Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire, 18th century.

The park and gardens of this enormous 18th-century estate were improved by Capability Brown. The opulent house occupies a central position amidst the extensive parkland, looking as though it was flawlessly set in the landscape.

© Blenheim Palace. Available at: https://www.blenheimpalace.com/360/Lake/. Accessed on 27/12/22.

When Fanny Price hears Mr Rushworth is determined to cut down the avenue that leads to his stately home, the heroine is extremely sorry that any human interference may take place in the vegetation around Sotherton Court. She then quotes the poem "The Task", by William Cowper[18], as to convey her mortification: "**Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper?** "**Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited**'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 56, my emphasis). Considering that Fanny is segregated from the other youngsters at Mansfield and, thus, extremely attached to the estate itself (rather than the people who live there), it is only reasonable that the protagonist should appreciate the

[18] William Cowper (1731–1800) was not only one of the forerunners of English Romanticism, but also one of Austen's favourite poets, whose verses had nature as their main theme. He wrote "The Task" in 1785.

natural environment around it. It is worth mentioning that due to her position as Mrs Bertram's companion, Fanny has to run errands in and out of the house most of the time. She also gazes at the stars with her cousin Edmund and goes horse riding, hence her abiding passion for nature.

Besides, since Fanny is an admirer of tradition and a defender of genuine moral and social principles, the protagonist's lament over the ancient oak avenue goes hand in hand with Duckworth's assertion that in the history of English literature, "the cutting down of trees has suggested a radical break with the past [...] In the light of this tradition,Fanny's objections to the cutting down of the avenue at Sotherton have deeper meaning" (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 53). The scholar also gives an overview of the profound significance trees have in Austen's oeuvre:

> In Jane Austen's fiction it is remarkable how often the presence of trees betokens value.Pemberley has its "beautiful oaks and Spanish chestnuts"*(PP*,267), Donwell Abbey (noticeably "with all [its] old neglect of prospect") has an "abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up" (*E*, 358), and there is no "such timber any where in Dorsetshire, as there is now standing in Delaford Hanger" (*SS*, 375). It is a sign, in *Sense and Sensibility,*that the Norland estate is secure at the beginning of the novel that safeguards have been taken against "any charge on the estate, or... any sale of its valuable woods" (4). Equally it is a sign of the present owner's corrupted values that, when the old owner dies, he should cut down "the old walnut trees" in order to build a greenhouse (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 54).

Much to Fanny's astonishment, though, Mr Rushworth mentions that he will spare no efforts to pay Mr Repton his rate of five guineas a day as to try to save his ancient abode: "I am afraid the avenue stands a bad chance, Fanny" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 56).Whereas the romantic heroine resents the idea of reshaping the park as to improve the situation of the house, Rushworth wishes to alter its aesthetics by changing the avenue that leads to Sotherton's grounds. The young landowner wants to do so especially because the unfavourable natural setting of the building makes the view of its front rooms look rather uninteresting. His desire to deforest a considerable amount of trees to clear the avenue goes hand in had with the ideals of the Picturesque movement, for to create a picturesque landscape, Repton not only reintroduced the formal gardens around the house, but also "reintegrated the park with the wider countryside by cutting out the tree belts" (BARRAS, 2016, p. 72). These gardens around the rural mansion contributed to place it at the core of the landed estate, which inevitably brings to mind the central position of the halls and courts of the Middle Ages:

> For the small villa, the surrounding garden was the medium through which Picturesque effects could be achieved. For the large country seat, the composition was extended to encompass the agricultural realm, with dairies, barns, and labourers

> cottages designed to harmonize with the natural landscape. Repton wished to create an image of **the country house as the essential focus of the working estate,** its owner exercising the benevolent paternalism which would ensure the survival of the established social order in the face of the political turbulence and economic upheaval which was convulsing early nineteenth century England (WILLIAMSON apud BARRAS, 2016, p. 73, my emphasis).

A few days after the improving grounds subject, the Bertram children, Fanny and the Crawfords call upon Mr Rushworth to take a survey of his grounds. On the road, approaching the park, Maria Bertram – the fiancée who is mainly interested in marrying Rushworth because of the size of his property – stresses the disadvantages of the house she is going to be mistress of: "It is not ugly, you see, at this end; there is some fine timber, but the situation of the house is dreadful. We go down hill to it for half a mile, and it is a pity, for it would not be an ill-looking place if it had a better approach" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 84). Once they enter the residence, the Mansfield party confirms that Sotherton is ill-placed:

> The situation of the house excluded the possibility of much prospect from any of the rooms; and while Fanny and some of the others were attending Mrs. Rushworth, Henry Crawford was looking grave and shaking his head at the windows. Every room on the west front looked across a lawn to the beginning of the avenue immediately beyond tall iron palisades and gates (p. 86).

What is at stake in this part of the narrative, with all its references to the Picturesque concept is that despite all the prestige that a grand Elizabethan construction such as Sotherton Court might have, nature has not been favourable to it. Judith Page claims that in the novels, the main characters are developed according to the ways "they relate to and respond to the houses, estates and grounds that they encounter" (PAGE, 2013, p. 97). Thus, in citing Cowper, Fanny – with her particular 'delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling' – demonstrates she values inanimate nature far more than houses, no matter how opulent they may be. Regarding this, it has been argued that:

> Fanny's comment and the lines from *The Task* that follow the quoted portion are significant in that collectively they reveal a relationship to the rural countryside reflective of Fanny's contemplative nature: "once more rejoice / That yet a remnant of your race survives" (1.339-40). Fanny, in many respects a remnant of a passing way of life herself, harkens her company back to **a time when the avenue was celebrated as part of the simple pleasures of rural life and the country house**. Yet Fanny's comments and the ensuing conversation are about more than the removal of trees; for Fanny, **the avenue symbolizes a connection to a conservative traditional view of the country estate, an appreciation that celebrates a spiritual nature in spite of current trends** (SAVAGE, 2006, my emphasis. <Available at: https://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol27no1/savage.htm>.).

Bearing that in mind, it is important to reiterate that Austen defends the integration between house and nature, but the landscape surrounding the English country estate must also mingle with the wilderness, for the outdoors play a key role in the routine of the inhabitants of her

rural mansions. It has been claimed that, in P&P, at least, she prefers "the epistemological process of the 'true' picturesque, which is based on experience, to the pre-determined rule-bound 'false' picturesque" (HEYDT apud PAGE, 2013, p. 98).

If in *Mansfield Park*, Sotherton Court and its improvements function as an example of the changes and interventions the writer condemns, in other novels, other manors still possess the conservative ladscape that is so dear to Austenian fiction. Starting with *Emma*, it is important to notice that Donwell Abbey, 'with all the old neglect of prospect', has gardens that are stretched down to meadows washed by a stream and an "abundance of timber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rooted up" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 289). When Emma Woodhouse has the opportunity to see the house after a long period of time, she is not only impressed by the respectable air of the building, but also by its grounds, famous for its fine strawberry-beds, 'the best fruit in England–everybody's favourite'. At the moment the heroine and her acquaintances walk over Donwell gardens, we are presented with a large portrayal of its traditional natural scenery:

> It was hot; and after walking some time over the gardens in a scattered, dispersed way, scarcely any three together, they insensibly followed one another to the delicious shade of a broad short avenue of limes, which stretching beyond the garden at an equal distance from the river, seemed the finish of the pleasure grounds. [...] Disputable, however, as might be the taste of such a termination, it was in itself a charming walk, and the view which closed it extremely pretty.–The considerable slope, at nearly the foot of which the Abbey stood, gradually acquired a steeper form beyond its grounds; and at half a mile distant was a bank of considerable abruptness and grandeur, well clothed with wood;–and at the bottom of this bank, favourably placed and sheltered, rose the Abbey Mill Farm, with meadows in front, and the river making a close and handsome curve around it (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 290-291).

Inevitably, these descriptions of Donwell Abbey's landscape give us the impression that Mr Knightley's grounds are the epitome of Austen's supreme English countryside: "**It was a sweet view–sweet to the eye and the mind. English verdure, English culture, English comfort, seen under a sun bright, without being oppressive**" (p. 291, my emphasis). This particular depiction of the natural environment around Donwell invokes the aforementioned preservation of a cultural heritage through the sublime, as defended by Edmund Burke. According to an article entitled"The Romantic sublime", displayed on the Tate Gallery website, the Irish philosopher "saw nature as the most sublime object, capable of generating the strongest sensations in its beholders."[19]

In S&S, we learn that Marianne Dashwood loved to stroll around the woods of Norland Park, the estate where she used to live. Hence, the only thing that comforts the

[19] "The Romantic sublime", article found at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/the-romantic-sublime-r1109221>. Retrieved 20/01/23.

protagonist, after her family is obliged to leave its grounds and settle at a cottage, is the prospect of the country where their new home is set:

> The situation of the house was good. High hills rose immediately behind, and at no great distance on each side; some of which were open downs, the others cultivated and woody. The village of Barton was chiefly on one of these hills, and formed a pleasant view from the cottage windows. The prospect in front was more extensive; it commanded the whole of the valley, and reached into the country beyond. The hills which surrounded the cottage terminated the valley in that direction; under another name, and in another course, it branched out again between two of the steepest of them (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 20).

As a great nature enthusiast, one of the first things Marianne does upon her moving to Barton is to go on a walk with her youngest sister Margaret. The young lady is so bedazzled by the high downs she sees from her windows that she ignores the partially showery sky to rejoice in the steep wooded hills of her new neighbourhood. At some point during their walk, Marianne turns to Margaret and exclaims: "'**Is there a felicity in the world**,' said Marianne, '**superior to this? –Margaret, we will walk here at least two hours**" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 30, my emphasis).

In P&P, Pemberley is also a great illustration of a place where the landscape is quite balanced, with its traditional natural advantages and unpretentious improvements. As Rosemarie Bodenheimer (1981, p. 610) mentions, this consistency allows the house to be "perfectly set in the landscape" for its good proportion is strictly connected to the social virtue of its owner (p. 605). Near the end of the novel, the Gardiners, Elizabeth Bennet's uncle and aunt, and the leading lady go on their northern tour of Derbyshire, where Mr Darcy's noble estate of ten thousand pounds a year is situated. Since Mrs Gardiner finds out Pemberley park has 'some of the finest woods in the country', she prompts her party to see the house, assuming the proprietors would be down for the summer. As soon as they reach the grounds, the place and its surroundings make Elizabeth dumbfounded:

> Elizabeth, as they drove along, watched for the first appearance of Pemberley Woods with some perturbation; and when at length they turned in at the lodge, her spirits were in a high flutter. The park was very large, and contained great variety of ground. They entered it in one of its lowest points, and drove for some time through a beautiful wood stretching over a wide extent. [...] **Its banks were neither formal nor falsely adorned**. Elizabeth was delighted**. She had never seen a place for which nature had done more**, **or where natural beauty had been so little counteracted by an awkward taste.** They were all of them warm in their admiration; and at that moment she felt that to be mistress of Pemberley might be something! (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 206, my emphasis).

Once they are inside the house, Lizzy looks out of the window and exults at the view in front of her:

> The hill, crowned with wood, which they had descended, receiving increased abruptness from the distance, was a beautiful object. Every disposition of the ground was good; and she looked on the whole scene, the river, the trees scattered on its

> banks and the winding of the valley, as far as she could trace it, with delight. **As they passed into other rooms these objects were taking different positions; but from every window there were beauties to be seen** (p. 207, my emphasis).

As we may infer, the protagonist stares at the windows she passes by as if she were appreciating paintings, which denotes the Romantic vision of nature Austen is so fond of, and which contributes to character development and emotional expression:

> Austen's landscape writing is related to romantic narrative and poetic technique in the sense that it points inward, consistently pulling the emphasis away from pictorial description itself to the vision of feeling of the viewer. Her artful uses of descriptions as projections of a character's sense of self or view of others reveal her sensitivity to the subject–object entanglements implicit in poetical responses to nature (BODENHEIMER apud PAGE, 2013, p. 99).

In fact, it also seems she is observing Darcy through his stunning grounds; but most importantly, from several different perspectives.

Besides this preference for a more traditional landscape in the grounds of her baronial estates, Austen uses their surroundings as a means to grant her characters the privacy they would not find inside the houses. As it has been argued, "moments of deep emotion and revelation often take place out of doors, revealing a conception of nature that focuses on the emotional tenor of the scene rather than on the visual elements for their own sake" (PAGE, 2013, p. 99). Considering that a great part of country-house entertainment revolves around the contact with nature – and that Austen's heroines, including Emma, have great pleasure in walking freely – it is usually during strolls and walks that most characters find themselves in crucial moments.

In light of that, Page reiterates that the "outdoor space offers freedom but paradoxically also privacy that would be impossible in the drawing-room, and, consequently, an emotional outlet for the characters" (PAGE, 2013, p. 99). In *Persuasion*, for instance, Anne Elliot wanders from house to house after her removal from Kellynch Hall, her father's estate. As soon as Sir Thomas Elliot moves to Bath, Anne spends some time with her sister Mary Musgrove, who lives in a cottage in the grounds of Uppercross, her in-laws' Great House. Once there, Anne has the opportunity of walking to the referred manor on a regular basis and of going for country strolls in the vicinity. On one of these occasions, on a very fine November day, Mary and her relatives (her husband Charles and his siblings, Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove), Anne and her estranged ex-fiancé, new-in-the-neighbourhood Captain Frederick Wentworth, decide to go on a long walk. Concerning the relevance of walking in the narrative, it has been suggested that:

> The forward movement of an ordinary walk parallels the development of the couple's romantic bond. [...] [W]alking serves to clear the characters' minds and rejuvenate their bodies while providing opportunities for social bonding [...] and

> they serve as a social medium through which Anne and Wentworth rediscover their mutual passion (ANDERSON; VONDERBECKE, 2007. Available at: <https://jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28no1/anderson-vonderbecke.htm>).

Despite the sheer emotional distress Anne is feeling because of Wentworth's return, the heroine decides to spend the day in communion with nature:

> Anne's object was, not to be in the way of anybody, and where the narrow paths across the fields made many separations necessary, to keep with her brother and sister. Her pleasure in the walk must arise from the exercise and the day, from the view of the last smiles of the year upon the tawny leaves, and withered hedges, and from repeating to herself some few of the thousand poetical descriptions extant of autumn, that season of peculiar and inexhaustible influence on the mind of taste and tenderness, that season which had drawn from every poet, worthy of bring read, some attempt at description, or some lines of feeling (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 64).

It is during this stroll that the jealous Anne, so far clueless about Frederick's present opinion of her, overhears a conversation between her beloved sailor and Louisa Musgrove in the hedge-row behind her. Afraid of being seen, Anne does not move, even though she is alarmed by the tenderness with which the two of them speak in the quiet seclusion of the wilderness:

> The brow of the hill, where they remained, was a cheerful spot: Louisa returned; and Mary, finding a comfortable seat for herself on the step of a stile, was very well satisfied so long as the others all stood about her; but when Louisa drew Captain Wentworth away, to try for a gleaning of nuts in an adjoining hedge-row, and they were gone by degrees quite out of sight and sound, Mary was happy no longer; [...] Anne, really tired herself, was glad to sit down; and she very soon heard Captain Wentworth and Louisa in the hedge-row, behind her, as if making their way back along the rough, wild sort of channel, down the centre. They were speaking as they drew near. Louisa's voice was the first distinguished. She seemed to be in the middle of some eager speech (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 66-67).

Confused as to whether Captain Wentworth still cares for her or is in love with one of the Musgrove sisters, apparently Louisa, at this moment of privacy sitting at the top of the hill that leads to Winthrop – the estate that belongs to Charles Hayter, the Musgroves's cousin – Anne notices that, based on his chat with Louisa, somehow, Wentworth is curious about her:

> She could imagine what Louisa was feeling. **For herself, she feared to move, lest she should be seen**. **While she remained, a bush of low rambling holly protected her, and they were moving on**. Before they were beyond her hearing, however, Louisa spoke again. 'Mary is good-natured enough in many respects,' said she; 'but she does sometimes provoke me excessively, by her nonsense and pride– the Elliot pride. She has a great deal too much of the Elliot pride. We do so wish that Charles had married Anne instead. I suppose you know he wanted to marry Anne?' After a moment's pause, Captain Wentworth said– 'Do you mean that she refused him?' 'Oh! yes; certainly.' 'When did that happen?' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 67).

As it is possible to note, this scene in the wild is very significant in that during this promenade, Henrietta Musgrove decides to call upon Charles Hayter, whom she had been attached to before Wentworth showed up and diverted her attention away from her cousin. Hence, as Henrietta and Charles reconcile, Anne may assume Frederick will hardly marry this

one Miss Musgrove. During this episode, too, Anne sadly notices that Louisa may be the object of Wentworth's attention, for they have walked together all along the way. However, when the party decides to go back home and Frederick's sister and her husband, Admiral Croft, approach them in their carriage, the captain privately asks Mrs Croft to take Anne toUppercross because he can see she is tired. Therefore, the stroll was the perfect event for the protagonist to find out that, regardless of his supposed interest in Louisa, he still cares about her:

> Yes; he had done it. She was in the carriage, and felt that he had placed her there, that his will and his hands had done it, that she owed it to his perception of her fatigue, and his resolution to give her rest. She was very much affected by the view of his disposition towards her, which all these things made apparent. This little circumstance seemed the completion of all that had gone before. She understood him. He could not forgive her, but he could not be unfeeling. Though condemning her for the past, and considering it with high and unjust resentment, though perfectly careless of her, and though becoming attached to another, still he could not see her suffer, without the desire of giving her relief (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 70).

Moreover, the fact that this long walk happened on a fine November day goes hand in hand with what Anne learns about Wentworth's opinion of her. The autumnal scene of the promenade represents both Anne's loss and her unconscious hopes of a possible reconciliation. Although Frederick no longer seems to be romantically attached to the young lady, just like it is possible to see beauty in the dead leaves of autumn, Anne is glad to know there is something left of his former feelings for her: "[A] remainder of former sentiment; it was an impulse of pure, though unacknowledged friendship; it was a proof of his own warm and amiable heart, which she could not contemplate without emotions so compounded of pleasure and pain, that she knew not which prevailed" (p.70). In fact, it has been suggested that this specific scene is imbued with "Austen's developing sensitivity to a more romantic, meditative relationship with nature" (BODENHEIMER, 1981, p. 606).

In *Emma*, when the summer comes and the weather is nice, Mrs Elton – a newcomer who has recently wed Mr Elton, the local vicar – makes plans to explore Box Hill, supposed to be seven miles away from the fictional village of Highbury, in Surrey – during her brother and sister's visit to Emma's microcosmos**.** In being informed that her family will have to defer coming, Mrs Elton gets disappointed. To make things worse, her horse is lame thus she cannot travel long distances. As he hears this, Mr Knightley feels for Mrs Elton and invites her to entertain herself by picking strawberries in the grounds of Donwell Abbey: "You had better explore to Donwell," replied Mr. Knightley. "That may be done without horses. Come, and eat my strawberries. They are ripening fast" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 285). The ostentatious lady, desperate to go just anywhere, immediately takes the liberty of making a list of friends

she wishes to bring along and of working on arrangements for her special alfresco party. As she informs the owner of the house: “We are to walk about your gardens, and gather the strawberries ourselves, and sit under trees;– and whatever else you may like to provide, it is to be all out of doors– a table spread in the shade, you know. Every thing as natural and simple as possible. Is not that your idea?" (p. 286).

This small passage makes us realise how attractive it is to a parvenue like Mrs Elton to be able to stroll about the gardens of Mr Knightley’s ancestral mansion in such a dry hot time of the year, particularly at a moment when she cannot rely on her horse to leave Highbury. What seems to be only a minor affair actually turns out to be an extremely important episode, for this outing grants Emma the opportunity to be at the hero’s residence for the first time after so long. Just like Elizabeth Bennet is mesmerised when she first sees Pemberley in P&P, it is during the strawberry picking tour of Donwell that the leading lady acknowledges that the abbey, with its respectable size and rambling style, and its ‘suitable, becoming, characteristic situation’ was “**just what it ought to be, and it looked what it was–and Emma felt an increasing respect for it**” (AUSTEN, p. 289, my emphasis).

This summer visit not only allows us to see the building through Emma’s eyes but it also gives us a better insight into Mr Knightley’s social stewardship, for the offer to receive such a large party of friends at his house – apart from the apples and the carriages he frequently sends to the impoverished Miss Bates and her family – corroborates what Alistair Duckworth (2019, p. 153) has mentioned, that “Knightley represents Jane Austen’s ideal social responses throughout the novel”, after all, he is an outstanding landowner. From the beginning of the novel until this scene, Mr Knightley is portrayed as a visitor to all the other houses described throughout the story, Hartfield included. Therefore, it is only when we see his estate and grounds that we get to know him more:

> Until we have this glimpse of his surroundings, we have only seen Mr Knightley as a visitor to other settings, someone who can provide a measured response to the inconsequential comings and goings of Frank Churchill and the turbulence of Harriet; the epitome of a gentleman, aloof, sensible, independent and always leaving when he chooses. He may well be charming but until we are at Donwell, he is a little unsubstantial; the voice of Emma’s conscience, a family friend whose kindness is matched by his abrasiveness. **Visiting Donwell Abbey places Mr Knightley in his real setting and suddenly presents him to us as Emma’s equal** (BOND, 2020. Available at: <https://cardiffbooktalk.wordpress.com/2020/11/25/donwell-it-was-just-what-it-ought-to-be-and-looked-what-it-was/>).

Comparatively, like Elizabeth Bennet, and Catherine Morland’s tour of Henry Tilney’s parsonage in *Northanger Abbey*, Emma is impressed with the house without knowing she is going to live there.

Besides, the strawberries, which were probably at the time of being harvested, also bring to mind an earlier episode in the narrative, in which Miss Bates tells Emma Donwell apples are the ‘very finest sort for baking, beyond a doubt.’ In fact, she says that apart fromsending her household their yearly supply, Mr Knightley has ordered William Larkins, his bailiff, to give them more of the fruit, despite his not being able to keep any for himself:

> He sends us a sack every year; and certainly there never was such a keeping apple anywhere as one of his trees – I believe there is two of them. **My mother says the orchard was always famous in her younger days**. [...] William said it was all the apples of *that* sort his master had; he had brought them all – and now his master had not one left to bake or boil. William did not seem to mind it himself, he was so pleased to think his master had sold so many (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 189, my emphasis).

As we may see, Miss Bates not only gives Emma an account of Knightley’s good nature, but she also points outs how fecund his notable orchard is, which corroborates the fact that Donwell is, essentially, a farm estate. As Claire Lamont affirms, “Donwell with its fertile gardens is the heir of its monastic origin” (LAMONT, 2005, p. 227).Theabundance of timber that catches the heroine’s attentions when she stops to observe the abbey confirms that its landscape still has the old traditional style of the English countryside. Hence Mrs Elton’s suggestion that Donwell has the finest strawberry beds in the country, which once more highlights the defense of a cultural heritage:

> The building lies in a low and sheltered situation, nearly at the foot of a considerable slope; there are ample gardens stretching down to meadows washed by a stream, **and an ‘abundance oftimber in rows and avenues, which neither fashion nor extravagance had rootedup’ - that is, the gardens are still planted in the formal manner of earlier centuries,and have not been 'improved' by the destruction of these avenues, and nor haveany of the Knightley family been so short of money as to necessitate selling thesepurely decorative trees.** The kitchen gardens at Donwell are famous locally fortheir strawberry beds, and there are also orchards**. The remains of the old monastic fishponds strike a note of historic interest.** A broad short avenue of lime trees provides a shady walk to the low stone wall with high pillars which terminates the pleasure grounds, and from here the view is very pretty (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 259-261, my emphasis).

Moreover, as soon as Emma discovers she, in fact, has feelings for Mr Knightley, she decides to go outside, enjoy the summer air and hurry into the shrubbery, which ends up being the perfect scenario for Mr Knightley to show up after so long:

> She longed for the serenity they might gradually introduce: and on Mr Perry’s coming in soon after dinner, with a disengaged hour to give her father, **she lost no time in hurrying into the shrubbery**.–There, with spirits freshened, and thoughts a little relieved, she had taken a few turns, when she saw Mr Knightley passing through the garden door, and coming towards her. [...] **He meant to walk with her, she found** (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 340).

Since he is coming from his London journey and sees Emma in the garden, the hero decides to walk with her. After a few turns, it is the in the open air that Mr Knightley gets around to

speaking up and declaring his love for the heroine. The outdoors, once again, plays a key role in the narrative, for this particular stroll about the shrubberies of Hartfield – and, first and foremost, the serenity of nature – offers them a remarkably intimate moment which they would never have in Mr Woodhouse's drawing room.

Likewise, in S&S, it is during her wander in the hills around Barton cottage that the passionate Marianne Dashwood encounters the charming Willoughby, whom she ends up falling deeply in love with. As she walks with Margaret and it starts to rain heavily, in seeing no shelter, they decide to run down as fast as they can towards their garden gate. Inevitably, Marianne falls and sprains her ankle: "They set off. Marianne had at first the advantage, but a false step brought her suddenly to the ground; and Margaret, unable to stop herself to assist her, was involuntarily hurried along, and reached the bottom in safety" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 30). Minutes later, the stranger comes to her rescue:

> A gentleman carrying a gun, with two pointers playing round him, was passing up the hill and within a few yards of Marianne, when her accident happened. He put down his gun and ran to her assistance. She had raised herself from the ground, but her foot had been twisted in her fall, and she was scarcely able to stand. The gentleman offered his services; and perceiving that her modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary, took her up in his arms without farther delay, and carried her down the hill. Then passing through the garden, the gate of which had been left open by Margaret, he bore her directly into the house, whither Margaret was just arrived, and quitted not his hold till he had seated her in a chair in the parlour (p. 30).

Although Willoughby turns out to be the rogue of the narrative, his chance meeting with Marianne is vital to the story, in that it is strictly because she is deceived by him that the romantic heroine changes and matures over the course of the novel. Based on this, considering that the heroine has just moved to Barton village, the hills around her house are the perfect setting for the incident to take place. If she had remained indoors, this particular encounter would not take place. Marianne's vulnerability, the instability of the weather and her being at the mercy of nature account for the extraordinariness of the introduction, which is itself remarkable by virtue of being unexpected. Alan Richardson points out that the episode in the slopes of Barton valley enables the seducing young man to enter the world of this overly sentimental young lady like "the hero of a favourite story" (RICHARDSON, 2005, p. 401).

On the tour of Sotherton Court, in *Mansfield Park*, after the youngsters examine the Tudor mansion and the unfavourable view from its rooms to the ancient avenue Mr Rushworth wishes to cut down, they decide to take a stroll in the wilderness garden of the estate. This seemingly harmless wander is of utmost importance to the plot because once they are inside it, the party splits into different groups, and what happens between each one of

them foreshadows the characters' fate at the end of the novel. First of all, it is relevant to explain that gardens were already found in the grounds of medieval castles and early manors. However, they became prominent in the 16th and 17th centuries, with the rise of the English country house. Wilderness gardens, more specifically, date back to the latter century, a few years before Brown and Repton replaced their formal style for the pictorial open landscapes of the 1800s. In general, gardens were places destined for people to sit and contemplate, and in many great houses, the pleasure grounds were comprised of flower gardens, wildernesses, and shrubberies, which were outdoor domestic spaces viewed as women's domain. In large estates, the extensive park beyond the pleasure grounds was men's territory, since it was used for hunting.

In relation to the wilderness depicted in *Mansfield Park*, it is clear that Sotherton is an Elizabethan mansion with a garden that is typical of the early 18th century. Thus, although Mr Rushworth wishes to call Repton to improve his landscape, garden and park still present features that are characteristic of the previous century. Austen scholar Robert Clark claims that:

> The fashion for laying out wildernesses within the pleasure grounds of large estates was prevalent in the years 1690-1750, probably peaking around 1735-1740. [...] Such wildernesses were woodland areas divided into "quarters"by regular avenues (*allées*), which were graveled or turfed and hedged with clipped hornbeam or beech, perhaps to a height between 8 and 18 feet. The spaces inside the quarters were usually planted with shrubs and trees, either in orderly rows or in a natural disposition, but they sometimes included grassed, open spaces. The basic layout of avenues was formal, taking its inspiration from the Italian and French parterre of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. [...] Where parterre planting is low, wilderness planting is intentionally high, so that the visitor's gaze is directed along the avenues, sometimes towards a distant eye-catcher (CLARK, 2015, italics in the original. Available at: <https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol36no1/clark/>).[20]

Wilderness gardens had formal bounds, which were usually iron palisades and gates. The earliest ones also presented terraces, cascades, ponds, fountains and statues, with the woods beyond. According to Trevor Yorke: "The gardens also began to spread out into the estate, with arrangements of high clipped hedges in geometric patterns called a wilderness laid out for walking within, although where this name survives today the area tends to be more appropriately natural and wooded" (YORKE, 2012, p. 102, my emphasis). Most of these elements are described in *Mansfield Park* from the moment Mrs Rushworth declares 'the wilderness will be new to all the party'. A bit before entering the garden, the party passes

[20] Clark (2015) also mentions the word 'quarters' comes from Renaissance Gardens, "which were often divided into four rectangular plots of equal size, with paths around the sides leading to a central fountain or statue."

through the lawn, and then a bowling-green, where a long terrace walk leads them to a view of the tops of the tall trees of the wilderness, whose door is unlocked:

> The door, however, proved not to be locked, and they were all agreed in turning joyfully through it, and leaving the unmitigated glare of day behind. A considerable flight of steps landed them in the wilderness, which was a planted wood of about two acres, and though chiefly of larch and laurel, and beech cut down, and though laid out with too much regularity, was darkness and shade, and natural beauty, compared with the bowling-green and the terrace. They all felt the refreshment of it, and for some time could only walk and admire (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 93).

Photograph 19 – The walled garden of Rousham House, Cotswolds, 17th century.

Although Rousham House's pleasure grounds were designed by William Kent (1685–1748), one of the precursors of the Picturesque movement, the manor preserves a formal wilderness garden that dates back to the 17th century. To the left, the blue iron gate of the herbaceous border is one of the entrances to the brick walls of the 'Long Walled Garden'. To the right, it is possible to see the 'Elm Walk', inside it, with its serpentine ways through the woods.

© Andrew Lawson/Rousham House & Garden 2021. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/roushamgardens/. Accessed on 27/12/22.

The first lot to enter the garden is the one formed by Edmund Bertram, Fanny and Mary Crawford. As she has recently discovered Edmund – who, at this point, is as much attracted to her as she is to him – is to take orders soon, the frustrated Mary sees, in the quiet of the wilderness, the ideal opportunity to confront him and make him give up on the idea of becoming a clergyman. A town girl in essence, Miss Crawford tries to convince the younger son that clergymen are so unimportant that they are rarely seen. This brings the conversation

to one of the most pertinent matters of the narrative, that of big city morality versus country morality:

> *You* assign greater consequence to the clergyman than one has been used to hear given, or than I can quite comprehend. One does not see much of this influence and importance in society, and how can it be acquired where they are so seldom seen themselves? [...]
>
> *You* are speaking of London,*I* am speaking of the nation at large.
>
> The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest. [...]
>
> We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there that respectable people of any denomination can do most good; and it certainly is not there that the influence of the clergy can be most felt (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 94, italics in the original).

In this remarkable speech, Edmund defends his career choice by affirming that even though the clergy may not be relevant in the metropolis, the Church plays a key role in the countryside, and that is what the largest part of England is comprised of in the Regency period. His walking in a wood at the moment he is confronted by Miss Crawford only validates the significance of his position.

The alleys in which wilderness gardens were divided were at first strict paths that became serpentine passages connecting different sections within them, that is:

> [V]arious garden rooms (*cabinets, salles vertes*, *salles de verdures*) in which statuary, basins, fountains, and seats would encourage pleasure, meditation, or conversation, and of course appreciation for the taste and discernment of the garden owner. Within such increasingly complex layouts, visitors might become "bewildered" as to where they were (CLARK, 2015, italics in the original. Available at: <https://jasna.org/publications-2/persuasions-online/vol36no1/clark/>).

When Fanny turns to Edmund and says she is tired and would like to sit down, Mary recognises they have been walking in circles in the long wood, and she is confused as to where they are, for they have not yet seen the way out: "Oh! you do not consider how much we have wound about. We have taken such a very serpentine course, and the wood itself must be half a mile long in a straight line, for we have never seen the end of it yet since we left the first great path" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 96). As Fanny rests, Edmund and Miss Crawford decide to wander a bit more through the alleys of the wilderness garden, where they end up forgetting all about Fanny sitting on the bench. Despite Edmund's efforts to take care of Fanny ever since she arrives at Mansfield, at the moment he walks aimlessly in the garden rooms with Miss Crawford, whom he is fascinated with, he cannot think of his poor dear cousin, who is

abandoned in the ha-ha[21]. This bitter scene is extremely important to the plot due to the fact that once more Fanny is assigned to a place of oblivion, and she can only wonder what Edmund and Mary are doing lost in the serpentine courses of the wilderness.

A little after that, the party formed by Henry Crawford, Maria Bertram and Mr Rushworth comes across Fanny in that part of the wood. In seeing the iron gate, Maria feels like going into the park, but the gate is locked. Hence, her fiancé decides to go all the way back to the house and fetch the key to please his fair lady. Miss Bertram, in turn, could not care less about the key, or Mr Rushworth, for that matter, for she is too busy talking to the worldy Henry Crawford, whom she is interested in, in spite of her engagement. Jealous of a potential relationship between him and her sister, Julia Bertram, Maria comments on the bad situation of Sotherton, her home-to-be. Mr Crawford, then, affirms the prospects ahead of her are only too fair. Bewildered as to the meaning of his words, Miss Bertram replies: "'Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally, I conclude.Yes, certainly, the sun shines, and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. 'I cannot get out,' as the starling said'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 101, my emphasis).As it is possible to notice in the passage Maria Bertram quotes[22], the landscape is of utmost importance not only to the narrative, as a whole, but especially in this scene, for Austen uses the grounds of Sotherton Court as a metaphor for Maria's loveless relationship with Mr Rushworth, whom she makes a fool of when she asks him to walk many miles as to fetch the key. The gate and the ha-ha of the wilderness are symbolic representations of her being trapped in her upcoming marriage of convenience to the silly Rushworth.

Afterwards, the histrionic Henry Crawford induces her to stop waiting for Rushworth's key and break into the park by passing round the edge of the gate with his aid. Maria does not think twice when the young man teases her by implying she is not forbidden to do so:

> 'And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr Rushworth's authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited'
>
> 'Prohibited!nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will' (p. 101).

[21] A ha-ha is an invisible ditch, typical of the landscape gardens of the 18th century, introduced by Capability Brown and characterised by vast expanses of open parkland, now coming up to the front door of the estates. The ha-ha was used to prevent animals, especially the livestock and deer, from getting close to the house. (YORKE, 2012, p. 103-104).

[22] The referred passage is a quotation from Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

Taking into accountthat Maria leaves her future husband behind, ignoring Fanny's warning that she had better not go, we may infer that Miss Bertram's proper decorum disappears, for she is there, in a garden, amidst nature. Were she indoors, and amongst people, she could hardly behave this way towards Mr Rushworth, especially because she in his residence. In fact, this escape with Henry from the confinement of the bounded wilderness garden to the large park beyond prefigures their fate. At the end of the novel, although Maria is already married to James Rushworth, she abandons him and elopes with Mr Crawford.

Shifting from one wilderness to the other, in P&P, the first description we have of Rosings Park, the impressive estate and grounds of Mr Collins's patroness, whose garden is separated from his humble parsonage only by a lane, is:

> But of all the views which his garden, or which the country or kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house. It was a handsome modern building, well situated on rising ground (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 134).

Since the mistress of Rosings, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, turns out to be Mr Darcy's aunt, whilst Elizabeth Bennet is staying with Mr and Mrs Collins at their home at Hunsford, Mr Darcy comes to Rosings to pay Lady Catherine a visit. The hero knows, from previous experience, that Elizabeth is an avid walker. Concerning this, Judith Page points out that "Elizabeth's affinity with walking and the natural landscape is crucial to the narrative: "the various outside places provide alternatively the privacy to meditate and the opportunity to talk privately to another person" (PAGE, 2013, p. 101). At the beginning of the novel, Elizabeth walks across the fields to visit her sister at Netherfield, the house rented by Mr Bingley. When they see her, Bingley's sisters are so appalled by her dirty petticoat, covered in mud, that Caroline Bingley spares no efforts to offend Elizabeth and criticise her wildness, which according to her, is a 'most country-town indifference to decorum.' As Darcy has been spending a few days at Netherfield at the time, Miss Bingley takes advantage of Elizabeth's situation to make him despise her, but Caroline does not succeed:

> [J]ealous Miss Bingley takes great pains to critique Elizabeth's 'almost wild' appearance, concluding that Elizabeth's actions 'shew an abominable sort of conceited independence [...] Her verbal assaults on Elizabeth, with expressions like 'Her hair so untidy, so blowsy!' (p. 39), however, have the opposite of her intended effect. Elizabeth's warmth, wildness and independent spirit pique Darcy's interest and arouse his passion. Like the picturesque landscape itself, Elizabeth defies Miss Bingley's stiff sense of decorum and form, and she embodies instead imperfections that have their own appeal. Not bound by the false proprieties of a social climber like Miss Bingley, Elizabeth acts out of genuine concern (PAGE, 2013, p. 100-101, my emphasis).

Consequently, it is not surprising that Mr Darcy keeps running into Elizabeth and joining the heroine in her many wanders in the park during his sojourn at his aunt's estate:

> More than once did Elizabeth, in her ramble within the park, unexpectedly meet Mr Darcy.She felt all the perverseness of the mischance that should bring him where no one else was brought, and, to prevent its ever happening again, took care to inform him at first that it was a favourite haunt of hers. How it could occur a second time, therefore, was very odd! Yet it did, and even a third. It seemed like wilful ill-nature, or a voluntary penance, for on these occasions it was not merely a few formal inquiries and an awkward pause and then away, but he actually thought it necessary to turn back and walk with her. He never said a great deal, nor did she give herself the trouble of talking or of listening much; but it struck her in the course of their third rencontre that he was asking some odd unconnected questions–about her pleasure in being at Hunsford, her love of solitary walks, and her opinion of Mr. and Mrs. Collins's happiness(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 156).

Considering that until now Darcy and Elizabeth were mere acquaintances, and that to her, he was, so far, the most disagreeable and conceited man on Earth, it is evidet that being alone in the surroundings of Rosings Park contributes immensely for them to get to know each other more deeply, away from the pressure of her family and of the Hertfordshire society, where she lives. Therefore, the natural setting affords them an intimacy they have not had before and these moments wandering in the woods there prompt Mr Darcy's emblematic first proposal to her. As Judith Page points out:

> Austen is careful to let us know that Elizabeth's favourite occupation while staying at the Parsonage is walking freely when the others are visiting Rosings [...] Of course Darcy soon learns her secret and is drawn to her during these once-solitary walks – and Elizabeth absurdly sees his action as 'wilful ill-nature' or 'voluntary penance' (p. 204) rather than a sign of his deepening attraction to her (PAGE, 2013, p.103).

When he goes to Rosings, the leading man brings along one of his cousins, a Colonel Fitzwilliam, who is delighted to make Elizabeth's acquaintance. The colonel also encounters Elizabeth a few times strolling about the park, and at one of these chance meetings, he reveals to her that it was Darcy who separated his best friend, Mr Bingley, from her beloved sister Jane:

> She was engaged one day as she walked, in perusing Jane's last letter, and dwelling on some passages which proved that Jane had not written in spirits, when, instead of being again surprised by Mr Darcy, she saw on looking up that Colonel Fitzwilliam was meeting her. Putting away the letter immediately and forcing a smile, she said:
>
> 'I did not know before that you ever walked this way.'
>
> 'I have been making the tour of the park,' he replied [...]
>
> 'Oh! yes,' said Elizabeth drily: 'Mr Darcy is uncommonly kind to Mr Bingley, and takes a prodigious deal of care of him.'
>
> 'Care of him! Yes, I really believe Darcy *does* take care of him in those points where he most wants care. From something that he told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to him. From something that he told me in our journey hither, I have reason to think Bingley very much indebted to him. [...] What he told me was merely this: that he congratulated himself on having

> lately saved a friend from the inconveniences of a most imprudent marriage (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 159).

This striking piece of information Elizabeth receives in the outdoors influences the bitter reply she gives Darcy at the moment she refuses his first marriage offer: "Had not my feelings decided against you–had they been indifferent, or had they even been favourable, do you think that any consideration would tempt me to accept the man who has been the means of ruining, perhaps for ever, the happiness of a most beloved sister?" (p. 164). Curiously, it is also amidst nature that, following this unfortunate scene, Mr Darcy reaches her and hands in the letter in which he tells the protagonist that Mr Wickham is but an unscrupulous person, and explains his reasons to separate Bingley from Jane:

> After walking two or three times along that part of the lane, she was tempted, by the pleasantness of the morning, to stop at the gates and look into the park. The five weeks which she had now passed in Kent had made a great difference in the country, and every day was adding to the verdure of the early trees. She was on the point of continuing her walk, when she caught a glimpse of a gentleman within the sort of grove which edged the park; he was moving that way; and, fearful of its being Mr. Darcy, she was directly retreating. But the person who advanced was now near enough to see her, and stepping forward witheagerness, pronounced her name. She had turned away; but on hearing herself called, though in a voice which proved it to be Mr. Darcy, she moved again towards the gate. He had by that time reached it also, and, holding out a letter, which she instinctively took, said, with a look of Thaughty composure, 'I have been walking in the grove some time in the hope of meeting you. Will you do me the honour of reading that letter?' And then, with a slight bow, turned again into the plantation, and was soon out of sight (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 167-168, my emphasis).

Afterwards, Darcy, once again, unexpectedly arrives at Pemberley when Elizabeth is taking a survey of its grounds with Mr and Mrs Gardiner. He immediately joins them in their hike across the park, which, in spite of the awkwardness of the situation, allows them to reconnect after the unfriendly separation at Rosings:

> After walking some time in this way, the two ladies in front, the two gentlemen behind, on resuming their places, after descending to the brink of the river for the better inspection of some curious water-plant, there chanced to be a little alteration. It originated in Mrs Gardiner, who, fatigued by the exercise of the morning, found Elizabeth's arm inadequate to her support, and consequently preferred her husband's. **Mr Darcy took her place by her niece, and they walked on together** (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 214, my emphasis).

Darcy's kindness to her and her aunt and uncle as they walk together, in his territory, makes Elizabeth wonder if he still loves her, especially because of his courtesy towards her and her relatives. In turn, Darcy's contemplating the landscape with the protagonist implies that he, too, would like to know whether she still has the same opinions about him.

Near the end of the novel, when Bingley and Darcy go back to Hertfordshire to see the Bennet girls, Bingley suggests that they all ramble in the environs of Longbourn, for he

wishes to be alone with Jane after staying away from her for so many months. When her sister Kitty leaves them, Elizabeth herself does not mind strolling with Darcy alone. In the most especial passage of the narrative, that is this walking scene, Elizabeth and Darcy have enough freedom to reunite and finally make amends. Even though Darcy was not successful at the time of his ill-fated first proposal indoors at Hunsford Parsonage, now the different setting brings about a more candid marriage proposal, as well as a brighter outcome. In reality:

> Austen offers no exact description of the walk, but the reader understands the freedom that the lovers enjoy while walking in the fresh air. Austen focuses on this emotional quality rather than any description of the natural world. In fact, it seems that the lack of description reflects the way the lovers experience the moment (PAGE, 2013, p. 107).

As they walk side by side, Darcy states that his feelings for the young lady have not changed: "You are too generous to trifle with me. If your feelings are still what they were last April, tell me so at once. *My* affections and wishes are unchanged, but one word from you will silence me on this subject for ever" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 306). Elizabeth, then, accepts his affection and assures him she presently reciprocates his feelings. Later on, "[a]fter walking several miles in a leisurely manner, and too busy to know anything about it, they ound at last, on examining their watches, that it was time to be at home" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 310).

All of these accidental encounters out of doors are indispensable to bring hero and heroine together. In contrast with their vexatious first meeting in a ballroom at the beginning of the story, the fact that their most intimate and important moments take place in the open air validates the romantic essence of the narrative. Furthermore, it corroborates the idea that the feelings they have for one another change, grow and mature, just as it is in nature.

In *Northanger Abbey*, protagonist Catherine Morland has been spending the winter season in Bath with Mr and Mrs Allen. Sick and tired of walking around the ballrooms of the city, when Mr Henry Tilney and his sister, Miss Eleanor Tilney, invite her to go on a country walk, she feels so elated that 'her spirits dance within her':

> In chatting with Miss Tilney before the evening concluded, a new source of felicity arose to her. She had never taken a country walk since her arrival in Bath. Miss Tilney, to whom all the commonly frequented environs were familiar, spoke of them in terms which made her all eagerness to know them too; and on her openly fearing that she might find nobody to go with her, it was proposed by the brother and sister that they should join in a walk, some morning or other. 'I shall like it,' she cried, 'beyond anything in the world; and do not let us put it off–let us go tomorrow' (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 60).

Given that Catherine has only recently met the Tilneys, there could be no better occasion for her to be more acquainted with them than a long walk away from the hustle and bustle of a holiday town like Bath. Nonetheless, a lot of things happen to prevent her from having this

magical moment in the country with her new friends. On the very day she had set to meet them, it starts raining heavily. As the time passes by and the Tilneys do not call on her, much to her distress, the young lady sees her own brother, her cunning friend Isabella, and her brother, Mr Thorpe, before her. In observing that the streets are dirty, the party tries to dissuade her from wandering in the mud: "I never saw so much dirt in my life. Walk! You could no more walk than you could fly! It has not been so dirty the whole winter; it is ankle-deep everywhere" (p. 64).

Insisting that she go to Bristol and Blaize Castle with them, the gauche and mischievous Mr Thorpe lies to Catherine and affirms he has just seen Henry Tilney driving his phaeton. As a lover of Gothic literature, Catherine reluctantly decides to visit the castle, though. As they pass by, in their carriages, Henry and Miss Tilney, who are walking slowly on the pavement, see her from a distance. This scene is extremely significant because it is Isabella Thorpe and Mr Thorpe's first attempt to separate Catherine from the Tilneys. Both siblings know quite well that the country walk can afford them the privacy and the peace they need to get to know more about one another.

At last, regardless of the Thorpes's endeavours to break her engagement to walk a second time, Catherine goes hiking up Beechen Cliff, a nearby hill, with the knowledgeable Tilneys. During the journey, as they talk about books, history, drawings, politics and nature and enjoy each other's society, Catherine Morland is slightly ashamed of her education. Her ignorance of what they say emphasises the ordinariness and naivete with which this young heroine is described at the beginning of the narrative, which accounts for her future delusions at Northanger:

> In the present instance, she confessed and lamented her want of knowledge, declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw: and a lecture on the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admired by him, and her attention was so earnest that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. He talked of foregrounds, distances, and second distances–side-screens and perspectives–lights and shades; and Catherine was so hopeful a scholar that when they gained the top of Beechen Cliff, she voluntarily rejected the whole city of Bath as unworthy to make part of a landscape (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 86-87).

It is also the candour and inexperience she innocently displays amidst nature that contributes for Henry Tilney to fall in love with whom she genuinely is. In his book *In the Improvement of the Estate*, Duckworth has remarked that:

> Jane Austen was no enemy to tasteful improvements, as her description of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice* most eloquently shows. But she also belonged to a long tradition of anti-improvement literature, on which she drew, particularly in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, in order to define the threats she perceived to a traditionally grounded cultural inheritance (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. xviii).

In view of all that has been analysed throughout this section, we may notice that not just in P&P and *Mansfield Park*, but in all the novels, both the interior and the exterior of the houses are essential to comprehending the routine of their inhabitants. If the indoor space gives us an insight into the behaviour of these dwellers, the out of doors allows us to have a glimpse of their emotions, for nature reveals character. Besides, the value of the picturesque shows Austen's preoccupation with a quaint rural landscape that is soon going to be devastated by the imminent Industrial Revolution, and which still is an inherent part of her world. Life as she knows it is intrinsically associated with nature, and if this long-established landscape of the English countryside fades away, the habits she portrays will inevitably change.

2.2 **The role of the servants: real machines behind the privileges of the leisured class**

> I suppose, sister, you will put the child in the little white attic, near the old nurseries. It will be much the best place for her, [...] close by the housemaids, who could either of them help to dress her, you know, and take care of her clothes, for I suppose you would not think it fair to expect Ellis to wait on her as well as the others. Indeed, I do not see that you could possibly place her anywhere else.
> Jane Austen,***Mansfield Park***

As it has been previously described, in one of the most remarkable scenes of P&P, Mr Collins, the heir to the Bennet estate, visits Longbourn House to meet his distant relations and to become familiar with the property he is going to inherit. In the first evening of his stay, when the family gathers together for dinner, the clergyman takes the opportunity to talk about himself, his patroness and, first and foremost, to inquire about the girls' accomplishments.

Since he is also seeking to choose a wife amidst his female cousins, on the occasion, as he praises the food that is being served, Mr Collins does not hesitate to ask which of Mr and Mrs Bennet's daughters has prepared the referred meal:

> He was interrupted by a summons to dinner; and the girls smiled on each other. They were not the only objects of Mr Collin's admiration. The hall, the dining-room, and all its furniture, were examined and praised; and his commendation of everything would have touched Mrs Bennet's heart, but for the mortifying supposition of his viewing it all as his own future property. **The dinner too in its turn was highly admired; and he begged to know to which of his fair cousins the excellency of its cooking was owing** (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 57, my emphasis).

However, vexed at his disagreeable question, Mrs Bennet answers quite straightforwardly that they can perfectly afford to pay a cook: "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. He begged pardon for having displeased her (p. 57)." Even though the Bennets belong to the lesser rural aristocracy – that is, they are not inhabitants of a stately home and they do not get a high income from their piece of land (it yields £2,000 per annum) – judging by the matriarch's reply, we may perceive she is very offended by the mere supposition of not being able to have domestic assistance. At a time when manual labour was degrading, it was mandatory to rely on the aid of servants. As a pseudo-gentry mistress of a reasonable estate such as Longbourn, Mrs Bennet finds it insulting not to have employees. In the elite, it was vital to have a large staff, for its members were real machines behind the extravagant lifestyle of the leisured class. Since the baronial mansions of the period were, above all things, praised for their prestige and lavish display of wealth, it is only reasonable that a lot of people were involved in their maintenance. Therefore, Mrs Bennet's reaction to Mr Collins's assumption is crucial for us to understand that in Georgian England being able to keep servants was a matter of dignity and social status. As Daniel Pool (1993, p. 219) suggests, women, in particular:

> That was, after all, the whole point of being a lady–you din't *do* anything, except tell the servants what to do, receive your callers, and work on your embroidery or perhaps paint decorative flowers on the fire screen for the hearth. Manual labor of any kind would have cast serious doubts on your eligibility to be received in polite society.

This great necessity for assistance is also portrayed in S&S, when the Dashwood widow and her daughters are forced to leave the pompous Norland Park (worth £4,000 a year) after the death of Mr Dashwood. As they are now moving to a smaller house, the Dashwoods' way of life is inevitably going to change. Hence, due to the decrease in their income, the sensible Elinor persuades her mother to dismiss the staff. But, still, some of the servants who have formerly worked for them at Norland accompany the girls to Barton Cottage. In fact, two

of them set off for the west ahead of the family, so that they may organise the place to receive the ladies as soon as they arrive:

> *Her* wisdom, too, limited the number of their servants to three; two maids and a man, with whom they were speedily provided from amongst those who had formed their establishment at Norland. The man and one of the maids were sent off immediately into Devonshire, to prepare the house for their mistress's arrival (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 19).

Based on this passage, we may infer that although the Dashwoods presently have short annual earnings of £500 a year and are thus trying to save up as much as possible (they sell their horses and carriage upon their removal), not keeping any servants is by no means an option.

A similar situation occurs in *Persuasion*. When Sir Walter Elliot realises he has nearly gone bankrupt, the baronet is advised to retrench, and amongst a lot of coveniences, it is mandatory for him to restrict the number of attendants he has in his household: "What! every comfort of life knocked off! Journeys, London, **servants**, horses [...] To live no longer with the decencies even of a private gentleman!" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 10, my emphasis). Mortified by the reductions that would affect the respectability of Kellynch Hall, the aristocrat prefers to move to a smaller house in Bath to live under such conditions, for his ancestral manor itself required a lifestyle that he could no longer fit into: "It did not appear to him that Sir Walter could materially alter his style of living in a house which had such a character of hospitality and ancient dignity to support" (p. 10). Afterwards, when Sir Walter and his eldest daughter, Elizabeth Elliot, are already residing in Bath, the latter is ashamed of inviting her sister Mary Musgrove and her in-laws to dinner. Although the Elliots have long been acquainted with the Musgroves, Elizabeth refuses to throw a dinner party so as to avoid the humiliation of having fewer servants now:

> Elizabeth was, for a short time, suffering a good deal. She felt that Mrs Musgrove and all her party ought to be asked to dine with them; but she could not bear to have the difference of style, **the reduction of servants, which a dinner must betray**, witnessed by those who had been always so inferior to the Elliots of Kellynch. It was a struggle between propriety and vanity (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 172).

By analysing Austen's fiction, we may assume she does not put especial emphasis on the employees of her great houses. Nevertheless, even though the author does not give an in-depth account of servants in her stories, in spite of their silence, they are constantly mentioned in all the novels. Hence, it is clear that they are inherent to her narratives, for they are indispensable to the existence of the English country house. In his book *Up and Down Stairs:* The History of the Country House Servant, Jeremy Musson affirms that:

> For those who love looking around country houses, the servant should be regarded as an indivisible part of the story. Like great machines, these houses combined public and private functions, as places of residence and hospitality, as well as of

> political and estate administration. They were built not only for the occupation of a landowning family but also had to accommodate a large body of servants to run it, whose duties included not only providing food, heat and light but the maintenance of precious contents and furnishings that needed constant attention (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

In fact, it was the servants who did the housework in these huge residences, especially as regards cleaning the vast furniture and the huge rooms – along with the high ceilings and tall windows (apart from all the paintings, sculptures and books found in the galleries and long libraries) – preparing extravagant banquets and balls, taking care of their clothes, gardens, stables, doing the laundry, and dressing their masters, amongst many other things. Besides, due to the lack of infrastructure, servants were overworked, for they strived to ensure that their lords had the basic amenities of the time:

> Quite apart from reasons of status, you had to have servants unless you wanted to do housework yourself. There were no electric lights for most of the century, nor vacuum cleaners, nor floor polishers, nor dishwashers, nor driers–if you wanted to do something, you did it by hand. And even transportation required horses that someone had to groom, water, and feed every day of the year. If you wanted a hot bath, you generally had to heat the water over a fire and then transport it upstairs in buckets and pour it into a hip bath. Plates and dishes all had to be scrubbed by hand after each meal or dinner party. Carpets had to be beaten and cleaned manually, and halls and floors and stone stoops had to be scrubbed on hands and knees. It all took manpower or womanpower–there were no technological shortcuts (POOL, 1993, p. 218).

In the Middle Ages and in the Tudor period, there was a predominance of male workforce in castles and early manors. In those ancient days, servants would mingle with soldiers and lords as they all gathered togethered in the Old Hall, where meals were taken. Given that country houses evolved throughout the centuries – and the need for privacy became more and more intense – by Austen's time, the role of servants, the way they must behave and the space they occupied in the rural mansions had considerably changed. To begin with, from the end of the 1600s onwards, women started to have a more prominent role in domestic service, outnumbering men. Due to that, workers were segregated by gender. However, in general, women's wages corresponded to 2/3 of those of men. It was around this time that the housekeeper, one of the most important female attendants of a grand estate, first emerged. Mostattendants were live-in servants. In fact, a great deal of them used to spend several years in the same household. Furthermore, they were often unmarried and worked many hours a day. Bearing that in mind, at the very beginning of *Emma*, for example, we learn that Miss Taylor, Emma's governess, had lived at Hartfield for a long time before she met Mr Weston and decided to get married: "Her mother had died too long ago [...] and her place had been supplied by an excellent woman as governess, who had fallen little short of a

mother in affection. Sixteen years had Miss Taylor been in Mr Woodhouse's family, less as a governess than a friend" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 1).

Considering that 18th-century English society was highly stratified, it is not surprising that amidst domestic servants, there was also a very strict hierarchy to be followed. Workers were split into indoor and outdoor servants, and in both areas, they were organised according to the positions they occupied, from top to bottom. Consequently, these employees were also divided into upper and lower servants. The longer an employee remained at the house, the higher their rank was. The lower the rank, the more distant from their masters they were. In the novels, this stratification is not especially emphasised, but different kinds of servants are particularly mentioned in each one of them. In some texts like *Emma* and *Mansfield Park*, for example, it is clear that they appear more frequently – and in a larger number, as is the case with the latter novel – than in the other titles. Richard Barras claims that:

> In the novels of Jane Austen there are to be found exquisite descriptions of the idyllic life on an English country estate at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It is a world of finely demarcated class divisions, arcane rules of correct behaviour, and an extreme fascination with the way of life of one's social equals. Yet there was a darker side to the reality, reflecting the widening of income differentials and the sharpening of class distinctions which occurred during the course of the eighteenth century. **The careful gradations of status so important to the landed elite were extended to their servants.** In the late medieval period, aristocratic households had numbered in the hundreds, and servants and masters had intermingled freely in their daily lives. By the eighteenth century, households had shrunk to well under a hundred. **Servants were only allowed to approach their masters when summoned, and then had to act according to a strict code of etiquette** (BARRAS, 2016, p. 55, my emphasis).

Above all things, it is essential to stress that in the Regency period, it was the custom for servants to lodge in the attics, on the lower storeys or even in wings or outbuildings that were far from the central axis of the rural mansions they worked at. Differently from the 19th century, at Austen's time, the lower male servants, in general, did not wear uniforms, but liveries. Mostly worn by footmen, a livery was a fancy colourful dress coat with buttons resembling a military uniform. The word 'livery' comes from the French term *livrer*, which means 'to deliver.'

Photograph 20 – Eighteenth-century servants livery

Colourful liveries with embroidered buttons, short trousers (breeches), stockings, and wigs.

© The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Available at: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/86582. Accessed on 30/11/22.

Liveries were the first kind of uniforms worn by the servants of royal courts in the Early Modern Period. As he comments on the role of **footmen** and their indispensable service to the wealthy households of the time, Daniel Pool explains:

> The footmen had duties both outside and inside the home—in the residence they trimmed lamps, carried coal, sometimes cleaned silverware, announced visitors, and stood around looking imposing. In their public capacity they waited at dinner and attended the mistress when she went calling—leaving the visiting cards at the front door while she waited in the carriage. They also attended family members to the opera, riding on the back of the coach or carriage–partly to keep street boys from jumping up and getting a free ride–in their "**livery**," or **household uniform of fancy coat, knee breeches, stockings, and powdered hair, a costume that endured to the end of the 1800s**. Because of their appearance at dinner and in public with the family, footmen were supposed to be the most "presentable" of the male servants. [...] Ideally, they were supposed to be quite imposing (POOL, 1993, p. 221, my emphasis).

The senior servants, though, dressed in their own way. In an online article written to the BBC News website[23], Lucy Wallis (2012) comments on the usage of uniforms both in the 18th century and in the Victorian Era: "Uniform was another way of maintaining rank. Servants dressed a little more individually in the 18th century. The black dress, white apron and white cap worn by maids in the 19th century was a Victorian creation, a way of disguising personal identities."

The outdoor staff of a manor house was usually comprised of a clerk of the stables, a coachman, grooms, a head gardener and gardeners. Even though many houses substituted the clerk of stables for the coachman, the **clerk of stables** was primarily concerned with managing the stables, the coach houses, and controlling the staff under him, **coachman** included. The latter was a liveried servant who not only drove the coach and prepared the stables, but was also in charge of the carriages and horses. The **stable boy**, also known as a **groom**, helped clean the stables and the horses. The coachman and the head gardener were the senior workers in the outoor staff. In *Mansfield Park*, it is implicit that the Bertrams have two postillions, that is, the servants who drive the left-hand horse of a carriage. Their names are Charles and Stephen. Nonetheless, the real coachman is an old man named Wilcox, who used to help Fanny whenever she rode without her cousins. When she describes the Sotherton journey to Sir Thomas Bertram, Mrs Norris, his sister-in-law, shows she was worried about the old coachman's health and asked him not to convey them, but regardless of that, he put on his wig and travelled to Mr Rushworth's estate anyway:

> My dear Sir Thomas, if you had seen the state of the roads *that* day! I thought we should never have got through them, though we had the four horses of course; and **poor old coachman would attend us, out of his great love and kindness, though he was hardly able to sit the box** on account of the rheumatism which I had been doctoring him for ever since Michaelmas. I cured him at last; but he was very bad all the winter–and this was such a day, I could not help going to him up in his room before we set off to advise him not to venture: **he was putting on his wig**: so I said, '**Coachman, you had much better not go**; your Lady and I shall be very safe; you know how steady Stephen is, and Charles has been upon the leaders so often now, that I am sure there is no fear.' But, however, I soon found it would not do; he was bent upon going, and as I hate to be worrying and officious, I said no more; but my heart quite ached for him at every jolt, and when we got into the rough lanes about Stoke [...], it was worse than anything you can imagine, I was quite in an agony about him (AUSTEN, 1994, p.190-191my emphasis).

In the excerpt above, a lot of things are at stake. Given that Wilcox is an old servant, it is evident that he will not be as healthy as the other coachmen (Stephen and Charles). However, as a token of his extreme devotion to the family, by no means does he accept to remain in his room whilst the Bertrams go on a trip away from Mansfield. In spite of his rheumatism and

[23] "Servants: A life below stairs." Article written by Lucy Wallis (2012) to the BBC News Website, found at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-19544309>.Retrieved 22/10/22.

Mrs Norris's assurance that they will do just fine without him, Wilcox puts on his wig, clearly stating that he is reporting for duty. Although briefly delineated by Austen, the old coachman's condition is representative of the loyalty of the servants of these great country houses, who on top of spending their entire lives working for the same household, still had to be useful to their masters. It is unclear whether the cunning Mrs Norris recommended that he not go because of his arthritis or simply because he could not drive well anymore. In any case, we may see that she does not address him by his name, but rather, in a very impersonal manner, she calls him 'coachman.'

A little before the event, as Mrs Norris, Edmund and Maria Bertram think of the trip to Sotherton, the aunt mentions the old coachman's dislike for narrow lanes. Maria, who is very keen to travel in Henry Crawford's barouche, complains of Wilcox's driving abilities: "'That would not be a very handsome reason for using Mr Crawford's,' said Maria; 'but the truth is, that Wilcox is a stupid old fellow, and does not know how to drive. I will answer for it that we shall find no inconvenience from narrow roads on Wednesday'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 79). The rude remark Maria makes about such a senior servant has much to do with the spoilt upbringing she receveid from her aunt Norris. Despite Maria Bertram's awful treatment, which inevitably reveals her bad character, near the end of the narrative, the importance of Wilcox is apparent. It is precisely he – who has constantly been of great assistance to Fanny – that takes the heroine away from Mansfield up to the second stage of her journey back to Portsmouth:

> The novelty of travelling, and the happiness of being with William, soon produced their natural effect on Fanny's spirits, when Mansfield Park was fairly left behind; and by the time their first stage was ended, and they were to quit Sir Thomas's carriage, she was able to take leave of the old coachman, and send back proper messages, with cheerful looks (p. 379-380, my emphasis).

Once again, we may observe how reliable the old coachman is to Fanny and the Bertrams. The fact that he has been a part of Mansfield for so long makes us understand that the live-in servants who conducted themselves in a great manner could spend a lifetime working at the same stately home.

As we examine the other members of the outdoor staff, we find out that the **head gardener** was the person who managed the pleasure grounds and kitchen gardens, whose produce was consumed by the household. Many of the head gardeners of the great estates of the time rose to prominence, becoming landscape architects. Such was the case with Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, who used to be head gardener at Stowe House, in Buckinghamshire, before becoming famous. As Jeremy Musson points out, head gardeners were not only

responsible for changing landscapes, but also producing exotic fruits, which were in vogue at the time:

> The scope offered to gardeners of the period had been increased by the mastery of better regulated hothouses or 'stoves'. Using hotbeds of tanner's bark, they could create the hot and humid conditions necessary for tropical plants. Thus by the 1730s most noblemen were the proud owners of hothouses, greenhouses and pineries for exotic fruit. This extension of responsibilities clearly put pressure on gardeners to acquire the necessary skills and experience (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

The other **gardeners** contributed to the maintance of the gardens and were responsible for showing them to visitors. In *Northanger Abbey*, we do not know whether or not General Tilney employs a head gardener at Northanger. However, when Catherine Morland visits his gardens, she is dumbfounded at the countless hot-houses she sees:

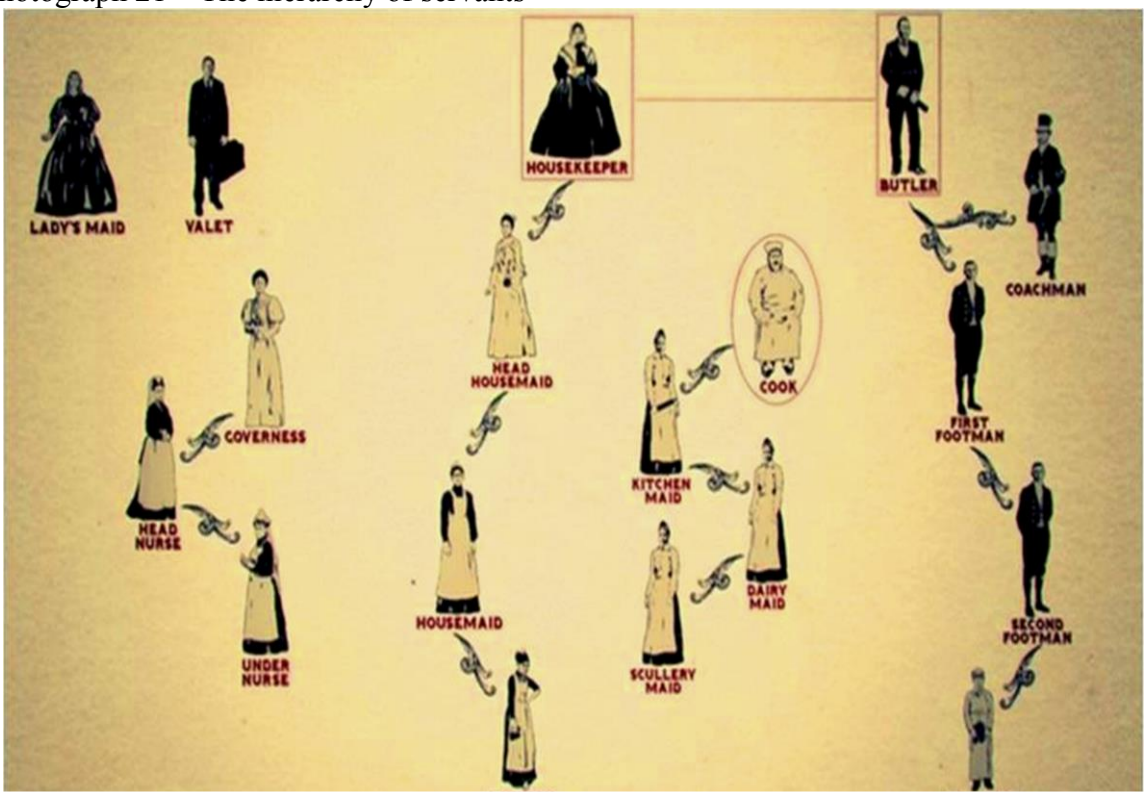
> The kitchen-garden was to be next admired, and he led the way to it across a small portion of the park. The number of acres contained in this garden was such as Catherine could not listen to without dismay, being more than double the extent of all Mr Allen's, as well as her father's, including church-yard and orchard. The walls seemed countless in number, endless in length; a village of hot-houses seemed to arise among them, and a whole parish to be at work within the enclosure (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 141-142).

As the general implies he loves pineapples, we may infer he can only employ a especialist as head gardener as well as an army of other gardeners to cater for his fine taste and high standards:

> Though careless enough in most matters of eating, he loved good fruit–or if he did not, his friends and children did. **There were great vexations, however, attending such a garden as his**. **The utmost care could not always secure the most valuable fruits**. The pinery had yielded only one hundred in the last year (p. 142, my emphasis).

Aside from a clerk of stables, stable boys, a coachman and gardeners, the landowners that loved hunting and shooting would also hire a **hunt staff** and **gamekeepers**, who managed the shooting of birds on the estate. The indoor staff of a great house, though, was comprised of far more workers than the outdoor personnel:

Photograph 21 – The hierarchy of servants



In the top left corner of the picture, we see the lady's maid and the valet. Both of them worked directly with the landowner's family. A little below them, from bottom to top, we have the under nurse, the head nurse and the governess, who was the upper servant amidst the education employees. From left to middle, we have a group of female general workers, whose leader is the housekeeper. From top to bottom: housekeeper, head housemaid, housemaid and laundry maid. In the centre, we may see the kitchen department, comprised of a scullery maid, a dairy maid, a kitchen maid, and the cook, at the top. To the right, we have the group of male general workers. From bottom to top: the hallboy, the second footman, the first footman, the coachman and the butler. As we may observe, the housekeeper and the butler were the heads of the female and male general servants, consecutively.

The picture above depicts the hierarchy of the inner servants, divided into different sections. Despite not being portrayed above, in the grandest houses, the **steward** was the most important servant of the estate, for he was responsible for its administration. This live-in officer had his own chamber and a boy to wait on him, also known as the **hallboy**. The steward was the most important male servant in a stately home. Hence, he was the highest-paid employee; the male cook came a second close. A steward earned around £1,000 a year. Because of that, only the wealthiest households employed one. In most cases, the butler

occupied his position amidst the menservants. Some proprietors also had a bailiff, who delt with the estate farm:

> [T]he head of the male staff of the grandest establishments was the house steward who [...] was the 'most important officer' although he featured only in the households of 'noblemen or gentlemen of great fortunes'. Elsewhere, the most senior staff member would be the housekeeper. A land steward, or agent, would manage the estates, probably with a bailiff to run the home farm. The house steward's chief duties were 'to hire, manage and direct, and discharge every servant of every denomination'. He must also manage the household accounts, paying all the bills and all the servants' wages. When the household was on the move, he was further responsible for planning and arranging the packing up of the house, especially the valuables, and for transporting goods and people between houses, or between the country house and the London house (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

In P&P, Mr Darcy has a steward, and it is an urgent conference with the latter that prompts the hero to go to Pemberley ahead of his friends. The business meeting with his employee enables Darcy to come across Elizabeth Bennet as she visits the house:

> She wished him to know that she had been assured of his absence before she came to the place, and accordingly began by observing, that his arrival had been very unexpected [...] He ackowledged the truth of it all, and said that **business with his steward** had occasioned his coming forward a few hours before the rest of the party with whom he had been travelling (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 214, my emphasis).

Northanger Abbey's General Tilney, too, has a steward, and it is also an important request from the referred servant that makes the Tilneys leave Bath. On the occasion, the general seizes his chance to invite Catherine Morland to Northanger:

> **A letter from my steward** tells me that my presence is wanted at home; and being diappointed in my hope of seeing the Marquis of Longtown and General Courteney here, some of my very old friends, there is nothing to detain me longer in Bath. [...] If you can be induced to honour us with a visit, you will make us happy beyond expression (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 108, my emphasis).

In *Mansfield Park*, when Sir Thomas Bertram returns from a long stay on his Antigua plantation, he must resume his activities as master of the family estate. His pressing duties include talking to his steward and bailiff. Besides that, he instructs the other servants to clean and repair the house, so that every trace of the theatre that was put up in his absence is removed once for all:

> He had to reinstate himself in all the wonted concerns of his Mansfield life: to see his **steward and his bailiff**: to examine and compute, and, in the intervals of business, to walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest plantations; but active and methodical, he had not only done all this before he resumed his seat as master of the house at dinner, he had also set the carpenter to work in pulling down what had been so lately put up in the billiard-room, and given the scene-painter his dismissal [...] The scene-painter was gone, having spoilt only the floor of one room,

> ruined all the **coachman**'s sponges, and made five of the **under-servants** idle and dissastified (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 192, my emphasis).

Still in the same novel, the prosperous Mr Rushworth indicates that in Sotherton Court, his steward does not have a room of his own, but a house; apart from that, he stresses that he is 'a very respectable man' (p. 84). In *Emma*, it is Mr Kightley's bailiff, William Larkins, that is in charge of Donwell Abbey's accounts and 'who thinks more of his master's profit than anything'. In several instances, we see Mr Knightley completely relies on the bailiff as he is always gathering together with him to do business. After the hero proposes to Emma, she suggests he ask William Larkins's permission to leave the abbey and live with her at Hartfield:

> Of their all removing to Donwell, Emma had already had her own passing thoughts. Like him, she had tried the scheme and rejected it [...] He had given it, he could assure her, very long and calm consideration; he had been walking away from William Larkins the whole morning, to have his thoughts to himself. 'Ah! there is one difficulty unprovided for,' cried Emma. 'I am sure William Larkins will not like it. You must get his consent before you ask mine' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 360).

Even though we do not hear of a steward in *Persuasion*, from the beginning, it is evident that it is Sir Walter Elliot's agent, Mr Shepherd, who takes care of the finances of Kellynch Hall. In S&S, whilst he is in London, we hear that John Dashwood, the new owner of Norland Park, 'is thinking about writing a letter to his steward in the country.' All of these landowners are amongst the wealthiest proprietors in Austen's fiction, hence it is only expected that they count on the aid of a steward and/or a bailiff. In view of these illustrations, we may observe that stewards played a key role in the manor house, given their great responsibility and direct contact with their masters. In most of the aforementioned fragments, it is possible to notice that whenever their stewards requested their presence, these landlords would immediately join them.

The housekeeper and the butler were immediately below the steward in the servant hierarchy. The butler was often the head of the male general servants and the housekeeper was the upper female servant in the household:

> The female indoor staff were by this time very much under the leadership of the housekeeper. This increasingly essential figure managed the linen, the cleaning of rooms and, if there were no clerk of the kitchen or male cook, the kitchen. Below her would be the female cook, followed by a number of chambermaids, housemaids, laundrymaids, and kitchen and scullery maids (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

The **housekeeper** often had her own room, where the most expensive food items were stored. That's why she always carried around too many keys. The cook would often user her room as

an office. Furthermore, "in addition to supervising the maids' housework, she made preserves, saw to the tea and coffee, ordered and kept the household accounts, and was responsible for the household linen" (POOL, 1993, p. 220). It was the housekeeper, too, who was entitled to show the house to visitors. As seen before, this is depicted in P&P, when Elizabeth Bennet and Mr and Mrs Gardiner take a tour of Pemberley House. According to Musson (2009, irregular paging), the **housemaid** was "essentially the cleaner, doing everything from making beds and mending linen to cleaning floors, doors, windows, carpets and furniture, as well as the scrubbing, cleaning and preparation of fireplaces. A housemaid's day was gruelling." The housemaid was always the first to rise in the morning and she had to be extremely neat. It has also been argued that:

> In the morning, she–it was usually a housemaid–would draw the blinds and curtains, remove soiled boots and clothes, and bring hot water for bathing or washing before breakfast. She would bring fresh water at noon and seven o'clock for washing before meals, and then before bedtime she would prepare the bed, close the windows, and bring fresh towels and clean water (POOL, 1993, p. 219).

Chatsworth House,for example, is an imposing 17th-century manor that has employed housemaids since 1737. As the institution traces the history of their housemaids over three hundred years on their website, we have a glimpse of these humble employees' working conditions and wages:

> Chatsworth did not start employing housemaids in the eighteenth century until 1737. Before that the Duke had relied on the labour of women from the local villages to clean and prepare the house. When housemaids were first employed at Chatsworth they were paid £3 a year. Although it may not seem much, housemaids did not have to pay for their accommodation as they lived in the house and the cost of their food was covered by the Duke through the payment of a 'board wage'. Housemaids at Chatsworth often received more in board wages than they were paid for their services. By the end of the century the 5th Duke was paying his housemaids £10 a year, a sum much closer to the £15 paid to the housekeeper. The maids at Chatsworth received a higher wage than many other housemaids. Maids who served in less wealthy households might hope to earn £8 a year. This £2 difference was a significant one. In fact, it was the same amount Chatsworth spent on a 'patent washing machine' in 1806 (CHATSWORTH, 2017. Available at: <https://www.chatsworth.org/news-media/news-blogs-press-releases/from-servants-to-staff-blog-series/from-servants-to-staff-how-much/>).

The **head housemaid** was the senior housemaid in the staff, reporting directly to the housekeeper. It was more common to find a head housemaid in the 19th century though. Some houses also had a **chambermaid**, who made beds, cleaned and tidied bedrooms and lit the fireplaces. A female employee who was solely in charge of the general tasks of a household was known as a **maid-of-all-work**. Such maid-servants were expected to sweep, dust and clean rooms, wash clothes; light the fire, run errands, and cook, amongst other things. In spite of their wearying routine, a great deal of maids-of-all-work enjoyed the freedom that came

from working by themselves. In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax and her grandmother and aunt, Mrs and Miss Bates, are amidst the most humble of the genteel families in the Highbury village, that's why they can only have one servant, Patty, who apparently does all of the work of the residence, from cleaning the kitchen and preparing the meals to receiving the visitors to the house:

> At one time Patty came to say she thought the kitchen chimney wanted sweeping. Oh, said I, Patty do not come with your bad news to me. Here is the rivet of your mistress's spectacles out. Then the baked apples came home [...] We have apple-dumplings, however, very often. Patty makes an excellent apple-dumpling (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 188).

As we may notice, according to Miss Bates's description, at one moment Patty sees to the kitchen chimney and at another moment, she receives the apples that were sent them by a kind friend of the family, a Mrs Wallis. Miss Bates also remarks that it is this very maid who frequently bakes the apple-dumplings they are so fond of.

In previous centuries, the chambermaid-cum-waiting-maid also helped wait on the lady, or the ladies, of the house. In Georgian England, this figure was substituted by the lady's maid:

> During the course of the eighteenth century, it appears that the roles of the traditional 'waiting gentlewomen' and the chambermaid gradually merged to become the familiar 'lady's maid', a well-presented servant who would be always in attendance on a great lady. In many cases such a personal maid would sleep in the same room, an adjoining room or even in the passage outside, and travel with her mistress from place to place (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

When it came to royal women, it was a lady-in-waiting, or court lady, who often assisted and accompanied them. A lady-in-waiting was always a member of the nobility, however, she was not seen as a servant. A **lady's maid,** or waiting-maid**,** also had extensive duties. She had to organise and clean all her mistress's clothes and shoes, apart from taking care of her jewellery, cosmetics, ribbons and other accessories. She not only had to dress her mistress, but also style and care for her hair. She would examine her clothes carefully, removing stains, dust or mud, and packing her suitcases when the great lady travelled, especially to the seasons in town. A lady's maid was expected to be a dressmaker and to have considerable expertise in hats. Considering that clothes and shoes were great symbols of social status, the work of a lady's maid and a valet was indispensable. The **valet** was the male employee who attended the master, or the masters, of the house. Valets counted on the aid of a tailor to dress the great landowners of the time, accompanying them wherever they travelled to. They had to organise their masters' dressing-room, besides separating, cleaning and brushing the clothes to be worn

every single day. Valets, too, were expected to be good hairdressers. They often had to cut their masters' hair, aside from shaving them if necessary. Both valet and lady's maid were responsible for the toilet articles of their bosses. *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot is so vain that it is implicit that if he had a valet, he would be extremely proud of attending him: "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation. [...] Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did; nor could the **valet** of any new-made lord be more delighted with the place he held in society" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 4, my emphasis).

Apart from that, in *Mansfield Park*, Julia and Maria Bertram have a lady's maid called Ellis. As soon as ten-year-old Fanny arrives at the mansion, her evil aunt Norris is decided to raise the young girl in compliance with Sir Thomas's wishes to distinguish her from his daughters. To his mind, the cousins could never be equals because 'their rank, fortune, rights and expectations would always be different.' Being quite at his service, Mrs Norris places Fanny near the housemaids, whom she thinks could dress her and give her some assistance, because, as she implies, a girl from such a humble background was not entitled to have a lady's maid: "[C]lose by the housemaids, who could either of them help to dress her, you know, and take care of her clothes, for I suppose you would not think it fair to expect Ellis to **wait on her** as well as the others (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 8, my emphasis). Aside from that, later in the narrative, we come across Mrs Chapman, Lady Bertram's very own personal maid. As Fanny prepares herself to come out into society, it suddenly occurs to the aristocrat that her niece might be in need of a lady's maid to get ready for the debutante ball Sir Thomas holds for her. Therefore, Lady Bertram sends Mrs Chapman to aid the heroine, who, in spite of being already dressed, ackowledges the unexpected favour as an act of kindness by her favourite aunt:

> Her aunt Bertram had recollected her on this occasion with an unusual degree of wakefulness. It had really occurred to her, unprompted, that Fanny, preparing for a ball, might be glad of better help than the upper housemaid's, and when dressed herself, she actually sent her own maid to assist her; too late, of course, to be of any use. Mrs Chapman had just reached the attic floor, when Miss Price came out of her room completely dressed, and only civilities were necessary; but Fanny felt her aunt's attention almost as much as Lady Bertram or Mrs Chapman could do themselves (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 275).

The **laundry maid** had to wash all the clothes and linen in the household by hand. It was an exhausting job done in two or more separate rooms, including a wet laundry, also known as a washhouse, and a dry laundry. The washing took place in the wet laundry. In the dry laundry, clothes were aired, ironed and folded. As it has been argued, laundry maids:

> [W]orked with their hands in very hot water, handling wet clothes such as shirts and neckcloths, bedlinen and towels, which then had to be starched, bleached, dried, pressed and ironed. The proper care of household linen was reckoned one of the most important demonstrations of good housekeeping and there were massive quantities of it (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/up-and-down-stairs-the-history-of-the-country-house-servant-e191523830.html>).

The kitchen staff was composed of a **cook**, a kitchen maid, a dairy maid, and a scullery maid. Whereas the male cook had higher wages than the female one, most houses had women in charge of the kitchen. Cooks, regardless of their gender, were considered senior servants, due to their relevance in the household. At Austen's time, it was fashionable to have French cooks, especially because the French Revolution forced many of them to move to England. Except for the steward, the male cook was the highest paid servant in the household. In spite of fleeing their country and coming to Britain as refugees, French cooks had even better wages than the English ones. In P&P, this is quite evident, for based on his high income, Mrs Bennet undoubtedly thinks the wealthy Mr Darcy 'has two or three French cooks at least' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 285).

During the Regency, the **kitchen maid** was also known as a 'cook maid.' Some kitchen maids were under-cooks who usually became cooks. They not only cleaned the kitchen, but also prepared sauces and bread, amongst other things. The **dairy maid** worked in the dairy,making cheese and butter to be consumed by the household. The dairy maid was also responsible for cleaning all the utensils used in the dairy, from pans, churns and vases to the room itself, for it required a high level of hygiene. A dairy was a cool room full of shelves with a central fountain that maintained the temperature down. The **scullery maid,** often a young girl,cleaned the kitchen and other cooking areas, as well as the servants's hall, apart from washing up and assisting the kitchen maid in the preparation of vegetables and other meals.

An 18th-century country-house kitchen was divided into many different sections. It was undeniably the most important room amidst the service rooms. In fact, the architects of the period started designing the kitchen to be placed in a separate wing, away from the central body of the manor and, sometimes, far from the other working offices. It was usually comprised of separate rooms, such as a bakehouse, a pastry room, a stillroom, a brewhouse, a dairy, a scullery, a pantry, larders and cellars. Plates and all other utensils were washed in the scullery. Soaps, polishes and waxes were made in the stillroom. The pastry room was destined for the production of sweets, and the brewhouse was used for the preparation of beer. Meat, fish and bacon were kept in several different larders. Wine and beer were stored in cellars

(YORKE, 2012, p. 89-98). The pantry was often the realm of the butler, that's why it was referred to as 'butler's pantry'.

Photograph 22 – The Old Kitchen at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

Old kitchen dating back to 1757. On its shelves, we may see some of the utensils used at Austen's time, such as pans and pots made of copper. According to the information displayed on the Holkham website: "Refurbished by the second Earl in the 1850s, this kitchen was used up until the Second World War. [...] Historically, the kitchen staff never saw the staterooms, and no anauthorised staff were allowed into the kitchen. There are two serving hatches at one end of the room, one for hot and one for cold food. Orders were spoken through a voice pipe located to the right of the door frame" (HOLKHAM, 2022).

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Catherine Morland, the protagonist of *Northanger Abbey*, is absolutely amazed when she first reaches what once was the ancient kitchen of the abbey. Much to her impression, the room, which partly looked into the court that had been the cloister, is extremely large, modern and full of servants; amongst them, there were a lot of cooks:

> [T]hey proceeded by quick communication to the kitchen–the ancient kitchen of the convent, rich in the massy walls and smoke of former days, and in the stoves and hot closets of the present. The general's improving hand had not loitered here: every modern invention to facilitate the labour of the cooks had been adopted within this, their spacious theatre (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 146-147).

Apart from noticing that General Tilney had spared no efforts to acquire the best cooking devices of the time, Catherine observes that he had improved that part of the house in such a way that the kitchen was compartmentalized into several different workrooms.

Photograph 23 – The kitchen range of Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

Eighteenth-century kitchen range fueled by wood. Probably one of the fanciest cooking appliances of Austen's time, like the ones *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland sees at Northanger.

Apart from noticing that General Tilney had spared no efforts to acquire the best cooking devices of the time, Catherine observes that he had improved that part of the house in such a way that the kitchen was compartmentalized into several different workrooms. In seeing this outline, which followed the architectural style of the period, the leading lady deemed the scullery and pantries of her own house insignificant:

> They took a slight survey of all; and Catherine was impressed, beyond her expectation, by their multiplicity and their convenience. The purposes for which a few shapeless pantries and a comfortless scullery were deemed sufficient at Fullerton, were here carried on in appropriate divisions, commodious and roomy (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 147).

Photograph 24 – The Old Bakery at Holkham Hall, Norfolk, 18th century.

An old bakehouse, one of the several service rooms that comprised a country-house kitchen in Georgian England.Often located in a kitchen wing or pavilion.

©Holkham Hall. Available at: https://www.holkham.co.uk/cleaning-up-the-wood-cellar/. Accessed on 27/10/2022.

As it has been previously discussed, in Georgian England, employees rarely circulated in the common areas of a manor, for at the time, placing workers far from the family and the polite parts of the house was the norm. Indeed, servants had to be very discreet, acting almost as though they were invisible. In most neo-Palladian houses, these rooms were located either on the basement or in separate wings. Concerning this, Daniel Pool adds:

> [L]arge country houses sometimes had one wing for male servants and male unmarried guests and one wing for female servants and female unmarried guests. Sometimes each group's sleeping quarters had their own set of stairs, and there would be an additional set of back stairs for the servants to use for work. In addition, there might also be a grand staircase for use only by family and guests, running from the bedrooms on the first floor down to the great front hall (POOL, 1993, p. 192-193).

Because of the distance, it was common for the family to **ring bells** as to summon the servants whenever they needed them. The lower servants would eat in the servants' hall, whereas the senior servants would eat in the housekeeper's or in the steward's room. The servants' hall was often placed on the basement. According to the hierarchy, the upper employees (i.e. steward, housekeeper, butler, lady's maid and valet) were also served by the

lower ones. In S&S, during her sojourn on the estate of Mrs Jenning's son-in-law, Elinor Dashwood rings the bell to ask one of the maids to look after Marianne, who is extremely ill: "[A]nd as soon as she had **rung up** the maid to take her place by her sister, she hastened down to the drawing-room" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 238, my emphasis).

This strict segregationof the landowner's family and the employees is well illustrated in *Mansfield Park*, particularly because, as we already know, it is in the servants' quarters that Fanny Price is accommodated upon her arrival at the Park. Due to the relevance of the epigraph used as a preface to this chapter, we quote it once again as to understand Fanny's blurred boundaries in the residence:

> I suppose, sister, you will put the child in the little white attic, **near the old nurseries**. It will be much the best place for her, so near Miss Lee, and not far from the girls, and **close by the housemaids** […] Indeed, I do not see that you could possibly place her anywhere else (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 8, my emphasis).

To begin with, we must state that in Georgian stately homes, it was common to find nurseries and schoolrooms in the upper area of the house. The nurseries, in particular, were situated above the rooms of the parents. Children slept in them until they were sufficiently old to have their own bedrooms (POOL, 1993, p. 191). Considering that Julia and Maria are no longer small kids when Fanny first comes to Mansfield, it is implicit that they already have a room of their own in the most important part of the dwelling. Hence, the fact that the heroine is placed amongst the servants – in a part of the house where her cousins, who are the same age as Fanny, no longer inhabit – reveals that she is treated as a subaltern amidst the Bertrams.

As it has been previously described, Mrs Norris has very little affection for her and is determined to treat Fanny differently from her wealthy relatives, the cruel aunt cannot find a better place for the young girl to be. The irony is that Mansfield is too large a residence for her not to place Fanny near the girls. Living in a tiny room near the housemaids contribute to emphasise the protagonist's inferiority and to render her a social outcast: "Her spatial position was clearly a definition of her intermediate social status, and Sir Thomas's intention was to make it clear to her that she was 'not a Miss Bertram'" (DUCKWORTH, 2019, p. 79). Against all the odds, as Alistair Duckworth (2019, p. 75) argues, it is crucial to the plot that Fanny's experience with the Bertrams should start in the second-class part of the house, that is, amidst the servants, for it contributes enormously to her rising importance through the years:

> Not a deep psychological irony but an overall structural irony characterizes Fanny's journey in *Mansfield Park*. As the novel progresses, Fanny moves closer to the center of the house, her inward journey marking her rising worth. […] From a childhood without prospects in Portsmouth, via the little white attic and the East room, to a ball at which she is treated 'just like her cousins' (275)–this is Fanny's

> journey from circumference to center, from limited to primary significance. […] From being 'dependent, helpless, friendless, neglected, forgotten,' she can acquire 'the consequence so justly her due.'

It is also worth mentioning that besides being almost always silent (just like the staff of a great house ought to be), Fanny acts as an attendant for most part of the story. Given that she is seen as the poor relation of the family, Mrs Norris is constantly forcing the protagonist to run errands and do needlework, and the business of Fanny's life is to keep Lady Bertram company.

The other chief male servants in a country house were the butler and the footmen. As it has been seen, the **butler** was in charge of the pantry, where plates, glasses and the cutlery were stored. In a Georgian household, a butler did not have to wear livery, only the other menservants under him. According to Pool, "his job often called for an ability to intuit social distinctions; when his mistress was 'at home,' he was to lead a gentleman or lady directly into the drawing room while ensuring that all other callers, e.g., tradesmen, waited in the hall" (POOL, 1993, p. 220). The butler also had to lock up the country house at night, receive guests, manage and give directions to the servants who waited on the table, that is, the footmen. During all meals, he would stand next to the table, removing dishes and waiting until he could serve wine and dessert (MUSSON, 2009, irregular paging.). As it has been mentioned, the footman was a liveried servant who set the table and served food, bringing and taking away several meals. A footman would also fetch and send messages and help in the stables.

The education staff was formed by **nurses**, who relied on the help of nursery-maids. In many cases, **wet-nurses** were also employed to help feed the babies. When children grew up, they were brought up by a **governess**, who gave them private education. In the *Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, it has been discussed that:

> The governess in the nineteenth-century novel becomes a culture heroine for the sad army of economically vulnerable single women, who had virtually no means of acquiring independence outside marriage, and little hope of independence within it either (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 122).

Differently from girls, boys were instructed by male tutors until they were old enough to go to school. It is important to highlight that the wealthy ladies of the time did not care about raising their children themselves:

> Having brought an infant into the world, the early-eighteenth-century lady's duty to it was largely discharged, for affluent families hired attendants, wet-nurses and nurse-maids, and later governesses, tutors, singing teachers and dancing masters. Women of quality traditionally had little to do with day-to day child-rearing, for adults were not meant to be interested in childish things. Relations between parents

> and children were expected to be formal – we would find them distant. Even in happy families respect was more visible than affection (PORTER, 1991, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-penguin-social-history-of-britain-english-society-in-the-eighteenth-century-e200462634.html >).

In *Emma*, Austen makes it clear, for when Mr John Knightley – a London lawyer who happens to be the hero's younger brother – visits Highbury with his wife and their five children, he brings along 'a competent number of nursery-maids.'

Still, a governess was a highly cultivated woman who was often single. She had to master English, French, mathematics and other sciences. Apart from that, they were supposed to teach young ladies how to draw, paint, and play the piano, amidst other things. Because of their high-quality instruction and politeness, governesses were often in-between. They were neither considered as a part of the landowner's family nor did they feel comfortable being with the other servants. Regarding this, it has been discussed that:

> **Another kind of amphibian**, one who can move upwards or sink downwards in society, **is the governess**. […] The novels of Charlotte and Anne Brontë amply dramatize the painful position of well-educated girls from the impoverished upper classes who become virtually the servants of families often much less well bred than themselves (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 121-122).

Charlotte and Anne Brontë were not the only writers who aimed to portray governesses at the time. A little before that, when creating the stories that would be published in the early 19th century, Austen had already brought up the subject. Although none of her heroines is, in fact, a governess, there is space for this special kind of servant in the novels, particularly in *Emma*. As it has been mentioned, in the referred narrative, Miss Taylor is the former governess who has helped raise Emma ever since the young lady lost her mother. Besides that, Jane Fairfax, Mrs and Miss Bates's cultured niece, is offered a job as governess, for despite her humble background, she has had a genteel upbringing.

As Mrs Elton suggests that she look for a job as a governess, Jane herself seems reluctant at first, making it obvious that tutoring rich infants would be her last option should she ever need it. In contrast with the 'human flesh' commercialised in the slave trade, Miss Fairfax tells Mrs Elton that employment agencies for governesses were trying to sell 'human intellect': "There are places in town, offices, where inquiry would soon produce something– Offices for the sale– not quite of human flesh–but of human intellect" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 241). Shocked, the latter asks Jane if she is actually talking about the slave trade: "Oh! my dear, human flesh! You quite shock me; if you mean a fling at the slave-trade, I assure you Mr Suckling was always rather a friend to the abolition" (p. 241). In a bitter way, Jane Fairfax answers that she means 'the governess-trade,' ironically implying that governesses could be

traded as well: "'I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade,' replied Jane; '**governess-trade**, I assure you, was all that I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; **but as to the greater misery of victims, I do not know where it lies**" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 241, my emphasis). The brief allusion to the slave trade describes the sad reality governesses found themselves in, for it suggests that they had to know and teach so much that they were almost slaves too.

When Jane thinks there is but a small chance for her to marry the rich and overly spoilt Frank Churchill – whom she had secretly been engaged to – she sadly considers moving to London as to take care of of the children of a Mrs Smallridge, who is somehow connected with Mrs Elton. When Miss Bates gives Emma the latest news, she does her best to think there could be no better prospects for her niece:

> Jane will be treated with such regard and kindness!–It will be nothing but pleasure, a life of pleasure.–And her salary!–I really cannot venture to name her salary to you, Miss Woodhouse. Even you, used as you are to great sums, would hardly believe that so much could be given to a youg person like Jane (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 308).

Despite the high salary Jane could earn, Emma cannot help pitying her neighbour, for to be 'comfortably settled,' Miss Fairfax would have to endure the painful task of schooling three young kids. However, as it turns out, at the end of the novel, Austen rescues Jane from such a harsh life by allowing her to get married and become Mrs Churchill. As Juliet McMaster (2011, p. 121-122) argues:

> Jane Fairfax, for instance, is well bred and well educated, beautiful and talented. But because her relatives cannot support her, she must earn her living at one of the only professions available to women, as a governess. […] Jane Fairfax, like Jane Eyre, is one of those governesses who survive by marrying into the gentry. But her escape from a life of drudgery, looking after Mrs Smallridge's three children for a pittance, is a narrow one.

In *Mansfield Park*, Miss Lee is governess to Julia, Maria and Fanny. In P&P, when Elizabeth Bennet dines with Lady Catherine de Bourgh at Rosings Park, she says to the aristocrat she can only play and sing a little. Lady Catherine also finds out that her younger sibling Mary Bennet is the only person in Elizabeth's family who can play the piano well, and that the heroine herself does not draw at all. Consequently, the latter asks the young lady if she and her sisters have been brought up by a governess:

> 'Has your governess left you?'
>
> 'We never had any governess.'
>
> 'No governess! How was that possible? Five daughters brought up at home without a governess! I never heard of such a thing. Your mother must have been quite a slave to your education.'
>
> Elizabeth could hardly help smiling as she assured her that had not been the case.

> ‘Then, who taught you? Who attended to you? **Without a governess, you must have been neglected**’ (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 139-140, my emphasis).

Taking into account that Lady Catherine is one of the richest characters in the novels, it is not surprising that she is stunned by Elizabeth’s negative reply. It is evident that she would never educate her own daughter, who is an only child, without the aid of a governess, let alone five children, as was Mrs Bennet’s case: “[I]f I had known your mother, I should have advised her most strenuously to engage one. I always say that nothing is to be done in education without steady and regular instruction, and nobody but a governess can give it” (p. 140).

Since it is hard to talk about servants without discussing domestic economy, the fact that Austen is quite didatic about money in the texts helps us understand how the consumer power of some of her fictional families was. In light of that, Edward Copeland (2011, p. 129-130) explains:

> Incomes are openly discussed in all of Austen’s novels [...] When incomes are *not* specifically named by Austen, then the signs of them are: the house, the furnishings, the garden, the park, the number of servants, the presence of a carriage. [...] **Numbers of servants mark incomes at the lower levels**; the acquisition of a carriage does it for incomes that are a bit higher; and ‘the house in town’ certifies the presence of great incomes, usually those belonging to the prosperous landed gentry**. Servants, an unfamiliar reckoning device these days, might be considered as the equivalent of modern household conveniences: add a servant, add a convenience** – hot water, central heating, a washing machine, and so on.

The lowest income which a small family could decently live on at Austen’s time was £100 a year, but it would usually be a part of the petty bourgeoisie rather than the gentry. In his book *English Society in the 18th Century*, Roy Porter comments that “it makes little sense to try to give modern real-worth equivalents of eighteenth-century monetary units. Multiplying eighteenth-century sums, however, by a factor of perhaps 60 or 80 will give a rough-and-ready 1990 equivalent” (PORTER, 1991, irregular paging).

On average, a household that relied on £100 a year could scarcely have more than two skilled servants, provided that their wages were not very high. Young and not very experienced attendants tended to accept these terms: “Even quite poor tradesmen and smallholders would employ young household servants, for they were plentiful and cheap, and working households ate up labour” (PORTER, 1991, irregular paging). Mingay sheds a light on this, by asserting that in the 18th century, a male employee, for example, would make £10–20 a year (MINGAY, 2002, p. 118). According to him, the upkeep of a lavish manor house cost an average of £5,000 a year. However, even the most modest of country gentlemen could employ a great deal of servants on about £300 or £400 per annum (2002, p. 118-119). In *Emma*, Robert Martin is but a tenant on Mr Knightley’s estate, but his beloved Harriet Smith

informs the heroine that the Martins live really well, even though they are farmers. As she describes their way of life, Harriet stresses that Robert's mother has an upper maid who has worked for her for 25 years, and makes it clear that having domestic assistance undoubtedly contributes to the prosperous lifestyle they lead on the Abbey-Mill Farm: "But they live very comfortably. They have no indoors man, else they do not want for any thing; and Mrs Martin talks of taking a boy another year" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 21).

In *Mansfield Park*, Mrs Price's earnings (£400 per annum) are not very different from the heroines' of S&S, but she has a lot of expenses due to her great number of children. Nonetheless, given that £400 a year is but a little amount to support so many people, it is striking that Fanny's mother can afford to have two maid-servants on such a small income:

> These shared her heart: her time was given chiefly to her house and her servants. Her days were spent in a kind of slow bustle; all was busy without getting on, 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 (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 395).

In depicting the unfavourable circumnstances of the Prices in their cramped terraced house in Portsmouth, Austen shows she is not oblivious to the terrible living conditions of the lower classes, servants included.The irony is that this portrayal is delineated through Fanny's eyes, which have long been accostumed to the army of servants that contributes to establish the quiet order of a large property like Mansfield Park. Far away from the privacy of Sir Thomas's mansion, the protagonist is astonished at the misery and poverty of her former home, where noise ad confusion seem to prevail:

> The living in incessant noise was [...] the greatest misery of all. **[...] Whatever was wanted was hallooed for, and the servants hallooed out their excuses from the kitchen.** The doors were in contant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 398, my emphasis).

In view of this fragment, we may also observe that Mrs Price's employees having to shout as to express themselves is in **s**tark contrast withthe discretion with which the staff of wealthy landed estates had to conduct themselves.

Such a household makes us wonder how the social situation of servants in the dwellings of the poor was. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how they lived, given that their employers themselves did not rely on much money. It is relevant to mention that a stable boy, one of the lowest posts amongst the servants of a wealthy household made only £4 a year. Even though it seems to be a very small sum, it is believed that the lower classes of the period

lived below breadline. In fact, the majority of the working population relied on less than £15 a year:

> Around 1688, Gregory King thought that the least a family (say, a man, his wife, and three children) could live on, without getting into debt or receiving poor relief or charity, was about £40 a year. He believed peers' families netted about £2,800 (an underestimate: their purses were perhaps twice as big), but **most of the working population lived below the breadline**. **For instance, 364,000 'labouring people and servants' had family incomes of just £15 a year; 400,00 'cottagers and paupers' were on £6 10s. a year** (PORTER, 1991, irregular paging. Available at: <https://www.pdfdrive.com/the-penguin-social-history-of-britain-english-society-in-the-eighteenth-century-e200462634.html>. My emphasis).

In the novel, it is unclear whether Mrs Price's attendants are solely rewarded with a place to live and something to eat or they get paid for their labour. Austen depicts this situation as is she were painting a landscape without a caption. It is up to us to read the condition of these employees in between the lines. Although we do not know if these characters are situated in the category of pauper servants, Bridget Hill explains that in the Regency period, most pauper domestic servants were mainly **infant workers** who lived on very little and in terrible conditions:

> Pauper servants were usually those placed out by the parish authorities all too anxious to be rid of the responsibility for their maintenance. **These types of servants provided a cheap source of labour for those with small incomes because they were paid very little.** During this period, most parishes offered servant training in order to provide employment for the poor (HILL, 2011, p. 128, my emphasis).

Indeed, at least one of Mrs Price's maid-servants is clearly a very young girl:

> The next opening of the door brought something more welcome: it was for the tea-things, which she had begun almost to despair of seeing that evening. Susan and **an attendant girl**, whose inferior appearance informed Fanny, to her great surprise, that she had previously seen the upper servant, brought in everything necessary for the meal (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 389, my emphasis).

In S&S, before Mrs Jennings, the rich widow that is friends with Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, finds out hero Edwards Ferrars, who wants to become a clergyman, will receive nothing from his wealthy mother if he decides to marry Lucy Steele, she wishes to point out a sister of her housemaid's to work for them. As she hears him and Lucy would, however, live on a little less than £100 per annum, she admits not even her housemaid Betty's sister could assist them, implying that her wages are higher than they could afford. Besides, Mrs Jennings suggests that they hire a maid-of-all-work only, considering their financial fragility:

> Wait for his having a living! –ay, we all know how *that* will end: –they will wait a twelvemonth, and finding no good comes of it, will set down upon a curacy of fifty pounds a-year, with the interest of his two thousand pounds, and what little matter Mr Steele and Mr Pratt can give her. Then they will have a child every year! and Lord help'em! how poor they will be! I must see what I can give them towards

> furnishing their house. **Two maids and two men, indeed! as I talked of t' other day. No, no, they must get a stout girl of all works. Betty's sister would never do for them *now***(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 211, my emphasis, italics in the original).

Copeland (2011, p.131) affirms that £200 a year enables a family to have more qualified servants, but it is only the £400 a year of Fanny Price's mother that "approaches the comforts of genteel life, but not readily. It brings a cook, a house maid and, perhaps, a boy." According to him, domestic economists think that £500 per annum, the income on which the Dashwoods live, is the amount that "fills the cup of human happiness." Though not real members of the landed aristocracy, the most affluent of pseudo-gentry families (belonging to the upper professional classes) had incomes ranging from £700 to £1,000 a year. Consequently, £2,000 is by no means a low amount of money, that's why Mrs Bennet, whose household lives on that revenue, assures Mr Collins they can perfectly afford to have a cook. In fact, the Bennets' indoor staff comprises:

> Mrs Hill the housekeeper, the cook, two maidservants, a butler and a footman who probably acts also as Mr Bennet's valet. The outdoor staff comprises a coachman and, by definition, grooms and stableboys to help him tend both the family's saddle-horses and the horses that work on the farm and sometimes draw the family coach (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 181)

Unfortunately, as the Bennets do not administrate their money very well, they are not able to provide their five daughters with dowries. Nevertheless, on £2,000, it has been suggested that they could employ an average of sixteen servants. In S&S, Colonel Brandon's estate of Delaford, where protagonist Marianne Dashwood lives when she marries him, also yields him this revenue.

Given that £4,000 a year and above were the incomes of the landed gentry, these were the amounts that granted families all sorts of comforts that were associated with the social level of the rural elite. Hence, it is evident that Mrs Bennet is desperate to introduce her girls to their new neighbour, Mr Bingley, as soon as she discovers he is a single man of large fortune, 'four or five thousand a year.' In view of that, it is not surprising that Bingley's best friend, Mr Darcy, whose noble estate in Derbyshire yields £10,000 per annum, also owns a house in town and 'everything that is charming.' Bingley, Darcy, and *Mansfield Park*'sMr Rushworth (whose estate grants him £12,000 a year) could have a staff of more than twenty servants. Mr Knightley's income, in *Emma*, is not specified, but we learn, from the beginning, that Donwell Abbey is a farming estate. Furthermore, Mr Knightley has tenant farmers, such as Robert Martin. Le Faye (2002, p. 261) argues that:

> His income is probably around £4,000 a year, and as a bachelor he has no need for a large domestic staff; we hear only, indeed, of Mrs Hodges the housekeeper, and Harry the clumsy footman, who may perhaps do double duty as a farmworker when he is not needed to wait upon guests.

We are not informed about Sir Thomas Bertram's revenue either, but in view of his great number of workers (there are nurseries in the Park, and Fanny, Maria and Julia are instructed by a governess; besides, he has a coachman, postillions, several maids, a regular carpenter, amongst other servants), it is estimated that he earns nothing less than £10,000 a year. Certainly, his Antigua plantation contributes a great deal to maintain this lavish lifestyle. In *Northanger Abbey*, if we consider the latest appliances and working conditions of General Tilney's servants' quarters, we may assume his income can only be very high too, for Catherine Morland is shocked at the amount of workers it takes to run an abbey:

> The number of servants continually appearing did not strike her less than the number of their offices. Wherever they went, some pattened girl stopped to curtsy, or some footman in dishabille sneaked off. Yet this was an abbey! How inexpressibly different in these domestic arrangements from such as she had read about–from abbeys and castles, in which, though certainly larger than Northanger, all the dirty work of the house was to be done by two pair of female hands at the utmost. […] when Catherine saw what was necessary here, she began to be amazed herself (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 147).

Moreover, *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot's income could only have been great, for he has led such an extravagant life that he can no longer afford the number of employees required to meet the standards of his ancestral estate. This is one of the main reasons why he decides to let the house and live more cheaply in Bath.

Even though she does not give much focus to servants, and their tittle-tattle, Austen is true to their unfair position; for, mentioning them without giving them much voice somehow reinforces the idea that they had little space in that highly stratified society which she belonged to. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that it is through the workers who have names in the novels that the writer alludes to the lower classes. As it has been discussed:

> The crucial distinction is between those who employ servants, and those who do not. […] **To her first readers, as habituated to the presence of servants as the novelist, they would not have been invisible at all. Indeed, her novels rely on the readers 'seeing' these servants in a way that we have forgotten to do.** Her characters are wise enough not to forget that they are often observed by servants. Colonel Brandon recalls how his planned elopement with Eliza, the woman he loved who was promised in marriage to his brother, was scotched by a servant. 'The treachery, or the folly, of my cousin's maid betrayed us' (II. ix). It is a foolish person who does not shape conversation to take account of the presence of servants (MULLAN, 2014, p. 87, my emphasis).

In truth, what is at stake is that in spite of the hierarchy, the contact with the landowner's family enables servants to know everything that happens in the lives of their masters. In S&S,

for instance, it is through Thomas, her man-servant, that Elinor and the Dashwoods find out Lucy Steele has been married to Mr Ferrars. Considering the long conversation Elinor and her mother have with Thomas, who has been working for them ever since they lived in Norland Park, it is possible to notice how close to the ladies he is. In spite of his willingness to convey the news, Thomas's message is, in fact, a huge misunderstading that serves to make Elinor think the Mr Ferrars who wedded Lucy Steele was Edward, whom the heroine has been in love with:

> Their man-servant had been sent one morning to Exeter on business; and when, as he waited at table, he had satisfied the inquiries of his mistress as to the event of his errand, this was his voluntary communication,–
>
> 'I suppose you know, ma'am, that Mr. Ferrars is married.'
> […]
>
> 'Who told you that Mr. Ferrars was married, Thomas?'
>
> 'I see Mr. Ferrars myself, ma'am, this morning in Exeter, and his lady too, Miss Steele as was […]'
>
> 'But did she tell you she was married, Thomas?'
>
> 'Yes, ma'am. She smiled, and said how she had changed her name since she was in these parts […]' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 273).

When Austen puts an end to the suspense at the end of the novel, Elinor realises her servant was slightly mistaken, for it was Edward's younger brother who ended up marrying Miss Steele. McMaster implies that these little details, these exchanges between servants and masters, are essential for us to understand the daily routine of Georgian society. Moreover, the scholar argues that, however minimal, although not truly representative of the lower classes, servants somehow established a connection between them and their upper-class employers:

> Though Austen doesn't usually give servants speaking parts, she recognizes the unobtrusive influence they have on the lives of their masters. It is a material convenience to Mr Woodhouse of Hartfield, for instance, that his coachman's daughter is placed as the housemaid at Randall's; James therefore never objects to harnessing the horses to the carriages, even though it is a very short drive (E1:3:20). **Such little negotiations between one social level and another are the stuff of life.** Beyond the servants comes the great mass of what was yet to be named the working class; but with them Austen's main characters have little to do. **Like 'most ladies and gentlemen' of their day, their acquaintance with this huge section of the population would be only through their servants, who are not truly representative. However, we get glimpses** (MCMASTER, 2011, p. 123).

In *Persuasion*, too, it is impressive how the servant-master relationship functions as plot device. When protagonist Anne Elliot spends some time with her sister Mary Musgrove, she is divided between the Great House and Uppercross Cottage. On the occasion, Mary talks to Anne about her mother-in-law's servants and their bad behaviour. The complaint is an

attempt to criticise Mrs Musgrove's conduct as a grandmother and as mistress of her household:

> Mrs Musgrove thinks all her servants so steady, that it would be high treason to call it in question; but I am sure, without exaggeration, that her upper housemaid and laundrymaid, instead of being in their business, are gadding about the village, all day long. I meet them wherever I go; and I declare, I never go twice into my nursery without seeing something of them. If Jemima were not the trustiest, steadiest creature in the world, it would be enough to spoil her; for she tells me, they are always tempting her to take a walk with them (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34).

In return, Mrs Musgrove tells Anne she does not think Mary's nursery-maid is a suitable servant:

> I have no very good opinion of Mrs Charles's nursery-maid: I hear strange stories of her; she is always upon the gad; and from my knowledge, I can declare, she is such a fine-dressing lady, that she is enough to ruin any servants she comes near. Mrs Charles quite swears by her, I know; but I just give you this hint, that you may be upon the watch; because, if you see anything amiss, you need not be afraid of mentioning it (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 34).

Based on these excerpts, it is evident that the disapproval of each other's servants, in fact, represents the huge dislike mother and daughter-in-law have for one another, especially in regard to the way Mrs Musgrove manages her house and Mary raises her children.

Austen also says a lot about how masters treat their attendants and vice-versa. Such was the case with *Mansfield Park*'s old coachman, Wilcox. At the beginning of S&S, for instance, we discover that Fanny Dashwood's father, the late Mr Ferrars, left some money for his old servants in his will. Much to her annoyance, Mrs Ferrars, his stingy widow, is forced to pay them. As Fanny explains to her husband: "I have known a great deal of the trouble of annuities; for my mother was clogged with the payment of three to old superannuated servants by my father's will" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 7). In P&P, the late Mr Darcy was so fond of his steward's son, George Wickham, that he became his godfather. Mr Darcy's father not only gave him formal education but also enabled him to study at Cambridge so that he would become a clergyman. Apart from that, should Wickham decide to be ordained, he would be granted a family living. Besides, the late master also left him an inheritance of £1,000.

In the same novel, Mrs Reynolds, Mr Darcy's housekeeper, provides Elizabeth with an insight into the hero's amiable character. According to her, if she went through the world, she could never find a better master:

> 'He is the best landlord, and the best master,' said she, 'that ever lived; not like the wild young men nowadays, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but will give him a good name. Some people call him proud; but I am sure I never saw anything of it' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 209).

Mrs Reynolds genuinely kind comments on Mr Darcy are decisive for Elizabeth to change her mind about him, for as the young lady thinks, "**what praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant?**" (p. 210, my emphasis). Overall, as it has been discussed throughout this chapter, the servants of stately homes had several different ranks according to the pecking order they were supposed to follow. Bearing in mind that 18th-century English society was extremely stratified, it is not surprising that servants should be too. These attendants, most of them live-in employees, did not so much contribute to maintain the enormous country houses of the period as they were a vital part of them. In Austenian fiction, we may notice that the way workers are treated gives us a glimpse of the character of their masters. Besides, apart from having very little voice, they are the representatives of the lower classes. By examining the narratives, it is evident for us that Austen's world did not exist without the aid of servants. Furthermore, she makes it clear that the greater the number of employees, the more prosperous the household was. Also, by mentioning the amount of servants in her rural mansions, the writer give us an idea of the consumer power of the households depicted. Even though few of the servants in the texts have names, their very presence in the stories gives us a better idea of the habits of the gentry, and even the lower gentry, in their residences. At a time when manual labour was considered humiliating to the rural elite, domestic attendants were the real machines behind the opulent and also the less affluent houses of the period.Above all things, it is undeniable that servants were indispensable for the great landowners of Georgian England to validate their social position as well as display their wealth and power.

2.3**Country-house entertainment: the dinner party**

> But there is, I believe, in many men, especially single men, such an inclination– such a passion for dining out–a dinner engagement is so high in the class of their pleasures, their employments, their dignities, almost their duties, that any thing gives way to it.
> Jane Austen, ***Emma***

In Georgian England, upper-class men and women were provided with a myriad of recreations, both in the country and in town. The urban seasons described in the novels make us understand that in big cities, entertainment ranged from walks about Kensington Gardens and trips to the jeweller, in London, to visits to the Upper and Lower Assembly Rooms, with their plays and concerts, in Bath. In the microcosms of rural society, we also hear of promenades and strolls to the local shops, but these sorts of amusements were no less important than the private and exclusive social gatherings held inside the houses, that is, 'sociability as practiced in the home.' Gillian Russell discusses that activities such as dinners, games, music and reading sessions, theatricals, and balls had a great impact on the social and cultural landscapes of the period:

> More commonly, such sociability involved people outside the immediate family circle and was a means for the Georgian family to sustain and advance its 'place' in the wider society. In connecting the sociability of the home with the polite leisure economy of the provincial town, linked ultimately to the powerhouse of London, Austen explores the new networked culture of late Georgian Britain as lived social experience. She is interested, above all, in sociability as performative, what it creates or destroys, and in that sense her fiction engages directly and deeply with the historical forces that were reshaping her society (RUSSELL, 2011, p. 180).

Taking into account that most of the unsuccessful city encounters Austen portrays in her narratives serve to highlight the more substantial events that take place in the countryside, and considering that the main focus of this research is the house and its surroundings, we shall limit the scope of this section as to analyse the most prestigious of the internally concentrated pastimes of the time, that is, the dinner party. Because food is the main fuel that brings people together in these kinds of reunions, it is also mandatory that we briefly investigate its relevance in the narratives.

In *Jane Austen in Context*, Maggie Lane examines the life Austen had in her father's rectory, in Steventon, as to explain the eating habits of the gentry at the time. The critic explains that almost everything consumed by landed households at the time was produced at home, "the exceptions being luxury imported goods like tea, coffee, chocolate, sugar, spices, wine, dried fruit and citrus fruit" (LANE, 2005, p. 262). Bearing that in mind, we must not forget that besides tobacco, these were some of the most important agricultural commodities of the British Empire, which were globally traded and brought to the domestic market in order to be nationally consumed by those who could afford them. In an analysis of food and society in eighteenth-century Britain, Professor Troy Bickham (2020, irregular paging) suggests that

the English had always had a "penchant for sweet tea and coffee and a pipeful of tobacco." Still according to him:

> Successful commerce, and the ability to manage and tax it, enabled Britain to punch well above its weight in terms of population, technology and natural resources against both European and global competitors. To assert that such ingestible products of imperial trade as coffee, tea, sugar and tobacco were important to the growth and prosperity of Britain and its empire during the eighteenth century is an understatement. They were the glue that bound the disparate parts of the empire to each other. **To some extent, the English, later British, Empire had always been gastronomic**. A major part of the East India Company's mandate when founded in 1600 was to trade for exotic Asian goods, including lucrative spices (BICKHAM, 2020, irregular paging, my emphasis).

Differently from what happened in the rectory, where Austen herself was responsible for the keys to the wine and imported goods purchased for the family, in the wealthy country houses, we have seen that it was the housekeeper and the butler who controlled these stocks, including homemade preserves. Vegetables, fruits and herbs were produced in the gardens and orchards, and cereal, meat and dairy came from the estate farm. The sheep, cows and poultry provided the meat. Apart from that, fish and other fowl usually came from sporting trips, and it was common to give and receive food gifts (BICKHAM, 2020, irregular paging).

A great example of the importance of food in Austenian fiction can be found in P&P. Ever since Mr Bingley has gone away to town, Mrs Bennet and his beloved Jane have heard almost nothing about him. Near the end of the narrative, Mrs Bennet assumes that he might be coming back to the neighbourhood. However, it is only when she finds out Mrs Nicholls, his housekeeper, was going to buy some meat as to welcome him that the matriarch is assured of his return:

> And so, is it quite certain he is coming? 'You may depend on it,' replied the other, 'for Mrs Nicholls was in Meryton last night; I saw her passing by, and went out myself on purpose to know the truth of it; and she told me that it was certain true. He comes down on Thursday at the latest, very likely on Wednesday. She was going to the butcher's, she told me, on purpose to order in some meat on Wednesday, and she has got three couple of ducks just fit to be killed' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 275).

In spite of that, it is undeniable that, of all six novels, it is in *Emma* that food is depicted the most frequently:

> *Emma* is the Austen novel by far the most laden with references to food, and here they build up to show us the interdependence of the village community, where some people have more access to food, through wealth or occupation, than others. […] **Food in *Emma* is a metaphor for neighbourly love** (LANE, 2005, p. 267-268, my emphasis).

Because Highbury is a close-knit community, we often see the Bateses, the most humble family in the village, being given foodstuffs. Right at the beginning of the story, Mr Woodhouse tells Mr Knightley he likes to send them food due to their limited resources:

> It is a great pity that their circumstances should be so confined! a great pity indeed! and I have often wished–but it is so little one can venture to do–small, trifling presents, of anything uncommon–Now we have killed a porker, and Emma thinks of sending them a loin or a leg; it is very small and delicate–Hartfield pork is not like any other pork–but still it is pork–and, my dear Emma, unless one could be sure of their making it into steaks, nicely fried, as ours are fried, without the smallest grease, and not roast it, for no stomach can bear roast pork– I think we had better send the leg–do not you think so, my dear? (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 134).

Especially because of the international trade – as we well know, many landowners of the period also had plantations in the West Indies – the 18th century was a period of abundance for the English elite. Taking that into consideration, we may affirm Mr Woodhouse's heartfelt contribution to the Bates women corroborates his status as one of the most prominent men in Highbury. As a matter of fact, the patriarch does not have a substantial farm on the Hartfield estate, for his income is mainly based on investment funds. That's why he states that 'Hartfield pork is not like any other pork.' Nonetheless, Emma's father makes sure he sends his less affluent neighbours some vegetables and meat, besides inviting them over for dinner regularly.

Later in the story, when Emma flirts shamelessly with Frank Churchill amongst a very large party, Jane Fairfax becomes extremely angry at the protagonist. In an attempt to make amends with the young lady, who has been unwilling to see her, Emma despatches the best arrowroot she finds in her storerooms, which, much to her disappointment, Miss Fairfax formally declines:

> Emma, on reaching home, called the housekeeper directly, to an examination of her stores; and some arrowroot of very superior quality was speedily dispatched to Miss Bates with a most friendly note. In half an hour the arrowroot was returned, with a thousand thanks from Miss Bates, but 'dear Jane would not be satisfied without its being sent back; it was a thing she could not take–and, moreover, she insisted on her saying, that she was not at all in want of any thing (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 315-317).

Emma's arrogance is reprobated by Jane Fairfax, who shows her she cannot hurt people's feelings and simply justify herself through her charity. Jane's refusal of the arrowroot is very pertinent, for it suggests the spoilt heroine will not always have things her own way, and this time she will not be easily forgiven with an apology food gift. This goes hand in hand with what Bickham mentions about the relation between the English elite and food during the Regency:

> Food offers an invaluable opportunity to better understand British society and its relationships with the empire. Food is essential to human existence, and a

> considerable amount of our time and energy is spent engaging with it – producing, distributing, selling, buying, preparing, consuming and digesting. Almost as common is the practice of assigning meanings, whether individual or communal, to food. […] In what Stephen Mennell describes as the 'civilizing of appetite' in his study of early modern English eating, in times of scarcity shows of abundance by the elite were sufficient to confirm their status (BICKHAM, 2020, irregular paging).

As previously mentioned, aside from the Woodhouses, it is possible to see this communal meaning assigned to food in the apples William Larkins, the bailiff of Donwell Abbey, sends the Bateses. This sense of community and hospitality is also manifest in the contribution Mrs Martin, the mother of Mr Knightley's tenant farmer, makes to Mrs Goddard, the mistress of the local boarding-school for young ladies. In the episode, Mrs Martin gives her a goose, as Harriet Smith, herself a pupil of Mrs Goddard's, describes to Emma: "And when she had come away, Mrs Martin was so very kind as to send Mrs Goddard a beautiful goose–the finest goose Mrs Goddard had ever seen. Mrs Goddard had dressed it on a Sunday, and asked all the three teachers […] to sup with her" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 20). Similarly, in S&S, when the Dashwoods arrive at Barton Cottage, their generous cousin, Sir John Middleton, not only invites them to dine at Barton Park, but also sends them vegetables and fruit from his manor. Furthermore – besides offering to collect their letters and to lend them his own newspaper – as a sportsman himself, he constantly gives them 'a present of game,' that is, any fowls he may catch whenever he is out shooting:

> He said of his earnest desire of their living in the most sociable terms with his family, and pressed them so cordially to dine at Barton Park every day till they were better settled at home […] His kindness was not confined to words; for within an hour after he left them, a large basket full of garden stuff and fruit arrived from the park, which was followed before the end of the day by a present of game. He insisted, moreover, on conveying all their letters to and from the post for them, and would not be denied the satisfaction of sending them his newspaper every day (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 21).

In a more negative way, in *Mansfield Park*, throughout the Sotherton trip, the stingy Mrs Norris 'befriends' the housekeeper of the mansion and its gardener as to gain foodstuffs. By the end of the day, she goes back home with a 'specimen of heath' she has received from the gardener, and "a few pheasants' eggs and a cream cheese from the housekeeper" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 107). That's why, during her long stay in Portsmouth, Fanny Price thinks her Aunt Norris would be a far better manager of her mother's home than Mrs Price. Dealing with domestic economy was usually a duty of the lady of the house, even in the most powerful of country homes. It was the master's wife who was in charge of coordinating the storage of food as well as controlling the income spent on the food supplies consumed by family and servants. Besides that, Deirdre Le Faye (2002, p. 89-90) argues that the mistress of a manor had many other occupations:

> In *Persuasion*, Jane lists female occupations as the 'common subjects of housekeeping, neighbours, dress, dancing, and music'. Her contemporary readers would have understood what lay behind this succinct phrase, but for us much enlargement is needed. Housekeeping alone was then a full-time occupation in its own right, and although ladies would of course delegate the actual heavy work to servants, the mistress of an average landed gentry household was nevertheless in modern terms something like the manageress of a small hotel. **She had to engage, instruct and supervise domestic servants; home-produce as many foodstuffs and household goods as possible, and buy in, probably with difficulty and at considerable expense, any that could not be made at home**; make, mend and keep clean the family's clothes, with the assistance of dressmakers and washerwomen; keep her domestic accounts and not run into debt; educate her young children and engage governesses for them; be a sociable hostess to maintain good relations with the neighbouring gentry; […] It was also part o f the lady of the manor's duties to provide Christmas gifts of baby clothes, blankets, shawls, coats, stockings and flannel petticoats to the villagers, and to organize a dame school where the children might learn to read and write.

In S&S, for instance, Lady Middleton, whose husband is landlord to the Dashwoods, takes enormous pleasure in organising the dinner parties thrown at her stately home: “Lady Middleton piqued herself upon the elegance of her table, and of all her domestic arrangements; and from this kind of vanity was her greatest enjoyment in any of their parties” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 24).

In these affluent households, though, it was the housekeeper who planned meals and supervised the kitchen. In Regency England, Lane affirms that breakfast was mainly an informal and “elegant meal of toast and rolls, with tea, coffee or chocolate to drink, all taken-off a handsome set of china” (LANE, 2005, p. 264). In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is impressed by the diversity of food she encounters at breakfast in General Tilney’s town house in Bath, shortly before she departs to Northanger with his family:

> His anxiety for her comfort – his continual solicitations that she would eat, and his often-expressed fears of her seeing nothing to her taste – though never in her life before had she beheld half such variety on a breakfast-table – made her forget for a moment that she was a visitor (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 121).

Afterwards, during her stay at the abbey, it is precisely the china set laid on the breakfast table that calls Catherine’s attention:

> The elegance of the breakfast set forced itself on Catherine’s notice when they were seated at table; and, luckily, it had been the general’s choice. He was enchanted by her approbation of his taste, confessed it to be neat and simple, thought it right to encourage the manufacture of his country: and for his part, to his uncritical palate, the tea was as well flavoured from the clay of Staffordshire, as from that of Dresden or Sêve. But this was quite an old set, purchased two years ago. The manufacture was much improved since that time; he had seen some beautiful specimens when last in town, and had he not been perfectly without vanity of that kind, might have been tempted to order a new set. […] Catherine was probably the only one of the party who did not understand him (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 139).

As it can be seen, the display of the breakfast set is as important as the food that is being served. Despite being a widower, the general's display of sophisticated china shows he is very concerned about showing off the most modern and refined appliances to his guests, from his modern Rumford fire to the best of English clay sets. Given that Catherine does not know anything about breakfast sets, it is clear that in this passage, just like in many others throughout the narrative, Austen is subtly criticising General Tilney's extravagance. Due to the importance of a fancy china set at breakfast and tea, it is not surprising that in S&S, when she considers the removal of the girls from their former country house, the envious Fanny Dashwood confesses that their set of breakfast china is 'a great deal too handsome,' far more handsome than her own (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 10).

Apart from breakfast, the other meals taken during the day were dinner, tea and supper. Breakfast was served around 9 or 10 a.m. In P&P, as she describes her wedding day to Elizabeth, Lydia Bennet mentions she and her groom 'breakfasted at ten as usual' before the ceremony took place. In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price tells Henry Crawford that he had better return to her house a few minutes later, for her brother is supposed to 'have breakfasted and be gone by half-past nine,' for his ship is about to set sail. Since 'lunch' still did not exist at the time, it was normal to have light meals consisting of bread, cold meat, fruit and sandwiches in between breakfast and dinner. When these meals were taken at home, they were called just 'cold meat' or 'collation' (LANE, 2005, p. 264). In *Persuasion*, it is implicit that Anne Elliot arrives at Uppercross Cottage, in the morning, for Mary Musgrove, her sister, says she has not seen her husband since 7 o'clock a.m. Because it is a little long before dinner, Mary savours her cold meat:

> She could soon sit upright on the sofa, and began to hope she might be able to leave it by **dinner-time**. Then, forgetting to think of it, she was at the other end of the room, beautifying a nosegay: then, **she ate hercold meat**; and then she was well enough to propose a little walk (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 29, my emphasis).

In the Georgian period, tea was not the quintessential afternoon tea as we know it. It was originally just a post-dinner drink, as Maggie Lane explains:

> Often in Austen's novels - and letters - the invitation is to 'drink tea' with neighbours. This is not the afternoon tea of the Victorians and ourselves, but a drink taken an hour or two after the completion of dinner. Sometimes visitors would come only for this drink, at other times it would be part of a dinner invitation. The gentlemen of the party, having lingered over the port after the withdrawal of the ladies, would enter the drawing room in time for tea, which was always made by one of the ladies of the house, often a young one. Fanny Price makes the tea when Mrs Norris is not at Mansfield Park; Elinor Dashwood 'presides' at the tea-table in Mrs Jennings's London drawing room, while at Longbourn, Jane makes the tea and Elizabeth pours the coffee (LANE, 2005, p. 266).

Supper was the last meal of the day, and it was usually soup, or something lighter than dinner. In *Emma*, when Frank Churchill, Mrs Weston and Emma decide to throw a ball at the Crown Inn, the small space to place a proper supper table at the event utterly distresses them. According to the text, we may infer that supper was an indispensable meal on such occasions: "Mrs Weston proposed having no regular supper; merely sandwiches, &c, set out in the little room; but that was scouted as a wretched suggestion. A private dance, without sitting down to supper, was pronounced an infamous fraud upon the rights of men and women" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 202).

Dinner was not only the most important meal of the day, but the most important formal event held in a country house. It was originally served at midday, but the timing of dinner changed considerably throughout the century:

> The chief meal of the day was dinner, the timing of which altered considerably during Austen's lifetime, and depended very much on one's social position. It was originally a midday meal, taking advantage of natural light for cooking and eating. As the eighteenth century progressed, more fashionable people took their dinner later and later, copied by those lower down the social scale (LANE, 2005, p. 264).

In *Persuasion*, when the Musgroves visit Bath, Elizabeth Elliot knows she ought to ask Mary's family to dine at her new home with her and Sir Walter. Nevertheless, as it has been previously discussed, as she is too ashamed of her reduced number of servants, the aristocrat invites them for an evening party, instead of dinner. Charles Musgrove, her brother-in-law, is so offended that he decides to miss the party and go to the theatre instead: "'Phoo! phoo!' replied Charles, 'what's an evening party? Never worth remembering. Your father might have asked us to dinner, I think, if he had wanted to see us. You may do as you like, but I shall go to the play'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 175). His attitude is extremely plausible, because back home, his parents often receive many guests at the dinner parties held at Uppercross Hall:

> The party at the Great House was sometimes increased by other company. The neighbourhood was not large, but the Musgroves were visited by everybody, and had more dinner-parties, and more callers, more visitors by invitation and by chance, than any other family. They were more completely popular (p. 35-36).

Dinner parties were so vital to country-house entertainment that they could be such a trial to hostesses (who had so many things to arrange and take care of) and guests alike. Daniel Pool (1993, p. 73) discusses that: "invitations were sent out (two days to two weeks in advance, depending on the grandeur of the event) by the lady of the house, and some form of reply was expected in return." In the novels, it is not only evident that dinner is the chief meal of the day, but also that a dinner party, in particular, was the most prestigious event held in a rural mansion. In P&P, for example, Mr Collins is flattered when he discovers Lady Catherine

has summoned him to dine at Rosings as soon as Elizabeth Bennet comes for her sojourn in the neighbourhood:

> Mr Collins's triumph, in consequence of this invitation, was complete. [...] 'I confess, said he, 'that I should not have been at all surprised by her ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected, from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such na attention as this? **Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there** [...] so immediately after your arrival!'(AUSTEN, 2007, p. 136, my emphasis).

In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price is delighted when Mrs Grant, who lives in the premises of Mansfield, invites her for her first dinner-visit ever:

> [S]he was glad. Simple as such an engagement might appear in other eyes, it had novelty and importance in hers, for excepting the day at Sotherton, she had scarcely ever dined out before; and though now going only half a mile, and only to three people, **still it was dining out**, and all the little interests of preparation were enjoyments in themselves (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 221).

At the moment she receives the unusual invitation, Fanny can hardly imagine the fuss that will come with it. When her aunt, Lady Bertram, is informed her companion has been asked to dine out, she is so astonished that she repeats several times she does not understand why Mrs Grant has invited Fanny to dine out. As she finds it absolutely strange, Lady Bertram seeks her husband's opinion. Much to her surprise, Sir Thomas comments that it is impressive how Fanny has never been summoned before:

> 'Nothing can be more natural,' said Sir Thomas, after a short deliberation; 'nor, were there no sister in the case, could anything, in my opinion, be more natural. Mrs Grant's shewing civility to Miss Price, to Lady Bertram's niece, could never want explanation. The only surprise I can feel is, that this should be the *first* time of its being paid. […] But as I conclude that she must wish to go, since all young people like to be together, I can see no reason why she should be denied the indulgence (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 220).

Nonetheless, Fanny's despicable aunt Norris says that due to her social standing, the heroine is not fit to attend a dinner party:

> I hope you are aware that there is no real occasion for your going into company in this sort of way, or **ever dining out at all**; and it is what you must not depend upon ever being repeated. Nor must you be fancying that the invitation is meant as any particular compliment to *you*; […] Mrs Grant thinks it a civility due to *us* to take a little notice of you, or else it would never have come into her head, and you may be very certain that, if your cousin Julia had been at home, you would not have been asked at all (p. 222, my emphasis).

Mrs Norris's remarks on the invitation gives us an even better idea of the importance of dinner parties at the time. She does not want her niece to go out and dine at a parsonage, let alone accept an invitation for dinner at a country mansion. Mrs Norris is so furious that she

suggests Fanny walks to Dr Grant's house, despite the bad weather. Disturbed by the absurdity of the plan, Sir Thomas Bertram affirms Fanny must have the carriage. His reaction shows us how humiliating it was for a young lady to walk to a dinner party, especially in winter: "'Walk!' repeated Sir Thomas, in a tone of most unanswerable dignity, and coming farther into the room. 'My niece walk to a dinner engagement at this time of the year! Will twenty minutes after four suit you?'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 223-224).

Still concerning this, in an important chapter of *Emma*, the eponymous heroine feels slighted when the Coles do not formally ask her to attend their dinner party. In spite of their origins, the 'friendly, liberal, and unpretending' Coles love to be with company. At first, Emma finds it nonsensical that a family of nouveau-riches like them, who made a fortune from trade, should invite a great part of Highbury to such an event. In her mind, this kind of affair should be hosted only by the higher-ranking families of Highbury, like the Woodhouses:

> **Their love of society, and their new dining-room, prepared every body for their keeping dinner-company**; and a few parties, chiefly among the single men, had already taken place. The regular and best families Emma could hardly suppose they would presume to invite–neither Donwell, nor Hartfield, nor Randalls. Nothing should tempt *her* to go, if they did […] 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 the superior families would visit them. This lesson, she very much feared, they would receive only from herself; she had little hope of Mr Knightley, none of Mr Weston (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 164, my emphasis).

However, when the proud protagonist realises Hartfield is the only house that has not received an invitation yet, she is tempted to go:

> She felt that she should like to have had the power of refusal; and afterwards, as the idea of the party to be assembled there, consisting precisely of those whose society was dearest to her, occurred again and again, she did not know that she might not have been tempted to accept (p. 166).

Lavish dinner parties like the one organised by the Coles required a lot of preparation both in the kitchen and in the dressing rooms. To begin with, when guests were staying at a manor house, they were impelled to bring a large suitcase full of clothes. Considering that these affairs were the perfect occasion for making new acquaintances and being seen, visitors had to be impeccably dressed at the table: "black pants, waistcoat and jacket, with white tie, shirt, and gloves for the gentlemen; formal evening dress for the ladies" (POOL, 1993, p. 73-74). In addition, excessive rules of etiquette dictated these celebrations. In fact, dinner parties were major rituals: initially, guests mingled in the drawing room. This first stage provided excellent oportunities for flirtation. Only a few minutes later were visitors directed to the dining room. When dinner was over, the ladies went back to the drawing room to engage in

conversation. The gentlemen remained in the dining room, where they would smoke, drink wine and discuss politics. It is interesting to mention that it was extremely impolite for a gentleman to smoke in front of a lady, hence this separation of sexes after dinner. Eventually, they left the dining room and reassembled in the drawing room, joining the ladies, until tea and coffee were served. Precedence played a key role:

> At the appointed hour, generally in the neighborhood of 7 P.M., on the appointed day, the guests arrived, although, after mid-century it was mandatory that one be precisely fifteen minutes late. The guests were then shown into the drawing room. […] Everyone stood about making polite chitchat while waiting for the late arrivals. There was no shilly-shallying here, since this was a staging area for an assault on the food and not a cocktail party. Drinks were not served, and loquacity was not encouraged. The host and hostess circulated discreetly to make sure that the appropriate gentlemen were paired off with ladies of appropriate status and then arranged in order of precedence for purposes of the formal promenade in to dinner. This, since it often involved very tricky questions of status and rank, was probably in many cases the hostess's most nerve-ranking moment during the whole evening (POOL, 1993, p. 73).

These dressing rules and pre-dinner drawing-room encounters are well illustrated in the texts. In P&P, at the moment Mr Collins receives the aforementioned invitation from Lady Catherine to dine at the Park with Elizabeth Bennet and his wife, he advises his guest not to care so much about her clothes, for it would not be appropriate for her to be as well dressed as someone who is above her station:

> Do not make yourself uneasy, my dear cousin, about your apparel. Lady Catherine is far from requiring that elegance of dress in us, which becomes herself and daughter. I would advise you merely to put on whatever of your clothes is superior to the rest, there is no occasion for anything more. Lady Catherine will not think the worse of you for being simply dressed. She likes to have the distinction of rank preserved (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 137).

In *Emma*, when the leading lady turns up at the Coles's reception, she sees Mr Knightley at the entrance to the house. Unaccustomed to seeing the hero all dressed up and making use of his carriage, Emma exclaims: "'This is coming as you should do,' said she; 'like a gentleman.–I am quite glad to see you'" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 170). Playfully, Mr Knightley replies that he is glad she has seen him before reaching the drawing-room, otherwise she would not recognise him:

> He thanked her, observing, 'How lucky that we should arrive at the same moment! for, if we had met first in the drawing-room, I doubt whether you would have discerned me to be more of a gentleman than usual.–You might not have distinguished how I came, by my look or manner (p. 170).

In view of the strict hierarchy of the period, it is not striking that *Persuasion*'s Mary Musgrove is always complaining she is not given due precedence at the parties held at the Great House. When Anne, Captain Wentworth, Mary and the Musgroves travel to Lyme, they have dinner with Wentworth's friends, Mr and Mrs Harville. At first, Mrs Musgrove has

precedence, but at the moment Mrs Harville hears Mary is the daughter of a baronet, she apologises to her: "[W]hen they dined with the Harvilles there had been only a maid-servant to wait, and at first Mrs Harville had always given Mrs Musgrove precedence; but then she had received so very handsome an apology from her on finding out whose daughter she was" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 99). As the Harvilles had no butler to serve the meal, just a maid, it is clear that the referred dinner was more casual and, consequently, less sophisticated than Anne and the Uppercross party were used to. However, regardless of this, placing guests at table according to their status and rank was imperative.

It was only later in the 19th century that dinner was served *à la russe*, that is, dishes were prepared in the kitchen and came ready to be eaten. At Austen's time, food was still served *à la française*, which means that large trays were left on the table for guests to serve themselves. Because of that, meals were comprised of several courses. Tables were decorated with flowers, and, in more elegant and expensive parties, it was customary for guests to have the 'bill of fare,' that is, the menu. The most common items consumed at dinner were meat, vegetables, pies, soup, and pudding. Depending on the number of guests, an ordinary dinner could have more than ten courses, including entrees, dessert, wine and coffee:

> Depending on the number of diners and the means of the host, several large joints of meat and whole boiled or roasted fowl, sometimes garnished with a few vegetables, would occupy the central area, with a tureen of soup at one end, a whole fish at the other, and pies, cutlets and so forth in the corners. Each gentleman carved the meat nearest to him and helped his neighbours to this and other dishes within his reach. […] When everyone had eaten enough of this course there would be large-scale disruption and bustle while the servants carried away the dishes and brought and arranged another complete course. This second course might contain lighter savoury concoctions such as fricassees and patties, together with a selection of fruit tarts, jellies and cream puddings (LANE, 2005, p. 265).

This is illustrated in *Emma*, considering that Frank Churchill and the leading lady have a very long conversation due to the prolonged interval between the courses:

> The conversation was here interrupted. They were called on to share in the awkwardness of a rather long interval between the courses, and obliged to be as formal and as orderly as the others; but […] the table was again safely covered, when every corner dish was placed exactly right, and occupation and ease were generally restored (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 173).

Furthermore, when *Mansfield Park*'s protagonists are invited for dinner at the parsonage, for instance, Edmund informs Mrs Grant she should not worry about a fancy meal, for he only wishes to spend some time amongst friends: "We none of us want to hear the bill of fare. A friendly meeting, and not a fine dinner, is all we have in view. A turkey, or a goose, or a leg of mutton, or whatever you and your cook chuse to give us" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 218).

In *Emma*, as soon as he is invited to dine with the Coles, the seductive Frank Churchill asks: "**might not the evening end in a dance?"** (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 166, my emphasis). First and foremost, dinner engagements were not so much comprised of meals and conversation as they were meant to combine reading, music, and even dancing sessions. Hence, in view of their significance, these celebrations were the perfect opportunities for women to show off their many accomplishments:

> 'Accomplishments' included several elements. Dancing, singing and playing music displayed the young woman's body and bearing at social occasions to attract a suitor. Drawing, painting, fashionable modern languages (especially French and Italian) and decorative needlework demonstrated taste and 'polite' knowledge as markers of cultural distinction, as did the social arts of conversation and letter-writing, with accompanying knowledge of the 'belles-lettres'. [...] Similarly desirable and useful was knowledge of 'books of the day', or important and widely read contemporary publications (KELLY, 2005, p. 257).

As Gary Kelly implies, at social occasions, the ladies were expected to play the piano – or any other musical instrument, such as a harp – to recite in front of the other guests, and, of course, to dance, amongst other things. Austen significantly depicts this in the novels (with the exception of *Northanger Abbey*), considering that most dinner-party episodes are essential to the development of the narratives. In the first part of *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is so busy enjoying herself at the Assemblies of Bath, heading to the theatre and attending public balls, that her dinner party with the Tilneys, at their Bath home, is not very meaningful. In fact, Catherine, who had been so keen to dine with their new acquaintances, in fact, gets disappointed by the serious way she is treated during the referred engagement:

> Catherine's expectations of pleasure from her visit in Milsom Street were so very high that disappoint was inevitable; and accordingly, though she was most politely received by the General Tilney, and kindly welcomed by his daughter, though Henry was at home, and no one else of the party, she found, on her return, without spending many hours in the examination of her feelings, that she had gone to her appointment preparing for happiness which it had not afforded. Instead of finding herself improved in acquaintance with Miss Tilney, from the intercourse of the day, she seemed hardly so intimate with her as before; instead of seeing Henry Tilney to greater advantage than ever, in the ease of **a family party**, he had never said so little, nor been so little agreeable; and, in spite of their father's great civilities to her – in spite of his thanks, invitations, and compliments–it had been a release to get away from him. It puzzled her to account for all this (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 100, my emphasis).

Later in the narrative, when she is already at the Abbey, the protagonist does not find much joy at dinner amongst them either. Unfortunately, it is only when she is expelled from the mansion that we find out the real reason for such lukewarm social gatherings. That is because the general is so authoritarian that his children do not feel at liberty to engage with their guest during the meal, which was very uncommon at the time.

On the other hand, one of the most remarkable scenes of S&S, for example, is the one in which Marianne and Elinor are invited to a dinner party organised by their half-brother John and his wife Fanny. Seeing that his sisters are staying with Mrs Jennings and the Middletons in London – their acquaintances from Barton – Mr and Mrs John Dashwood decide to ask the girls and their party to dine with them:

> The Dashwoods were so prodigiously delighted with the Middletons, that, though not much in the habit of giving anything, they determined to give them– **a dinner**; and soon after their acquaintance began**, invited them to dine** in Harley Street, where they had taken a very good house for three months. Their sisters and Mrs Jennings were invited likewise (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 173, my emphasis).

In this specific evening, Elinor would meet the snobbish Mrs Ferrars, the mother of Fanny and her beloved Edward, for the first time. Thinking that Edward is to marry Lucy Steele, Elinor – who now seems to be free from the burden of Mrs Ferrars's evaluation – is looking forward to seeing someone whom she has heard so much of:

> They were to meet Mrs Ferrars; but Elinor could not learn whether her sons were to be of the party. The expectation of seeing her, however, was enough to make her interested in the engagement; for though she could now meet Edward's mother without that strong anxiety which had once promised to attend such an introduction, though she could now see her with perfect indifference as to her opinion of herself, her desire of being in company with Mrs. Ferrars, her curiosity to know what she was like, was as lively as ever (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 173).

As it has been discussed before, Fanny Dashwood took a dim view of a possible attachment between Edward and the heroine given her financial circumstances. Therefore, throughout the party, it is implicit that Mrs Ferrars has been informed of the young couple's former connection, for she does everything in her power to treat Elinor with sheer indifference: "She was not a woman of many words […] and of the few syllables that did escape her, not one fell to the share of Miss Dashwood, whom she eyed with the spirited determination of disliking her at all events" (p. 175). Furthermore, despite John Dashwood's frequent complaints about his expenses at Norland Park, we learn that he throws an abundant dinner, served by a great number of attendants. However, conversation, one of the prerequisites for such meetings, was extremely poor, indicating the superficiality of the hosts:

> The dinner was a grand one, the servants were numerous, and every thing bespoke the Mistress's inclination for show, and the Master's ability to support it. In spite of the improvements and additions which were making to the Norland estate, […] nothing gave any symptom of that indigence which he had tried to infer from it; – no poverty of any kind, except of conversation, appeared–but there, the deficiency was considerable. John Dashwood had not much to say for himself that was worth hearing, and his wife had still less (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 175).

After the guests finish their meals and withdraw to the drawing room, John Dashwood has the chance to admire Elinor's talents by showing his visitors the screens she has painted

for Fanny, and which are on display in the room: "'These are done by my eldest sister, said he; 'and you, as a man of taste, will, I dare say, be pleased with them. I do not know whether you have ever happened to see any of her performances before, but she is in general reckoned to draw extremely well'" (p. 176). However, in a most arrogant manner, Mrs Ferrars barely observes the paintings. To make things worse, she compares Elinor's work to that of a Miss Morton, which sounds terribly rude. The insolence of the widow stirs Marianne to defend her sister, in spite of her deep mortification: "This is admiration of a very particular kind! – what is a Miss Morton to us? –who knows, or who cares, for her? –it is Elinor of whom *we* think and speak (p. 178). Marianne's reaction to Mrs Ferrars's attitude evidently calls everyone's attention, spoiling the rest of the celebration.

In light of that, it is possible to notice that due to their limited financial resources, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are often neglected by their brother, and humiliated by his money-minded wife. It is clear, though, that besides being brought up on a grand estate, the girls have received an impeccable education. Despite the fact that they presently live at a cottage, both of them are extremely accomplished. In fact, earlier in the story, we see that Marianne, too, can recite books by heart and play the piano really well. Nevertheless, the invitation to dine with their own family, during their town season, only came because they are favourites with Sir John Middleton and Mrs Jennings, who themselves are quite wealthy. Gillian Russell reiterates this by asserting that Elinor and Marianne are treated as victims in most of their social gatherings, especially when they are in London:

> The adventure of eighteenth-century sociability – the liminal act in crossing a threshold, both real and symbolic, with the prospect of losing or finding oneself in the company of others – is here rendered as a hollow ritual, which the Dashwood girls endure as defeated victims of the imperious code of politeness, to which they must pay the necessary 'tribute'. They are supernumeraries in an agglomeration of individuals, not proper participants in a vital social body (RUSSELL, 2011, p. 181).

Evidently, what is at stake at this apparently inoffensive party is that Mrs Ferrars knows Elinor has social value, but she patronises the young lady because she is not rich. It is precisely because of their home connections that the Dashwood girls are able to mingle with the well-off Ferrarses. Moreover, what makes this episode extremely relevant to the plot is the fact that Mrs Ferrars's fortune was made from trade, and just like her daughter – who is not able to engage in good conversation throughout the whole dinner – she has little cultural capital, that's why she cannot acknowledge the substantial value of the heroine. Pierre Bourdieu explores this as he divides capital (i.e. wealth and/or assets) in three different categories:

> As **economic capital**, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as **cultural capital**, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as **social capital**, made up of social obligations ('connections'), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility (BOURDIEU, 1986, p. 242, my emphasis).

Ironically, at the end of the story, Edward Ferrars rejects his inheritance, that is, his economic capital, and ends up marrying Elinor.

In P&P, two dinner parties are crucial to the plot, bearing in mind that they contribute to the growth of Elizabeth and Darcy's relationship. The first one is the reunion that takes place at Netherfield Hall. As we know, subsequently to the public ball Mr Bingley and his friends attended at Meryton, his sister Caroline decides to invite Jane Bennet over for dinner. When the latter gets ill, Elizabeth is forced to go stay with her sister. In the affair, Mr Darcy has the opportunity to observe the protagonist more closely, and as the Bingleys, Elizabeth and him converse in the drawing room, he realises how clever and assertive she is. Since the heroine produces a book whilst the others play cards, the group starts talking about women's accomplishments. When Mr Bingley claims that all young women are accomplished, Darcy replies that he does not know more than half a dozen ladies who are truly skilled. At this precise moment, Caroline Bingley intervenes and supports him:

> [N]o one can be really esteemed accomplished, who does not greatly surpass what is usually met with. A woman must have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages, to deserve the word; and besides all this, she must possess a certain something in her air and manner of walking, the tone of her voice, her address and expressions, or the word will be but half deserved (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 35).

Elizabeth, then, starts a fiery debate with the hero:

> 'I am no longer surprised at your knowing *only* six accomplished women. I rather wonder now at your knowing *any*.'
>
> 'Are you so severe upon your own sex, as to doubt the possibility of all this?'
>
> '*I* never saw such a woman. *I* never saw such capacity, and taste, and application, and elegance, as you describe, united' (p. 35, italics in the original).

Elizabeth Bennet's views and opinionated manner – added to the fact that she walks a long distance to take care of Jane, careless of what the hosts will think of her muddy petticoat – inevitably call Mr Darcy's attention. Because he knew no one in the village apart from Bingley and his siblings, Darcy neither danced nor chatted with anyone apart from his friends at the referred disastrous ball. Just like Bingley explains to Jane, Darcy "never speaks much unless among his intimate acquaintance. With *them* he is remarkably agreeable" (AUSTEN,

2007, p. 17). Hence, there could be no better occasion than a dinner party for him to familiarise himself with Elizabeth, and find out she is far more interesting than the woman he had thought was 'not handsome enough to tempt him.'

A few months later, during Elizabeth's stay at Mr Collins's parsonage, we are informed that Elizabeth and her friends dine twice a week at Rosings Park as to entertain Lady Catherine de Bourgh. In one of these events, the party increases with the presence of Mr Darcy, whom Elizabeth has not seen for a while, and Colonel Fitzwilliam. Darcy's cousin immediately sits next to Elizabeth and starts socialising with her, discussing several different subjects such as travels, books, and music, which renders Darcy jealous:

> He now seated himself by her, and talked so agreeably of Kent and Hertfordshire, of travelling and staying at home, of new books and music, that Elizabeth had never been half so well entertained in that room before; and they conversed with so much spirit and flow, as to draw the attention of Lady Catherine herself, as well as of Mr Darcy. His eyes had been soon and repeatedly turned towards them with a look of curiosity (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 147).

When Colonel Fitzwilliam tells Lady Catherine they are talking about music, the noble widow replies: "Of music! Then pray speak aloud. It is of all subjects my delight. I must have my share in the conversation, if you are speaking of music. There are few people in England, I suppose, who have more true enjoyment of music than myself, or a better natural taste" (p. 148). As the theme leads the colonel to ask Elizabeth to play the piano, during the music session, the hero walks towards her, intimidating the heroine. Once again, they engage in a heated conversation:

> 'You mean to frighten me, Mr Darcy, by coming in all this state to hear me? […] There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me'
>
> […]
>
> Darcy smiled and said, […] No one admitted to the privilege of hearing you, can think anything wanting. We neither of us perform to strangers (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 150-151).

Based on this passage, we may notice that music was a fundamental part of the dinner parties of the gentry. According to Le Faye (2002, p. 104), with or without dancing, "music was an important part of family entertainment in the evening, and girls were usually taught to play the harpsichord, piano, harp or guitar, while men learnt the violin, flute and cello." Even though Lady Catherine affirms Elizabeth could have been more skilled if she had had a London master, both her nephews admire the protagonist whilst she plays to them. Darcy, of course, is not so much fond of her musicality as he is fascinated with her strong personality. His infatuation only grows because of these private encounters, for as Gillian Russell points

out, it is at these moments in which the ladies are in control that "Austen is reflecting the importance of sociability to elite women of this period as one of the ways they could exert power and influence" (RUSSELL, 2011, p. 181). Taking that into consideration, it is not surprising that Mr Darcy first proposes to Elizabeth some days after this episode.

It is also during her noteworthy dinner-visit at the Grants' that the heroine of *Mansfield Park* is able to shine, for the affair is a great opportunity for her to dress in a more sophisticated way. Although it is already dark when Fanny and Edmund head towards the parsonage, her cousin, whom Fanny has loved ever since she was a little girl, notices that she seems to be very elegant: "'Now I must look at you, Fanny,' said Edmund, with the kind smile of an affectionate brother, 'and tell you how I like you; and as well as I can judge by this light, you look very nicely indeed. What have you got on?'" (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 224). Taking into account that she is not used to going out, and not at all accustomed to dressing up, Fanny gives Edmund a humble answer: "'The new dress that my uncle was so good as to give me on my cousin's marriage. I hope it is not too fine; but I thought I ought to wear it as soon as I could, and that I might not have such another opportunity all the winter. I hope you do not think me too fine'" (p. 224).

Even though Austen does not provide us with many details about the clothes of her characters, by the time she was writing the novels, there was a considerable influence of French style in English fashion. That was due to the Napoleon wars, which led a lot of Parisian dressmakers to flee to London. Considering that Fanny has put on the dress she had worn at Maria's wedding, we may infer it is but a fancy evening gown. In her book *Fashion in the time of Jane Austen*, Sarah Downing explains it was common for young ladies of the period to wear outer dresses over a satin petticoat with a low neckline, also known as 'décolletage'. The lowest necklines, though, were mostly worn for balls:

> This important period marked the transition away from the old wide hooped silhouette, which remained reserved strictly for wearing at Court, to the modern vertical silhouette. For some years, gowns were becoming narrower, with a rising waistline, and simpler […] A puff of muslin known as a 'Buffon' gave modesty to the décolletage and brought **interest upwards to the face**, which was framed prettily by a coiffure of natural curls and topped by a large picture hat (DOWNING, 2010, p. 9-10, my emphasis).

Whether or not Fanny's dress was too fine, it is unclear. Nevertheless, it certainly has a great effect on the flirtatious Henry Crawford, who cannot stop talking about her appearance, especially in relation to her face, complexion and countenance. As he narrates his impressions of the evening to his sister on the following day, he affirms he now finds Fanny extremely

beautiful, and is decided to spend more time at Mansfield in order to make her fall in love with him:

> But I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart. You do not seem properly aware of her claims to notice. When we talked of her last night, you none of you seemed sensible of the wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks […] I assure you she is quite a different creature from what she was in the autumn. She was then merely a quiet, modest, not plain-looking girl, but **she is now absolutely pretty**. I used to think she had neither complexion nor countenance; but in that soft skin of hers, so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided beauty; and from what I observed of her eyes and mouth, I do not despair of their being capable of expression enough when she has anything to express. And then her air, her manner, her *tout ensemble*, is so indescribably improved! (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 231-232, my emphasis).

In view of that, it is relevant to mention that previously at the referred dinner, Fanny is the only young woman invited to spend the evening with the Crawfords and the Grants, who are related. Therefore, the main reason why Henry notices the heroine is that Julia and Maria Bertram, with whom he has flirted before, are not present at the event. When dinner is over and they all gather together in the drawing room near the tea-table, much to Fanny's distress, Mr Crawford starts chatting with her, even though she had been resolved 'to sit silent and unattended to.' On the occasion, the artful Henry Crawford tells Fanny it is a pity Sir Thomas had to come back from the Caribbean a bit earlier than expected, otherwise their private theatre would not have come to an abrupt end. As Fanny never really liked the theatricals, she gets so enraged she responds angrily to him, saying she would not have delayed her uncle's return for a day:

> **She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so angrily to any one**; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed at her own daring. **He was surprised**; but after a few moments' silent consideration of her, replied in a calmer, graver tone […] And then turning the conversation, **he would have engaged her on some other subject, but her answers were so shy and reluctant that he could not advance in any** (p. 228, my emphasis).

Hence, afterwards, when he talks to his sister about the event, Henry confesses he is intrigued by Fanny's behaviour. Since Mr Crawford does not know the protagonist secretly despises him, he thinks he may succeed in attracting her, just like he has done to her cousins:

> 'I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her. I could not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character? Is she solemn? Is she queer? Is she prudish? Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my life, trying to entertain her, and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, 'I will not like you, I am determined not to like you'; and I say she shall' (AUSTEN, 1994, p. 232).

Differently from what he had predicted, it turns out that, a few chapters later, it is the mischievous Henry Crawford who becomes utterly infatuated with Fanny. The shy young lady, then, who has never had much opportunity to attend such social gatherings, becomes the centre of his attentions. The Grants' dinner party is thus vital for her to bloom, in every sense of the word. At this intimate reception, she is not only prone to socialise, but also to be admired for the first time in her life. This scene plays a key role in the storyline because a little later, Fanny's refusal to marry Crawford forces her to go back to Portsmouth. Consequently, it is during her sojourn with the Prices that her Mansfield relations realise they cannot do without her. Moreover, the referred dinner party triggers the suspense that permeates the narrative up to the end of the novel, for until then, we do not know for certain if Fanny and Edmund will really be brought together.

The illustrious reception the Coles give in *Emma* could not start in a more pleasant way for the heroine. In fact, as soon as she arrives, she is treated according to her position in Highbury society. On top of that, Frank Churchill, whom she has enjoyed a flirtation with, finds a way to sit by her side at dinner:

> Emma had as much reason to be satisfied with the rest of the party as with Mr Knightley. She was received with a cordial respect which could not but please, and given all the consequence she could wish for. When the Westons arrived, the kindest looks of love, the strongest of admiration were for her, from both husband and wife; the son approached her with a cheerful eagerness which marked her as his peculiar, and at dinner she found him seated by her– and, as she firmly believed, not without some dexterity on his side (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 170).

As soon as they all begin to eat, the large group of guests at the table comment that a beautiful pianoforte has been sent to the Bateses on account of Jane Fairfax. Since everybody in the village knows that her aunt and grandmother could not afford to get her such an instrument, everybody, including Emma, tries to guess who her anonymous benefactor is. In spite of her humble background, Jane has been brought up by some friends of her father's, in London, who have provided her with an excellent education. However, as she came to Highbury to spend some time with her own family, she would not be able to practise the piano. Therefore, it is precisely at this event that one of the most important subjects of the novel is brought up, that of highly skilled women who circulate amongst the gentry but do not have the means to keep up with their consumer goods. Bearing in mind that the ladies of the time were raised to provide domestic entertainment, especially as regards music, there could be no better situation for the discussion to take place. In an article about female musical accomplishment in the 18th century, Ursula Rempel argues that:

> For fashionable young ladies, instruction in one or more of lute, guitar, lyre/guitar, mandolin, voice, harp, harpsichord and piano was a social necessity; they were expected to entertain at domestic evening entertainments and provide the music for informal hops. Lack of talent was no deterrent; Ancelet writes with some irony that 'every young lady, whether or not she has the talent, must learn to play the piano or sing ... it is the fashion' (REMPEL, 1989, p. 44).

In view of this social necessity, once again Austen portrays the importance of cultural and social value to the detriment of economic capital per se. That's why Mrs Cole, the merchant hostess, shows heartfelt sympathy for Jane when she claims she could not be any happier with the news:

> It always has quite hurt me that Jane Fairfax, who plays so delightfully, should not have an instrument. It seemed quite a shame, especially considering how many houses there are where fine instruments are absolutely thrown away. This is like giving ourselves a slap, to be sure! And it was but yesterday I was telling Mr. Cole, I really was ashamed to look at our new grand pianoforte in the drawing-room, while I do not know one note from another, and our little girls, who are but just beginning, perhaps may never make any thing of it; and there is poor Jane Fairfax, who is **mistress of music**, has not any thing of the nature of an instrument, not even the pitifullest old spinet in the world, to amuse herself with (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 171, my emphasis).

Vehemently thinking she is Frank Churchill's peculiar, a clueless Emma, who is not so very fond of Jane Fairfax, talks to him the whole evening, puzzled as to who may have given Jane such a present. The deceitful Frank Churchill encourages her suspicions so that she may not notice that, in fact, it was he who sent Miss Fairfax the instrument. After all the agitation brought on by the news, Mr Cole asks Emma to play the piano. Although she is not a great player, Emma performs a duet with Frank Churchill:

> She knew the limitations of her own powers to well to attempt more than she could perform with credit; she wanted neither taste nor spirit in the little things which are generally acceptable, and could accompany her own voice well. One accompaniment to her song took her agreeably by surprize–a second, slightly but correctly taken by Frank Churchill. Her pardon was duly begged at the close of the song, and every thing usual followed. He was accused of having a delightful voice, and a perfect knowledge of music; […] They sang together once more; and Emma would then resign her place to Miss Fairfax, whose performance, both vocal and instrumental, she never could attempt to conceal from herself, was infinitely superior to her own (p. 180).

By joining Emma in a duet, Churchill reinforces the idea that she may, indeed, be the object of his love interest, for their performance together inevitably becomes a spectacle for the other guests. As Penny Gay suggests: "Frank Churchill, like Willoughby, is a keen duettist, not so much (perhaps) to 'show off his voice,' as Mr Knightley says (*E,* 2:8), as to engage in the heightened opportunities for flirtation that making music together supplies (GAY, 2005, p. 338). In fact, a little before their music session, the proud heroine feels very important as the rogue crosses the room in order to find, once again, a seat next to her: "Emma divined what

every body present must be thinking. She was his object, and every body must perceive it" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 175). Nevertheless, the rich heiress, who thinks she has attracted Jane's secret fiancé, has to bear the fact that Miss Fairfax, in spite of her circumstances, is a far better piano player than her. Still according to Rempel (1989, p. 43-44):

> In *Emma*, we are given the well-educated, clever, musical bluestocking, Jane Fairfax, who enjoys practising on her new pianoforte. We infer that her musical tastes and technical abilities are superior to those of Emma, Mrs. Weston, or Mrs. Elton. Unlike Mary Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, who has neither taste nor execution, Jane Fairfax has both, and for her, music is an art; for the others it is a skill necessary to secure a husband; once the knot is tied, there is, we are told by Mrs. Elton, little opportunity for practice or retaining one's skills – and possibly little need; after all, the main goal of music as a social accomplishment has been met.

As it is possible to see, in terms of plot, this significant reunion highlights how clever Emma thinks she is, even though she makes a complete fool of herself by playing a dangerous game with the cunning Frank Churchill. In fact, Emma and Jane Fairfax's music performance and the piano issue are fundamental to the party, for in this context, both young ladies become some sort of rivals when it comes to being the most accomplished. Up to this moment, Emma has declared she neither needs nor wishes to marry anyone. Nonetheless, just like Churchill, she loves being in the spotlight. Had he not been attracted to Jane Fairfax, Frank would not have given her the instrument. Despite that, his ill nature is exposed when he lies to Emma and supports her wild guesses. In essence, this social gathering is especially relevant because it brings about some of the great misunderstandings that permeate the text. Throughout the evening, Emma's former governess tells her that Mr Knightley and Jane Fairfax would be a good match. Judging by the way he looks at the young lady play the piano, Mrs Weston reckons it can only have been Mr Knightley who sent Jane the gift. Whilst all eyes are on Jane Fairfax's presentation, a shocked Emma isolates herself as to reflect on the scenario:

> With mixed feelings, she seated herself at a little distance from the numbers round the instrument, to listen. Frank Churchill sang again. They had sung together once or twice, it appeared, at Weymouth. But the sight of Mr Knightley among the most attentive, soon drew away half Emma's mind; and she fell into a train of thinking on the subject of Mrs Weston's suspicions […] Her objections to Mr Knightley's marrying did not in the least subside. She could see nothing but evil in it. […] A Mrs Knightley for them all to give way to! –No– Mr Knightley must never marry (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 180).

Even though the assumption that the hero is in love with Miss Fairfax does not linger, this dinner party allows Emma to think Frank Churchill has great interest in her. Besides, their proximity throughout the event renders Mr Knightley extremely jealous. Thus, this social gathering contributes enormously to the climax of the novel, when Emma finds out it was

actually Churchill who gave Jane the piano. Most importantly, when she discovers he deceived her for the whole of that evening gathering at the Coles's, Emma notes she has failed both in her matchmaking and in forming people's character. Above all, the heroine, whom has always felt so superior towards others, realises she has been completely wrong about her own self.

In *Persuasion,* during the course of Anne Elliot's long stay at Uppercross, we are informed she frequently dines with her sister's in-laws at their 'mansion-house'. As Mary lives in a cottage, there could be no better amusement than attend the receptions the Musgroves give at Uppercross Hall. Their daughters, Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove are so fond of music that they dance and sing with their guests at the end of their busy nights. Since Anne has been of the party, she is also invited to play the piano and entertain the visitors:

> The girls were wild for dancing; and the evenings ended, occasionally, in an unpremeditated little ball. **There was a family of cousins within a walk of Uppercross, in less affluent circumstances, who depended on the Musgroves for all their pleasures**: they would come at any time, and help play at anything, or dance anywhere; and Anne very much preferring the office of musician to a more active post, played country dances to them by the hour together; a kindness which always recommended her musical powers to the notice of Mr and Mrs Musgrove more than anything else, and often drew this compliment;–'Well done, Miss Anne! very well done indeed! Lord bless me! how those little fingers of yours fly about!" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 36, my emphasis)

In view of this excerpt, it is inevitable to notice that the Hayters, the Musgroves' less affluent cousins, rely on these dinner invitations as to have fun. Given that they cannot afford to throw such parties, they mix with the masters of Uppercross Hall, who apart from being family, are also their best society. Moreover, despite being a baronet's daughter, Anne prefers not to take part in the little ball that follows the meal, but rather show her piano skills. Because she has been deeply wounded ever since the end of her relationship with Captain Wentworth, it is evident Anne does not feel much inclined to dance. Her unwillingness to actively participate in the post-dinner dance indicates she is not yet prone to meet a potential suitor, for as Austen herself mentions at the beginning of P&P, "**to be fond of dancing was a certain step towards falling in love**" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 10, my emphasis). Instead of that, the cultivated aristocrat plays the songs that dictate the terms of the ball. The songs Anne performs, also known as 'country-dances', were in vogue during the Regency, even though they date back to the 17th century:

> [B]y Jane Austen's time, the dance had assumed its quintessential nineteenth-century form, in which three or more couples, the men and women in separate lines some four feet apart, facing one another, danced their way through a series of figures. A figure was merely a sequence of movements, like those in square dances in which men and ladies opposite one another advanced and then retreated, or locked

> arms and swung around, or do-si-doed (from the French *dos-à-dos),* or wove their way through the other dancers. Depending on the nature of the figures, all the couples might be in motion at once, or only one or two, with the rest following the leading or 'top couple' in sequence–each dance could vary considerably in form at the pleasure of the dancers (POOL, 1993, p. 59).

No one around Anne has any doubts she is a very accomplished young lady. Nonetheless, we come to know that, unlike her, the Miss Musgroves play the harp, "the epitome of grace, elegance and refinement" (REMPEL, 1989, p. 46). Indeed, in the 18th century, the harp was considered a status symbol. Besides being one of the most delicate and fanciest of musical instruments, it evoked the feminine ideals of the Renaissance. According to an article displayed at the *Jane Austen Centre* website:

> Lessons on the harp were reserved for the privileged daughters of indulgent parents. While the piano was necessary and functional, the harp was stylish. It was an expensive instrument taught by visiting 'Masters'. Some music training, along with art and dancing lessons, was deemed necessary to finish a young lady's education, regardless of whether the family daughters were sent to school or not. Indeed, the level of education obtained by Jane Austen's heroines is in direct proportion to her family's financial and social status (JANE AUSTEN CENTRE. Available at: <https://janeausten.co.uk/blogs/regency-history/the-harp-as-a-status-symbol>).

Based on this fragment, we may infer it was mainly the daughters of extremely doting parents that were taught how to play the harp. This is delineated in *Persuasion*, for on one of those dining occasions at the Great House, when Mr and Mrs Musgrove applaud their daughters' music skills, Anne feels slighted. This lack of prestige, though, does not have so much to do with the harp as with her having no one to care about her, for her sister Mary only thinks of herself, and her vain father, whom she is not really attached to, is far away, in Bath:

> She played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves; but having no voice, no knowledge of the harp, and no fond parents to sit by and fancy themselves delighted, her performance was little thought of, only out of civility, or to refresh the others, as she was well aware. She knew that when she played she was giving pleasure only to herself; but this was no new sensation: excepting one short period of her life, she had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any appreciation or real taste. In music she had been always used to feel alone in the world; and Mr and Mrs Musgrove's fond partiality for their own daughter's performance, and total indifference to any other person's, gave her much more pleasure for their sakes than mortification for their own (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 35).

Consequently, although she is amidst dear acquaintances, Anne usually feels lonely at these celebrations. To make things worse, she hears Wentworth is coming to stay with his sister and Admiral Croft at her former home of Kellynch Hall, only a few miles away from Uppercross. When the Musgroves invite him for dinner, the protagonist does everything in her power not to go. However, incapable of turning down another invitation, it is precisely at one of these receptions that Anne formally encounters her former fiancé. During the course of

the evening, the admiral, his wife and Mrs Musgrove talk about all sorts of things related to the Navy, such as the living conditions of sailors' wives on a ship. They also argue Wentworth must get married soon. Anne, who feels extremely uncomfortable, has to listen to everything silently. Thus, when the others start dancing, she immediately sits at the piano, her heart aching: The evening ended with dancing. On its being proposed, Anne offered her services, as usual, and though her eyes would sometimes fill with tears, as she sat at the instrument, she was extremely glad to be employed, and desired nothing in return but to be unobserved (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 55).

Eight years later, it is at this social gathering at the Musgroves' that Anne and Captain Wentworth are properly reunited. This scene heightens a tension that would only be gradually dissolved, for since he still resents Anne's decision, Wentworth treats her with cold civility. Deirdre Le Faye argues that this specific dinner allows him to feel somewhat important, given the attention the Miss Musgroves give him:

> Time and success have not modified his resentment of Anne's rejection, and he is barely civil towards her when they meet, but is delighted to bask in the attention of both Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, as they listen round-eyed to his descriptions of voyages, battles and life aboard ship. He is tactless enough to tell the girls that Anne Elliot is so altered that he should not have known her again – a remark which, of course, is repeated back to her (LE FAYE, 2002, p. 287).

This unexpected meeting prompts them to be in the same social circle, because from this moment on, they both are constantly invited to dine at the Musgroves. Therefore, it is 'but the beginning of other dinings and other meetings.' Sadly, when this renewal period starts, Anne acknowledges they are acting like strangers towards one another:

> They had no conversation together, no intercourse but what the commmonest civlity required. Once so much to each other! Now nothing! There had been a time, when of all the large party now filling the drawing-room at Uppercross, they would have found it most difficult to cease to speak to one another. [...] there could have been no two hearts so open, no tastes so similar, no feelings so in unison, no countenances so beloved. Now they were as strangers; nay, worse than strangers, for they could never become acquainted. It was a perpetual estrangement (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 48).

Ironically, in spite of his previous decision not to see Anne again, and his certainty that 'her power with him was gone for ever,' whilst Anne plays the piano, during their referred first dinner at the Great House, the heroine hears Frederick Wentworth inquire after her: "[B]ut then she was sure of his having asked his partner whether Miss Elliot never danced? The answer was, 'Oh, no; never; she has quite given up dancing. She had rather play. She is never tired of playing" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 55). By asking if she ever dances, consciously or unconsciously, the captain shows he is concerned with Anne's sociability. The negative answer, then, indicates she has not been open to falling in love again. Thus, as we may see,

such festive gatherings set the stage for the couple's future reconciliation. Similarly, in P&P, and, somehow, in *Emma*, they also contribute to strengthen the bonds between hero and heroine.

Considering everything that has been explored throughout this session, we may assume that the dinner party was not only the most exclusive and refined of domestic amusements, but it also played a key role in sociability, for it brought different sorts of people together. Moreover, it is possible to affirm that the dinner-party scenes we have examined are pivotal to the development of the plot of each novel. It is at a dinner engagement that the great part of the tension involving the main characters is set, culminating in the climax of the stories. Lastly, based on the illustrations mentioned, there is little doubt that these gatherings were a great opportunity to connect the stratified rural aristocracy of Georgian England, with their wide variety of titles and different economic, cultural and social circumstances.

CONCLUSION

> Portsmouth was Portsmouth;
> Mansfield was home.
> Jane Austen, ***Mansfield Park***

It is undeniable that the grand rural mansion, which is at the heart of Austen's narratives, is a quintessential mark of English tradition, for it is the space in which part of its most intrinsic customs originated, were developed and perpetuated. Therefore, it has been an indispensable element for promulgating an ancient cultural heritage and a sense of Englishness. Even though it had reached its apogee by the time the writer was composing her novels, the age-old country house has its origins in the castles built throughout the Norman period. Since land symbolises permanence, with the evolution of castles and their gradual transformation into stately homes, the concentration of rural seats in the hands of the nobility was maintained for a great many centuries. Only after a new social class emerged, divided between agrarian capitalism and urban mercantilism, did the situation start to change.

In the High Middle Ages, the clergy, too, were found in possession of land, administrating farmhouses and the tenants they had on their large estates. The first modifications of castles, though, occurred in the Late Medieval Period. At that time, lords treated the members of their households as an extended family. Consequently, the castles were also places of entertainment, for at that age of chivalry, frequent banquets and festivities were held at an entrance chamber where noblemen, servants and soldiers alike had their meals, also known as 'great hall.' Curiously, because of their similar function, this historic chamber would later pave the way for the large dining rooms and drawing rooms of the 18th-century stately homes. Hence, the strongholds and primitive manors characteristic of the Normans laid the foundations for the early country houses around the 14th and 15th centuries. Little by little, castles were being replaced by unfortified manors. Also known as 'halls' (due to the importance of the great hall within them and their courtyard setting), these primal houses not only preserved the majestic gatehouses of the previous hundred years, but also became more opulent, displaying the wealth and power of the manorial lords. As fortresses were transformed into country houses, priories, abbeys and cathedrals were also bought by

rich aristocrats during the Tudor Period and most of them were converted into private residences. Thus, by examining the relevance of this kind of property to the rural nobility, and their significance in the novels, we may infer that the most prestigious manors in Austen's world are, in fact, abbeys. As we have seen in *Emma* and *Northanger Abbey*, on account of their grandiosity, and, above all things, of their ancient origins, these large monastic houses, at first, render their respective heroines utterly dumbfounded. Hence Emma's reaction as she looks at the size, style and situation of Donwell Abbey with so much respect she thinks it is just what it ought to be, and it looks what it is (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 289). Likewise, it has been easier to understand Catherine Morland's ecstasy when she 'boldly bursts forth in wonder and praise,' (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 141) struck by the grandeur of Northanger.

Apart from the significant effect the Dissolution had on the development of country houses, Renaissance not only contributed to consolidate the rural mansion but it also brought about a huge variety of architectural styles. Consequently, by the Regency Era, it already presented a diverse combination of patterns, both internally and externally. That's why we come across so many different house types and names in the texts. In *Mansfield Park*, for instance, Mr Rushworth's Elizabethan house is called Sotherton Court. In S&S, Sir John Middleton's estate is called Barton Park. As we have found out, all these different hyponyms (Castle, Hall, Manor, Abbey, Grange, Palace, Court, Park, and a House) remained because of the tradition of the age-old families whom the houses belonged to. Besides, rather significant changes occurred still in the sixteenth century. With the end of the open halls, the communal way of life of medieval England faded away. A little after that, the Civil War was partly responsible for the decline of the ancient nobility and the rise of the landed gentry. It is especifically this emergent social class, essentially constituted by a minor rural aristocracy, that Austen portrays in her narratives.

The weakening of manorial ties at the beginning of the Early Modern Era propelled proprietors to invest even more in their landed estates, culminating in the great age of the country house, that is, the 18th century. During this period, most power houses were being remodelled, becoming a real mix of different styles. Therefore, most Georgian stately homes were the product of centuries of transformations. Since Austen does not provide us with a substantial account of her fictional manors, it is hard to affirm, for example, whether Pemberley is Elizabethan, Jacobean or if it has the neo-Palladian layout which was dominant when the stories were being written. However, considering Mr Darcy's aristocratic roots (his aunt, Lady Catherine De Bourgh seems to have a French surname and so does he, for 'Darcy'

might have originally been ‘D’arcy’, which inevitably goes back to Norman times), there was little doubt that the most important house in the novels is nothing less than an ancestral estate.

Bearing in mind the long history of the English countryside, we may presume that land, property, titles and social status were always interconnected. We have learnt that for a long period, these majestic houses, with their gatehouses and heraldic banners, were essentially the means their noble owners had to show off their fortune and rank. Taking into account that the manors from bygone days were passed down through royal lineage, it was evident that – in a conservative society that was very much concerned with consequence in life – the older the houses, the more prominent their proprietors were. This is, once again, well illustrated in *Emma* and in *Northanger Abbey*, for when the protagonists see the buildings that had probably been constructed in the ninth or tenth centuries, they immediately reflect on their remarkable ownership lines. In *Emma*, the leading character feels an increasing admiration for the “residence of a family of such true gentility, untainted in blood and understanding” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 289). In the latter novel, Catherine Morland ponders:

> It was wonderful that her friends should seem so little elated by the possession of such a home, that the consciousness of it should be so meekly borne. [...] **A distinction to which they had been born** gave no pride. Their superiority of abode was no more to them than their superiority of person (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 110, my emphasis).

Another striking observation was that, in general, the dwellings of the heroines are more modern than those of the heroes. In terms of social position, with the exception of *Persuasion*’s Anne Elliot and the Dashwood girls from S&S, this fact suggests that the female protagonists often come from a more modest background than men.

Like scholar Chris Jones (2005, p. 269) has reiterated, because land represents stability and continuity, it was precisely the control of large rural properties that made Georgian landowners the ruling class:

> Land, as Coleridge and Burke asserted, represented permanence. In law it was termed 'real' property, in contrast to personal property and the stocks that were so volatile as seemingly to possess only imaginary value. To own land was to be identified more physically with the nation than to engage in commerce and a wide yet intimate knowledge of the affairs of the countryside where the majority of the nation lived made landowners the 'natural' governing class.

Hence, since money revolved around the grand estates of the time, in the texts, wealth and morality overlap one another. Because the Austenian universe is the world of the rural gentry, we have noticed that it is impossible to dissociate the landowning class from land and vice-versa. In fact, in Regency England, land was “more a monetary abstraction than an expanse of soil” (EAGLETON, 2005, p. 115). As Terry Eagleton has suggested, it “had long been a

commodity, and it is certainly that in Austen's fiction. She has a notably quick eye for the size and value of an estate, along with the likely social status of its proprietor" (EAGLETON, 2005, p. 115). Given that the country house was the main statement of this kind of rural order, whose society was deeply guided by rules and moral values, it could only be of utmost importance in the novels.

To begin with, it was clear that, most young ladies at the time had to marry into money because it was their main chance of survival. In fact, but for the rich heiresses, such as *Mansfield Park*'s Mary Crawford, Miss de Bourgh, in P&P, and the protagonist of *Emma*, nearly all the other single female characters are on the verge of losing their homes.Consequently, they need to wed prosperous men in order to have financial security. As we have seen, this impending situation was the reflection of a catastrophic scene, in which the English economy was deeply affected by international wars, huge debts, the enclosure of common lands, and a significant transition in the distribution of wealth, amongst other things:

> The Austen fictional economy draws on a real economy in a state of rapid and unsettling transition: an expanding commercial sector, a rapidly developing consumer culture, an economy tied to the ups and downs of foreign wars, high taxes, scarce capital, inadequate banking and credit systems and large sums of money to be made and spent by those who never had it before. Aggressive enclosures of common lands, consolidation of neighbouring farms and the introduction of modern agricultural improvements had brought enormous wealth and power to the great landholders. These conspicuous and deeply felt changes in the distribution and management of wealth were made even more acute by an unheard of rate of inflation in prices, punctuated by periodic economic depression. **In this unstable economy, marriage, Austen's narrative mainstay, was a legitimate and common means of gaining access to all-important capital** (COPELAND, 2005, p. 317).

Due to a centuries-old tradition, inheritance was often entailed on men as a means to preserve land and the family line. At a time when titles and gradations of rank still played a key role in society, we have investigated that these great country seats were passed down through very strict, and often unfair, laws of inheritance; primogeniture being the most important of them. Hence, whenever titles were at stake, they were transferred along with the houses. Considering that an estate could only remain in the same family if it were transmitted through male-line descendants, women had little rights when it came to inheriting their parent's rural mansions. On account of entail, most of them had to see their uncles, cousins and nephews come into their properties.This is depicted in P&P, for none of the Bennet sisters is to come into Longbourn, the family home. Instead, their entailed estate will be passed down to Mr Collins, a distant cousin, because Mr Bennet has not had a male heir. Such circumstances have made them so vulnerable that their mother is desperate to marry them off to rich landlords. That's why, at the time of his first proposal, the aristocratic Mr Darcy

reminds heroine Elizabeth Bennet of the inferiority of her circumstances: “Could you expect me to rejoice in the inferiority of your connections?–to congratulate myself on the hope of relations, whose condition in life is so decidedly beneath my own?” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 166).

Primogeniture also affects the lives of the Dashwood women in S&S. Given that the manor where they had always lived originally belonged to their great uncle, and they could only inhabit it as long as their father lived, we may conclude that Mr Dashwood only had a life estate in Norland Park. As a result, when he dies, it is their half-brother who comes into the manor, leaving the girls destitute. From the moment the Dashwoods quit the baronial mansion on, they are regarded as poor genteel ladies. Similarly, in *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot only has a life tenancy of Kellynch Hall. As he has had no son, and the house must be passed down together with his baronetcy, none of his three daughters will be able to have a share of their ancestral estate. Because of that, William Elliot, a distant cousin, is to succeed to the property, which is naturally attached to rank. In order to secure the home of his forefathers, Sir Walter wishes his eldest daughter would marry his heir, whom he is at the mercy of. As William Elliot is seen as the most suitable match for Elizabeth – and bearing in mind that he is to inherit Sir Walter’s title as well – we could observe that in the referred novel, kinship, lineage and inheritance are closely linked to one another.

In Regency England, upper-class widows and rich heiresses belonged to the small category of women who neither suffered an impending loss of home nor had to rely on marriage as to get by. We have learnt that the medieval laws of inheritance made sure that at least a third of the husband’s real property belonged to the widow. This spousal share was also known as a ‘dower’. If they wanted, husbands could also leave their wives some financial assistance, which was called ‘jointure.’ The dower was associated to the dowry, that is, the portion a bride brought into the marriage, which was given to her by her parents. Mrs Rushworth (*Mansfield Park*), Lady Catherine de Bourgh (P&P), Mrs Jennings and Mrs Ferrars (both from S&S), for example, were financially independent widows. However, it is possible to affirm that the powerful Mrs Ferrars, whose late husband made money from trade, is the most remarkable widow in the narratives, for she has managed to reshape patrilineal inheritance in her family. When she decides to transfer her country residence to her second son, she defies the laws of primogeniture of the period. That probably happens because she does not come from the long tradition of landownership, which has always been ruled by the partriarchy. Consequently, in spite of being a minor character, Mrs Ferrars plays a very important part in the story.

We have also examined that he heroine of *Emma* is the only female protagonist that is an heiress-at-law. Thus, apart from not worrying about getting married, Emma also has sovereignty over her community. This supremacy is validated by, and because of, Hartfield, the Woodhouse estate. Very conscious of her privileges and high position in Highbury society, Emma is snobbish to an extent that she makes her friend Harriet Smith refuse Robert Martin, for he is a mere tenant farmer. Owing to their fortunes, in the Regency Era, heiresses like Emma were the main target of younger sons, who had limited choices in life. Either they married a rich woman or they pursued a career, for they would not inherit their father's properties. It is important to stress, though, that in the 18th century, it was no longer unusual for junior brothers to find themselves liberal professions:

> During the second half of the eighteenth century, the traditional 'learned professions' - the church, the law and medicine – took on a new and distinctive *social* character as the 'liberal professions', 'liberal' in the sense of befitting a gentleman. Together with the army and the navy - known as the profession of arms - they came to be regarded as suitable occupations, both socially and financially, for the sons of gentlemen. Since the eldest son would inherit the family estate, this applied to younger sons in particular. As Mary Crawford points out, 'there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son' (MP, 1:9); or he might inherit money or land from his mother's side of the family. If not, along with the other younger sons, he would be left to make his own way in the world, to earn a living in one of the gentlemanly occupations that the liberal professions could provide (SOUTHAM, 2005, p. 366).

Heroes Edmund Bertram and Henry Tilney (*Mansfield Park* and *Northanger Abbey*, respectively) are second sons who have decided to join the clergy. Similarly, the male lead of S&S, Edward Ferrars, is an eldest son who becomes a second child because, as we have seen, his mother changes the order of succession in his family. Just like the other male leads, he chooses to be ordained. In P&P, Mr Darcy's cousin, Colonel Fitzwilliam, is a junior brother who cannot afford 'to marry without some attention to money' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 158). Since they were brought up in an extravagant way, the second sons of rich landowners could only maintain their lifestyle by forming an alliance with wealthy women. Therefore, although the wealthy Mary Crawford is in love with Edmund Bertram, she refuses to engage in a relationship with him because he is going to become a humble priest. Still concerning this, in *Northanger Abbey*, General Tilney only invites Catherine Morland to Northanger because he has been deceived into believing she is a very rich heiress. Consequently, he expels her from the abbey once he finds out she is just a clergyman's daughter.

Despite that, we have noticed that some eldest sons are extremely irresponsible, such as *Mansfield Park*'s Tom Bertram and *Northanger Abbey*'s Frederick Tilney. Tom Bertram recklessness almost puts his stately-home-to-be at risk. Besides, the thoughtless Frederick

Tilney only cares about flirting with all the young ladies he sees without having the slightest intention of marrying any of them. Based on that, we have observed that apartfrom the other bad landlords, they are representatives of a group of people Austen utterly despises, for in all the novels, she demonstrates that being highborn is not equal to good breeding. Indeed, we may see that in her narratives, to be a respectable landowner one ought to have a sense of duty not just in relation to his land and manor but also towards his servants and the community. Irresponsibility and extravagance are two things the writer often emphasises as the traits an ideal landowner cannot possess. In fact, only in *Emma* and in P&P can we find – in Mr Knightley and Mr Darcy, respectively – respectable landowners who manage their large properties properly, who worry about the well-being of their servants, and who treat others without a sense of superiority. In the other four texts, the great landlords are faulty. General Tilney (*Northanger Abbey*), Sir Thomas Bertram (*Mansfield Park*), John Dashwood (S&S) and Sir Walter Elliot (*Persuasion*), the masters of the country mansions that are central to the referred narratives, are all morally culpable and do not govern their estates in a paternalistic way.

National economy aside, another striking theme in the texts was that of the British Empire, brought up in *Mansfield Park*. Despite its brief reference, we have learnt that Sir Thomas Bertram, Fanny Price's uncle and owner of Mansfield Park, possesses a slave plantation in the West Indies. It is this very colonial estate in Antigua that provides the sustenance of the Bertrams at Mansfield, contributing to the maintenance of their lavish lifestyle.

Raymond Williams (2016, p. 162) has asserted that in Austen's novels, much of what happens lie 'in the changes of fortune', that is to say, most of her characters are left to the mercy of good luck. It particularly happens when they experience a process of general change and the possibility of moving up and down the social ladder, which often affected the landowning families of Georgian England. Indeed, because power shifted from aristocracy to the gentry, the rise of this latter group brought about a great preoccupation with social mobility.As we have noted, in the novels, there is a constant clash between the long-established nobility and the rural bourgeoisie. In *Emma*, for instance, the Coles are merchants who thrived so much that they could buy a luxurious manor and give lavish parties.Consequently, they dine and entertain themselves with the best families in Highbury society. In S&S, Mrs Ferrars, the hero's mother, is a London-based widow whose wealth has obscure origins hence her modest country house. In *Mansfield Park*, Mary and Henry Crawford, too, are Londoners who have been raised by their rich uncle, an admiral. In P&P,

Mr Bingley, whose father made a lot of money from trade, wishes to buy his way into the rural elite by acquiring an impressive mansion. *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland marries into the old aristocracy when she decides to wed Henry Tilney, whose father is the owner of a property that dates back from the Dissolution. In a more negative way, *Persuasion*'s Sir Walter Elliot, a baronet, is obliged to quit his ancestral estate because of his financial ruin. Similarly, in S&S, the Dashwood girls are forced to leave the grandeur of Norland Park and move to a cottage after their father dies.

In view of that, it is possible to affirm that, in the narratives, the country estate plays an important role in social mobility. Going up and down the social ladder ismainly enabled by attachments such as the marriages of Marianne Dashwood to Colonel Brandon (S&S), Elizabeth Bennet and Mr Darcy (P&P), Catherine Morland and Henry Tilney (*Northanger Abbey*), Emma and Mr Knightley (*Emma*), Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price (*Mansfield Park*), and Anne Elliot and Frederick Wentworth (*Persuasion*). These alliances have shown that "Austen is not against mobility within the class system" (EAGLETON, 2005, p.117), for as Terry Eagleton has mentioned, in these narratives, the "danger lies at the moral and cultural level, not at the material one" (p. 117). Nonetheless, it has been rather interesting to notice that in *Persuasion*, Austen seeks to break away from the old tradition of landed property by bringing together a high-born heroine and a man that belongs to the professional class. Bankrupt and forced to move away from the home of her forefathers, Anne Elliot ends up marrying Captain Wentworth. Since he is a naval officer, Wentworth cannot permanently reside in one single place. Therefore, acquiring a country house makes no sense to the couple. As a result, their marriage denotes a more progressive attitude towards land, property and social status.

With the portrayal of the households, which was typical of 18th-century novels, there came also the representation of the house as a private sphere, a restricted area that could tell so much about the lives of its dwellers that the depictions of the place and its inhabitants merged into one another.Based on that, we have briefly analysed the interior and the exterior of some Georgian country houses not only to understand the short descriptions of these residences made in the novels, but also to briefly examine the relationship between house and character. In order to understand how characters moved inside and outside the mansions, it was necessary to explore them both internally and externally. We have found out that, during the Regency, the great hall of the Middle Ages became a large entrance hall around which the other parts of the house were centred. A new kind of internal layout was in vogue at the time so that these rural seats would become a real amusement centre for dwellers and guests. The

house was divided into two sections: the main body, where the family was concentrated, and the secondary body, mostly destined to the staff. Thus, as the state rooms of the rural mansion (statue and landscape galleries, royal chambers, drawing-room, dining-room, saloon, library, etc.) became a priority, they were set on the ground floor. In consequence, the landowner's family started to have even more privacy, for their own personal rooms (bedroom, dressing-room, boudoir) moved upwards. All this was extremely important because, even though there are little descriptions of the more personal part of the manor house in the texts, we have observed great representations of living in these public rooms.

In P&P, for instance, the library is Mr Bennet's favourite part of his home. In spite of not being the owner of a majestic estate, the Longbourn library has contributed enourmously to the cultural capital of his daughters. The same happens to the Dashwood girls in S&S, for as they have been raised amidst the books of their large library at Norland Park, they are great readers, especially Marianne. *Mansfield Park's* Fanny Price, too, is so used to reading at her uncle's abode that she resorts to a circulating library during her stay in Portsmouth. Besides, the drawing-room was not so much the realm of the lady of the house as it was the foremost chamber within it. Still in *Mansfield Park*, the indolent Lady Bertram is always sitting with her pug in the drawing-room sofa, where the household often gathers together. When Sir Thomas comes back after a long journey in the West Indies, he immediately heads to the drawing-room to reunite with his family. Also, we have found out that after men and women separated after dinner, it was in the drawing-room that they were reassembled. Apart from that, at the beginning of the referred novel, Fanny's being placed in a cold attic – without a fire, and away from her wealthy cousins – in the secondary body of Mansfield shows how the house is an instrument for the maintenance of class division. Regarding this, Edward Said has affirmed that: "the conclusions of the novel confirm and highlight an underlying hierarchy of family, property, nation, there is also a very strong spatial *hereness* imparted to the hierarchy" (SAID, 1994, p. 79, italics in the original).

It was also relevant to explore the grounds and gardens of the houses in order to verify their importance on the country estate, for as it has been suggested, gardens and houses "play a variety of coded roles in the English novel" (DUCKWORTH apud PAGE, 2013, p. 97). We have noticed that in the early 19th century, landowners were very much concerned with the landscape surrounding their properties. Hence, a new landscape design, related to the Picturesque artistic concept, appeared as a means to integrate the gardens with the house. As a result, by investigating the way Austen approaches the picturesque in the novels, it was evident that she did not entirely approve of the renovations that considerably affected the old

rural landscape surrounding the grand estates of her time, for it was an intrinsic part of her universe. We have seen that since the habits of the gentry were strictly related to nature, if this long-established lanscape of the English countryside vanished, so would their way of life. That's why *Mansfield Park's* Fanny Price is in shock when she finds out Mr Rushworth is willing to cut down an avenue of ancient oak so that he can improve the disadvantageous situation of his Elizabethan mansion. It is clear that there is an antagonism between these changes depicted in the narrative and the natural landscape, as we have seen in P&P and *Emma*, for example. Furthermore, we have discovered that some of the most intimate moments characters have with one another happen in the outdoors, because the external world offers them the privacy and freedom they do not have in the drawing room.

Above all, delving into the inside and outside of the houses have helped us understand the characters of their masters. In relation to that, Canadian-American professor Witold Rybczynski has asserted that the "appearance of the internal world of the individual, of the self, and of the family" finds in the house that is being inhabited "a setting for an emerging interior life" (RYBCZYNSKI, 1986, 35-36). In view of that, we have noted that only after the heroine of P&P visits Pemberley does she learn how to read Darcy. Evidently, in spite of its seemingly landscaped grounds, Pemberley is a place much favoured by nature. Therefore, its spontaneous renovation gives us a glimpse of Darcy's personality. On account of that, we may interpret him as a landowner who is conscious of the adaptations of his time, but despite that, he has decided to maintain the traditional aspect of his estate by improving it in a natural way. When Elizabeth Bennet admires the stunning grounds and gardens of the mansion from the window, we have the impression she is actually seeing Darcy from several different angles. Similarly, in *Emma*, Mr Knightley is so much against improvement that the landscape of Donwell Abbey, with its 'English verdure, English culture, English comfort' (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 291), is the epitome of Austen's supreme English countryside. Hence, the abbey – along with its 'abundance of timber in rows and avenues' and its 'old neglect of prospect' (p. 289) – contributes to the preservation of an age-old tradition through the sublime.

In a different light, in *Persuasion*, Sir Walter Elliot's roomful of mirrors accounts for the sheer vanity that has made him go bankrupt and that forces him to quit his baronial mansion. Besides his excessive value of ranks and social status, we have learnt that his selfshiness and folly put his household and, most importantly, his ancestral estate at risk. Similarly, the extravagance of General Tilney, in *Northanger Abbey*, is a sign of his greedy nature. The changes he made inside his house were so radical that Catherine Morland can barely identify its medieval origins. His too modern kitchen, apart from his Rumford

fireplace, and the villages of hot-houses set in the grounds of the abbey show how materialistic he is. All of this have made us understand why he decides to ask Catherine Morland, whom he has thought to be extremely wealthy, to visit him. In *Mansfield Park*, the fact that Sotherton Court is ill-placed represents Mr Rushworth's dullness. Also, his exaggerated desire to hire an expensive landscape architect to entirely modify the external situation of his stately home means he is completely foolish, for he does not even think of adding his own personal taste to the renovation. In the same novel, Sir Thomas Bertram's urge for the money that comes from his colonial plantation makes him turn a blind eye to the misconduct of his daughters and, in particular, his eldest son's irresponsibility. In S&S, for example, John Dashwood, the new master of Norland Park, is so worried about the improvement of his grounds that he cannot afford to assist his impoverished haf-sisters in any possible way.

Grounds and common areas of the internal part of the house aside, we have found out that the secondary body of the stately home was occupied by the servants, who were no less than the driving force behind the opulent lifestyle of the gentry. Since country houses were enormous, it was mandatory that a lot of people were involved in their maintenance. At a time when manual labour was humiliating, not having any employees was completely unusual, for as we have observed, in P&P, Mrs Bennet is insulted when Mr Collins suggests her daughters have made dinner. Likewise, in *Persuasion*, Elizabeth Elliot is ashamed of giving a dinner party on account of her reduced number of attendants. In fact, even very poor households like the Bateses in *Emma* relie on the assistance of servants, because, as it was possible to find out, their wages were very low. Furthermore, just like English society was very stratified, workers, too, followed a strict hierarchy. They were divided into indoor and outdoor servants and organised according to their posts. The higher the number of employees, the wealthier the household was. Such is the case in the main residences from *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park,* since each of them have a very large staff. Besides, in the 18th century, servants were segregated from their masters, living in outer buildings or in detached wings, away from the private parts of the house. Thus, as we have examined, in *Mansfield Park*, the location of Fanny's room, close to the servants area,denotes the subaltern position she has amidst the Bertrams.

Athough Austen does not give much emphasis to servants in the novels, it was clear that they were essential to the existence of the grand estates of her time. Although she was true to their unfair condition, by giving life to these employees, the author alludes to the lower classes. We have also analysed that the way they are treated and what they say about their

masters help to reveal the character of the landowners they work for. In S&S, for instance, the Dashwood women choose to take some of their most faithful employees with them to Barton Cottage, their new home. In *Emma*, Mr Knightley is very close to his bailiff, William Larkins. In P&P, when Mr Darcy's housekeeper praises her master in front of Elizabeth Bennet, the protagonist has a new insight into his nature. First and foremost, it was possible to see that servants were crucial to validate the wealth, power and social position of the great landlords of Georgian England. Moreover, their loyalty and hard work insured that the prosperous households they served had the privileges that were characteristic of their class.

Lastly, amongst the different sorts of entertainment the country house provided, it was important to further analyse the dinner party, for it was the most exclusive event held at a rural mansion. To begin with, exploring the dinner party was an opportunity to understand the eating habits of the gentry, not only in relation to food but also to the etiquette code that dictated these celebrations. We have seen that items like sugar, tea and coffee were imported from the colonies of the British Empire. Consequently, they were so expensive that they were kept locked. Besides, during the Regency, the timing of meals was constantly changing, and dinner gradually became an evening repast. In between breakfast and dinner, it was common for people to have a collation, also known as 'cold meat'. Supper was a very light meal taken at the end of the day, especially at balls. We have also examined that food per se is an important feature in the novels. In *Emma*, for instance, the Woodhouses constantly get the Bates women food gifts. Mr Knightley's bailiff, too, usually send them apples from the Donwell orchard. Likewise, in S&S, Sir John Middleton often gives presents in the form of fruits, vegetables and poultry to the Dashwood girls. In *Northanger Abbey*, Catherine Morland is utterly surprised when she sees the variety of things laid on the table as she first joins the Tilneys for breakfast. However, when she arrives at the abbey, General Tilney does not stop talking about his refined set of breakfast china. In P&P, the Netherfield housekeeper's purchase of food is an indication that her master, Mr Bingley, is returning to the neighbourhood.

Furthermore, we have learnt that precedence was mandatory when it came to showing guests to the table. A little after dinner, the gentlemen split from the ladies as to talk about politics, smoke and drink wine. Later on, they reassembled in the drawing room and stayed with them in order to have tea or coffee. During evening parties, women had the opportunity to show off their accomplishments by playing the piano or the harp, reciting, singing and dancing. As we have investigated, music was a central part of these festivities and it contributed to bring people together. In the novels, the dinner party serves as backdrop to

scenes that are crucial to the development of each storyline. This was best explained by the fact that apart from enabling people to have substantial conversations, the dinner party prompted guests from different backgrounds to mingle with one another. This is delineated in an episode of *Persuasion* in which it is mentioned that the humble cousins of the Musgroves' do everything they can to take part in the dinner engagements of the Great House. Most of all, as we have seen in the dinner-party scene from S&S in which the Dashwoods are humiliated by Mrs Ferrars, the sociability promoted by this very intimate kind of pastime raises acute matters of economic, social and cultural capital.

In light of everything that has been discussed throughout this thesis, we may affirm that the English country house is vital to the plot of each of the six novels examined herein. Despite falling into decay after the Industrial Revolution, Raymond William has remarked that this kind of construction is central to English literature because for a long time, it was associated with rural ideas:

> Rural Britain was subsidiary, and knew that it was subsidiary, from the late nineteenth century. **But so much of the past of the country, its feelings and its literature, was involved with rural experience** and so many of its ideas [...] persisted and even were strengthened, that there is almost an inverse proportion, in the twentieth century, between the relative importance of the working rural economy and the cultural importance of rural ideas (WILLIAMS, 2016, p. 356, my emphasis).

Bearing that in mind, we may conclude that the grand rural mansion is an iconic symbol of Austenian fiction, for it was also a fundamental part of the novelist's world. As we have seen in the narratives, land, property, money, marriage, status, manners, tradition, and most importantly, moral conduct, all revolve around the manor house. Therefore, it does not so much function as the basis of the lifestyle of the gentry as it works as an expression of cultural, socio-economic and political power in Austen's oeuvre.

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