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Julia Seixas Romeu

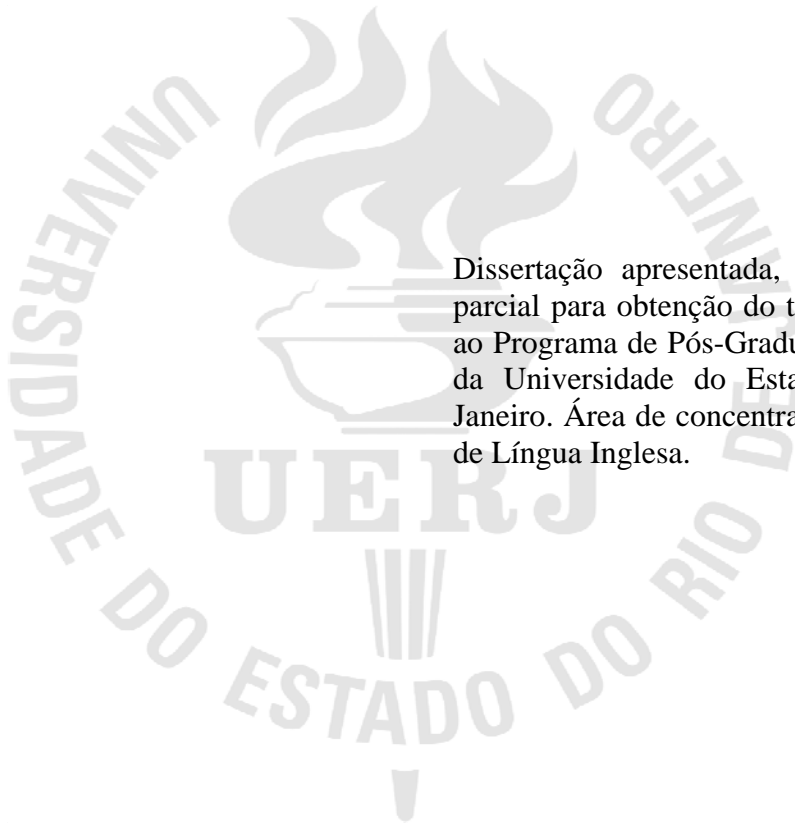
**Nothing but an excellent walker: the representation of restrictions to female
mobility as social critique in Jane Austen's novels**

Rio de Janeiro

2016

Julia Seixas Romeu

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa.

Orientadora: Prof^ª. Dra. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros

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Aprovada em 28 de março de 2016.

Banca Examinadora:

Prof^ª. Dra. Fernanda Teixeira de Medeiros (Orientadora)
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

Prof^ª. Dra. Leila Assumpção Harris
Instituto de Letras – UERJ

Prof. Dr. André Cabral de Almeida Cardoso
Universidade Federal Fluminense

Rio de Janeiro

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DEDICATION

To my mother, who gave me *Pride and Prejudice* to read and told me I would love it.

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To all my professors at the postgraduate program at UERJ, for everything I have learned in the last three years.

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To my friends and family, for believing in me even when I don't believe in myself.

To my cat Leonel, for teaching me unsuspected uses for my computer keys.

She was not an unshockable blue-stocking
If shades remain the characters they were,
No doubt she still considers you as shocking.
But tell Jane Austen, that is if you dare,
How much her novels are beloved down here.
She wrote for posterity, she said;
'Twas rash, but by posterity she's read.

You could not shock her more than she shocks me;
Beside her Joyce seems innocent as grass.
It makes me most uncomfortable to see
An English spinster of the middle-class
Describe the amorous effects of 'brass',
Reveal so frankly and with such sobriety
The economic basis of society.

W. H. Auden, "A letter to Lord Byron"

RESUMO

ROMEU, Julia Seixas. *Nada além de uma excelente disposição para caminhar: a representação de restrições à mobilidade feminina como crítica social nos romances de Jane Austen*. 2016. 109 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.

Esta dissertação pretende, através da análise dos seis romances maduros da escritora inglesa Jane Austen (1775-1817), mostrar como a autora fez uma crítica da situação da mulher em sua sociedade em cenas nas quais as personagens femininas lidam com convenções que restringem sua mobilidade tendo por base apenas o seu gênero. Jane Austen goza de imensa popularidade nos dias de hoje, mas muitas vezes o foco sobre sua obra se limita aos temas de corte e casamento em torno dos quais as tramas giram, deixando de lado o engajamento da autora nos debates políticos ocorridos na Inglaterra ao longo de sua vida. Austen, através de sua ficção, não apenas participou desses debates como, evitando radicalismos e utilizando-se de ambiguidades e sutilezas necessárias para sua aceitação pelo público leitor da época, defendeu maior liberdade para as mulheres e denunciou a condição de dependência em que elas se encontravam, dependência não só econômica e legal, como também física, já que não podiam sequer ir para onde desejassem sem ferir normas de conduta socialmente aceitas.

Palavras-chave: Jane Austen. Mobilidade feminina. Crítica social.

ABSTRACT

ROMEU, Julia Seixas. *Nothing but an excellent walker: the representation of restrictions to female mobility as social critique in Jane Austen's novels*. 2016. 109 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2016.

This dissertation aims to, through the analysis of the six mature novels of English writer Jane Austen (1775-1817), show how the author criticized the situation of women in her society in scenes where female characters deal with conventions that restrict their mobility solely on the basis of their gender. Jane Austen enjoys immense popularity today, but often the focus on her work is limited to the themes of courtship and marriage around which her plots revolve, leaving aside the author's participation in the political debates occurring in England during her lifetime. Austen, through her fiction, not only took part in these debates but, avoiding radicalisms and using ambiguities and subtleties that were necessary for her acceptance by the reading public of that age, defended greater liberty for women and denounced the condition of dependence in which they found themselves, a dependence that was not only economic and legal, but also physical, since they did not even have the freedom to go wherever they wished without breaking the socially accepted rules of conduct.

Keywords: Jane Austen. Female mobility. Social critique.

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INTRODUCTION

Almost two hundred years after her death, Jane Austen is more widely read today than ever before in history. Such is her current popularity that critics have started referring to it as “Austenmania”, a phenomenon which many believe gained strength in the mid-1990s, when the release of the BBC miniseries *Pride and Prejudice* (1995), written by Andrew Davies, and Ang Lee’s film *Sense and Sensibility* (1996) brought renewed attention to her work, not only in England, but throughout the world. Her fans call themselves “Janeites” – a term first coined by the literary scholar George Saintsbury (1845-1933) in an introduction written for an 1894 edition of *Pride and Prejudice*, and popularized by Rudyard Kipling in a 1926 short story about a group of World War I soldiers that form a secret society to discuss and admire Austen’s novels (LYNCH, 2000). Modern-day Janeites, who have been compared to other popular culture fandoms such as those of the *Star Trek* series, the *Star Wars* movies and the *Harry Potter* books, have indeed formed countless societies and clubs around the world, not only to read and discuss Austen’s novels, but also to dress up in period costumes and try to immerse themselves in what they regard as her world.

Further proof of the existence of an “Austenmania” is the fact that Jane Austen’s writings, comprising six complete novels, three unfinished novels, three volumes of juvenilia and one hundred and sixty-one letters, have inspired dozens of screen adaptations in the last two decades alone, including movies, miniseries, web series and YouTube videos, as well as several books, among prequels, sequels, mash-up novels, graphic novels and retellings of her stories. However, some Jane Austen scholars worry that this recent popularity fails to emphasize some of the most interesting aspects of her work, focusing on the themes of courtship and marriage and leaving the humor and social criticism, for example, aside. Claudia L. Johnson, an Austen expert and professor of English literature at Princeton University, was quoted in an article written by journalist Jon Kelly for the *BBC News Magazine* in January 2013 stating that the fact that today Austen is beloved for her love stories and considered “chick lit”, or literature written specially for women, is a real loss (KELLY, 2013).

Jane Austen’s life encompassed the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a period during which Europe as a whole and England in particular were going through many changes caused by the Industrial Revolution, the American Revolutionary Wars, the French

Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars. These events, however, do not figure prominently in any of Austen's novels, which focused on the lives of young women, their growth into maturity and their choice of a husband. This earned Austen the approval of critics who praised her for keeping within the boundaries of what was proper for women authors, but, on the other hand, also garnered her the reputation of a writer who was incapable of discoursing about serious matters and dealt only with the trivial. In her Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*, Vivien Jones points out that the structure of her novels is the same as that of a Harlequin book – referring to the Canadian publishing house which specializes in romance and so-called “women’s fiction” –, and that this is undoubtedly one of the reasons for her continuous popularity. Jones writes:

The romantic fantasy which so effectively shapes Austen's early-nineteenth-century novel is still a powerful cultural myth for readers in the late twentieth century. We still respond with pleasure to the rags-to-riches love story, to the happy ending which combines sexual and emotional attraction with ten thousand a year [...], a resolution which makes romantic love both the guarantee and the excuse for economic and social success. Romance makes connections across history: it helps us identify and understand the continuities – and the differences – between the novel's significance at the time it was written and published and the appeal it still has for modern readers (JONES, 2006, p. VII).

Saying that Jane Austen told beautiful and engaging love stories that are still able to inflame the imaginations of readers is certainly not devaluing her work, and Austen herself made, in *Northanger Abbey* (1818), an eloquent defense of novel-reading for the sake of pleasure alone. Harriet Margolis, in an article entitled “Janeite culture: what does the name ‘Jane Austen’ authorize?”, written for the book *Jane Austen on Screen* (2003) points out that Austen would be the first to mock those who idolize her novels and are horrified by any change made in the plot or the dialogues in the many products derived from it. To lament, as Johnson does, that Austen's novels are considered “chick lit” is, in a way, to undermine literature that is particularly associated with the feminine, and to be concerned with the emphasis given to the love stories in Austen is to believe that women can be misled by what they read in novels, since they are unrealistic and lead to false expectations of what life offers – a belief that was already widespread in Jane Austen's time.

Jane Austen is one of the few authors that are both very popular with the reading public and widely studied by critics, thus problematizing the relationship between mass culture and academia. Scholars who discuss the Austenmania usually do not aim to direct the consumption of Jane Austen, a project that would be, above all things, futile. However, to give emphasis to some of the less marketable and subtler elements of her work is, in my

opinion, to enrich this Austenmania, both for professed Janeites and for those who have yet to have contact with Austen's work. Although Jane Austen's novels all end with her heroines getting married, many critics such as Claudia Johnson, Marilyn Butler, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Margaret Anne Doody have identified strategies that she used in her work to criticize the social fabric of England during her times and, particularly, the predicaments of her own sex in a system that granted men absolute social and legal control over women. Because these strategies are subtle and Austen's political positions are never overtly stated, she has become famous for her ambiguity; however, these positions can be determined or at least inferred by more attentive readers.

Even though Jane Austen's ambivalence has led to many different interpretations of her work, most critics agree that her novels espouse an essentially conservative way of life, maintaining the value of the established social order. However, her precise stance on gender has been a matter of debate in Austen criticism for many years. That she was not a radical feminist seems to be a settled question – as a matter of fact, she was not radical about anything, at least so far as we can garner from her fiction and her correspondence. But many an Austen scholar has found signs of a moderate feminism in her *oeuvre*. In Austen's novels, the ideal of femininity defined by some of the writers and thinkers of her day – that of a woman who, understanding that her biological traits rendered her less capable of rational thought and more prone to be gripped by her emotions than men – is ridiculed. In her novels, Austen focuses on individuals and small communities, but, while doing that and portraying the domestic sphere that was the woman's accepted domain, she took part in the political debates that were occurring during her lifetime, and in which women's place in society was extensively discussed. As Vivien Jones puts it: "She writes [...] about femininity and about class: about forms of identity and about marriage as a political institution which reproduces – symbolically as well as literally – the social order" (JONES, 2006, p. XI).

I started reading Jane Austen over ten years ago, and have been fortunate enough to translate some of her works: *Northanger Abbey* and part of the juvenilia. While reading her novels, something that called my attention specifically is the marked difference between the way the male characters move from one place to the other and the way the female characters do so. Jane Austen's heroines follow the rules of conduct that were dictated for young, single women of their class during her times: rules that ensured that men could come and go as they wished, whereas women had to suffer the wills of others to circumscribe their mobility. In several scenes in Austen's novels, rules of conduct prevent the female characters from changing their geographical location, leaving them in a state of passivity and confinement, in

expectation of the actions of the male characters. Even though Austen's women do at times walk, run and travel, they are generally not allowed to decide how and when to do so and be the agents of their own movement. These movements, when they happen, must always either defy or comply with these restrictions, which no woman could entirely escape.

The restraints put on female physical mobility were part of a much larger set of rules, which, although ostensibly followed in order to protect women, the weaker sex, from the dangers of the world, in reality served as a means of control. Austen, although never openly advising her female readers to break these rules, effectively shows how they could be a source of unhappiness to women. By depicting situations in which the movements of female characters, regardless of how much intelligence, common sense and rationality they may prove to have, were not determined by themselves, Austen leads her readers to question the norms of a society that deprived such capable beings of agency and independence. Even her conventional happy endings can lead to this discussion: aware that men's power over women was very real, Austen dramatizes in her fiction how female survival depended on male approval, either of fathers or of potential husbands. However, by giving glimpses of what could happen when women did not get this approval, she never lets the reader forget that happy endings were not available for everyone.

The aim of this work is to identify one of the strategies that Jane Austen used to criticize the situation of women in her society, thereby contributing to the work of the many great critics who have discussed her as an author with political concerns. Through an analysis of specific scenes drawn from Austen's six complete or mature novels – *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1816), *Northanger Abbey* (1818) and *Persuasion* (1818) – I propose that physical movement or the inability to move on the part of the author's female characters can be interpreted as a device used to demonstrate her critique of women's submissive position.

In order to develop this discussion, this dissertation is divided into two chapters. The first chapter is divided into three sections, that deal, respectively, with Jane Austen's life and the way the circumscription of female mobility affected her personally; with the female tradition in the English novel and Austen's relationship with it; and with selected critical studies of the author's *oeuvre*. The second chapter is divided into four sections, the first of which discusses the importance of setting in Jane Austen's work; the second, the concept of gendered spaces and the gendered control of mobility; the third, the conduct material that was very popular in Austen's day and that is the best source to understand the rules that guided her society; and the fourth, the scenes in Austen's novels where female characters have to deal

with the rules that circumscribed their mobility specifically. These scenes are grouped under four headings: Immobility and gender; Mobility and powerlessness; Mobility and defiance; and Mobility and marriage. My choice for such grouping came from my own reading of the novels, for I did not find, in any critical study of Austen's work, pre-established categories to work with. My expectation is that by describing and discussing the passages selected I may supply a satisfactorily thorough picture of Austen's concern about the strategic role mobility was to play in the life of her female characters.

I believe this discussion is relevant because even today, in the twenty-first century, women's movements are more circumscribed than men's. We are raised to believe that we should not walk alone at night, or go alone to certain places, because they are dangerous for us. In our society, as in Austen's, we seldom discuss what poses these dangers and why they threaten women exclusively; our solution to the problem is, then as now, to prevent women from occupying certain places at certain times or under certain conditions. In spite of the fact that women, in several countries, have gained many liberties and rights since the nineteenth century, an analysis of the more obvious ways female mobility was restricted in earlier times may help us identify these restrictions today.

1 JANE AUSTEN, HER TIMES AND HER WORK

In this chapter, divided in three sections, I will outline a brief biography of Jane Austen, discuss her place within the literary tradition and analyze some of the numerous critical studies on her work. In the first section, I examine Jane Austen's life and how she herself suffered the consequences of the restrictions on women's mobility that were the social norm of her day; in the second section, I discuss the female tradition in the novel genre and how Jane Austen's work can be classed in relation to those of her women predecessors; in the third section, I analyze critical studies of Austen's work that consider her political positions and, particularly, her stance on women's condition in her society.

1.1 Jane Austen's life and writings

Jane Austen was born on 16 December 1775, in the little town of Steventon, in the county of Hampshire, England. She was the seventh child and second daughter of George Austen, a clergyman of the Anglican Church, and Cassandra Austen. The thirteenth-century church of St Nicholas, where she was baptized and where Reverend George Austen read his sermons, is still standing, next to the 900-year-old yew tree in whose hollow trunk the key to the church door was kept by the family.

At the time of Jane Austen's birth, thirteen of England's North American colonies were rebelling, and they would declare themselves independent in July of the following year. The transition to new manufacturing processes had already begun in her country, marking the commencement of the Industrial Revolution. A rise in literacy among the upper classes and new forms of printing that made books smaller and, therefore, easier to carry, had caused an almost fourfold increase in the output of publications in England between the years 1666 and 1756 (WATT, 2000). Times were changing and, after the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, both of which happened during Austen's lifetime, they would change still further.

Jane Austen's father supplemented his income by keeping pupils, and she grew up among many boys, playing with them, running with them and overhearing their lessons. In the

spring of 1783, when Jane was seven and her sister Cassandra was ten, they were both sent to a boarding school for girls in the city of Oxford. In eighteenth-century England, it was not unusual for girls to be sent away from home to be educated, but most did not go at quite so young an age as Austen. According to a story that Jane Austen's mother told to her granddaughter Anna, it was her own wish that made it so, for Cassandra was going, and she did not want to be separated from her sister. They only stayed there for a few months, because the school was overtaken by an epidemic that attacked both sisters and nearly killed the young Jane Austen. The experience did not prevent her parents from sending the girls away again a year later, to another boarding school, this time in Reading, where they would remain for a year and a half. Towards the end of 1796, Jane and Cassandra were again brought to Steventon, where they would continue to live for the next several years.

At home, Jane Austen had uncensored access to her father's library, which consisted of over five hundred volumes, a large collection in those days. Her brother Henry, in the "Biographical Notice of the Author" written for the posthumous edition of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* which came out in 1818, said that her two favorite authors were the poet William Cowper and the essayist and moralist Samuel Johnson, stating that "[...] she recoiled from every thing gross" (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 33). But from references in her letters and writings, we know her to have read works such as *Tom Jones* (1749), by Henry Fielding, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1754), by Samuel Richardson, *Tristram Shandy* (1767), by Laurence Sterne, and many others which dealt with themes like rape, adultery and drunkenness. In an age when many believed that reading fiction was an activity that could pervert a young person's mind, especially if that person happened to be a woman, Jane Austen's clergyman father let her enjoy an extraordinary level of freedom.

The Austens were a family of readers and writers. Novels were read aloud in the family parlor, plays were put on by the children for their parents and neighbors and Mrs. Austen wrote comic verses to Mr. Austen's pupils when they were away from school. In January 1789, James, Jane Austen's eldest brother, while still in college in Oxford, began producing a weekly magazine called *The Loiterer*, which was sold to the public for three pence and was modeled on Samuel Johnson's periodicals the *Rambler* and the *Idler*. Most of the essays in *The Loiterer* were written by James himself, and the magazine was distributed not only in Oxford, but also in London, Birmingham, Bath and Reading, having lasted for fourteen months. James was studying to become a clergyman like his father, and, at that time, was considered the professional writer of the family (TOMALIN, 1997).

Jane Austen's other siblings would follow different paths. Not much is known about George, the second oldest of the family; he had an unspecified mental condition and was raised by cottagers who lived near the parsonage at Steventon. Edward, the third oldest one, was perhaps the luckiest: he was adopted by two of Mr. Austen's cousins who were rich and childless, and who left him a considerable estate; in turn, he had to change his last name from Austen to Knight. Henry, who was Jane's favorite, was something of an adventurer: he enlisted in the army, founded a bank and, after all else failed, finally turned to the church to earn his living. Francis, the one closest to her in age, went into the navy, travelled the world and rose to the rank of admiral; as did Charles, the only brother who was younger than she. Cassandra, who was Jane's closest companion throughout her life, became engaged to a young man from their neighborhood who died while trying to make his fortune in the West Indies; she never married, and spent her life busy with domestic chores and taking care of her nephews and nieces (HONAN, 1987; TOMALIN, 1997).

Jane Austen's freedom to read soon turned into a freedom to write: she left extensive juvenilia, works that were composed when the author was between the ages of twelve and eighteen. James Edward Austen-Leigh, her biographer nephew, in *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1869), stated that the pieces were written solely for the amusement of her own family, indicating that she never meant for them to be published. But Jane Austen must have been at least fairly satisfied with them, for she herself copied them out and sorted them into three volumes, making additions and corrections as late as 1811 (DOODY, 1993). These early pieces are nearly all satires of contemporary works of fiction, showing how familiar Austen was with the literature of her day; and their most remarkable characteristic is the boldness of their themes and their deeply satirical tone. As Frances Beer wrote in her Introduction to *The Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë*:

She gleefully turns her critical guns on the excesses of sentimentality so typical of the period's 'lachrymose novel' and the attendant vices and virtues of its dramatis personae. What is perhaps even more striking about these early pieces than their outrageous humour is their toughness; at twelve the little assassin is eagerly at work, showing no mercy to her victims. Even as she parodies literary excess, she takes deadly aim at a range of real human foibles (BEER, 1986, p. 9).

In Volume the First and Volume the Second, Austen wrote short stories, plays, longer pieces that she described as novels and even a History of England, all satirizing popular works of her time. In Volume the Third's *Catherine, or The Bower*, written in 1792, she tries her hand at something new and, moving away from the satire of her shorter pieces, shows us a

more naturalistic work and her first fully drawn heroine. It is an unfinished story that introduces us to a young lady that is lively and sunny, with a personality that resembles that of Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine from *Pride and Prejudice*. Catherine tries to keep her spirits up in spite of the fact that she lives with an aunt that does not allow her any freedom and the fact that she misses her two closest friends, girls from the neighborhood who were obliged to leave their home after the death of their father, having no income of their own. One of them goes to live with relatives who dislike her and mistreat her; and the other suffers a yet more chilling fate: because her family refuses to provide for her and she cannot provide for herself – since it was not acceptable for women of the upper classes to work in Jane Austen’s day – she is sent to India to find a husband among the Englishmen living there, and marries a much older man for whom she has no affection (AUSTEN, 1993). It is the first instance in Jane Austen’s fiction in which she ponders on how much – or how little – control a woman had over her own life, and it is all the more interesting because it is drawn from the real experiences of her paternal aunt, Philadelphia Hancock.

When Philadelphia and George Austen became orphans, they were each sent to live with a different aunt. George attended school and was awarded a fellowship that enabled him to go to St John’s College, Oxford, where he would prepare for his career in the Anglican Church. But Philadelphia had more difficulties: at the age of fifteen she was apprenticed to a Covent Garden milliner, an occupation that was only on the border of respectability. She spent five years learning the trade, but later gave it up and went to India to try to marry. Six months after her arrival in Madras, in February 1753, Philadelphia was wed to an employee of the East India Company named Tysoe Saul Hancock, who was nearly ten years her senior (TOMALIN, 1997). There is no record of Philadelphia’s feelings about all this, but this is how Jane Austen described what happened to her heroine’s friend in *Catherine, or The Bower*, written a few months after her aunt’s death:

The eldest daughter had been obliged to accept the offer of one of her cousins to equip her for the East Indies, and tho’ infinitely against her inclinations had been necessitated to embrace the only possibility that was offered to her, of a Maintenance; Yet it was *one*, so opposite to all her ideas of Propriety, so contrary to her Wishes, so repugnant to her feelings, that she would almost have preferred Servitude to it, had Choice been allowed her (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 187-188).

In her later fiction, Austen would return many times to the subject of how women’s lives and their movements were affected by decisions made by others, and this was an experience that she shared herself. Conduct books of her time dictated that unmarried women under thirty should never leave the house unaccompanied, much less travel alone. Jane Austen

and Cassandra never left England – unlike the male Austen siblings who, with the exception of George, all went to other countries – and, when they did travel, it was always in the company of relatives. One of her surviving letters, written to Cassandra on September 1st 1796 while she was visiting family, shows her exasperation in having to wait for her brother Henry to take her home. Henry keeps postponing their going, and Jane writes: “I am sorry for it, but what can I do?” (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 6). At that time, she was almost twenty-one years old and had already written her first draft of *Sense and Sensibility*, which was then called *Elinor and Marianne*.

This was not, however, her first attempt at a full-fledged novel. After giving up on *Catherine, or The Bower*, Jane Austen had begun work on *Lady Susan*, an epistolary novel written between 1793 and 1794. *Lady Susan* features a character unlike any other in Austen’s work. She is manipulative and very sexual, but outwardly follows all the rules that society imposed on women, showing that if one was smart enough, they could manipulate the system (AUSTEN, 1974). Some critics have compared her to the Marquise of Merteuil from Choderlos de Laclos’ *Dangerous Liaisons* (1782), a novel that was very popular when first published and is also in epistolary form, but one which we do not know for sure Austen read. Jane Austen gives her characters a conclusion, but the novel is finished off hastily and is not considered one of her mature works. For unknown reasons, she chose to turn her attention to *Elinor and Marianne*.

The manuscript of *Elinor and Marianne* has not survived, so we do not know how many changes were made in the story between the time when it was first drafted and the time of its publication, which only took place sixteen years later, in 1811. But *Sense and Sensibility* begins in the same way as two novels Jane Austen would write later in life, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*: with the heroines being driven from the homes where they spent their childhood and moving to an entirely new neighborhood. In 1795 she was not aware of it yet, but the same fate was in store for her.

It was in that same year that Jane Austen met the man who is considered the great love of her life by her biographers: Tom Lefroy, the nephew of one of her neighbors and a clergyman like her father. Tom went to his aunt’s home for the Christmas holidays and, even though he and Jane Austen only spent a few weeks together, she was still mentioning him in her letters years later and, after her death, he admitted to his son that the two had been in love. The attraction was strong enough to alarm Tom Lefroy’s relatives – for he, the eldest son of a poor family with many sisters, could not afford to marry a girl with no dowry. He was quickly shipped off to his home in Ireland and Jane never saw him again. Claire Tomalin, one of Jane

Austen's biographers, marks the contrast between the sad ending of the author's love affair and the love stories developed in the novels that would make her known throughout the world, including *Sense and Sensibility*, whose first draft was written roughly around the time when Jane Austen was having her relationship with Lefroy:

[...] it was not Tom Lefroy, or anyone like him, who became her adventure, but the manuscript upstairs. Not marriage but art: and in her art she made this short period in a young woman's life carry such wit and human understanding as few writers have managed to cram into solemn volumes three times the size (TOMALIN, 1997, p. 119).

It was after this disappointment, in October 1796, that she began writing *First Impressions*, which would later have its title changed to *Pride and Prejudice*. From then onwards, perhaps due to the fact that Mr. Austen had made the decision to give up taking pupils – which meant that a lot less housework had to be done by the women of the parsonage – Jane Austen's output became prodigious. *First Impressions* was completed in about nine months, by the following summer. She then returned to *Elinor and Marianne*, deciding that the epistolary form did not suit her purposes, which required her to rewrite the entire manuscript, work that she carried out over the winter and spring of 1798, giving the novel its second and final name. Then, she began the first draft of a book then called *Susan*, which would later be renamed *Catherine* and finally be published with the title *Northanger Abbey*. In four years, Jane Austen had finished three novels, all before the age of twenty-five (TOMALIN, 1997).

During this period of great productivity, Jane Austen's claim to the position of writer of the family was recognized by its patriarch. Mr. Austen thought so well of *First Impressions* that he wrote to a publisher in London in November 1797, asking him to consider it and even offering to put up his own money for its publication. The publisher declined, and it is not known if Jane Austen ever found out about her father's attempt to show her work to the public (TOMALIN, 1997). In any case, she continued to write and everything seemed to indicate that she would produce many more works over the following years.

However, this did not happen. For the next ten years, Jane Austen wrote almost nothing, and not until she was nearly thirty-five, in the summer of 1809, did she have another burst of creativity comparable to that of her early twenties. There is no explanation for this hiatus in any of her surviving letters or in the biography that her nephew wrote about her. However, anyone who is familiar with Jane Austen's life cannot fail to notice that this period of near inactivity as a writer began when she was forced to move from her childhood home at

Steventon to the city of Bath. The decision to leave the parsonage was made by her parents, who did not consult the wishes of either Jane or Cassandra; but they, as unmarried women with no homes or income of their own, were obliged to go along. Claire Tomalin affirms that, after the move to a more agitated life in Bath, Jane Austen lost the particular working conditions that allowed her to write. According to Tomalin, “The ejection from Steventon made several practical difficulties for her; it also depressed her deeply enough to disable her as a writer” (TOMALIN, 1997, p. 175). Mary Poovey, in *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), agrees, stating that during this period “[Austen’s] own unsettled emotional and domestic situation were not conducive to sustained composition” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 210).

The Austens moved to Bath in the spring of 1801. They lived in two different addresses in the city and, during their period there, spent almost as much time travelling as at home, visiting relatives and lounging in the resort towns of the Devon and Dorset coast. In the autumn of 1802, while on a visit to old neighbors from Deane, a town near Steventon, Jane Austen received a marriage proposal. The young man in question was Harris Bigg, brother to her very good friends Alethea, Catherine and Elizabeth Bigg and heir to a large Hampshire house and estate. He was five years younger than Jane Austen, who had known him all his life; she was twenty-six years at the time, and, for a woman of her age and position, it was a very good match, and one sure to bring a great deal of happiness to both families. Jane Austen accepted him; but changed her mind the very next day, indicating that she, herself, followed the moral code she prescribed to her heroines, and refused to marry without love, even if the marriage had decided economic advantages. Austen would receive no other offers (HONAN, 1987; TOMALIN, 1997).

At the start of 1803, she copied out and revised *Susan*, which her brother Henry, taking over Mr. Austen’s duties as her agent, offered to a London publisher named Richard Crosby. Crosby paid ten pounds for the manuscript, promised to publish it soon and even advertised the book, but after this, nothing else happened. Nonetheless, Jane Austen began working on a new novel for the first time in years. She named it *The Watsons*, and it is the story of four sisters who are all unmarried, have no dowries, and know they have to remedy the situation before their invalid father dies. When Jane Austen’s own father died in January 1805, she abandoned the manuscript and never finished it. Austen-Leigh (2009) suggests that she gave it up because she lost interest in a heroine that had been placed too low in the social hierarchy; but Tomalin (1997) believes that a more likely reason is that it touched too closely Jane’s fears for herself and for Cassandra.

After Mr. Austen's death, Jane's brothers offered to supplement their mother's income, with which it would have been otherwise impossible for the three women to live. Mrs. Austen, Jane and Cassandra then moved about quite a lot in the next four and a half years, staying with several relatives and living in two different houses with Francis' wife and children, while he was at sea. Finally, Edward, the more affluent brother, offered one of the houses he owned to his mother and sisters, who moved there in July 1809 along with Martha Lloyd, an unmarried childhood friend of Jane and Cassandra's. This house was Chawton Cottage, in Hampshire, where Jane would live for the remainder of her life, the place where she would write three more books and that today is the Jane Austen's House Museum. Tomalin writes:

The effect on Jane of this move to a permanent home in which she was able to re-establish her own rhythm of work was dramatic. It was as though she were restored to herself, to her imagination, to all her powers: a black cloud had lifted. Almost at once she began to work again. *Sense and Sensibility* was taken out, and revision began (TOMALIN, 1997, p. 211).

Henry continued to act as her agent and, in the last months of 1810, he finally found someone who agreed to publish *Sense and Sensibility*. It came out in 1811, in a three-volume edition which was sold out by the summer of 1813, making Jane Austen a profit of one hundred and forty pounds and finally giving her some measure of financial independence (TOMALIN, 1997). Austen, as many women writers of her time, did not include her name in her books, and *Sense and Sensibility*, like the other three novels she would publish in her lifetime, indicated merely that it had been written "By a Lady". Even before the edition sold out, the same publisher, seeing that the book was a success, had agreed to buy her next work: *Pride and Prejudice*, which came out in 1813. Besides doing extensive revisions in her first two published novels, Jane Austen also began working on *Mansfield Park* in February 1811, finishing the novel in 1813 and publishing it the following year. It was the most commercially successful of her books during her lifetime, and earned her the attention of an eminent person whom she profoundly disliked: England's Prince Regent, who would later become King George IV (HONAN, 1987).

Even though Jane Austen published all her novels anonymously, Henry could not resist telling some people in his London circle that his sister was the author of books that had been so well received by the public. The secret was discovered by one James Stanier Clarke, the Prince's librarian, who took the liberty of writing to Jane Austen to inform her that His Royal Highness had a copy of her books in each of his houses, and that, if she wanted, she

had the permission of dedicating her next novel to him (TOMALIN, 1997). This was *Emma*, which Jane, after working on it for over a year, had finished in March 1815, and which came out later that year with a very formal dedication to the Prince Regent; albeit one not actually written by Jane Austen herself, but by her publisher. It was her largest edition yet, with two thousand copies printed, and had the further distinction of being reviewed favorably by Walter Scott in the *Edinburgh Review* (HONAN, 1987).

In 1816, Jane Austen started feeling unwell, but her illness was not yet serious enough to prevent her from writing. She began working on a novel which she named *The Elliots* – her first title for *Persuasion*. She also recovered the manuscript for *Susan*, finally buying it back from Crosby and making some revisions in it. Austen changed the heroine's name to Catherine and wrote a note explaining that the book had in fact been finished many years before, in 1803, to excuse herself for any parts of the work which the thirteen years that had elapsed had made comparatively obsolete. On 18 July 1816, she finished writing *Persuasion*, but then went back to the manuscript and rewrote the last two chapters entirely. But neither book was offered to anybody for publication that year (HONAN, 1987; TOMALIN, 1997).

Her illness then got progressively worse. She had pains on her back and on the side of her face, and felt so weak that she remained confined to the house, unable even to walk short distances. Between January and March of 1817, she wrote twelve chapters of a book referred to by Cassandra as *The Brothers* and named *Sandition* by the great Jane Austen scholar R.W. Chapman (1881-1960), who first published it in 1925. This fragment of a novel shows an entrepreneur trying to turn a small village into a fashionable seaside resort, and makes fun of hypochondriacs – even while struggling with a very real disease, Jane Austen was able to laugh at imaginary ones. In May she agreed to be removed to Winchester, to be cared for by local surgeons. None of the treatments prescribed by them worked, and she grew progressively worse. Her unfailing sense of humor would remain with her until the end – only three days before her death, she dictated a comic poem to Cassandra known as “When Winchester races” (the title is given in many editions of the juvenilia, but the manuscript itself is untitled). Jane Austen died on July 18, 1817, at the age of forty-one. The cause of her death remains a matter of dispute among biographers, but most agree that it was from Addison's disease, a rare disorder that attacks the endocrine system.

The following year, Henry Austen would arrange for *Persuasion* and *Northanger Abbey* to be published, and they were the first books to come out bearing Jane Austen's name. The “Biographical Notice of the Author” written by Henry for this edition and the biography written by James Edward Austen-Leigh in 1869 contributed to create an image of Jane Austen

as a nearly flawless woman who led a very uneventful life. This image was consolidated as time went on, and even her last work, the poem about the Winchester races which Henry praised as “[...] stanzas replete of fancy and vigour” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 30) that showed his sister’s spirit and wit on the face of death, was censored by Austen-Leigh and Jane Austen’s niece Caroline in later editions of her *oeuvre*, because they considered it not solemn enough for a death scene (DOODY, 1993). However, more recent biographers and critics such as Claire Tomalin, Margaret Anne Doody, Marilyn Butler and Claudia Johnson, among others, in a more detailed analysis of her major fiction and her minor works and private letters, have identified Austen as a woman who, through her fiction, was involved in Britain’s political debates and who was at times a sharp critic of the society in which she lived. Anyone who has read Jane Austen’s books must disagree with Henry Austen when he wrote that, “Faultless herself, as nearly as human nature can be, she always sought, in the faults of others, something to excuse, to forgive or forget” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 31). Rather, the “little assassin” that Frances Beer described matured into a writer that learned to disguise her attacks, but became no less deadly for doing so.

1.2 Jane Austen and the female tradition in the novel

In her renowned essay about women and fiction, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf describes two fictional places, a university for men called Oxbridge and a women’s college, Fernham. Oxbridge is luxurious, while Fernham cannot provide its students with amenities: the very existence of a women’s college was a difficult thing to achieve, while the all-male university had been endowed with money for centuries. Fernham’s grounds are open to anyone who wishes to enter; Oxbridge, however, is carefully guarded – Woolf’s narrator, a woman, is not allowed to walk in the turf, is told that ladies are only admitted to the library if accompanied by a fellow of the college or if they bring a letter of introduction. She does not even feel she may go inside the chapel, imagining that someone will find an excuse to bar her entrance there too. She feels unwelcome; she does not belong. This literal exclusion from a place of learning is, in Woolf’s essay, a symbol of the fact that, throughout history, women have been denied access to education; the contrast between the extravagant lunch the narrator has at Oxbridge and the meager dinner she eats at Fernham is meant to

illustrate how women have always been poor compared to men. Woolf states that since women have always been concerned with running households and having children, and since, for centuries, they were not allowed to own property, they could not have become professional writers. She imagines that, if Shakespeare had had a sister who was as brilliant as he, she still never could have written his plays: she would not have been allowed to go to London, to frequent the theater, to learn the playwright's trade. Woolf then goes on to build an argument that a person's economic conditions and their environment are essential for them to be able to create: that is, the famous conclusion that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (WOOLF, 2007, p. 565).

For centuries the number of women writers was very small; those that existed were usually from the aristocratic classes, the only ones who could afford to dedicate themselves to literary activities, and their work was mostly kept private, for it was considered inappropriate for them to make their writings public. In the mid-eighteenth century, however, with the rise and popularization of the novel in England, there was a sudden increase in the number of women writers, and they were no longer restricted to the upper strata of society. In the words of Woolf, "Thus, towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write" (WOOLF, 2007, p. 603). And among those women who launched themselves in a literary career, the absolute majority chose the novel as the ideal genre for their debut.

The explanation for the rapid multiplication of women novelists in mid-eighteenth century England is manifold: middle and upper class women no longer had to manufacture many products – which could be bought ready from shops and factories – and, therefore, found themselves with more leisure time; there was an improvement in the education of women who, albeit barred from higher academic achievements, at least learned to read; the novel, especially since the immense success of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, was associated with the themes of love, courtship and marriage, which were considered appropriate for women; the new genre had caused a break from the classical models, and this break opened possibilities for writers that were not familiarized with them; and the novel was characterized by a greater formal liberty, because its conventions were still being formed. Furthermore, writing became one of few ways in which women could earn a living, and economic concern drove many to take up the pen. Thus, the female tradition in the English novel began with the emergence of the novel genre itself (VASCONCELOS, 2002).

However, women had to be careful when they took the step of trying to publish their works, because that very act was, in itself, a way of quitting the domestic sphere that was considered the proper place for them. According to the ideal of femininity in eighteenth-century England, women were supposed to be modest and shy away from public life, concerning themselves with the private. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (1984), Mary Poovey states that among the many factors that helped to delimit women's place as the home, two can be considered the principal ones: the ascendance of first Puritan and then Evangelical principles and the rise to prominence of the middle class in England during the eighteenth century. By stressing the benefits of family life and considering that women's virtue was as important as men's in the eyes of God, Puritans and Evangelicals gave women a relevance other forms of Protestantism did not; they, however, also emphasized the patriarchal family organization, with the man as the head of the household, which required female obedience to fathers and husbands. With the political and economic triumph of the English middle classes, women's position was enhanced, but became more confined. Their duties were to comfort men after a day's work and to raise children that were disciplined and self-controlled and would, therefore, become successful competitors in the marketplace (POOVEY, 1984).

Only very few reasons for entering the publishing world were considered appropriate. Therefore, a woman could, for example, write for the moral edification of her public or to earn money to take care of her family, but self-fulfillment was not an acceptable motive:

Let a woman write to amuse her leisure hours, to instruct her sex, to provide blameless reading for the young, or to boil the pot; moral zeal was an accepted justification and poverty an accepted excuse; but there was one motive which could neither be justified nor excused – ambition, the “boast” of conscious power, craving to perform its task and receive its reward. The proper attitude for a female talent was diffidence; the proper field for its exercise, the narrow circle of her intimate friends; and if for any of the permitted reasons she stepped outside her circle, let her at least sedulously avoid the disgraceful imputation of assurance (TOMPKINS, 1961, p. 116).

Women could find inspiration to attempt to be published after the remarkable examples of such role models as Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Mary Delarivière Manley (1663-1724) and Eliza Haywood (1693-1756). The works of these three women, who were later called by the poet and critic Reverend James Sterling (1701-1763) “the fair triumvirate of Wit”, were popular and admired; however, they also garnered a lot of criticism from literary greats such as Alexander Pope and Samuel Richardson, who considered their writings immoral and scandalous. In most cases, the solution to women who wished to see their work

in print was to use pseudonyms or publish their books anonymously, with a mere indication that they had been written “By a Lady” (as Jane Austen did), thereby showing the modesty expected from their sex. They also had to write stories that were extremely pious and followed a strict moral code, usually not allowing their heroines to defy their fathers or husbands, and to put their chastity and purity above all else, even their survival. Another strategy was to declare that their intention in writing their works was the instruction of the public, and not the gratification of their own personal vanity (VASCONCELOS, 2002). Since middle class ideology of that period in England dictated that a woman should be the sovereign of the home, the caregiver of children and the keeper of the religious and moral code, women’s first professional activities, including that of novelist, were extensions of these feminine roles as teachers and mothers:

Work, in the sense of self-development, was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal. The self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing made the career an especially threatening one; it required an engagement with feeling and a cultivation of the ego rather than its negation (SHOWALTER, 1977, p. 22).

Female writers in the eighteenth century used their prefaces to show themselves to be models of helpless femininity, asking for the generosity of critics and the public and claiming that they were either ignorant and inexperienced or driven to write by financial necessity. Their contribution to literature was viewed with indulgence, for there was a belief that women had a civilizing function and that their values would complement those of male writers and make the novel genre more complete, provided, however, that they never strayed from the realm of the feminine (TOMPKINS, 1961). With the encouragement of male novelists and intellectuals such as Henry Fielding and Samuel Johnson, as was the case of Sarah Fielding and Charlotte Lennox, or defying social convention and deciding on their own that they wanted to write and publish, as Fanny Burney or Frances Sheridan did, women then overran a territory that had been almost exclusively dominated by men (VASCONCELOS, 2002).

The construction of gender during that period equated man’s greater physical strength with a stronger ability to reason, while declaring that women, with weaker bodies and weaker understanding, had, however, stronger emotions. Critics such as Frederic Rowton (1818-1854) and G.H. Lewes (1817-1878), who were admirers of women’s literature, declared that women were not inferior to men, but still maintained that they were different, with intellectual powers that complemented, rather than competed with, those of their male counterparts. To them, men’s intellect should be the instrument of rational discourse, while women should

write from the heart, with passion and spontaneity; both in theme and in style, their writing was to be judged by the marks of “femininity” that they presented (VASCONCELOS, 2002). Incongruities in the plot and faults of logic were tolerated, for example, but the use of coarse language and the want of delicacy, that essential characteristic of a woman writer, were not (TOMPKINS, 1961).

In the essay “The Rise of Feminine Authority in the Novel” (1985), Nancy Armstrong argues that the two literary phenomena – the popularity that the novel gained in the eighteenth century and the fact that so many women became novelists during the genre’s rise to prominence – are part of a single historical event. To her, it is not enough to state, as Ian Watt did in *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), the commonplace that feminine sensibility was somehow better fit to deal with the themes that came to be considered the province of the novel; and neither, as did Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), that these themes became more prevalent in the genre because a large part of novelists were women trying to carve a place for themselves while dealing with patriarchal literary standards. Armstrong believes that women gained the authority to write literature due to a redefinition of gender and the separation between the work unit and the family unit that took place in Britain during that period:

The world of work was detaching itself from domestic affairs to create the all too familiar gulf between public and private life. By presenting this split in the social world as one of sexual differences, or of male and female spheres of experience, the domestic novels of the period were able to describe a fractured and rapidly changing social world as if it were nothing else but a natural order that had maintained its shape down through the generations. Not only did these fictions make the social world of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries seem coherent in its own right, they also provided a language for resolving the obvious contradictions between a competitive society and the old patriarchal traditions of pre-industrial England, thus sanctifying the new middle-class order (ARMSTRONG, 1985, p.129).

Thus, while the circumscription of women to the domestic world in England after the Industrial Revolution excluded them from public life and made them relinquish political and economic control to their male counterparts, at the same time it gave them absolute authority over courtship, marriage and morality and, therefore, the sanction to write novels that dealt with these themes (ARMSTRONG, 1985). They became prolific writers of the domestic and sentimental novel whose model had been created by Samuel Richardson and, while following the rules of plot and style that guided the acceptance of their works by critics and the public, also managed to use them for their own self-expression. In works that were avowedly didactic and whose objective was moral instruction, these women novelists created heroines that

combined virtue and solid principles with mental vigor, common sense and even a certain independence, offering alternative representations of femininity. Some of them also denounced the vulnerability of women in English society, showing examples of the abuse of institutions and authorities over their long-suffering protagonists:

A few novelists managed to escape the traps of a society which insisted on negotiating the acceptance of their works based on the critical adherence, on their part, to the feminine ideal, and built an alternative image of femininity. Without actually defying the social hierarchy or the political structure, many of them created heroines that were not innocent victims trying to defend themselves in a world infested by male predators, but intelligent, strong and unembarrassed women. In their books, they opposed themselves to the idea that feminine virtue could be put at risk through education, which they defended as an important achievement. In spite of social embarrassment, some of them took on the responsibility of defending women and their right to serious reading, broader interests and intellectual occupations as also being part of the feminine sphere. Contesting predominant conventions, their voices were raised in protest against female subordination, against limited horizons and the lack of opportunities. As professional writers, which in itself was a challenge to the traditional role of women, it was natural that they would position themselves against the restrictions that limited their lives (VASCONCELOS, 2002, p. 112-113, our translation).¹

Another trait observed by critics in early female writers was their remarkable sympathy for one another. According to Elaine Showalter, “women novelists’ awareness of each other and of their female audience showed a kind of covert solidarity that sometimes amounted to a genteel conspiracy” (SHOWALTER, 1977, p.15-16). The novels written by women, for women and, many times, in the defense of women, helped create the feeling that they belonged to a community of shared tastes, passions and sufferings (VASCONCELOS, 2002).

Since her earliest writings, Jane Austen showed her disposition to defy and complicate the literary conventions of her day, at once questioning and honoring them. Most of the juvenilia the author composed roughly between 1787 and 1793 are parodies of sentimental novels filled with incredible coincidences, overpowering heroes and swooning

¹ The original is: “Algumas romancistas conseguiram escapar das armadilhas de uma sociedade que insistia em negociar a aceitação de suas obras com base na adesão crítica, por parte delas, ao ideal feminino e construíram uma imagem alternativa da mulher. Sem de fato desafiar a hierarquia social ou a estrutura política, muitas delas criaram heroínas que não eram vítimas inocentes tentando se defender num mundo infestado de predadores masculinos, mas mulheres inteligentes, fortes e desembaraçadas. Em seus livros, elas se opuseram à ideia de que a virtude feminina poderia ser colocada em risco pela educação, que defenderam como uma conquista importante. Apesar dos constrangimentos sociais, algumas delas assumiram a responsabilidade por defender a mulher e seu direito à leitura séria, a interesses mais amplos e ocupações intelectuais como parte também da esfera feminina. Contestando convenções predominantes, suas vozes se levantaram para protestar contra a subordinação feminina, contra os horizontes estreitos e a falta de oportunidades. Como escritoras profissionais, o que por si só já era um desafio aos tradicionais papéis destinados à mulher, era natural que se colocassem contra as restrições que limitavam a vida das mulheres.”

heroines. The pieces show Jane Austen to have been an avid reader of contemporary fiction, because they could not have been composed by anyone who was not extremely knowledgeable about eighteenth-century literature. As Margaret Anne Doody puts it, by the time Austen started writing, “she was as familiar with the workings of fiction as a watchmaker with the interior movements and structures of a clock” (DOODY, 1993, p. XV). In the juvenilia, which Austen wrote to amuse her closest family members and friends, the author makes explicit or suggested references to several popular novels and plays of her day, with the confidence that she was writing for a public that was as acquainted with them as she was herself. To Doody, this material “can be fully understood only in the light of a great deal of precedent literature, and formal suppositions expressed in the precedent literature” (DOODY, 1993, p. XXXVII). In a letter written in 1798 to her sister Cassandra, Jane Austen declared that all the Austens were eager novel readers, and did not consider the genre inferior as many other people of the period did:

I have received a very civil note from M^{rs} Martin requesting my name as a Subscriber to her Library which opens the 14th of January, & my name, or rather Yours is accordingly given. [...] As an inducement to subscribe M^{rs} Martin tells us that her Collection is not to consist only of Novels, but of every kind of Literature &c &c – She might have spared the pretension to *our* family, who are great Novel-readers & not ashamed of being so; – but it was necessary I suppose to the self-consequence of half her Subscribers (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 26).

The list of authors she mentions in her surviving letters to her friends and family includes, besides several male authors, female authors such as Charlotte Lennox (1730-1804), Mary Brunton (1778-1818), Hannah More (1745-1833) and Fanny Burney (1752-1840). Burney, as a matter of fact, is the author Jane Austen refers to most frequently, by alluding to her novels *Evelina* (1778), *Cecilia* (1782) and *Camilla* (1796) (DOODY, 1993). In the same letter where she complains to Cassandra that Henry will not take her home as soon as she expected, she compares herself to the latter heroine: “To-morrow I shall be just like Camilla in Mr. Dubster’s summer-house; for my Lionel will have taken away the ladder by which I came here, or at least by which I intended to get away, and here I must stay till his return” (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 6).

Literary references also pervade one of Jane Austen’s mature novels: *Northanger Abbey*. This novel is, at least in part, a satire of a genre that had enjoyed immense popularity in the eighteenth century: the gothic novel. The heroine, Catherine Morland, is constantly compared with the standard gothic heroine, usually a model of perfection in appearance and conduct; and her prosaic adventures are presented in contrast with the tragedies that befall the

protagonists of books such as *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), by Ann Radcliffe, which Catherine herself is reading. *Northanger Abbey* cites no less than seven early works of Gothic fiction as well as other novels, plays and poems. In her Introduction to the 2006 Penguin edition of *Northanger Abbey*, Marilyn Butler wrote that the novel is “quintessentially concerned with novel-reading, and other reading too, of serious non-fiction, guidebooks, even newspapers” (BUTLER, 2006).² To Butler, what links the more naturalistic passages of *Northanger Abbey* to the satire of the Gothic novel – criticized by many as being out of place in a mature work of Austen’s and as being more characteristic of the juvenilia – is the pervasiveness of the theme of reading. Butler believes that the readers who knew more about the defense of the novel genre and its association with women writers made by other authors of the eighteenth century such as Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) in a 1750 issue of his periodical *The Rambler* and English novelist Clara Reeve (1729-1807) in her history of prose fiction entitled *The Progress of Romance* (1785) would be able to see *Northanger Abbey* as a more complex book than those who were not acquainted with the subject.

In *Northanger Abbey*, Jane Austen constantly points out how unlikely are the events that usually take place in Gothic novels, and has her naïve heroine confuse fiction and real life, only to be mortified before the hero and learn the lesson of being a more discerning reader. However, she does not deride reading novels as a frivolous pastime for empty-headed women and, in one of the very few instances of authorial intrusion of any of her works, makes a spirited defense of the genre enjoyed by her protagonist:

Alas! If the heroine of one novel be not patronized by the heroine of another, from whom can she expect protection and regard? I cannot approve of it. Let us leave it to the reviewers to abuse such effusions of fancy at their leisure, and over every new novel to talk in threadbare strains of the trash with which the press now groans. Let us not desert one another; we are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the *Spectator*, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens –, there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 58).

By describing novels as works “in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation

² The edition used here is a Kindle edition without page numbers.

of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 58), Jane Austen shows her appreciation for a genre that, as has been showed, was identified with women writers from the start. It is undeniable that the work of these pioneer women helped shape Austen’s novels, because they shaped the novel genre itself.

The idea of whether or not there is something that can be described as “female literature” has been a question in literary criticism for years. Elaine Showalter, in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), while stating that she does not believe there are specific traits that can be considered part of a female sensibility or imagination, warning that trying to identify those in any examination of women’s literature many times projects cultural stereotypes of femininity, reiterates the relevance of studying female authors in order to discover the links that bind one generation to the next, giving us a more clear understanding of the continuity of women’s writing. In *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1975), Marilyn Butler affirms that, when Jane Austen began writing, the conventions of the novel genre had already been formed, and that Austen inherited a tradition that, on the one hand, projected readers’ desires and, on the other, were a rational analysis of society’s inequities in the treatment of its individuals. She protests against the idea that what her predecessors, specifically her women predecessors, practiced was only “mindless romance” (BUTLER, 1975, p. XXXIII). Finally, Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One’s Own*, summarizes why Austen and all the women writers that came after her have a debt with the pioneers of the eighteenth century:

Without those forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forgotten poets who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice. Jane Austen should have laid a wreath upon the grave of Fanny Burney, and George Eliot done homage to the robust shade of Eliza Carter — the valiant old woman who tied a bell to her bedstead in order that she might wake early and learn Greek. All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn, which is, most scandalously but rather appropriately, in Westminster Abbey, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds (WOOLF, 2007, p. 603-604).

In her novels, Jane Austen made use of this authority that had been granted to women in the eighteenth century, writing works that revolved around love stories and dealt with courtship and marriage, the feminine province outside of which she could not step. Nonetheless, even within this province, she used what by then were the conventions of the

novel to express her own views of the world, albeit with the ambiguity and subtlety that are characteristics of her mature work. The humor of her early satirical pieces was tamed, but it never ceased to be present, and few readers indeed would call her novels sentimental. In her Introduction to *Catharine and Other Writings*, an edition that includes all of Austen's juvenilia and other minor works, Margaret Anne Doody cites critic G.K. Chesterton, who wrote a Preface to the first edition of Austen's juvenilia in 1922 saying that the vitality in her early pieces shows her to be a buffoon like the Wife of Bath, from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. To Doody, "The public is not ready for the 'female buffoon' inspired by gigantic and seemingly heartless laughter – not in the 1790s" (DOODY, 1993, p. XXXIV). By the time Austen published her first work – *Sense and Sensibility*, in 1811 – she had already suffered years of rejection and learned what editors thought the public would not accept. So she used the rules of the novel genre in order to be read, but always keeping a voice that was only her own.

1.3 Such dull elves: critical studies on Jane Austen

In this section, I will examine a specific selection of critical studies on Jane Austen, referring to texts written by renowned literary scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Marilyn Butler, Vivien Jones, Tony Tanner, Margaret Anne Doody, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar and Claudia Johnson. These studies are part of a long tradition of critical commentary on Austen's *oeuvre* which began over two hundred years ago, when her novels were first published, and which never really ceased to receive contributions from some of the most prestigious minds in literature and literary criticism. Jane Austen's position in the ranks of great literature has been secured at least since the mid nineteenth century, but few authors have given rise to such varied interpretations.

Within the scope of Austen criticism, her ambiguity is famous: in her novels, she hardly ever states anything outright and is more likely to pose questions than to answer them. Therefore, throughout history, Austen has been considered by some to be oblivious of the great events that were unfolding around her in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, preferring to keep within the boundaries of the domestic world; and by others, to be deeply, if subtly, engaged in the political debates of her days. By some, to staunchly defend

conservative values; and by others, to be bitterly critical of her society, and particularly of its treatment of women. In order to give basis to my claim that Austen did indeed step outside the themes of courtship and marriage that are the centerpieces of her novels and, moreover, that her agenda was progressive as far as gender is concerned, I will discuss not only texts by the authors above mentioned, but also letters by Jane Austen herself, in the belief that they can help illuminate some of her views.

Jane Austen's niece Anna and her nephew James Edward, both children of her eldest brother James, were interested in writing, and asked their novelist aunt for her professional advice. Austen read Anna and James' work carefully, and the letters in which she discusses them contain precious glimpses of her writing process and the manner in which she saw her own work. To Anna, she stated her preference for small communities, telling her "You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; – 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on [...]" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 275). And when James Edward, who would later publish a biography of his famous aunt, told her that he had lost two and half chapters of something he was working on, she joked that she could not be accused of stealing them, for "What should I do with your strong, manly, spirited Sketches, full of Variety & Glow? – How could I possibly join them on to the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush, as produces little effect after much labour?" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 323). Austen's description of the narrow reach of her work certainly fits in well with the modesty women were advised to exhibit in her days; but examples from other letters show that it was very likely an ironic statement.

Discussing another of Austen's modest appraisals of her own powers in *Jane Austen: A Life*, Claire Tomalin tells us that James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent's librarian, recommended several subjects to her, saying she should write, for example, a story about a clergyman of the navy who travels the world (TOMALIN, 1997, p. 249-250). Jane Austen politely but firmly declined, stating that she did not have the knowledge necessary to portray such a character, because she spoke only her mother tongue, knew nothing of science and philosophy and had had no classical education. She concludes one of her letters to Stanier Clarke saying "I think I may boast myself to be, with all possible Vanity, the most unlearned, & uninformed Female who ever dared to be an Authoress" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 306). Tomalin believes that Austen was exaggerating her ignorance in order to keep Stanier Clarke from interfering with her writing, since at least one of the things she said to him was certainly untrue: she was able to read French and, therefore, knew more than just her mother tongue.

Claudia Johnson, in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel* (1988) declares her opinion that in her letter to James Edward, whom she dryly calls Jane Austen's "talentless nephew" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. XIV) her self-deprecation was ironic.

Jane Austen's use of irony, in all of her novels and even in her letters, has been a cause of great confusion among critics and readers, because it does not make her meaning immediately clear. James Edward was much younger than Austen and saw her as a mentor, so it is not impossible that, in defining her work as a little bit of ivory – as something beautiful, but of limited scope – she was somewhat underselling her abilities. This idea gains strength if we examine some of the letters she wrote to her siblings about her work. In January 1813, when *Pride and Prejudice* had just come out, she wrote to her sister Cassandra, who was her closest confidante, about her heroine Elizabeth: "I must confess that *I* think her as delightful a creature as ever appeared in print, & how I shall be able to tolerate those who do not like *her* at least, I do not know" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 201). To Cassandra, therefore, Austen could openly admit her appreciation of what would become her most beloved protagonist. In another letter written to her sister that same year, Austen complains that their mother spoke too rapidly when reading *Pride and Prejudice* aloud to a neighbor, and blames this for the fact that this neighbor did not react with all the delight she expected from her novel's audience. She then resorts to irony once more, to discuss the possible flaws of the novel:

The work is rather too light & bright & sparkling; – it wants shade; – it wants to be stretched out here & there with a long Chapter – of sense if it could be had, if not of solemn specious nonsense – about something unconnected with the story; an Essay on Writing, a critique on Walter Scott, or the history of Buonaparte – or anything that would form a contrast & bring the reader with increased delight to the playfulness & Epigrammatism of the general stile. – I doubt your quite agreeing with me here – I know your starched Notions (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 203).

It is unlikely that Austen, who in all her mature novels nearly always refrains from authorial intrusion, really felt that a long chapter about something unconnected with the story was needed in *Pride and Prejudice*; especially one about "solemn, specious nonsense". It is much more probable that she was imagining what critics might say about her book, and making fun of it to Cassandra, which also can be considered a way for her to take the sting out of this criticism by anticipating it.

In another letter written in 1813, Austen makes clear that she kept a careful account of what she earned by her writing, giving a detailed report of *Sense and Sensibility*'s sales to her brother Francis: "You will be glad to hear that every Copy of S&S. is sold & that it has brought me £140 – besides the Copyright, if that sh^d ever be of any value. – I have now

therefore written myself into £250. – which only makes me long for more” (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 217). Jane Austen, therefore, was not only proud of what she wrote, but also proud of the profit it brought her. In her days, to wish for notoriety and fortune was, as has been discussed, behavior considered unsuitable for a lady. That is probably why Henry Austen wrote in his biographical notice of his sister: “Neither the hope of fame nor profit mixed with her early motives. [...] It was with extreme difficulty that her friends, whose partiality she suspected, could prevail on her to publish her first work. [...] Few so gifted were so truly unpretending” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 32). This image created posthumously by Henry, of Jane Austen as a type of genteel amateur who was almost forced to publish her novels, is in stark contrast with the evidence provided by her letters, and may help explain why she refrained from acknowledging her own value to people like her nephew and James Stanier Clarke. Perhaps she, knowing so well the rules of conduct of her time, did not think it would be proper to tell the Prince Regent’s librarian that she only wished to write what she wanted, or to tell her nephew that her little bit of ivory had more “Variety & Glow” than many manly sketches.

The fact remains that since very early on, Austen was a favorite with male critics precisely because they thought of her as practicing what was deemed “feminine literature”, one that kept within carefully restricted boundaries. According to Claudia Johnson, critics such as Archbishop Richard Whately (1787-1863), G.H. Lewes (1817-1878) and Richard Simpson (1820-1876) praised Austen for the themes that she does not raise in her work and for only hinting at serious matters rather than tackling them openly, regarding this as the behavior of a real lady. In *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), Elaine Showalter says that Jane Austen was so well thought of by male critics that they commonly prescribed the reading of her novels to nineteenth century female writers as an example of suitably feminine works. But, to many of the novelists of the generation that immediately followed Austen’s, she was rather too didactic and cerebral, which made her an inadequate role model. Charlotte Brontë, referring to *Pride and Prejudice* in a letter to Lewes (who had recommended Austen to her), described the book as “[...] a carefully fenced, highly cultivated garden, with neat borders and delicate flowers [...]. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen, in their elegant but confined houses” (BRONTË apud TANNER, 1972, p. 7).

Showalter explains that in the Victorian era, Austen’s name became synonymous with female literary restraint and, that in rejecting any links to her, Charlotte Brontë was choosing “a volcanic literature of the body as well as the heart, a sexual and often supernatural world” (SHOWALTER, 1977, p. 103). However, to Claudia Johnson, this same feminine modesty not to leave the proper sphere assigned to her that won Austen the indulgence of so many

Victorian reviewers also precluded her from being considered an artist of the same level of importance as the male writers that are commonly regarded as possessing literary genius (JOHNSON, 1988). Johnson accuses even R.W. Chapman (1881-1960), perhaps the most prestigious Jane Austen scholar of all time, of not considering her a major author in the same sense that male authors are viewed, since he protests that any attempt to interpret her work as anything more than a record of the elegant manners of her time would be to misunderstand her intentions. Chapman produced the first annotated edition of Jane Austen's novels, *The Oxford Illustrated Edition* (1923), whose text was based on those of the first editions in order to correct any errors or omissions. Most editions of Austen's work that are published today use Chapman's editions as points of reference. However, their appendixes detailing the clothing, carriages and modes of address of Austen's day and ignoring her mentions of London riots in *Northanger Abbey* and of the slave trade in *Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, for example, are, to Johnson, responsible for creating "the author it presumed, and the history it desired" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. XVII), being "a graceful monument to country life in Regency England, a time which twentieth-century readers have been prone to idealize into graciousness and tranquility" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. XVII). Johnson believes that Chapman did nothing to dispel the longstanding image of Austen as a harmless spinster aunt and sister, who meant only to tell amusing tales and spoke of nothing important, an image created by Henry Austen and James Edward Austen-Leigh and consolidated by Victorian critics. In an Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice* written in 1972, Tony Tanner, an Austen scholar, biographer and great admirer of her work, gave an example of the prevalent view of Austen among critics:

It is indeed possible to call [*Pride and Prejudice's*] relevance to the society of the time into question, for during a decade in which Napoleon was effectively engaging, if not transforming, Europe, Jane Austen composed a novel in which the most important events are the fact that a man changes his manners and a young lady changes her mind. [...] The overall impression given by the book is of a small section of society locked in an almost timeless present in which very little will or can change (TANNER, 1972).

However, especially since the 1970s, more and more critics have become interested in the works of Jane Austen, placing them within a wide study of the treatment of women in society, the ways they were represented and the obstacles they had to surmount in order to express themselves creatively. Among the vast number of critical works on Austen, the ones analyzed here were chosen because all of them, to some extent, discuss the author's political positions and whether or not, in spite of her general conservatism, some of her views,

including her stance on the condition of women, were, if not radically progressive, at least more complex than an initial reading of her novels might lead one to believe.

Jane Austen lived in turbulent times and, during her formative years as a writer, the 1790s, England was engaged in a controversy concerning the French Revolution: the political debate that took place as the nation reacted to the new ideas coming from across the English Channel. After the Bastille fell on 14 July 1789, the liberal English saw the developments in France with enthusiasm; the Revolution became fashionable and the images of its heroes graced snuffboxes and scarves (TODD, 1993). This brought about a conservative reaction of those who saw the events in France as a great danger to English society. Among the most prominent of them was political theorist and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who wrote a pamphlet named *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in which, holding to a pessimistic view of human nature that opposed the ideology of liberals and revolutionaries – who defended that man was naturally good – he postulated that social problems were caused by individual selfishness rather than government. To Burke, people were ruled by passion, not reason, and needed a head of state to prevent society from falling into a barbaric state (TODD, 1993).

Burke made part of his argument through a sentimentalized picture of the French queen Marie Antoinette, presenting her as mother above all, and describing the complex events in France as a family drama. In his work, the queen becomes a symbol of the state, fleeing from her own subjects, who mean to defile and kill her. Claudia Johnson, in *Jane Austen: Women Politics and the Novel* (1988), affirms that, with this, Burke presented “the political act as a sexual act, the violation of the queen as an assault on the king’s authority” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 5). Dwelling on the vulnerability of patriarchal authority through the seduction of women, Burke posits the family, which he described as “our little platoon” (BURKE, 2011)³, not simply as a metaphor for the state, but a basic political unit in its own right, which had to function through the rule of the father, just like the state had to function through the rule of the king.

Reflections on the Revolution in France sold about 19,000 copies in its first year and about another 30,000 in the next five years, and was followed by over fifty replies (TODD, 1993), which generally asserted natural rights and questioned political institutions. In one of the most famous of them, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft, although not being the first thinker at the time to question the status of women, acquired the

³ The edition used here is a Kindle edition without page numbers.

distinction of including the issue of women's rights into the general debate about civil rights, linking feminism to the general struggle for political and social reform (TODD, 1993). She declared that women's education viewed them as sexual objects and prepared them only for marriage. To Wollstonecraft, the inequality of power between men and women corrupted all of society, which could not progress if half its members were kept ignorant. In order to correct this, she advocated a female education that was a mixture of information and rational skills, while vigorously opposing the widespread idea that women, while endowed with superior sensibility and delicacy, were marked by a lesser ability to reason.

In her opposition to sensibility, Wollstonecraft took part in a reaction that included such politically diverse writers as William Godwin and the conservatives Hannah More (1745-1833) and Jane West (1758-1852). During most of the eighteenth century, the so-called cult of sensibility deeply influenced cultural life in Europe. The term sensibility at first described a quality found in individuals that were extremely sensitive to external stimuli, and later acquired the further connotation of a form of response to external objects, a response that supposedly engendered sympathy for the suffering of others and, at least theoretically, inclined to lead to ameliorative social action (BALLASTER, 2007). According to Marilyn Butler, novels of sensibility espoused a belief in the goodness of the individual and a dislike of social conventions, defending that the heart, and not reason, should dictate the actions of their protagonists, who, by relying on intuition, would find a happy ending. These protagonists tended to be acutely sensitive, expressive and responsive to the unhappiness of others. Novelists of the sentimental movement were concerned with the reader's response to its heroes, and believed that the correct reaction to them should be one of sympathy, influencing them to have the same impulsive generosity shown by the protagonists. In a novel such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), for example, the hero acts recklessly and imprudently, but the reader is still meant to sympathize with him due to his fundamental good nature. Another characteristic of the sentimental novel is showing not what people should do, but what they actually do; not exemplary heroes, but fallible ones that, nonetheless, win the reader's heart (BUTLER, 1975).

Because sensibility was, to a great extent, linked to femininity, radical writers such as Wollstonecraft decried it, arguing that valuing emotional responsiveness led to a rejection of the rational which enslaved women to men. But some conservative writers also criticized exacerbated sensibility in women, although for very different reasons. Conduct book writer Hannah More, for example, disliked the amoral self-indulgence inherent in sensibility, warning that the sentimental woman would prefer to live in the fantasy world of books rather

than face the realities of marital life, and that she would trust the dictates of her emotions, including her sexual feelings, before the dictates of the morality of her society (BUTLER, 1975).

In Jane Austen and the War of Ideas (1975), Marilyn Butler argues that the debate on the dangers of sensibility and overpowering emotions took place not only in political writing, but also in fiction and, more specifically, in novels. To Butler, during the 1790s, literature as a whole was partisan, and, while the majority of writers did not aspire to propagate an ideology, “every novel was expected to offer a moral pattern through its heroes and heroines, and the outcome of the action would fatally betray a sense of values” (BUTLER, 1975, p. 30). Butler argues that Jane Austen, in her novels, espoused a contempt for sensibility and a defense of the rational that placed her in the same ideological field of conservative writers such as More and West. By including Austen in this debate, or, as she deemed it, this “war of ideas”, Butler wrote the first important work that challenged the notion that Austen focused solely on courtship and marriage, remaining detached from the great turbulences that took place in Europe during her lifetime. To Butler, the fact that Jane Austen chose to keep her gaze on the drawing room rather than the battlefield was more political than aesthetic: unlike what Austen herself stated in her letters, Butler believes she did not prefer to limit her novels to small communities only because she felt confident that it was something she could do well, but because she wished to validate a way of life: the same way of life defended by Edmund Burke, that of a family headed by a patriarch where everyone knew their place.

Butler sees Jane Austen, whose father and eldest brother were clergymen of the Anglican Church, as having been born and raised in the conservative fold. Henry Austen writes in his biographical notice that Jane Austen’s favorite writer was Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), who asked, in a famous essay, whether it was proper for a novelist to give a naturalistic account of man, since, to him, a writer’s duty was not only to entertain, but to instruct. Dr. Johnson feared that, by creating sympathy for fallible heroes or heroines, the novel could cause the moral undoing of its readers. To Butler, Jane Austen took Dr. Johnson’s advice to heart, writing novels whose plots were meant to educate the public. Butler states that Jane Austen’s prose style and her arrangement of character and plot suggest that the author was trying to depict a world whose order was ideal, and she either created heroines that conformed to that order and were shown as models to the reader, or imperfect heroines who had to discern the claims of the society around them and submit to them (BUTLER, 1975). Heroines who are more controlled and submissive, such as Elinor from *Sense and Sensibility*, Fanny

from *Mansfield Park* and Anne from *Persuasion*, are models of conservative orthodoxy, advocating duty and self-denial in the service of others; while heroines that seem to ignore the superior claims of authority, such as Elizabeth from *Pride and Prejudice*, and Emma, from the eponymous novel, will learn how to subdue their individuality.

To Butler, another sign that Jane Austen's novels were unequivocally conservative is the fact that she leaves out the sensuous and the irrational while portraying her heroines' inner life. In all of her six mature novels, Austen shows the action mainly through the point of view of her female protagonist, but Butler states that she deliberately leaves out certain elements of inward experience in order to give more prestige to the rational than the irrational, to the outer world of evidence more than the inner world of imaginings, making her an author who is not an observer of the whole consciousness. According to Butler, "Jane Austen's method of presentation is meant to explode the sentimentalists' claim that subjective experience is the individual's whole truth" (BUTLER, 1975, p. 293).

Nevertheless, in her quest to include all of Jane Austen's work within the moral framework of the conservative or reactionary writers of the late eighteenth century, Marilyn Butler performs a reductive reading of her novels, limiting them to ideological pamphlets rather than aesthetic exercises. To say that Jane Austen's heroines are either fallible or perfect, that they are either right or wrong, is to deny them the complexity with which they were endowed by their creator. And, while Jane Austen certainly criticized selfishness in her novels, she took pains to differentiate self-will from adherence to one's moral principles, and I believe that it cannot be said of her that she disregarded individual wishes and desires and always placed the welfare of the community above them. Two of her heroines, albeit with very different personalities, can be used to illustrate this: Fanny Price and Elizabeth Bennet.

Fanny can certainly be considered as a model young woman by contemporary standards, who never fails to do what she is told. But, when Fanny refuses the proposals of Henry Crawford, even though we see that she does not stand her ground out of mere obstinacy, she can also be said to be following the dictates of her own heart, or her own individual wishes. It is impossible not to see that such a match would be a tremendous advantage to her entire family, who are the very poorest of all families depicted by Austen. The same can be said of Elizabeth Bennet: when she refuses Mr. Collins, she does not yet know that there is a Mr. Darcy in store for her – a Mr. Darcy who, in fact, she also refuses at first. Since she and her sisters are unable to inherit their father's estate and marriage to either gentleman would save all of them from almost certain poverty, she is undoubtedly making a decision based only on what is good for her, not for her entire family. Butler herself concedes

that there is some social criticism in *Pride and Prejudice*, which shows, through characters like Mrs. Bennet, Lady Catherine and Charlotte Lucas, that to a lot of people matrimony is merely a transaction involving money and status. She affirms that Jane Austen regards Elizabeth's intelligence with skepticism, at the same time considering it baffling that it should be so seductive to readers. Butler decides that, in *Pride and Prejudice*, the message lacks clarity, and that is why so many critics interpret it as progressive (BUTLER, 1975).

Tony Tanner, on the other hand, albeit having professed his opinion that *Pride and Prejudice* does not concern itself with the larger world, considers that part of the drama of the novel lies in the fact that two people must defy the conventions that society wants to impose on them and make a connection that is not moved by rationality, but by both their judgment and their emotions. Because we must remember that, in marrying Elizabeth, Mr. Darcy was also going against the wishes of his family. Tanner writes:

One of the gratifications of the book is that Elizabeth and Darcy seem to demonstrate that it is still possible for individuals to make new connections in defiance of society. That there is perhaps a fairy-tale touch to their total felicity at the conclusion in the dream world of Pemberley should not discourage us from recognizing the importance of holding on to this possibility as one which is essential to a healthy society. That is to say, a society in which the individual can experience freedom as well as commitment (TANNER, 1972, p. 34).

In spite of the rebelliousness that is a part of both Elizabeth and Darcy, Tanner admits that, in Jane Austen, love is always something that is reflected on and never the product of impulsivity. To him, Jane Austen's society minimized bodily sensations and transcendental experience, giving emphasis to the secular and the materialistic and a higher value to an alert consciousness than to the states of reverie and trance, which would be so lauded by Romantic writers. Therefore, what Butler interprets as a conscious decision on Jane Austen's part not to show the entire consciousness for ideological purposes, Tanner interprets as something that was a product of Austen's times.

In the Introduction that she wrote in 1987 to the latest edition of her book, Butler admits that she failed to address Austen's stance on the condition of women in her society, stating that, in her works, there is something that we should now call a "feminist consciousness". She disagrees with other authors who had stated that Jane Austen took sides with writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, who explicitly state that women were as rational as men and, therefore, were entitled to a serious education, an education that was centered not on the acquisition of superficial "accomplishments", but on the learning of a trade, so that they could gain economic independence. However, she states that there used to be a conservative

women's tradition "which must also be thought of as proto-feminist, for it was conscious that women were treated as an inferior class in a man's world" (BUTLER, 1975, p. XXIII). To Butler, conservative women dealt with this situation by urging women to develop moral and spiritual strength, and also by assigning to them a role of service to the family and, through teaching and charity, to the community. She believes that it was this viewpoint, rather than that of the educationalists, that Jane Austen shared.

To Marilyn Butler, Jane Austen's alignment with the conservative ideology is a settled question, and her greatest distinction is to have espoused her ideals in a much more discreet manner than other reactionary writers of the period, something that enabled her to reach a wider audience than her more partisan contemporaries. Butler believes that in her novels, Jane Austen set out to ask what the moral nature of the individual and his/her true role in society was, much as all major novelists of her day. She settles the problem of Austen's ambiguity by stating, "Her happy endings cannot resolve the clash of values which she sets out to describe, because it is hardly in the power of art to resolve them. Art merely mimes its resolutions, without real intent or power to deceive" (BUTLER, 1975, p. 299). But she, herself, seems to fall into contradiction and to admit the progressive elements in Austen's *oeuvre*:

Instead of investing one character throughout with the right opinions [...] do, Jane Austen depicts even the best minds as continually fallible, under the pressure of new evidence, and potentially undermined from within by selfishness. Her only constants are abstract qualities – directness, honesty, sincerity, humility – the characteristics striven for by people who care about truth. She sees perfectibility as a condition of human life, but not perfection. The continuous effort necessary in her moral world is one of the few points in which she seems almost Godwinian (BUTLER, 1975, p. 260).

In her Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*, Vivien Jones says that the novel derives its vitality from Austen's usage of a very conventional romantic plot with, however, the addition of a heroine that is witty and outspoken, and therefore, very different from the vulnerable protagonist of most romances – which makes her still very likeable to modern readers, who are more apt to reject the timid personality of a character like Fanny Price. What attracts Darcy to Elizabeth is not her beauty – very early in the novel, in the ballroom scene that gives start to Elizabeth's dislike of him, he says of her, "She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt *me* [...]" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 13). What sets Elizabeth apart in Darcy's eyes is her intelligence and self-assertiveness.

But Jones sees more than a dream romance in Elizabeth and Darcy's union, agreeing with Butler in saying that Jane Austen, with her novels, was participating in a wider political

debate. Regarding these novels, she states that, “Written in a period of political crisis and social mobility, they are strategic critical analyses of the moral values and modes of behaviour through which a section of the ruling class was redefining itself” (JONES, 2006, p. XI). Jones affirms that in order to understand the full political dimension of Austen’s novels, we must see the ways in which details that may seem unimportant actually carried very specific significance to contemporary audiences:

Her texts work on the shared assumption that nuances of language, or dress, or behaviour can carry very particular implications: as comparatively straightforward signs of social status, for example; as clues to a character’s moral attitude; or – more problematically for modern readers – as conscious references to the terms and issues which were being contested in contemporary cultural debates. Like its protagonists, *Pride and Prejudice* is vitally engaged in argument (JONES, 2006, p. XII).

The argument, to Jones as to Butler, is the Revolution Controversy and the values defended by conservatives like Edmund Burke on the one hand and progressives like Mary Wollstonecraft on the other. Jones states that most commentators agree that Austen’s novels have an essentially conservative stance, because they always focus on a section of the ruling class – the gentry – and have a concern with order and decorum that “speaks for the consolidation and renewal of an established social order rather than for revolution” (JONES, 2006, p. XIII). But, even within this broadly conservative position, Austen’s views on gender issues are more difficult to define than her views on class structure, precisely because of the fact that she was a woman. In every class, women were subordinate to men and had a peripheral existence. Jones states:

The precise conjunction of gender and class in Austen has been a vexed question in Austen criticism for some years. Does she, as some critics have suggested, present a subversive, proto-feminist critique which conflicts with her class politics? Or is she demonstrably anti-feminist, an anti-revolutionary defender of traditional femininity and family values? It’s probably most useful, I want to argue, to think of her as post-rather than simply anti-revolutionary, as strategically assimilating rather than blindly opposing ideas for change (JONES, 2006, p. XIII).

To Jones, Jane Austen’s creation of Elizabeth Bennet was her way of doing this strategic assimilation. Elizabeth is energetic and assertive, such as the heroines that could be found in novels written by liberal-minded women such as Mary Hays, Charlotte Smith and Wollstonecraft herself. These novels questioned the institution of marriage and overtly denounced women’s condition of dependence on men. On the other hand, conservative novels by Jane West, Hannah More and Elizabeth Hamilton, among others, “reasserted a virtuous,

domestic feminine ideal, often through plots which demonstrate the catastrophic personal consequences of taking up radical ideas – or of giving in to ‘first impressions’” (JONES, 2006, p. XVI). Jones’s reference is to the name given by Austen to the first draft of *Pride and Prejudice*, a novel where the heroine is schooled into not believing her intuition (which leads her to believe that Darcy is a villain and Wickham a gentleman, while the truth is the other way around).

In spite of the fact that *Pride and Prejudice*’s first draft was written during the contentious 1790s, the novel was only published more than a decade later, in January 1813. By then the French Revolution had lost most of its supporters in England, and, as the Napoleonic Wars went on, the more emphatically reactionary atmosphere that had taken over the country since 1790s gave way to what Jones calls “a precarious conservative consensus, at least among the increasingly confident middle classes” (JONES, 2006, p. XVI). However, the fact that conservatives such as Edmund Burke had placed such an importance in domestic life had put the discussion about the roles of women once more in the center of Britain’s political life. Wollstonecraft’s thoughts on femininity were discredited by anti-revolutionary propaganda, but the idea that women had a crucial part to play in the nation was appropriated by the conservative cause that defended family values. Hannah More, in the conduct book *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), affirms that there are natural differences between both sexes, and that in order for women to be happy, they should learn to acquire a submissive temper and a forbearing spirit.

To Jones, “*Pride and Prejudice* could well be read as a critical exploration of More’s contention that women’s happiness is dependent on restraint and submission” (JONES, 2006, p. XIX). She argues that, even though Elizabeth Bennet is clearly a better example of Wollstonecraft’s rational femininity than of More’s submissive and elegant temper, that does not mean that Austen subscribed entirely to Wollstonecraft’s ideas. As Jones states, “The two categories are not actually incompatible in Austen’s post-revolutionary scheme of things: the more conventionally feminine, and upper-class, attribute of elegance can coexist with the more contentious claim to rationality” (JONES, 2006, p. XXI). This coexistence means that, even though Elizabeth’s errors in judgement as regards the hero and the villain of the novel – Darcy and Wickham – do not cause her ruin and downfall, as was common for the fallible heroines of conservative novels, she still has to adjust her independence of mind and recognize the error of her first impressions:

This plot formula seems to give women, and the values they represent, a lot of power and responsibility. But it is power of a carefully circumscribed kind. The social order has been modified, not radically altered. Austen's post-revolutionary achievement in *Pride and Prejudice* is to put Wollstonecraft's revolutionary femininity at the service of the Burkean 'family party' by writing what is still one of the most perfect, most pleasurable and most subtle – and therefore, perhaps, most dangerously persuasive – of romantic love stories (JONES, 2006, p. XXXI).

Other critics have read Jane Austen's work as being even further away from any conservative agenda than Vivien Jones portrays them. In her Introduction to *Catharine and Other Writings*, Margaret Anne Doody asserts that the key to understanding Austen's politics lies in her juvenilia, writings that were meant only for the eyes of her family and where she had no need to behave with any constraints. Doody regards as interesting that Jane Austen was re-reading and revising the material of her teens as late as 1811, and possibly enjoying a new audience for them in the form of Anna and James Edward, the two children of her brother James who were themselves interested in becoming writers. The year 1811 saw the publication of *Sense and Sensibility*, the first of Austen's novels to be read by the general public. After suffering the disappointments of having *Pride and Prejudice* (still titled *First Impressions*) rejected by a publisher and after selling *Northanger Abbey* to another publisher who never actually printed the work, she for the first time could consider herself a professional writer. Doody writes that "We forget how much of failure there was in Jane Austen's middle period, when she tried to write works that would appeal beyond the family circle, and to meet a public which was apparently indifferent" (DOODY, 1993, p. XX). She notes that little attention has been paid in Austen criticism to the effects these years of rejection may have had on her. "By the time she did achieve publication, she had had to realize that what she wanted and what the world wanted might be different things" (DOODY, 1993, p. XXX).

To Doody, Jane Austen accommodated her writings to what she perceived was wanted by publishers and the reading public. The young Austen, who had not yet had to compromise to the necessities of the market, practiced more subversive writing, a subversion visible in the fact that, in her juvenilia, she does not shy away from subjects such as alcoholism, theft and adultery and laughs unabashedly at nearly everyone and everything, leaving no rank or profession untouched by her satire. In *The Common Reader*, while writing about the juvenilia, Virginia Woolf comments on Austen's ability to make fun of everything. "[...] what is this note which never merges in the rest, which sounds distinctly and penetratingly all through the volume? It is the sound of laughter. The girl of fifteen is laughing, from her corner, at the world" (WOOLF, 1984, p. 136).

Doody believes that Austen's choice to write love stories was a way for her to tame her talents as a ruthless *comediienne* and be more accepted by the public and critics in the roles assigned to women writers by the beginning of the nineteenth century. She states:

[...] in writing her comic novels of courtship Austen chose a genre which would have a certain appeal to an audience, a form of book which looked like just another story of a nice girl getting engaged. Within this acceptable and apparently unalarming genre Austen could hope to work some changes without the style and depth of what she was doing being overmuch noticed. She succeeded brilliantly in an attempt which has about it a certain element of disguise (DOODY, 1993, p. XXXI).

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (2000), describe this adherence to fictional conventions as a common practice among women writers who were Austen's contemporaries. They link women's physical confinement to the domestic sphere to their figurative confinement to specific literary constructs, "For not only did a nineteenth-century woman writer have to inhabit ancestral mansions (or cottages) owned and built by men, she was also constricted and restricted by the Palaces of Art and Houses of Fiction male writers authored" (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000)⁴. To Gilbert and Gubar, in Austen's novels, it is women who must acquiesce to men because they were recognizably the ones who held power in that society; and Austen, by advising her heroines to conform to social standards, was thinking of their survival. Nonetheless, Austen persistently demonstrates her discomfort with the narrowness of the place assigned to women. Her choice to remain within the domestic sphere "[...] is centrally concerned with the impossibility of women escaping the conventions and categories that, in every sense, belittle them" (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000).

In their analysis of Austen's juvenilia, Gilbert and Gubar state that her parody of the literary conventions is a critique of society as a whole, for placing women in a position where they were vulnerable to the fantasies present in that fiction. She does not attack the romantic traditions of her culture as a way to attack feminine moral laxity, as conservative writers did, but rather in order to criticize a culture that, by circumscribing women, made them weaker. To them, Austen "[...] expresses her dissent under the cover of parodic strategies that had been legitimized by the most conservative writers of her time and that therefore were then (and remain now) radically ambiguous" (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000). Yet, in the mature fiction, she learns to use these literary conventions as the only way to become a professional writer:

⁴ The edition used here is a Kindle edition without page numbers.

Austen admits the limits and discomforts of the paternal roof, but learns to live beneath it. [...] If she wishes to be an architect herself, however, she needs to make use of the only available building materials—the language and genres, conventions and stereotypes at her disposal. She does not reject these, she reinvents them (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000).

To Gilbert and Gubar, Austen, in her novels, describes the lives of women who were as vulnerable as the romantic or gothic heroines they read about, albeit subjected to more mundane dangers. One of the examples of that is the fact that, in Austen's novels, every single father figure or, rather, every single parent figure fails in some way or another: Mr. and Mrs. Bennet, from *Pride and Prejudice*, are, respectively, negligent and frivolous; Mrs. Dashwood, from *Sense and Sensibility*, too irrational; General Tilney, from *Northanger Abbey*, greedy and insensible; Mr. Woodhouse, from *Emma*, entirely self-absorbed in his hypochondria; Sir Thomas, from *Mansfield Park*, oblivious of the faults of his children; and Sir Walter, from *Persuasion*, vain and ridiculous. Because of these deficient parent figures, Austen's heroines understand that they must look to get married in order to find security and some form of independence, although marriage is a deficient institution in the author's view, as may be inferred by the fact that nearly all married couples in her fiction are unhappy. Austen's plots, therefore, illustrate both the lack of options women had in their lives and the lack of options they had as writers, having to confine themselves to the so-called feminine province of courtship and marriage (GILBERT; GUBAR, 2000).

The thesis that Jane Austen used the conventions of fiction of her time to propose progressive ideas without causing scandal or the rejection of the public is also defended by Claudia Johnson in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics and the Novel*. To Johnson, there was a wide variety of responses to the social questions raised in England by the French Revolution, and most of the novels written during what Butler dubbed the "war of ideas" were more complicated and less doctrinaire than many modern critics believe. Johnson states that Austen and her contemporaries participated in a polemical tradition without necessarily accepting completely the ideas of one side or the other: "Under the pressure of intense reaction, they developed stylistic techniques which enabled them to use politically charged material in an exploratory and interrogative, rather than hortatory and prescriptive, manner" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. XXI).

Johnson compares Austen's works with those of professedly conservative novelists such as Jane West and Hannah More, highlighting the differences among them. Conservative novelists idealized authority – of laws, conventions, customs and fathers, husbands,

clergymen. Abuses which reformers argued were intrinsic to existing power structures were dismissed as being personal failures and blamed on individuals rather than institutions. To suggest, as Austen frequently does, that fathers, sons and brothers can be selfish and unscrupulous and otherwise fallible would be, in the eyes of these writers, to attack the institutions that safeguard the moral life of the country and contribute to the dissolution of the government. The novels and conduct books written by West and More advocate strict female subordination to male authority figures. West, for example, saw marriage as a social duty and not a source of personal happiness, and disapproved of matches of affection. To her, the system of complete subordination may be inconvenient, but women can learn to work it to their advantage. Hannah More went even further in her demands of her female readers: she wanted them to actually cherish the system that relegated them to peripheral positions. In one of her novels, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809), the hero is a very eligible and fastidious bachelor who travels the country in search of the perfect woman, but the specimens he finds always have one fault, such as not being religious enough or not knowing how to cook. One of the women inspected by Coelebs, Amelia Rattle, is frowned upon because she expresses her opinions rather than deferring to those of the men and jumps onto a carriage without masculine assistance. Her energy and her confidence are seen as defects. Coelebs finally finds his wife in the person of Lucilla Stanley, such a model of female modesty that she hardly ever opens her mouth and is mostly talked about by other characters. To Johnson, this presents an aesthetic as well as a logical problem, because “How can More as a novelist praise, and by praising make attractive to women readers, a modest and feminine ambition precisely to have none, to go unnoticed?” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 18) For conservatives such as West and More, being an author and championing female subordination was a paradox, one they tried to circumvent by employing pseudonyms, writing prefaces in which they acknowledged their own ignorance and using the viewpoint of a male character to tell their stories.

In these points, the difference between West and More and Jane Austen is also immediately clear. Austen never claimed authorship of her novels, which were signed simply “by a lady”, but all of them are told from the perspective of a female character, who, by being necessarily oppressed in a society that gave its power to men, showed a marginal point of view that could help readers identify with the hardships they, as females, encountered. Furthermore, Austen is completely consistent in defending marriages of affection and in allowing her heroines to pursue personal happiness even to the detriment of their families. By granting them matches of affection that also satisfy any pecuniary concerns, Jane Austen is marking a difference between the egotism of characters such as Maria Bertram and Lydia

Bennet and the individuality of her heroines. Another sign that she disapproved of More's ideas is the fact that, in "Catherine, or The Bower", *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* is one of the books that Mrs. Percival, a ridiculous character who is concerned with her niece's virtue to the point of hysteria, advises Catherine to read.

To Claudia Johnson, Austen, as well as Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth, belonged to a class of authors who wanted to use the subjects post-revolutionary ideas had opened up, such as the status of women in society, without getting trapped in the binary opposition these very ideas had caused. If they were to criticize any aspects of the society they lived in without being accused of wanting to destroy family ties and topple the government, or advance progressive ideas about the situation of women without seeming to condone Wollstonecraft's radicalness and personal lifestyle, they would have to employ interrogative and not declarative narrative methods to do so, and develop strategies of subversion and indirection. One instance of such a strategy that she offers as an example is Austen's famous lack of scenes in which her heroines accept proposals of marriage. To many critics, this omission is ascribed to personal inadequacy and to an inability of Austen's to confront such an emotion. To Johnson, Austen chose to do this because the logic of female propriety dictated that a modest woman could not avow intense personal desire – and this desire, therefore, was impossible to be represented. She states:

[...] if Burney and Austen draw back with ambivalence where Wollstonecraft and Hays step forward with confidence, their worries about the moral unreliability of patriarchal figures and their dubiousness about social conventions which privilege the prerogatives of men at the cost of confining the choice of women are not the less perceptible. By writing from the viewpoint of dispossessed characters who themselves do not question the legitimacy of Burkean loci of moral and social stability, Burney and Austen alike are able to show, beneath nominally conventional surfaces of their novels, truths about the absence or arbitrariness of fathers, the self-importance of brothers, and the bad faith of mentors which, if not as daring or seeping, are still as disturbing as any of the indictments made by radical novelists (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 26).

Austen's ambiguity and subtlety, while allowing such a wide range of interpretations of her works, may also be one of the sources of her centuries-old popularity. By using what Claudia Johnson calls an interrogative narrative method and, as Butler stated, not resolving the war of ideas which she, one way or another, seemed not to be completely oblivious of, she granted a relevance to her work that her more partisan contemporaries do not enjoy. In a letter to Cassandra, while commenting that the first edition of *Pride and Prejudice* had come out with a few errors that made the dialogue a little more difficult to grasp, she immediately dismisses the idea that her public would not understand her, paraphrasing a line from Walter

Scott's poem *Marmion*: "I do not write for such dull Elves as have not a great deal of Ingenuity themselves" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 202). Dull elves we may be: but the truth is that Austen has a certain protean quality that allows her to be loved by all kinds of admirers, and that is part of the reason why her works have never ceased to be read in the last two centuries.

2 SPACE AND MOBILITY IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

After presenting an outline of Jane Austen's life and times, of her place within the female tradition in the novel and of the critical studies about her work in order to try to uncover her political positions and, specifically, her critique of the situation of middle-class women in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century English society, in this chapter I aim to highlight, in her six major novels, scenes where hindrances to women's movements reveal a context of oppression. These scenes, analyzed as a whole, are able to reveal how Jane Austen used the differences between women and men's control of their mobility to make a political point.

To conduct this analysis, I will divide this chapter into four sections. In the first section, I will examine the category of space in the novel and the importance of setting and movement in Jane Austen's work. In the second section, I will consider the concept of gendered spaces and the association of the masculine with the public and the feminine with the private or domestic sphere in order to discuss how this distinction influences the rules that govern women's movements. In the third section, I will extract examples from conduct books written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to show how women's movements were restricted in Austen's society specifically. In the fourth section, I will take scenes from Austen's novels to demonstrate how the female characters' movements, or lack thereof, illustrate these restrictions and are used by the author, however subtly, to criticize women's position in that society. The scenes in the fourth section will be divided into four different themes: Immobility and Gender, Mobility and Powerlessness, Mobility and Defiance and Mobility and Marriage. In these subsections, I will show how each of Austen's seven heroines, in spite of having different personalities and economic situations, all suffered the same predicaments as regards their lack of agency in their physical movements.

2.1 Space in Jane Austen

Ian Watt, in his seminal book *The Rise of the Novel* (1957), concluded that one of the elements that characterize the realism of the novel form and sets it apart from previous works of fiction is the more minute descriptions of space, and the choice of specific localities in

which to have the action played out. While discussing what constitutes the formal realism of Samuel Richardson, Watt states that the direction of Richardson's narrative "is towards the delineation of the domestic life and the private experience of the characters who belong to it: the two go together – we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses" (WATT, 2000). Thus, the particularization of space, that is, the description of the specific homes, villages, cities and counties inhabited by the characters, was a way of delineating the characters themselves and giving them the individual traits that are a mark of the novel.

Jane Austen, who is considered by Watt to be Richardson's successor, is not famous for descriptions of landscape: unlike those of some of her contemporaries, hers are rare and short. Austen does not spend many pages giving the reader an idea of the settings in her novels, and neither does she feel it is necessary to give a detailed account of the appearance of her characters. However, although Austen's descriptions of places are not extensive, that does not mean that space was not an important element in her work. She avowedly loved to stage her novels in country villages, and created six fictional ones with intricate geographies that fitted the purposes of each one of her major works – Longbourn for *Pride and Prejudice*, Fullerton for *Northanger Abbey*, Highbury for *Emma* and the unnamed ones where Mansfield Park, in the novel thus entitled, Barton Cottage in *Sense and Sensibility* and Kellynch Hall in *Persuasion* are located.

Two big cities also figure prominently in her novels: London and Bath. The capital is present in each of the six major works, being sometimes portrayed, sometimes merely mentioned, but never wholly out of thought. Bath, where Jane Austen lived for nearly four years, is described in some detail in both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*. Austen's familiarity with the city and her concern with the realism of her work are apparent in both novels, for she has the characters who spend time in Bath inhabit houses and streets that perfectly match their status, use modes of transportation that are appropriate for the distances they cover (for example, going on foot, by carriage or taking a chair, that is, being carried by two servants) and frequent the fashionable shops and public places.

And yet this attention to detail did not mean that Austen was fond of Bath, a city she left "[...] with what happy feelings of escape!" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 138). In fact, one of the major functions of setting in Jane Austen's novels is to compare big cities with small country villages, always to the advantage of the latter. She was probably exaggerating when she wrote from London to Cassandra "Here I am once more in this Scene of Dissipation & vice, and I begin already to find my Morals corrupted" (AUSTEN, 1995, p. 5). But, in her novels, metropolises always have more or less harmful effects over characters, who seem to be

consistently safer in the country. In *Mansfield Park*, the novel in which this comparison is more evident, Austen contrasts her heroine and hero, the country dwellers Fanny and Edmund, with the fashionable Henry and Mary Crawford, who have spent much of their life in London. Henry and Mary are witty and attractive; however, even though they are not evil enough to be called villains, their upbringing in the loose atmosphere of London contaminates them irreversibly, and their anarchic influence nearly implodes the domestic life in Mansfield Park. The distrust of anything that comes from the capital is plain in the novel, and Austen even writes that Fanny “[...] was disposed to think the influence of London very much at war with all respectable attachments” (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 422).

However, not even the country, with all its superiority, is a perfect, idyllic place in an Austen novel. Jane Austen was a great critic of the “improvement” mania of the latter half of the eighteenth century, when it became fashionable for rich landowners to renovate their homes and grounds for aesthetic purposes, with many of them hiring experts on architectural improvement and landscape gardening, among whom the most prominent were Lancelot ‘Capability’ Brown (1716–83) and Humphry Repton (1752–1818). Capability Brown and Repton could, in the name of what was considered most pleasing to the eye, pull down ancient trees, destroy parts of stately houses, alter the course of rivers and even remove unseemly cottages from view. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the heroines’ brother, John Dashwood, inherits the estate where they grew up, and as a consequence they not only have to move, but also have no saying in the substantial changes he makes in the property, such as the enclosure of the land and the destruction of an old walnut grove. These are acts that, according to Ros Ballaster in her Introduction to the novel, “[...] tend towards the extension and reflection of his own economic and social power at the expense of his neighbours and the environment [...]” (BALLASTER, 2007, p. XXIII). In *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen compares the changes made by John Dashwood, which are either solely aesthetic or meant to benefit only himself, with those that one of the heroes of the novel, Colonel Brandon, makes in his own estate, which have in view the wellbeing not only of himself, but also that of his tenants, with an evident recommendation of the latter.

Likewise, in *Northanger Abbey* and *Mansfield Park* we see characters that are, as Marilyn Butler classes them, “distasteful improvers” (BUTLER, 2006). In her Introduction to *Northanger Abbey*, Butler states that General Tilney, the villain of the novel and owner of the estate after which it is named, “[...] exhibits the unacceptable face of contemporary capitalism” (BUTLER, 2006) in his interest in procuring every latest technology in order to have the best possible garden to impress his guests and satisfy his pride. To Butler, with his

modernizing fever, the General loses all claims to be considered the generous squire, and, rather, occupies the place of the self-centered aristocrat, both stock characters in eighteenth-century literature that she believed were reworked by Austen in her novels. In this reworking, the aristocrat became the selfish member of the gentry who was unconcerned with the needs of the poor, such as John Dashwood, General Tilney and the foolish Mr. Rushworth, a minor character from *Mansfield Park* who is the owner of an ancient estate and, albeit devoid of any real taste, decides to make considerable changes in its grounds in order to better fit with the aesthetic notions of the time.

Another function of setting in Jane Austen's novels comes through the discussions on the part of her characters of the notion of "picturesque", a term that was much in vogue during her lifetime. The definition of what was picturesque – that is, the sort of beauty which possessed any quality that would make it look particularly pleasing when portrayed on a painting – was mainly established by artist and writer William Gilpin (1724-1804) in a series of six books entitled *Observations on Various Parts of Great Britain*, which was published between 1782 and 1809, and in the book *Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape*, published in 1792. Henry Austen in his "Biographical Notice of the Author" comments that his sister was, from a very early age, "[...] enamoured of Gilpin on the Picturesque" (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 33). This infatuation, however, did not prevent her from using Gilpin as yet another target for her irony. In "Evelyn", one of the pieces of the juvenilia, the hero admires the beauty of an estate because of, among other things "[...] four white Cows which were disposed at equal distances from each other" (AUSTEN, 1993, p. 176). This is evidently an ironic reference to Gilpin, since the grouping of cattle was one of the subjects that he discussed at some length in his books on picturesque beauty.

Gilpin's works would once again be referenced by Austen in *Sense and Sensibility*, her first published novel, where the characters' different opinions about the picturesque are very important to determine their personality. In an important scene, picturesque theory is debated by the heroines Marianne and Elinor and by Edward Ferrars, the man with whom Elinor is in love. Marianne, who values feelings over reason, also values beauty over utility, and declares that she has great admiration for the picturesque, only lamenting that this sentiment has become rather too commonplace and lost its originality. Edward, on the other hand, states that landscape should be judged according to the economic advantages it may yield, and that no aesthetic beauty is reason enough to admire something that is unpractical or useless:

I like a fine prospect, but not on picturesque principles. I do not like crooked, twisted, blasted trees. I admire them much more if they are tall, straight, and flourishing. I do not like ruined, tattered cottages. I am not fond of nettles, or thistles, or heath blossoms. I have more pleasure in a snug farm-house than a watch-tower—and a troop of tidy, happy villagers please me better than the finest banditti in the world (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 95-96).

Marianne is horrified by this speech, but Elinor tries to find a compromise between her sister's and her lover's views. She comments that she suspects Edward to be exaggerating precisely because he wishes to escape the picturesque craze that was going on at the time. To Elinor, "Because he believes many people pretend to more admiration of the beauties of nature than they really feel, and is disgusted with such pretensions, he affects greater indifference and less discrimination in viewing them himself than he possesses" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 95). Ros Ballaster affirms that Elinor is trying to find a balance between artistic and practical responses to nature. Thus, in *Sense and Sensibility*, this one scene on the picturesque helps to delineate three major characters and also, through the contrast between Marianne's more radical views with Elinor's more sensible ones, to include a critique of those of the upper classes who saw the countryside merely as a subject for their paintings, forgetting that it also provided shelter and livelihood to the majority of the English population.

A discussion about landscape in Jane Austen's novels, can, therefore, be a key to her political views. By portraying fanatics for picturesque aesthetics and injudicious improvers of country estates as silly or reprehensible characters, she was criticizing those who favored beauty while neglecting what was the essence of the country she so loved: its communities. Marilyn Butler mentions a controversy that was widely known in England in the 1790s, in which two landowners from Hereford, Uvedale Price and Richard Payne Knight, attacked the purely aesthetic theories of Humphry Repton in a series of essays and open letters, calling for a more socially conscious style of agrarian improvement (BUTLER, 2006). She speculates that Austen, by portraying the proponents of landscape improvement in such an unfavorable light in her novels, was agreeing with Price and Knight's view.

Thus, Austen's politics are, as always, subtle and elusive, but pointing towards a defense of those in a position of oppression. In *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* (2006), Barbara Britton Wenner states that she means to investigate "[...] the social, physical and cultural importance of landscape and the complex way in which they interact in Jane Austen's fiction" (WENNER, 2006, p. XIII-XIV). To Wenner, landscape in Austen is clearly gendered: while her male characters are masters of the land, the female characters are very often marginalized and must find their way through settings over which they have little

or no control. She states that Austen's protagonists use landscapes to observe the world, to take shelter and to embark on processes of self-discovery, declaring that "[...] a clever tension may exist in literary landscape: the landscape influences the behavior of the characters, but characters, especially Jane Austen's heroines, find ways of challenging the landscape and find new meaning there" (WENNER, 2006, p.2).

Reflections about space are productive ways to think about mobility, since the latter is, of course, directly related to the former. Thus, I will use Wenner's statement to observe that Jane Austen's heroines also need to find ways of challenging the restrictions to their mobility, and that the way they deal with these restrictions can be used as keys to their personality. In Jane Austen's six major novels, the ways male and female characters move are very different: while young, unmarried men from the middle class, even if not very rich, need only jump on a horse after a moment's notice to change their location, to young women, even a simple walk through the neighborhood is a source of gossip among the village, and every movement is controlled and scrutinized. With this difference, and the effect it has over her female characters, I believe Jane Austen was calling attention to how women had their freedom of movement defined solely because of their gender, and criticizing this and other forms of curtailing their independence.

2.2 Gendered spaces and gendered mobility

In the book *Space, Place and Gender* (1994), social scientist and geographer Doreen B. Massey explains that, in today's globalized world, there is an increasing uncertainty about what constitutes a place, due to a widespread feeling that, as means of communication and means of transport become ever faster, the specific characteristics of local communities are homogenized, and spatial barriers rendered meaningless. Massey, however, calls attention to the fact that this uncertainty is a product of an ethnocentric view, since colonized peoples have known for centuries what it feels like to experience a sudden flow of foreign merchandise and strange customs, and this is only being treated as novelty by a portion of the world's population that can be considered privileged. She also states that, while economic forces have undoubtedly helped shape flows of movement throughout history, there are other factors that clearly influence those who move, when they move, and how they move – and one of them is gender.

Gender is one of the variables that determine the degree to which, for example, we travel between countries, or walk through the streets at night. Massey mentions that countless surveys have shown that women's mobility, even in the Western world of today, is restricted if compared to men's, and that they suffer limitations imposed solely on the basis of their sex. She explains that, as some groups of people are in charge of mobility, this leads to the possibility of developing a politics of mobility. She states that "[...] mobility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power. It is not simply a question of unequal distribution [...]. It is that the mobility and control of some groups can actively weaken other people" (MASSEY, 1994, p. 150). To Massey, in the context of today's world, where you can find the same clothes, the same music and the same food almost everywhere you go, instead of lamenting the demise of local communities, one should seize the opportunity of developing a more progressive concept of place. To her, no place is static – rather, a place's uniqueness comes from the specific way in which all the social relations at work within it function there. Therefore, a more complex way of conceptualizing place is analyzing the individuals that inhabit it and their social interactions.

Linda McDowell, in the book *Gender, Identity and Place* (1999), agrees with Massey in stating that places are not simply points on a map, but rather made through interactions that create both social and spatial boundaries. Different groups that inhabit the same physical space can have a very different experience of it: those who hold more power have the ability to exclude those who have less. Even though many feminist scholars have called attention to the fact that the experiences of women are not homogeneous, being affected by, for example, factors like social class or race and ethnicity, McDowell believes that there needs to be a theoretical space that defines sexual difference and gendered relations as a specific axis of power relations. To McDowell, despite the fact that feminist scholarship over the last decades has demonstrated that binary gender divisions are flawed, and despite a growing recognition of the plurality of experiences, the idea that women and men are associated with certain characteristics remains extremely powerful in most of the world. The assumption of categorical differences between women and men influences our idea of ourselves, our daily interactions and our institutional structures; and this categorization is not only binary, but also hierarchical, constructing women as inferior to men.

One of these categorical differences is the idea that women are associated with the private and men, with the public sphere. Because of that fact, one of the many aspects of daily life that is affected by binary gender divisions is the definition of which places should include or exclude women, and how and when women should move from one place to another. As

McDowell affirms, “This binary division is also deeply implicated in the social production of space, in assumptions about the ‘natural’ and built environments and in the sets of regulations which influence who should occupy which spaces and who should be excluded” (MCDOWELL, 1999, p.11). Thus, to McDowell, gender divisions and spatial divisions are mutually constitutive:

The idea that women have a particular place is the basis not only of the social organization of a whole range of institutions from the family to the workplace, from the shopping mall to political institutions, but also is an essential feature of Western Enlightenment thought, the structure and division of knowledge and the subjects that might be studied within these divisions (MCDOWELL, 1999, p.12).

McDowell points out that in advanced industrial societies the control of men over women is constructed and enforced through a number of ways, including social conventions and the legal system. As an example, she cites the fact that in Britain, until the passing of the Married Woman’s Property Act in 1870, women were entirely dependent either on their fathers or on their husbands, and had no individual existence under English law. When they married, all their property passed into the hands of their husbands, and they were allotted only a weekly or monthly allowance. Furthermore, women had no right to own property, sign contracts, sue for divorce or, in the case of a divorce being obtained by the man, try to gain custody of their children. Jane Austen’s novels were published in England between 1811 and 1818, and, therefore, in a time where these rules still applied. An example of this is the allusion to the so-called “pin-money”, the allowance that women received after their marriage and which, in *Pride and Prejudice*, is listed as one of the advantages of Elizabeth’s marriage to Darcy, who are, respectively, the heroine and the wealthy hero of the novel: “How rich and how great you will be! What pin-money, what jewels, what carriages you will have!” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 357).

This control was also expressed in the rules that dictated from which places women should be excluded and how they should move, something that Roger Sales, in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (1996), calls “the politics of movement” (SALES, 1996)⁵. While analyzing *Emma*, Sales notes how Jane Austen’s text shows the very different way the male characters and the female characters move, drawing attention to the gendered control of transport. In fact, it would be a long time before British women began to move more freely between the public and the private spaces. In *Beginning Modernism* (2011), Jeff

⁵ The edition used here is a Kindle edition without page numbers.

Wallace, while discussing *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), states that Virginia Woolf, by having the characters Clarissa Dalloway and her daughter Elizabeth Dalloway walk about London, was emphasizing that the ability to stroll through the city alone was relatively new for women in the 1920s (WALLACE, 2011). In Jane Austen's novels, written over a century earlier than Woolf's, it was virtually impossible for any woman in Clarissa and Elizabeth's social class – and in the class of every Austenian heroine – to do so. The social rules and conventions that circumscribed their movements can be clearly understood through a brief analysis of contemporary conduct books, to which we will proceed in the next session.

2.3 Conduct material in Jane Austen's time

Conduct books or advice books were extremely popular in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They differ from the more commonly known etiquette books in that their objective is not only to tell readers how to behave in certain social situations, but how to improve their characters and morals through the practice of Christian virtues such as honesty, fidelity and modesty. Some conduct books were written to men and children, but most of them were directed to women. Two examples of conduct books that sold extremely well and were still being printed when Jane Austen wrote her novels are James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1766) and Thomas Gisborne's *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797); both, while ostensibly meaning to emphasize the value of women, advised them to be subordinate to men in all legal and financial matters.

As Alison G. Sullo way explains in *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (1989) the great majority of conduct book writers affirmed that women were naturally weaker and, therefore, inferior, in body as well as mind. Thomas Gisborne, for example stated that women were born with a natural tenderness for husbands and children, but, at the same time, with minds that, by their innate structures, had greater propensity to failings better endured by the other sex. Both were reasons to keep women confined to the home, which was the place perfectly suited to display female excellency and also to save women from temptation. Therefore, women's faults as well as their virtues destined them to the domestic sphere, leaving all public employments in the hands of men (SULLOWAY, 1989).

The book *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* (1993), by Daniel Pool, is a guide to daily life in nineteenth-century England that uses examples from several novels to

illustrate the customs and laws of the period. In the section “Basic Etiquette”, Pool’s first item in the list of guidelines for ladies states:

If unmarried and under thirty, she is never to be in the company of a man without a chaperone. Except for a walk to church or a park in the early morning, she may not walk alone but should always be accompanied by another lady, a man or a servant. An even more restrictive view was that if she could not walk with her younger sisters and their governess, or the maid could not be spared to walk with her, she should stay at home or confine herself to the garden (POOL, 1993, p. 55).

This excerpt from Pool’s book, which can be used as an amalgam of conduct books from Jane Austen’s time, shows how prevalent was the view that women should be protected from the outdoors. According to Mary Poovey, this was due to the fact that the very emotional responsiveness that was thought to form the basis of women’s natural benevolence, while productive of the greatest social and personal goods if properly contained in the home, could rapidly degenerate into sexual appetite if exposed to outside temptations (POOVEY, 1984). To Poovey, in order to understand what were the qualities most valued by the society in which Jane Austen lived and, furthermore, what were the arguments used to defend them, it is essential to analyze contemporary conduct material, because it “[...] provides the best access both to the ways in which this culture defined female nature and to the ways in which a woman of this period would have experienced the social and psychological dimensions of this ideology” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 16).

Jane Austen specifically mentions James Fordyce’s *Sermons to Young Women* in *Pride and Prejudice*, and the way she does so provides clear evidences on what she thought of works of such a nature. The book is picked by Mr. Collins, the pompous clergyman who is visiting the heroine and her family, as suitable to be read aloud for the entertainment of the ladies present:

[...] 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, 2002, p. 67).

The fact that Mr. Collins does not read novels is, for the attentive Austen reader, already enough to tell us what the author thinks of this character. Austen, who was a great novel reader and would make a spirited defense of the novel in *Northanger Abbey*, certainly does not mean to imply that Mr. Collins is a wise man by making that specific choice of reading material. And a familiarity with the content of the *Sermons* can quickly tell us why:

James Fordyce, for example, suggests that rather than reading books, women should read men, in order to make themselves agreeable and useful; and advises them to refrain from trying to be witty, lest they should displease their husbands with their sharp comments. A woman should at all times be self-effacing, for “If aught on earth can present the image of celestial excellence in its softest array, it is surely an accomplished Woman, in whom purity and meekness, intelligence and modesty, mingle their charms” (FORDYCE, 2012, p. 4).

Pride and Prejudice, however, is precisely the Austen novel which has its wittiest heroine, Elizabeth Bennet, who, when refusing Mr. Collins’ marriage proposal, begs to have her refusal interpreted not as coquetry, but as the truth spoken by a “rational creature” (AUSTEN, 2002, p. 106). In her Introduction to the novel, Vivien Jones connects this phrase of Elizabeth’s with a quote from Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*: “My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone (WOLLSTONECRAFT, 1993). As explained in Section 1.3, which analyzes different critical studies about Jane Austen’s work, Jones’ view was that, in the creation of Elizabeth, the author was making a strategic assimilation of ideas for change that arose after the French Revolution, such as those espoused by Wollstonecraft, that defended much more independence for her sex. Elizabeth, indeed, not only goes against the feminine ideal of the conduct book because of what she deems “the liveliness of [her] mind” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 359), but also through her physical vigor and her unwillingness to accept the forced confinement indoors to which women of her class were subjected.

Not all of Austen’s female characters are like Elizabeth, however. In her six novels, she created female characters of widely different personalities, that conform more or less to the image of the model woman constructed by writers of conduct material of the period. In the next section, I will analyze how their behavior was expressed in situations concerning mobility, which will allow us to see Austen’s critical stance against Fordyce and his peers’ works and ideology; a critical stance that, in turn, is part of the author’s overall critique of female oppression in her society.

2.4 Restrictions to mobility as a critical device in Jane Austen’s six novels

What Doreen B. Massey calls a politics of mobility and Roger Sales calls a politics of movement can be clearly identified in Jane Austen's novels through an analysis of the way the female characters move, or are restricted from doing so. Among the heroines we have Emma, the only Austen protagonist to spend the entire length of a novel in the same location, and whose immobility influences her entire personality; Fanny, who is moved about according to the wishes of others, never her own; Elizabeth, the more energetic protagonist, the one mostly associated with the verb "to run"; Anne, who dreams to be the wife of a sailor and to travel around the globe with him, while in reality hardly ever leaving her father's house; Elinor, who, restrained in her movements as in everything else, spends most of the novel waiting; her sister Marianne, who, although much more impulsive, is still restricted by convention from moving according to her will; and Catherine, who manages to break free from those who mean to direct her actions. Their movements, or lack thereof, determine the fates of all seven: an indication that Jane Austen saw the relevance not only of space, but of mobility to the development of character.

2.4.1 Immobility and gender: the daily happiness of private life

The society that Jane Austen depicted in her novels had strict rules that set limits on many aspects of life, regulating introductions, visits, dances, walks and travels, among others. *Pride and Prejudice*, for example, opens with the mother of the heroine haranguing her husband to go visit the young man that is about to move into the neighborhood; she is so intent in having him do so because the young man, being rich, is marriageable, and she wishes to visit him also and introduce him to her daughters – something that could only be done in accordance to social rules if the man of the family began the acquaintance. In the fiction produced by women writers that were contemporaries of Austen, there are all kinds of reactions to these social norms, ranging from the intensively defensive to the openly critical. However, as a whole, the characters of women novelists were observant of them, either because the authors really believed that they were beneficial to society or because they were afraid of being accused of lack of modesty, something that could determine the failure of a book. Thus, in the words of Mary Poovey, most novels written by female writers "[...] echo conduct books almost verbatim, stressing self-control and self-denial to the exclusion of

psychological complexity and attributing almost all initiative to the evil characters rather than to the heroines” (POOVEY, 1984, p. 38).

Austen mocks the novelistic habit of preventing women from taking any initiative in her satirical novel *Northanger Abbey*, by including a scene in which the narrator hopes that Catherine, her heroine, would not allow herself to dream of a young man after only one meeting, “[...] for if it be true [...] that no young lady can be justified in falling in love before the gentleman’s love is declared, it must be very improper that a young lady should dream of a gentleman before the gentleman is first known to have dreamt of her” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 51). By demanding of her heroine the absurdity of trying to control her own dreams, Austen presents an incisive critique of the fiction of her day and of the social norms that were reproduced in this fiction. In her other mature novels, the critique is still present, yet the tone is more serious than in the light-hearted *Northanger Abbey*; and the fact that Austen’s heroines are barred from taking action in several situations is a source of real suffering, placing them in a state of physical and emotional immobility that was stifling and tormenting. Ronald Blythe comments on “[...] the trapped, immobilized, even the *caged* state of the female in contrast to the darting quality of the male, who is always walking, riding, entering and leaving rooms and moving about generally” (BLYTHE, 1966, p. 29). This forced immobility is so present in all of the novels that it was used by Austen as a plot strategy that creates the suspense that protracts happiness until the end of each.

All of Austen’s novels address the question of female modesty, by discussing what were the consequences of either following or breaking the code of propriety that ruled women’s lives. No Austen protagonist is as daring as, for example, the heroine that Mary Hays created in *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), an epistolary novel that features a woman that proposes repeatedly to a man, listing the qualities that would enable her to make him happy (JOHNSON, 1988). However, some of them are bold, such as the aforementioned Catherine or Elizabeth Bennet from *Pride and Prejudice*, both young women who speak their minds and show the value they place on their individual choices. Yet even the bolder heroines can only passively wait for the heroes during the so-called season of courtship, with every step of the way, from introduction to proposal, having to be taken by the men. As Claudia Johnson states, “They can scrutinize their suitors’ gestures, review their every word, differentiate acts of civility from acts of particular affection and form all manner of conjectures about the likelihood of receiving proposals. But finally they can only wait” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 59).

In Austen's first published novel, *Sense and Sensibility*, the two heroines, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, might be said to embody, respectively, conformity to and despise for conventions. The events that happen to one are mirrored by the events that happen to the other; but their reactions to them are antithetic. Both fall in love and both are disappointed by their suitors; but, while Elinor is discreet, cautious and struggles to conquer her emotions, Marianne not only does not wish to hide her feelings, but even feels contempt for the idea of doing so. According to Tony Tanner, "[...] between Marianne's compulsion to scream and Elinor's instinct to screen, Jane Austen brings home to us some of the problems and paradoxes involved in life in society as she knew it" (TANNER, 1969, p. 18). One of these problems was the fact that the more open and impulsive a woman was, the more she would suffer in that society, because her utter dependence on men required the patience and self-control that Elinor is able to display.

As will be discussed in another section, when *Sense and Sensibility* opens, Elinor and Marianne have to leave Norland, the home where they were raised, and move to Barton Cottage. The situation in this new neighborhood is more physically confined; the cottage where they live is much smaller and, because they are comparatively poor and unable to keep a carriage, they can only visit the one house within walking distance that is inhabited by a family of the same social class. The owner of this house, Sir John, offers them the use of their carriage, but their mother proudly refuses to accept: "[...] the independence of Mrs. Dashwood's spirit overcame the wish of society for her children" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 42). Everything conspires to leave the Dashwoods somewhat secluded: their economic circumstances, their mother's temperament, and their sex. Had they been young men instead of young women in the same situation, they could have been much more mobile, as is proved by the movements of the men around them.

When the Dashwoods move to their new home, Elinor has already met her lover Edward; and immediately after they are settled, all the women in the house begin to expect a visit from him. While they are waiting, Marianne makes the acquaintance of the man with whom she will fall in love, Willoughby, and he begins to make constant visits to Barton Cottage. Interestingly, Marianne becomes settled in Barton Cottage more quickly because of the presence of Willoughby there: "Her heart was devoted to Willoughby, and the fond attachment to Norland, which she brought with her from Sussex, was more likely to be softened than she had thought it possible before, by the charms which his society bestowed on her present home" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 55). Willoughby, likewise, professes to consider the cottage his home, wishing that no alteration be made to it, however imperfect it may be. But,

as Marianne will learn, Willoughby is fickle; he leaves as suddenly as he had appeared, going to London. And Marianne, as free as she is with her body and her mind, cannot follow, but has to wait to be invited by someone who can take her to the city in their carriage; because it was considered unseemly for young women to travel by public transport, especially without a chaperone.

Elinor and Marianne then receive an invitation to come to London that is socially acceptable. To Marianne, this is intensely desirable; however, to Elinor, it is not, because she has found out that Edward is engaged to another woman and wishes to avoid any chance of seeing him again. Yet Elinor, with her characteristic self-control, does not protest, and goes to the capital with her sister. Once they get there, Marianne begins frantically to write to Willoughby, a fact that she does not bother to hide from her sister and not even from their hostess. For a young woman to take that step was such a serious issue that, when Elinor sees the first letter, she becomes convinced that Marianne must be officially engaged to Willoughby, even though nothing has been announced by either. Willoughby, however, does not answer her letters and does not visit them – and they, of course, are barred by the social norms to go visit him. When the Dashwood sisters finally come across Willoughby at a ball, Marianne shows her impulsivity once more by addressing him first and holding out her hand. Willoughby receives her coldly and leaves almost immediately, causing Marianne to nearly faint from the shock. She begs her sister to go to him and force him to come back. But the prudent Elinor knows this would cause a scene and says: “No, my dearest Marianne, you must wait” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 168).

The wait of the Dashwoods continues until the very end of the book. Marianne finds out that Willoughby is a scoundrel who has impregnated and abandoned another young woman and, because of this, was disinherited. He becomes engaged to a richer woman, a woman he later marries; and the engagement of Edward also becomes public. Elinor then resigns herself to expect news of the marriage, until it finally comes by means of a servant, who tells them he saw the new couple passing through town. She continues to expect more details, waiting for any letter that might contain them; until Edward himself arrives, with the news that it was his brother who married his bride and that he is now free to propose and be accepted by Elinor. Marianne nearly dies from the heartbreak, having rendered herself vulnerable to the wiles of an unscrupulous man by the frankness and naïveté that are precisely what make her such an engaging character. Many critics see this as a sign that Austen approved of the rules that advised modesty and self-effacement in women. However, Claudia Johnson notices that Willoughby himself is never punished for his flaws, while the young

woman he disgraces must suffer for her actions for the rest of her life. To her, with Marianne's fate, Austen was rather warning her female readers that, due to the fragility of their position, it was better for them to be on their guard, for Willoughby's actions are "[...] the effects of established and accepted social practices for men of family, not as aberrations from them. It is their commonplace lapses towards women that render female manners so desperately important and so impossibly problematic" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 58).

In *Persuasion* it is the heroine's compliance with social rules that causes her immobility and her waiting, which last longer than that of any other Austen protagonist. In her youth, Anne Elliot falls in love and is proposed to by Frederick Wentworth, a man who is her social and economic inferior, since he is a poor officer of the Navy and she is the daughter of a baronet. Obeying the wishes of her foolish and vain father and of a family friend who, albeit kind, is also snobbish and prejudiced, she refuses Frederick. This plunges her in an eight-year period of deep melancholy, during which she hardly ever stirs out of Kellynch Hall, where she lives, largely because her father and sister are too selfish to invite her in their trips, and she has no other means to travel. This physical immobility has the effect of freezing her heart, for the lack of a second attachment makes her incapable of forgetting her first love: "[...] no aid had been given in a change of place [...] or in any novelty or enlargement of society. – No one had ever come within the Kellynch circle, who could bear a comparison with Frederick Wentworth, as he stood in her memory" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 28).

When Frederick and Anne meet again, he has become a wealthy, dashing captain, while she, at twenty-seven years of age, is considered by society as being past the most desirable age for a woman. Frederick has travelled the world while Anne has remained static, both physically and emotionally. She dreams of what her life could have been like if she had accepted Frederick's proposal; she envies the fate of his sister, Mrs. Croft, who married an Admiral and travelled extensively with him, being the only female character in all of Austen's novels that we know to have gone abroad; and is charmed by the informality and warmth of another family of officers she meets:

There was so much attachment to Captain Wentworth in all this, and such a bewitching charm in a degree of hospitality so uncommon, so unlike the usual style of give-and-take invitations, and dinners of formality and display, that Anne felt her spirits not likely to be benefited by an increasing acquaintance among his brother-officers. "These would have been all my friends," was her thought; and she had to struggle against a great tendency to lowness. (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 91-92).

Anne is too humble to believe that she could possibly have held her sway over Frederick's affections after so much time has passed, and too modest to dare declare hers outright. Since Frederick really believes that he has forgotten Anne (even though the narrator makes it clear that he may not know his own heart), they spend almost the entire length of the novel unaware of one another's feelings. Only when Anne sees that Frederick is jealous of her does she become anxious to express herself to him; but, being ever mindful of propriety, she must find a way to do it that does not break the rules that forbid initiative. This was very common in contemporary fiction, as mentioned by Mary Poovey: "Forbidden by convention to declare their desires, the heroines must struggle, often ineffectually, to communicate by indirection or even deceit, and the interest of the plot lies in the nuances of frustration and achievement that mark their efforts" (POOVEY, 1984, p. 43).

Unable to have a direct conversation with Wentworth on the subject, Anne must use a third party to convince him of what she feels. While discussing men's and women's different habits regarding love with a character named Captain Harville, and knowing that she is being overheard by Frederick, Anne uses the subject to explain the state of her own heart. She claims that women's love is more constant, that they are able to love even when all hope is gone, and links this to the physical immobility that they have to endure:

We certainly do not forget you, so soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps, our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 218).

It is curious that *Persuasion*, Jane Austen's last finished novel, the one she wrote when she was oldest, is also the one that tells her most unlikely love story. While all the other heroes and heroines – with the possible exception of the couple in *Pride and Prejudice* – have more prosaic ways of being united, in *Persuasion* the author asks us to believe that the sensible words of Anne Elliot are not wholly true; because, after all, Frederick Wentworth, in spite of the travels and experiences lived in nearly a decade away, is also still in love with her. Perhaps what the narrator says of Anne Elliot is also true of Austen: "She had been forced into prudence in her youth, she learned romance as she grew older – the natural sequel of an unnatural beginning" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 29). Whatever be the case, the tenacity of Frederick's attachment given the circumstances, although charming, is not very probable; and

this improbability serves as a reminder that for most women, the rules of society were an obstacle to happiness, rather than conducive to it.

Sense and Sensibility and *Persuasion* contain many examples of how mobility was much more difficult for British women of the gentry than for the men; but in no other Austen does this become clearer than in *Emma*. Emma Woodhouse, the novel's protagonist, is the only one of Austen's heroines to never leave the small town where she was born; throughout the novel, people come and go from the village of Highbury, but Emma stays altogether static. She has never been to school; she has never seen the sea; she has never even gone to a picturesque spot named Box Hill, even though it is only seven miles away from Highbury; as a matter of fact, she hardly ever leaves her house. This is due to the fact that her father is a hypochondriac who is afraid to stir out of doors, and thinks of three turns around the garden as considerable exercise. The immobility of her father dictates Emma's immobility, but, because she is the mistress of his house, since her mother died when she was an infant, she believes herself to be independent. However, she is wrong about this, as she is wrong about everything else; if Fanny never errs, Emma is the opposite: she, though clever and charming, knows so little of the world that she is never right.

Since Emma believes herself to be independent, she has no wish to marry; and this robs her of the only suitable occupation for a young, unmarried woman of her class. She is dislocated from her proper sphere, which leaves her idle and out of place. As Ronald Blythe puts in his Introduction, "Her liveliness is symptomatic of a caged bird's dissatisfaction" (BLYTHE, 1966, p. 13). Since cannot busy herself in trying to find a husband, she decides to make matches for those around her. Her first object is Harriet Smith, a young woman who lives in a boarding school in Highbury and whose parents are unknown, making her, in Emma's eyes, in need of proper guidance. Blythe sums up well Emma's relationship with Harriet: "Her need for a human being to call her own is evident in the way she treats Harriet, sometimes as a little sister, sometimes as a lady-in-waiting, but more often as a pretty doll which she intends to manipulate according to her fancy" (BLYTHE, 1966, p. 18).

Emma provides her guidance for Harriet by convincing her that she must refuse the proposal of a farmer who asked for her hand and wait for a more eligible match; a match she soon finds herself in the person of the village clergyman, Mr. Elton. Emma convinces herself that Mr. Elton is in love with Harriet, and this is where the brilliance of Austen's narrative technique begins to unfold. Even though we, as in the other novels, mostly see the world through the protagonists' eyes, the external events that Austen depicts are enough to show the discerning reader that Emma is incorrect; Mr. Elton is, in fact, addressing himself to her. This

is only the first of the several romantic mistakes that Emma will commit throughout the novel; later on, she will believe herself to be in love with a young man named Frank Churchill, when she in fact is in love with Mr. Knightley; she will believe another young woman from Highbury, Jane Fairfax, to be in love with a certain Mr. Nixon, when she is in fact in love with Frank Churchill; and finally, she will believe that Harriet is in love with Frank Churchill, when she is in fact in love with Mr. Knightley also. It is the latter discovery, and the fear that Mr. Knightley might reciprocate Harriet's affection, that leads Emma to finally understand her own heart and know that she does not want anyone but herself to marry him.

Susan Morgan, in an article written for the Jane Austen Society of North America's online magazine entitled "Adoring the Girl Next Door", makes the point that Jane Austen, in all of her other mature novels, uses the strategy of moving her heroines away from their homes in order to educate them; and that Emma's blindness to the feelings of others as well as hers is the author's way of making the same argument by a different route. To Morgan, the fact that Emma is wrong so many times "offers claims for the value of wider experience, of literal as well as perceptual movement out from the confines of self into the larger world" (MORGAN, 2000)⁶. Emma's relentless immobility leads to her false sense of certainty, for, since she is the cleverest young woman in Highbury, she comes to think of herself as the cleverest young woman in the world. Her overly confined life leads to a lack of experience that makes her fall into the series of emotional traps that occur in the novel. As Morgan puts it, she has been shaped by a father who refuses to move out of the small boundaries in which she rules: "Mr. Woodhouse, that gentle tyrant, has taught Emma well, has assured her of her superiority in the little world they dominate and has, through his very inaction, encouraged her in the belief that the only way always to be first is never to leave home" (MORGAN, 2000).

Austen does find a happy ending for this remarkable heroine, "[...] this sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults [...]" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 371). Emma marries Mr. Knightley, who defers to her father's inaction by moving to her house, rather than taking Emma to live with him, as was the custom. Austen closes the novel with the promise that Emma will benefit from Knightley's experience, and furthermore, that he will take her to see at least a little of the world herself. They go spend their honeymoon by the sea, thus widening the horizons of this Austen heroine who learns that, in spite of "[...] the daily

⁶ This is an online article with no page numbers.

happiness of private life [...]” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 100) women were taught to relish, sharing the public life of men had manifold advantages.

2.4.2 Mobility and powerlessness: the danger of being forgotten

Jane Austen’s interest in women’s lack of agency over their own mobility is perhaps most visible in her choice to portray, in her fiction, young ladies who are obliged to move out of their childhood homes against their will. As we have seen, the first work of Austen’s that was concerned with such a situation was the juvenilia piece *Catherine, or the Bower*, in which one of the protagonist’s friends is sent to India to find a husband, an experience that the author’s own aunt, Philadelphia Austen, went through. Austen would return to this subject in her mature work, and give it even more prominence than she did in *Catherine*. Three of her finished novels – *Sense and Sensibility*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* – have heroines who are somehow or other expelled from the homes where they were born, and this is the very event that propels the entire plot.

All of Austen’s novels were published in the 1810s, and, therefore, after the author herself had to leave her childhood home in Steventon and move to Bath, a decision that was made by her father and, by all accounts, against her will. More than one critic has noted that this move coincides with the beginning of a ten-year period in Austen’s career during which she wrote almost nothing – a period all the more marked by the fact that it was both preceded and followed by years of intense literary activity. Whether Austen was drawing on her own life experience when she depicted similar moves in the three novels above mentioned is impossible to assert – there is no mention of it in any of the surviving letters. In any case, one may affirm that she considered forced moves to be momentous occasions, worthy of engendering all kinds of different consequences for her female protagonists.

In *Sense and Sensibility* this move takes place due to the particular position in which women of the gentry were placed by the laws that regulated the inheritance of land estates during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Jane Austen’s time, the basis of wealth, status and power was fundamentally the ownership of land. In order to maintain their influence and their fortune, the great landed families found it was more advantageous to transmit their estates intact, generation after generation, without dividing it between the sons

and daughters of the owner or selling any part of it to anyone. Two laws were enforced in order to secure this: the right of primogeniture, which meant that the entire estate was left to the eldest male relative of the next generation, leaving all the women and the younger men as dependents or with the obligation of finding other sources of income; and the law of entail, which restricted the rights the heir had over the land, so that even he could not dispose of it as he wished, having to leave it intact for yet another generation. Women were usually not considered able to inherit an estate because, when they married, it would be passed into the hands of their husband, since wives were not allowed to own property; therefore, to keep the prestige of a specific family, it was preferable to leave the estate to a distant male relative than to a closer female one, something that became a very uncommon practice (POOL, 1993).

In *Sense and Sensibility*, Austen foregrounds the workings of inheritance laws by opening the novel with them: in the first chapter, the author introduces and then almost immediately kills off an unnamed character – designated merely as “the old Gentleman” (AUSTEN, 2003, p. 5) – who is the owner of the Norland estate, where the heroines, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood, spend their childhood. When the old Gentleman dies, he leaves the estate to Elinor and Marianne’s father, but requires in his will that he should, in his turn, bequeath it only to his male heirs:

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 division of the estate, or by any sale of its valuable woods (AUSTEN, 2007, p.6).

Mr. Dashwood, therefore, in spite of wishing to provide for his daughters, is obliged by law to leave his property to his son and his grandson, even though they are both already wealthy and in less need of it than the females of the family. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the protagonist Elizabeth and her four sisters will also not be able to inherit their father’s estate, because “[...] unfortunately for his daughters [it] was entailed in default of heirs male, on a distant relation” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 29). However, while the entail over the estate in *Pride and Prejudice* was not the doing of the heroine’s father, who evidently received the inheritance on these terms himself, the old Gentleman from *Sense and Sensibility* makes a choice – and a choice that, as Austen points out, is painfully arbitrary. He decides to leave the entire Norland estate to three succeeding male generations because he is charmed by the child of four years old mentioned in the passage above, whose tricks and noise, displayed on occasional visits to Norland, “[...] had so far gained on the affection of his uncle [...] as to

outweigh all the value of all the attention which, for years, he had received from his niece and his daughters” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 6). To Claudia Johnson, when Austen explains the rationale behind the inheritance, she is criticizing the framework of the patriarchal ideology that regulated land ownership, and by doing this she “[...] enables, indeed invites, us to stand far enough outside that ideology for a moment to see it as capricious rather than steady [...]” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 52).

The practical consequence for Elinor and Marianne is that, when their father dies, they are left with practically no money – since all of his income came from the revenues of the Norland estate – and in need of a new home. Their brother John Dashwood and his insufferable wife lose no time in taking possession of their inheritance: “No sooner was his father’s funeral over, then Mrs. John Dashwood, without sending any notice of her intention to her mother-in-law, arrived with her child and their attendants” (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 7). Soon, the presence of Mr. and Mrs. John Dashwood makes it impossible for Elinor, Marianne and their mother to stay in Norland any longer, even in the condition of visitors. Their treatment on the part of John Dashwood is another critique of the social rules of the period, for, if society dictated that the eldest male heir was to receive the entire estate, on the other hand it considered it his duty to provide for his female relatives. The Dashwood sisters, however, are three times disappointed here: the old uncle forgets them in his will, their father dies unable to leave them anything and their brother, in spite of having made a deathbed promise to his father that he would assist them, is easily convinced by his wife to go back on his word, in one of Austen’s most grimly hilarious dialogues.

The Dashwoods then move to Barton Cottage, a house that is offered to them on very cheap terms, as a favor, by one of the mother’s cousins, Sir John. Sir John, then, fills the shoes of the Dashwood’s closest male relatives, and provides them with the shelter and the respectable society they need in order not to fall further down in the social scale, something that their scant financial means would inevitably cause. However, in spite of his kindness, he is a noisy, meddlesome man, married to a haughty, ignorant woman. And, as the Dashwoods live very near and their mother considers that they should be grateful for their help, they are obliged to visit much more often than is agreeable, and to give up their hours to their choice of amusement or employment. As Claudia Johnson puts it, “As fortunate as Sir John’s good nature turns out to be for them, Elinor and Marianne have more than one occasion to find being drawn into Barton almost as oppressive as having been shut out of Norland” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 54).

The failure of their closest relatives to provide for them will mean that the Dashwoods must become dependent on the kindness of comparative strangers not only to have a place to live, but also to move from one place to another. When they wish to go to London, they must wait for an invitation from Sir John's mother-in-law, since their own brother does not ask them to stay in his house in town; and, when they wish to leave, they must wait for the same lady to finish her stay, because they have no other acceptable means of transport. For Marianne in particular, this forced stay in town becomes a source of deep anguish: "Marianne's impatience to be gone increased every day. She sighed for the air, the liberty, the quiet, of the country; and fancied that if any place could give her ease, Barton must do it" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 261). Elinor and Marianne's plight only ends when they marry men of suitable fortune, thus acquiring the only form of independence from their paternal family that was possible to women of their class, and having more of a say when it was time to decide when and how they wished to move.

Anne Elliot, the heroine from *Persuasion*, is similarly disappointed by her male relatives. Her foolish and vain father imprudently spends the family fortune and he is obliged to rent Kellynch Hall, the family estate, in order to make some money. Anne, who takes no part in this decision, must resign herself to a temporary move to Bath, even though she hates the idea of leaving the country and going to a big city. Since Anne only has one female sister, Kellynch Hall, much like the Bennet estate from *Pride and Prejudice*, will be inherited by a distant male cousin; and her only hope of continuing to live in her childhood home would be to marry him. As will be discussed in another section, the idea is so tempting to Anne that she actually considers it, in spite of the fact that she is in love with another man. To Anne, this attachment is powerful enough to overrule almost anything else; and a matrimonial alliance with her father's heir would have been considered completely appropriate, and even desirable, for the conventions of the times.

However, in a novel that states that a "[...] removal from one set of people to another, though at a distance of only three miles, will often include a total change of conversation, opinion, and idea" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 40), and that calls every different household a "little social commonwealth" (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 41), it is all the more remarkable that Austen chose to have her heroine abandon her roots to marry a sailor. Daniel Pool mentions that, to women who married, "[...] the deep attachment to the family property fostered by the practice of transmitting it reverently from generation to generation obviously produced emotional scars when they had to leave [...]" (POOL, 1993, p. 93). But Anne, in spite of the attachment she does feel for Kellynch and the timid personality she displays throughout the book, ends it

with a spectacular affirmation of her individuality, putting her wishes above the more conventional and socially acceptable match that is offered her.

In *Mansfield Park*, the heroine is also made to leave her father's house without a say in the decision, but it is a heroine that is not losing quite so much as the Dashwood sisters or Anne Elliot. Fanny Price is a poor relative who, at the age of ten, leaves her parent's house in Portsmouth and goes to live with her rich uncle and aunt in Mansfield Park, something that is done as a charitable office to her mother, who has little money and too many children. She is told that she should be very grateful for what is considered a great fortune by all those around her, but, being young, shy and utterly intimidated by the opulence and coldness of the Mansfield household, she spends the first days of her stay in deep misery:

The grandeur of the house astonished but could not console her. The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease; whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often retreating towards her own chamber to cry; and the little girl who was spoken of in the drawing-room when she left it at night, as seeming so desirably sensible of her peculiar good fortune, ended every day's sorrows by sobbing herself to sleep (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 51).

It is worth noting that, in this passage, the author's narrative voice is showing Fanny's conscience to the readers, and acquainting them with her extreme shyness and deep sensibility. This sensibility will be hurt for most of Fanny's time in Mansfield Park, because of her complicated position in that house: in spite of being a blood relative, she, at the same time, lacks the social status of the rest of the family and, at once, belongs and does not belong to their world. While she is above a servant or a paid companion, she leads a life that is very different from those of her cousins Maria and Julia. When the two begin to go to balls and other social functions, Fanny is required to stay at home with her aunt Lady Bertram, and keep her company; and her other aunt, Mrs. Norris, treats her as if she were her personal errand girl, sending her to fetch things and to cut flowers in the hot sun, even though this is bad for her health. When the young lady who will turn out to be her rival for the love of the hero, Mary Crawford, meets her, she asks her cousins if Fanny has "come out", a telling phrase used to describe a young woman's formal introduction into society, the time when she was expected to talk more, to wear more attractive clothes and to entertain romantic attentions from the opposite sex (POOL, 1993). The fact that they do not know how to answer is a mark of Fanny's ambiguous position.

Fanny's importance in Mansfield only increases when her female cousins go travelling, leaving her as the only young woman in the house, and when a young man of

fortune, Mr. Crawford, falls in love with her. When her uncle Sir Thomas learns that Fanny has refused Mr. Crawford's offer of marriage, he decides to do something he had not thought of doing at any time during the decade she spends in Mansfield Park: send her home to see her parents. Of course, Sir Thomas does not have Fanny's feelings in mind when he does this; the fact that she very naturally misses her family is not his inducement for sending her there, but rather, as Tony Tanner puts it, "[...] a salutary reminder of what poverty is like" (TANNER, 1966, p. 9). In Portsmouth, Fanny is deeply disappointed to find a house that is dirty and noisy, and relatives that leave her disheartened and ashamed. It is clear that she no longer belongs there either, and she spends all of her stay wishing to go back to Mansfield. When Mr. Crawford follows her there, he appeals to the deepest desire in her heart by offering to take her back whenever she wants, rather than have her wait for Sir Thomas to order his carriage to come fetch her:

I know Mansfield, I know its way, I know its faults towards you. I know the danger of your being so far forgotten, as to have your comforts give way to the imaginary convenience of any single being in the family. I am aware that you may be left here week after week, if Sir Thomas cannot settle every thing for coming himself, or sending your aunt's maid for you, without involving the slightest alteration of the arrangements which he may have laid down for the next quarter of a year (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 402).

Crawford, who is a selfish and vain man, is, however, perfectly right in his description of the Mansfield household towards Fanny. The possibility of her being forgotten is by no means unlikely, because her needs are often ignored, not only in Mansfield, but also in Portsmouth. Edmund, the cousin with whom she is in love, is described by her as the only member of the family who thinks of her; but even Edmund is incapable of understanding what she really feels. Tony Tanner says that Crawford and his sister Mary, who come from London to Mansfield to disrupt the life in the old country house with their amoral ways, "are both associated with movement, the unhindered expenditure of energy. They have the wealth and the vitality to scorn limits and limitations" (TANNER, 1966, p. 19). To him, their energy, although attractive, turns out to be destructive and unprincipled, and is the fact that the timid Fanny is their opposite that is supposed to win the reader's heart: "It is next to the ebullient Crawfords that we must try to appreciate Fanny's stillness, quietness, weakness, and self-retraction" (TANNER, 1966, p. 20). Both Tanner and Marilyn Butler believe that, in *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen was making a defense of the old country life and denouncing the corruption of London. However, neither can quite explain why Austen, who was able to create such engaging heroines in her other novels, fails to charm the reader with Fanny Price.

To Claudia Johnson, the fact that Fanny is a model of femininity for the standards of the time – someone who never speaks her mind, who hardly ever takes any initiative and who allows herself to be guided by her older male relatives, especially Edmund and Sir Tomas – but that, with this behavior, earns nothing but negligence, is Austen’s way to condemn the code of female propriety. According to Johnson, in *Mansfield Park* “Austen accomplishes her critique of the gentry family by registering its impact on a heroine who, though a model of female virtue and filial gratitude, is betrayed by the same ethos she dutifully embraces” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 96). Unlike her female cousins, who learn only to pretend to be modest in order to fool their father, Fanny really does not believe her own powers of observation. She sees farther into people’s characters than Sir Thomas ever does, but takes a long time to believe that she is right where he is wrong. And Sir Thomas is wrong very often: he believes his passionate daughter Maria does not have strong feelings, and allows her to marry a man she obviously does not love just because he is rich; and, when Fanny refuses Mr. Crawford, being the only one to see how corrupt he is, accuses her of having that “[...] willfulness of temper, self-conceit, and every tendency to that independence of spirit, which prevails so much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is offensive and disgusting beyond all common offense” (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 318). That, of course, is a ridiculously inaccurate description of Fanny; however, it is only by following her own wish and not Sir Thomas’ in this all-important issue that she saves herself from unhappiness. To Johnson, “[...] if *Mansfield Park* appears to let conservative ideologues have it their way, it is only to give them the chance to show how little, rather than how much, they can do, and so to oblige them to discredit themselves with their own voices” (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 120).

Jane Austen’s four heroines who are taken away from their childhood homes against their wishes all begin by being forgotten and neglected: the Dashwood sisters by the old gentleman, Anne by her father and sister and Fanny by the entire Mansfield household. All of Austen’s novels end with their heroines getting married which, in some cases, will signify another dislocation, as we will see in another section. But they all have happy marriages and a promise of life in a home where their importance will be greater, which will lead them to have a greater say in their own movements. However, by leading readers to ponder on what could happen when no suitable man came along to take care of a young woman – when she was left in the hands of imprudent, vain or blind authority figures – she criticizes a system that left so little for the women themselves to decide.

2.4.3 Mobility and defiance: an abominable independence

In Austen's novels, when female characters dare to break, or at least bend, the rules of conduct concerned with mobility, this decision usually has momentous consequences. In some of these characters, a comparative freedom of movement is a sign of spontaneity that is regarded as something to be admired; while, in others, the disrespect for the rules that regulate mobility is a sign of lax morality, anticipatory of the reprehensible decisions they will make in other matters. One could argue that this is a sign that Austen's opinion about the socially accepted restrictions on female mobility in her day is impossible to define, and that a discussion about this issue will lead once again to the author's ambiguity, emphasized by so many critics of her work. However, Austen never punishes female characters for wanting to stir out of doors, either to get something done without waiting for the assistance of others or simply to see the world around them. And yet, for some female characters, the wish for greater liberty expressed in moving physically to places that, for some reason or another, should be out of bounds for them, is a sign of a yearning for greater liberty from other restraints, a propensity to take paths that will lead to their ruin in the eyes of their society. Yet even for these characters Austen shows more sympathy than other writers from the same period, punishing their false steps less harshly than those of her contemporaries who were professedly conservative.

Among the protagonists of Austen's novels, the least concerned with convention is certainly Marianne, from *Sense and Sensibility*. Unlike some critics, I include Marianne in the heroine category for two reasons: the first is that, even though she is flawed, she is not, as already stated, a negative character, or a complete opposite of her more sensible sister, Elinor. The second is that, whether this was Austen's intention or not, she almost takes over the novel, making the reader care deeply about her, regardless of her mistakes. However, it is clear that Marianne's indifference to the rules of society is not considered by the narrator to be a positive thing, and she is certainly not rewarded for it. It is through Marianne's relationship with Willoughby that this indifference will be mostly emphasized; and it is also this relationship that will cause her sufferings and nearly bring her to death. Marianne's very meeting with Willoughby shows a certain disregard for rules on both their parts: Marianne, after going for a walk in spite of the threat of rain, slips and twists her ankle; Willoughby then shows up and "[...] perceiving that her modesty declined what her situation rendered necessary" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 44), takes her up in his arms and carries her to her house.

Marianne's decision to expose herself to the elements outdoors, then, leads her to be in a vulnerable position before a strange young man, who begins their relationship with an unsanctioned physical intimacy. This boldness on Willoughby's part, however, will be the first of his traits to charm Marianne, just as her candor and lack of social restraint will later charm him; they find each other's rebellious side seductive, and will proceed to ignore many other rules of society in their days of courtship.

One of the examples of this is their visit to Allenham House, the place where Willoughby's aunt lives and which he will inherit. In spite of the fact that Willoughby has no right to take Marianne there without the knowledge of its proprietor, and in spite of the fact that they, being two young, single, unengaged people, should never be alone, she is more than willing to go with him. Marianne's willingness to occupy physical spaces that were unsanctioned by the rules of the period, such as walking outdoors in the rain and spending time alone with a man in a strange house eventually leads to her moral and emotional exposure, as the development of her thwarted love becomes known by all of her acquaintance. The flames of the spectacle continue to be fanned by Marianne herself, who considers the idea of trying to repress any public displays of emotion as not only impossible, but beneath someone with her level of sensibility. Marianne's surrender to her depression is not shown as a proof of the largeness of her heart, but as a dangerous selfishness that reaches its peak when she again willfully exposes herself outdoors:

Two delightful twilight walks on the third and fourth evenings of her being there, not merely on the dry gravel of the shrubbery, but all over the grounds, and especially in the most distant parts of them, where there was something more of wildness than in the rest, where the trees were the oldest, and the grass was the longest and wettest, had — assisted by the still greater imprudence of sitting in her wet shoes and stockings — given Marianne a cold so violent, as, though for a day or two trifled with or denied, would force itself by increasing ailments, on the concern of every body, and the notice of herself (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 286).

The result is an illness of such severity that Marianne almost loses her life. It is only after that that she learns the lesson the narrator means to impart, and becomes more rational and controlled, recognizing that it was her own behavior that almost led to her death: "Had I died, it would have been self-destruction" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 322). This may seem, to modern readers, a severe way to treat such an engaging character whose major fault, after all, seems to be that of being too naïve and trusting. However, to Claudia Johnson, in a time when the Burkean idea that women's behavior and morals were essential to secure England's survival against the forces of anarchy was widespread, many novelists reserved much crueler

fates to female characters who became involved with the wrong men. In Jane West's *Tale of the Times* (1799), for example, the protagonist, Lady Geraldine, is unhappy with her unfaithful husband and, when she confides in another man, he abducts and rapes her (JOHNSON, 1988). Marianne Dashwood, on the other hand, marries a wealthy man who adores her and remains close to her beloved mother and sisters. *Sense and Sensibility*, by giving Marianne a happy ending and having characters who followed conventions perfectly but were, nonetheless, selfish, vapid or scheming, is subtly criticizing these very conventions.

In *Mansfield Park*, the character who falls in love with the wrong man is not a protagonist: Maria Bertram, one of Fanny's cousins. Maria, outwardly, is another one of those characters who fits perfectly with the standards of her society: she is beautiful, accomplished and polite. However, as the narrator puts it, she and her sister Julia "[...] with all their promising talents and early information [were] entirely deficient in the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 55). Once more, Austen makes the case for the fact that following the rules did not necessarily mean being a good person. Maria does her duty as a daughter of the English gentry by becoming engaged to Mr. Rushworth, a man who at first glance is eminently eligible, being rich and from an ancient family. Mr. Rushworth, however, is foolish, uninformed, and utterly despised by Maria. She later becomes enraptured by Mr. Crawford, who, however, only flirts with her for sport. Jane Austen uses an outdoor scene in the novel to perfectly illustrate this love triangle and the consequences it will have: the visit to Sotherton, the home of Mr. Rushworth.

Maria, Mr. Crawford and Mr. Rushworth walk through the grounds together, until they stop before a locked iron gate and a kind of ditch called a ha-ha, two obstacles that prevent them from going into the garden. As Mr. Rushworth, at Maria's request, goes to fetch the key to the iron gate, she complains to Crawford of want of spirits, saying, "[...] 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" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 127). Crawford, then, proposes that they pass round the edge of the gate, without waiting for Mr. Rushworth and the key: "I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 127). Maria happily accepts, and this incident foreshadows her betrayal of Rushworth and elopement with Crawford, which will cause her to be banished from society and secluded in a farm with only her odious aunt Norris for company. In the Introduction to the 2003 Penguin edition of *Mansfield Park*, Kathryn Sutherland defines Maria thus: "A fortune-hunter, playing the game she thinks she understands and for which she has been trained from birth by education [...] what she does not take into account is the

strength of her own passions” (SUTHERLAND, 2003)⁷. Maria believes she knows what she is doing by flirting with one man while keeping her engagement with another, but in reality she is less malicious than Crawford, because her love for him is real. Her engagement to Rushworth, like the locked iron gate, makes her feel suffocated, but the feeling is even worse in her father’s house, and she marries a man she detests as the only socially acceptable way to escape it. Jane Austen gives Maria a less than gruesome ending – after all, she is not raped and does not die, as many other unfaithful women in the literature of the period; furthermore, she describes her as someone who is more to be pitied than reviled, someone who is trapped by the options given to any woman in her class.

A character with even fewer options is Jane Fairfax, from *Emma*. Jane can be considered as an opposite of the protagonist in many respects: she is poor, while Emma is rich, she is reserved, while Emma is open, she has dark hair, while Emma is fair. Both Emma and Jane, however, have their mobility restricted by the conduct rules of the period. Emma has the financial means to travel and refuses to leave their native village of Highbury. Jane, on the other hand, is also born in the village, but is given away to a guardian after she becomes an orphan, and raised elsewhere. This movement, over which she of course has no control at all, is thankfully beneficial, because her guardian and his family come to love her and cherish her. Because they travel, she is able to do so too, and goes, for example, to Bath. However, when Jane comes to Highbury to visit her aunt and grandmother and leaves the sphere of influence of her guardian, the fact that her family is poor, combined with the fact that she has the refinement and intelligence of a girl who received a much better education than that which her own family could afford, makes her, much like Fanny from *Mansfield Park*, a character divided between two worlds, belonging to both, and yet, to none. Ronald Blythe, in an Introduction to *Emma*, states that this renders Jane Fairfax “[...] defenceless against the noisy, the inquisitive, the gossip, the mediocre” (BLYTHE, 1966, p. 24). A sensitive and bright young woman, she is, due to her economic conditions and her gender, vulnerable to the dictates of almost any member of the Highbury gentry.

Nowhere is this vulnerability better exemplified than in the discussion that follows the rather trivial piece of news that Jane walked in the rain to the post office. Several different characters admonish her for doing so; Mr. Woodhouse, the hypochondriac, asks her if she changed her stockings and states: “Young ladies should take care of themselves. —Young ladies are delicate plants” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 251). Mrs. Elton, a meddlesome and vulgar

⁷ The edition used here is a Kindle edition without page numbers.

woman who takes it upon herself to do favors for Jane, then declares that she will not allow her to do such a thing again. Jane, who, unbeknownst to anyone, is going to the post office to receive letters from the man she is secretly engaged to, must justify her own movements to her neighbors. These neighbors, while meaning to take care of Jane's health – as we have seen in Marianne's example, a walk in the rain could be dangerous to a young woman – in reality try to seize control of the only thing in the world that belongs to her: her body and her movements. If Jane were stopped from walking to the post office every morning, she would lose her most significant source of happiness and her only excuse to get away from her aunt's cramped and uncomfortable lodgings. However, since none of her interlocutors know of the engagement, her justifications for the walk are not accepted and they persevere in trying to dissuade her from it. But she is stubborn, and Austen writes of her that "Jane looked as if she did not mean to be conquered" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 253). In the end, she keeps walking to the post office, whether it rains or not. She is indeed not conquered, and is able to maintain this small piece of liberty.

Jane Fairfax's situation of complete dependence and lack of control of her mobility is heart-rending. Throughout *Emma*, the readers, who are also unaware of her secret engagement, are reminded that this dependence will only worsen when she takes a position of governess, the profession for which she was educated. The idea of having the hours of your day wasted in the employment of someone else was appalling to a woman of the English gentry, and many nineteenth-century female writers, such as Charlotte and Anne Brontë, wrote of the experience with deep bitterness. Austen is no different and, in a comparison that is somewhat shocking today, has the sensible Jane Fairfax equal being a governess to being a slave. Jane lacks the spontaneity and openness of the protagonist Emma; but it is through her that Austen makes one of the most evident criticisms of the condition of women in her day. If what Blythe calls a "conventional solution" (BLYTHE, 1966, p. 25) had not been found for her – that is, marriage to a rich young man that recognizes all her virtues and makes it unnecessary for her to work for a living – she would have no choice but to live a life of dependence, and her personality would guarantee that it would be also a life of intense suffering.

There are two Austen novels where the heroines' energy and activity, that which leads them to move about in unconventional ways, are portrayed as unambiguously positive: *Northanger Abbey* and *Pride and Prejudice*. In *Northanger Abbey*, we are told from the beginning that Catherine Morland is an unusual heroine because, as a girl, she was "[...] noisy and wild, hated confinement and cleanliness, and loved nothing so well in the world as rolling

down the green slope at the back of the house” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 38). This wild girl, as a young woman, will certainly not defy convention in a willful manner; but her candor will lead her to do something that Elinor Dashwood would not approve of – showing her feelings clearly – without the consequences that befall Marianne. Catherine goes to Bath and meets two sets of siblings: Eleanor and Henry Tilney and Isabella and John Thorpe. She falls in love with Henry, but Isabella and John, who think she is rich and are after her family’s money, try to spoil their relationship. On one occasion, the Thorpes lie to Catherine, telling her the Tilneys, with whom she had made plans, have left her behind, and convincing her to go for a ride along with them. When Catherine is leaving in John’s carriage, she sees Henry and Eleanor going in the direction of her house, and her reaction is not precisely ladylike. Later, she describes it to Henry by saying: “[...] I begged Mr. Thorpe so earnestly to stop; I called out to him as soon as ever I saw you; [...] indeed I did; and, if Mr. Thorpe would only have stopped, I would have jumped out and run after you” (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 103).

This confession on the part of the heroine that she wished to jump out of a carriage and run after the hero is as unfeminine as Catherine’s girlish pursuits of rolling down a slope; but they have the effect of captivating Henry Tilney. Later on, when John Thorpe once more tries to prevent Catherine’s outing with the Tilneys, she not only shows her energy, but her independence of mind, by making it a point of leaving the Thorpes immediately to explain the situation to them. John and Isabella catch her hands and try to physically stop her, but this time Catherine indeed runs after the Tilneys and enters their lodgings without permission:

Away walked Catherine in great agitation, as fast as the crowd would permit her, fearful of being pursued, yet determined to persevere. [...] So rapid had been her movements, that in spite of the Tilneys’ advantage in the outset, they were but just turning into their lodgings as she came within view of them; and the servant still remaining at the open door, she used only the ceremony of saying that she must speak with Miss Tilney that moment, and hurrying by him proceeded up stairs. Then, opening the first door before her, which happened to be the right, she immediately found herself in the drawing-room [...]. (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 103).

The strength of Catherine’s feelings is what lends power to her movements, and makes her disregard the social guidelines that dictated that a lady could never be so energetic. Once more, this does not hurt her in the eyes of anyone she cares about, and is certainly not portrayed by Austen as a negative quality. The same occurs with Elizabeth, from *Pride and Prejudice*. The most popular of Austen’s heroines, Elizabeth is not only witty and intelligent, but also vigorous. Her mental and bodily strength is a large part of what makes her so engaging, as is her refusal to accept the rules that restricted women’s behavior in her day.

This attitude is most clearly translated into a freedom of mobility in a scene where Elizabeth decides to walk to another house to see her sick sister Jane.

The walk, which is comprised of three miles, a distance that Elizabeth considers small, but that every other female character seems to find daunting, is undertaken alone and in muddy ground, with Elizabeth “[...] crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity, and finding herself at last within view of the house, with weary ancles, dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 32). Several characters react to this walk in different ways which shows us a great deal about her personality. Elizabeth’s mother, concerned with what the neighbors might think, says she will not be fit to be seen when she arrives, while her sister Mary, whose sentences seem like extracts from conduct books, states that “[...] every impulse of feeling should be guided by reason; and, in my opinion, exertion should always be in proportion to what is required” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 32). Elizabeth arrives at the house where her sister is staying, and sees that “[...] her appearance created a great deal of surprise. —That she should have walked three miles so early in the day, in such dirty weather, and by herself, was almost incredible” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 33). Miss Bingley, who is her rival for the attentions of the hero, and her sister Mrs. Hurst, criticize her severely for such an extraordinary show of activity. Mrs. Hurst says: “She has nothing, in short, to recommend her, but being an excellent walker. I shall never forget her appearance this morning. She really looked almost wild” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 35). To which Miss Bingley replies: “To walk three miles, or four miles, or five miles, or whatever it is, above her ancles in dirt, and alone, quite alone! [...] It seems to me to shew an abominable sort of conceited independence, a most country town indifference to decorum” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 36).

To Vivien Jones, Elizabeth’s walk is crucial to the development of the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, and also “dramatizes an important debate about what is and is not ‘proper’ behavior” (JONES, 2006, p. XX). When Miss Bingley equals walking to an indifference to decorum, she is using conduct book standards for her own interests and “[...] rationalizing her jealousy by appealing to a more worldly, metropolitan view of propriety” (JONES, 2006, p. XX), which only makes the reader sympathize more with Elizabeth’s liveliness and spontaneity. But the most important consequence of Elizabeth’s walk is its effect on the hero, Mr. Darcy. When he first sees her, he is “[...] divided between admiration of the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion, and doubt as to the occasion’s justifying her coming so far alone” (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 33). Darcy, who at this point in the book is deeply concerned with the rules of society, begins, in this scene, to have his notions deconstructed by

his love for Elizabeth, which will make him rethink his positions on class, rank, and male and female behavior. Elizabeth's walk, however socially improper it may be considered, makes her all the more attractive. To Jones, "Darcy's 'divided' responses point up a conflict in which a spontaneous female individuality wins out over feminine propriety and social status. And it does so because it's a source of sexual power" (JONES, 2006, p. XXI).

Tony Tanner, in his Introduction to *Pride and Prejudice*, states that, in Austen's writing, physical sensations are not very important. He mentions that in her novels, dancing, for example, is almost exclusively an occasion for conversation; and, indeed, there are important exchanges that take place between Darcy and Elizabeth while they are dancing, but the movements of their bodies are never described. To Tanner, in Austen's work we find "[...] the minimizing of a whole range of physical experiences which can often change lives more forcibly than rational reflection" (TANNER, 1972, p. 36). He identifies in Austen a suspicion of sexual attraction, stating that "[...] passion, as such, is hardly differentiated from folly in the terms of the book" (TANNER, 1972, p. 38). An example of this is the story of Lydia, Elizabeth's youngest sister. Lydia is as energetic as Elizabeth, or perhaps more so; she spends her days walking to the nearby town in search of gossip or young men and never loses an opportunity to dance. Austen describes her as having "high animal spirits" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 45), and, unlike Elizabeth, her vivaciousness is not tempered by reason and intelligence. Due mainly, one suspects, to physical attraction, she elopes with the villain of the book, to the shame and dismay of her family.

However, even if Lydia falls prey to the strength of her passions, much like Maria from *Mansfield Park*, that does not mean that Austen is making an absolute criticism of vigor in women, but rather stating that a rational education was also necessary for their development. Lydia is neglected by both her parents, who fail to develop her mental faculties due to disinterest and indifference. Because she does not possess the natural intelligence with which Elizabeth is endowed, her life becomes restricted to clothes, flirting and everything superficial. Maria, on the other hand, does not lack intelligence, but also through the neglect of her parents becomes selfish and cold, accepting a marriage solely for money and status, which excludes any affection. But Elizabeth manages to be rational without being conniving, and to unite intelligence and heart. Tanner states that in Austen's books, emotion is either rational or it is folly. But he continues to say:

And yet we sense that there is a capacity for depths and animations of feeling in Elizabeth which is not allowed for in the above description of the "rationally founded" emotions preferred by Jane Austen. It is that extra something which

dances through her words conveying an emotional as well as a semantic energy; it is what glows from her eyes and brings the blood to her cheeks so often; it is what sends her running across the fields and jumping over stiles when she hears that Jane is ill at Netherfield (TANNER, 1972, p. 39).

To Tanner, the fact that Elizabeth is described by Miss Bingley as looking “almost wild” means that *Pride and Prejudice*’s protagonist, while not as untamed as Lydia, will not be entirely contained by social restraints, something that is also indicated by the unshakable sense of humor, the potentially anarchic ability to laugh, that she displays throughout the novel. Elizabeth, with her liveliness and laughter, is, like Jane Fairfax, another character that becomes difficult to fix within the social space available to her. Like Jane, she also gets her conventional ending, her happy union with a man who is at once capable of making her materially comfortable and really happy. But Austen’s narrator states in *Mansfield Park* that “[...] there certainly are not so many men of large fortune in the world, as there are pretty women to deserve them” (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 41); that is, the conventional ending is not available to everybody. To those who are less fortunate than Jane Fairfax and Elizabeth, all that was left was to exist within the boundaries of a society that was extremely cruel to penniless, single women, especially those who displayed that abominable independence that makes Elizabeth such a target to Miss Bingley, but so delightful to readers today.

2.4.4 Mobility and marriage: domestic virtues

In Jane Austen’s time, after a woman was married, she would usually leave her parents’ house and go live with her husband and his family. Since, in England, travelling was much more difficult before railroads became widespread in the mid-nineteenth century, this separation often meant that women could spend years or even the rest of their lives without seeing the people with whom they had grown up. If a woman was attached to her family, the separation could be a source of profound unhappiness. Jane Austen doubtless understood this, because, as her heroines find their husbands and make the matches that invariably take place in the final pages of her novels, she makes sure to place them precisely where they will be most satisfied in their conjugal life.

The one who moves less has the strongest attachment to her own home: Emma, the immobile. She begins the novel that bears her name by refusing to entertain the idea of

marriage precisely because she could not think of leaving her father alone. Mr. Woodhouse is an enemy of marriage because he detests change of any kind; he refers to Emma's governess and Emma's sister, who both marry men they love and are, thus, removed from his company, as "poor Miss Taylor" and "poor Isabella" respectively, not comprehending how something that is disagreeable to him could ever be agreeable to anybody else. In order to modify Mr. Woodhouse's routine as little as possible, Mr. Knightley, after he becomes engaged to Emma, proposes to invert the order of things and leave his own home to live with her – certainly something that would be recognized as a great concession by Jane Austen's contemporaries, and that the narrator emphasizes: "How very few of those men in a rank of life to address Emma would have renounced their own home for Hartfield!" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 403). To Claudia Johnson, this conclusion is an empowerment of the female protagonist, since Knightley, being a rich landowner and much older than Emma, is a clear authority figure to her and the community where they live, and even so "[...] cedes a considerable portion of his power which custom has allowed him to expect" (JOHNSON, 1988, p. 143). Emma is the mistress of her father's house, and by living in it, Knightley places himself in her domain.

Fanny, from *Mansfield Park*, who is also deeply attached to the house that names the novel, does not move far away when she marries. After being courted by the unscrupulous Mr. Crawford, she gets the wish of her heart and marries her own cousin Edmund and, since he is destined to be the clergyman of the parish of Mansfield, the two will inhabit the village parsonage, which, the narrator tells us, is "[...] scarcely half a mile apart [...]" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 97) from the great house itself. This proximity to Mansfield Park will certainly be a positive thing for Fanny who, through the course of the novel, goes from being terrified of the place to regarding it as her home, especially after her distressing visit to her parents' house in Portsmouth:

[...] she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways. Every thing where she now was, was in full contrast to it. The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony —and perhaps, above all, the peace and tranquility of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour of the day, by the prevalence of every thing opposite to them here (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 384).

Portsmouth makes Fanny forgive Mansfield Park's coldness and negligence towards her, and give it qualities that it never possessed: "[there] every body had their due importance; every body's feelings were consulted" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 384). After her female cousins, Julia and Maria, are themselves removed from the house permanently by, respectively, an unsuitable marriage and an adulterous affair, she is lavished with attention by all the

remaining members of its household, and in her Introduction to the novel, Kathryn Sutherland states that she becomes Mansfield's "true spiritual inheritor" (SUTHERLAND, 2003).

However, the marriage to Edmund that will settle her forever in its environs feels less than ideal to readers, because he spends the entire novel regarding Fanny much more as sister than a lover, and Jane Austen never explains how the change in his affections takes place. She simply writes: "I only intreat every body to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund [...] became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 454). To Claudia Johnson, Edmund marrying Fanny seems like a rushed and perfunctorily conventional ending because Austen meant *Mansfield Park* to be a parody of conservative fiction, rather than a conservative novel itself (JOHNSON, 1998, p. 114). However, whether or not we, as readers, agree with Fanny that Mansfield is "thoroughly perfect" (AUSTEN, 1966, p. 457), by fixing her heroine near the house she comes to love, Austen is ensuring her satisfaction according to her own expressed wishes. According to Fanny herself, Mansfield is where she is most happy; and, due to her marriage, her permanence there is secured.

In *Sense and Sensibility*, the unhappiness of a beloved daughter moving away from home is discussed by Mrs. Dashwood and Marianne at the beginning of the novel, when they imagine that Elinor will soon marry Edward and leave them. Mrs. Dashwood consoles herself by stating that "[...] it will be scarcely a separation. We shall live within a few miles of each other, and shall meet every day of our lives" (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 19). When Mrs. Dashwood says that, she is imagining that they will not remove far away from Norland, the estate that belonged to her husband. As we have seen, this does not come true, but everything else in her prediction does. For, when Elinor finally marries Edward and Marianne marries Colonel Brandon, the first is settled as the clergyman of the second, and the sisters live, respectively, in Delaford Parsonage and Delaford House. Moreover, they also stay close to their beloved mother, who remains at Barton Cottage. Austen ends the novel with a summing up of these placements:

Between Barton and Delaford, there was that constant communication which strong family affection would naturally dictate; –and among the merits and the happiness of Elinor and Marianne, let it not be ranked as the least considerable, that though sisters, and living almost within sight of each other, they could live without disagreement between themselves, or producing coolness between their husbands (AUSTEN, 2007, p. 353).

Pride and Prejudice also features two sisters that love each other, and the displacement they go through after their respective marriages will also contemplate that affection. The heroine, Elizabeth, receives offers of marriage from two widely different men. The first, from Mr. Collins, a foolish and vain man who is a clergyman and who will, in the future, inherit the estate of Elizabeth's father. When Elizabeth becomes aware of Mr. Collins' attentions, the narrator states: "It now first struck her, that she was selected from among her sisters as worthy of being the mistress of Hunsford Parsonage, and of assisting to form a quadrille table at Rosings, in the absence of more eligible visitors" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 86). Austen's irony is at its sharpest here, because marrying Mr. Collins and having to accompany him in his frequent visits to Rosings – the estate of the arrogant Lady Catherine, to whom he owes his job – is a prospect that horrifies Elizabeth. From a purely financial point of view, becoming Mrs. Collins would be very positive for her, but an Austen heroine does not get married for purely financial reasons, and Elizabeth refuses him.

Mr. Collins then ends up marrying not one of the Bennet sisters, as had been his intention, but their neighbor Charlotte Lucas, who is Elizabeth's best friend. Charlotte, who is an intelligent girl with no beauty and no fortune, is twenty-seven years of age and fast approaching spinsterhood, something that most women at the time dreaded. When Elizabeth learns of the engagement, she is incredulous. But Charlotte explains her reasons with candor and simplicity: "I am not a romantic you know. I never was. I ask only a comfortable home" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 123). Elizabeth never fully accepts Charlotte's decision, considering that she has "sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 123). Yet, Charlotte is far from being a cold fortune hunter; she is a kind and sensible character, who the narrator herself never chastises or punishes for this choice. The fact that she marries such an insufferable man as Mr. Collins only illustrates to readers the plights that women who were less lucky than an Austen heroine had to face. As Tony Tanner puts it,

In such a society, the need for an 'establishment' is a very real one, and in putting prudence before passion, Charlotte is only doing what the economic realities of her society – as Jane Austen makes abundantly clear – all but force her to do (TANNER, 1972, p. 38).

When Elizabeth visits Charlotte at Hunsford Parsonage after her marriage, it becomes more evident to her that her friend only derives pleasure from her domestic arrangements, and none from her husband's company: "When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really an air of great comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 154). Aside from giving us a closer

look into Charlotte's matrimonial life, Elizabeth's visit to Hunsford Parsonage will also further the acquaintance between her and the hero of the novel, Mr. Darcy and it is there that he will propose for the first time. Shortly before this first proposal, there is a scene between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy in which they discuss whether it could be said that Charlotte, who has removed fifty miles after her marriage, is living far or near her family. Darcy considers it "[...] a *very easy distance*" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 174), while Elizabeth, possibly considering how much more troublesome it is for a woman to cover it, answers with some irritation: "I should never have considered the distance as one of the *advantages* of the match" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 174). Darcy, then, draws his chair near Elizabeth and says "*You cannot have a right to such very strong local attachment*". With this remark and the expectation of Elizabeth's answer, Darcy is possibly wondering whether she would accept being removed from her father's home, and, perhaps, away from a family that he considers socially inferior to himself.

Darcy then proposes and is refused; and Elizabeth will meet him again only in his own home, Pemberley. This location has such significance for Austen fans that one of the oldest and most visited websites dedicated to the author is called The Republic of Pemberley. In this setting, Elizabeth – along with the readers – will not only understand Darcy better, but also begin to reciprocate his love. As Watt said of Richardson's characters, to get inside Darcy's house is also to get inside his mind. When Elizabeth first sees Pemberley, she is struck by the beauty of its nature and by the fact that, even if the grounds did not escape the current fad for landscape gardening, the changes done there were subtle and tasteful:

[...] 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. 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, 2006, p. 235).

In this passage, Jane Austen is showing her readers that there is more to her hero than they knew until then. Pride, the fault most associated with Darcy throughout the novel, is not, in his case, severe enough for him to subjugate nature's beauties to his own fancy. Darcy is not one of the distasteful landowners that Jane Austen mocked in other books; he knows how and to what degree he should apply the laws of aesthetic beauty in estate. Furthermore, he does not have the other, more serious characteristic severely criticized by Austen in his class:

he is not selfish. In Pemberley, surrounded by Darcy's property, Elizabeth realizes how great his responsibilities are and how important it is that a man in his position should have the qualities that he does possess: "As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people's happiness were in his guardianship! —How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow! —How much of good or evil must be done by him!" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 240).

Darcy and Elizabeth, of course, get married, and she becomes indeed mistress of Pemberley. Her abode there will bring her not only the enjoyment of Darcy's company and of a share of his wealth and status, but also of proximity to only the members of her family she loves most. Her beloved sister Jane moves nearby with her husband, and she and Elizabeth, "[...] in addition to every other source of happiness, were within thirty miles of each other" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 364). Her favorite uncle and aunt, we are told, are always received in the house; while the rest of the irksome Bennets are invited much less frequently, removing the couple "[...] from society so little pleasing to either, to all the comfort and elegance of their family party at Pemberley" (AUSTEN, 2006, p. 363). As Darcy and Elizabeth are Austen's favorite couple, so their home is perhaps the most fascinating of all the houses in her work; the near perfection of the setting, uniting elegance and taste, tradition and modernity, might be said to embody the relationship of the protagonists' themselves.

In *Northanger Abbey*, the house that names the novel at first occupies the protagonist's mind a great deal: the abbey is imagined by Catherine to be a place that could be used as a setting for one of the Gothic novels she so enjoys reading. After seeing that there is nothing extraordinary about the building itself or about its inhabitants, whose qualities and flaws are more prosaic than she at first had considered them, her great interest becomes Woodston Parsonage, the home of Henry Tilney, with whom she is in love. When the excursion to Woodston takes place, Catherine has been staying at the abbey long enough to lose all interest in it: "What a revolution in her ideas! she, who had so longed to be in an abbey! Now, there was nothing so charming to her imagination as the unpretending comfort of a well-connected Parsonage [...]" (AUSTEN, 1972, p. 211). The revolution in Catherine's ideas that leads her to find much more charm in a modern parsonage than in an ancient abbey is a symbol of the growth she undergoes throughout the novel. At first, she is immature enough to confuse fiction and reality and to see gothic plots in real life; in the end, she is more concerned with the business of most women from her times: getting married and settling down as mistress of a comfortable, if prosaic, home. Catherine moves away from her own parents and rather too close to the irascible General Tilney – but she has the sort of personality that leads readers to

imagine that this would not be a great evil, and that her happiness will not be marred by this proximity.

We began this section with Emma, the heroine that does not leave her home even after her marriage; and will end it with Anne, the only Austen protagonist whose abode remains unspecified, and can be said, perhaps, to be the entire world. In the opening of *Persuasion*, Anne is obliged to leave her childhood home, Kellynch Hall, due to the imprudence of her father, who incurs into so much debt that he has to rent the place in order to balance his accounts. Kellynch is going to be inherited by Anne's cousin, Mr. Elliot, who wishes to marry her – but she is in love with Frederick Wentworth, a captain of the navy. Lady Russell tries to make Anne see the advantages of marrying Mr. Elliot: she would take the place that had once been her mother's and have the chance of helping administrate the beloved estate in a much more sensible manner than her father did:

Anne was obliged to turn away, to rise, to walk to a distant table, and, leaning there in pretended employment, try to subdue the feelings this picture excited. For a few moments her imagination and her heart were bewitched. The idea of becoming what her mother had been; of having the precious name of "Lady Elliot" first revived in herself; of being restored to Kellynch, calling it her home again, her home for ever, was a charm which she could not immediately resist (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 150).

However, Anne, knowing that she has not forgotten Frederick and suspecting Mr. Elliot to be less amiable than he appears – a suspicion that proves wholly right – she, after wavering only for a moment, decides that she will not marry him. Being mistress of Kellynch is the one thing that could tempt her; but she resists the temptation and makes the choice that Austen considers correct for all her heroines: to marry not for money, for family obligation, or even for prudence, but for affection. In the final sentences of *Persuasion*, Austen states that Anne, by being a sailor's wife, belongs to that profession herself. Since married women did not work, their husbands' profession was their own; and it would determine what their daily concerns would be, to which social circles they would belong, and where they would live. Elinor, Fanny and Catherine become clergymen's wives, and will busy themselves with the affairs of their parish; and Emma, Elizabeth and Marianne marry rich landowners, and must have their share of their responsibility. Anne, on the other hand, has no fixed home with Frederick and will, perhaps, travel with him around the globe; a suitable ending for a heroine that is not loved by anyone in her family, and that has remained rooted in the same house for the nearly three decades of her life.

It is my belief that Jane Austen, in her novels, discussed the condition of women in her society, as well as many other profound issues that concern the human condition. However, it

is undeniable that she did so through little variation in her plots, which are always about courtship, and all end in marriage. The word “domestic” appears in every single one of her six mature novels, either followed by the words “felicity”, “happiness”, or “comfort”. That is fitting; for the fact remains that women in the eighteenth and nineteenth century were indeed restrained to the domestic sphere, and women’s lives were those that Austen chose to portray more closely. In her essay on Austen for *The Common Reader*, Virginia Woolf wonders what books Jane Austen would have written if she had lived longer than only forty-one years. To Woolf, the author whom she calls “[...] the most perfect artist among women, the writer whose books are immortal [...]” (WOOLF, 1984, p. 145) would have benefitted from a wider experience and, perhaps, try a greater variety of subjects. However, within the narrowness of the drawing room, Jane Austen managed to produce six masterpieces of literature, where new layers of meaning can be discovered after each reading.

CONCLUSION

With this dissertation, I aimed to analyze how Jane Austen made a critique of the situation of women in her society through scenes in which her female characters deal with conventions that restricted their mobility solely on the basis of their gender. Austen, who endured these restrictions in her personal life, showed in her art the discomfort and suffering that they could cause for women of her class, being part of a set of rules of conduct which, if followed to the letter, would have created unnatural beings deprived of any free will or individuality, always at the mercy of the whims of others.

After several readings of Jane Austen's six completed novels, I became convinced not only that the author was much less conservative than some of the critics of her work believe, but was also able to identify that one of the many subtle ways she used to communicate her stance on women's issues was the representation of the mobility of female characters. In Austen's fiction, women range from being virtually immobile to having a great deal of initiative about their physical dislocations – but even the bolder of them have to deal with social conventions that censured all kinds of independence on their part, specifically if manifested through freedom of movement.

By showing the manifold ways in which these restrictions on female mobility affected the lives of women of her class, I believe Jane Austen developed a strategy of criticizing the feminine condition that she uses in her six major works, albeit in different degrees. She, at first glance, may be considered a writer who did not give a great deal of importance to the setting of her novels, since her descriptions of landscape and houses are not very rich in detail. However, space is indeed a key element in her *oeuvre*, one that she uses to delineate her characters, be it through their views on picturesque aesthetics, their attitudes towards landscape improvement or simply, in the case of women, through the act of moving or remaining still, of allowing oneself to be moved or taking charge of one's mobility. Once we define place as not merely a physical location that can be described, but as the specific space where a given community interacts, we can see how essential this element was for Jane Austen's fiction, which is concerned above all with the everyday events of her society.

In a time during which profound changes were raging through Europe, Jane Austen did not, as some early critics believed, fail to participate in the several debates that these changes occasioned. However, unlike some of her contemporaries, who were avowedly progressive or staunchly conservative, she adopted an ambiguous tone that was further

complicated by the constant use of irony present in her narrative voice. This ambiguity has led to many different interpretations of her work; yet, in later years, the tendency of critics has been to identify in Austen a much more subversive writer than a careless reading of her novels usually shows. She was certainly not a radical novelist in the vein of Mary Wollstonecraft; however, in spite of the fact that she never turned her gaze, for instance, to the poorer classes, her insistence on showing the point of view of women by keeping the narrator of all of her novels mainly in the conscience of her female protagonists, was one way to express the side of the oppressed and the voiceless. She had Anne Elliot, the heroine from *Persuasion*, remark that “Men have had every advantage over us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands” (AUSTEN, 1998, p. 220). In an age where simply taking up the pen was an act of defiance, Austen did her part to redress this balance.

She began to write novels when the form was already identified with the feminine sphere, dealing mainly with the themes of courtship and marriage around which all her plots would revolve. Her first works, especially the juvenilia, *Northanger Abbey* and *Sense and Sensibility*, all use this previous literature as a starting point, at once satirizing its conventions and defending it from its detractors. She was a voracious reader of contemporary literature, and the references to other writers, either overt or oblique, are numerous in her fiction. However, even though Jane Austen owes a great deal to her predecessors, she also developed an entirely original voice, one that granted her a place among the founders of the modern novel. She has the distinction of having written works that are as engaging today as they were when they were published, something that is verifiable by her ever increasing popularity.

W. H. Auden, in the section of the poem “Letter to Lord Byron” that is the epigraph of this dissertation, confesses that Austen shocks him when she describes the link between matrimony and economics. The incongruity between the image of the idyllic and harmless spinster that was described in the biographies written by Austen’s family members and the professional writer who never refrained from criticizing the authority figures in her society is still confounding. Even though the academia has been lately dwelling more in the social critique of Austen’s work, the majority of her millions of readers still regard her novels as fairy-tale stories, in which a young woman is rescued from a difficult situation by the man who marries her and lives happily ever after with him. Marriage is, indeed, the denouement of all of Austen’s plots, but this merely indicates that she was following the conventions of female literature. If we were to regard Austen as a proponent of marriage as the highest objective in a woman’s life or, as more than one critic has stated, believe that she was living

vicariously through her heroines and compensating for the frustration of never having been married herself, we would be ignoring, for instance, the fact that, in her novels, most of the couples already married are far from being pictures of perfect felicity. Her happy endings, sometimes so unlikely that they have been deemed unrealistic, are rather signs of her struggle with the contemporary feminine condition, a struggle that she expressed, among other things, through exploring the physical movements of women living in a society bent on controlling them.

Thus, when Elizabeth Bennet takes a walk that leaves her muddy, but also enhances the brilliance of her fine eyes from the point of view of Mr. Darcy; and when Catherine Morland runs after Henry Tilney to explain herself to him, the reader cannot fail to find their spontaneity as engaging as the heroes themselves. When Fanny Price and Anne Elliot follow every rule of female conduct, but are then trapped in a cage of their own making, unable to move physically or emotionally in the direction they want to go, we are made to wonder at a system that punished so severely those who were models of propriety by its own standards. When both the controlled Elinor and the impulsive Marianne become subject to male inconsistency, we become aware of the value of self-restraint in a society that valued appearances above real feeling. And when we see the effect that relentless immobility has had upon an intelligent, generous woman like Emma, causing her to have so little experience of the world that she becomes completely unable to read the behavior even of those most familiar to her, we see that Jane Austen, in spite of professing to love the confines of small communities, understood that those who never move can never change and, therefore, can never really evolve.

While on the surface telling conventional love stories with happy endings, Jane Austen criticized not only the economic concerns that drove so many marriages in the England of her days, but also the contradiction between personal freedom and membership in a community, and the complex relationship between a woman's desires and the imperatives of propriety. In the post-revolutionary debate in which Austen was a participant, the merits of thinking for oneself were widely discussed, with some arguing that refusing to yield to authority could cause the destruction of the entire structure of society. Women in particular were required to be pliant not only as regarded their minds, but also as regarded their bodies, allowing themselves to be moved or to remain static according to the dictates of male figures of authority. And, even though Western society has changed a great deal, women's movements continue to be restricted today, which makes a discussion of the politics of mobility still entirely relevant. From birth, women learn that going to certain places, travelling to certain

countries, being alone outdoors in certain situations, is dangerous to them, and only to them, because of their gender. These restrictions are accepted as natural, when in reality they are a part of our culture. Using an author as widely read as Jane Austen in order to discuss them is a way not only to enrich the debate about her work, but to problematize these restrictions themselves.

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APPENDIX – The plots of Jane Austen’s six complete novels***Sense and Sensibility* (1811)**

Elinor and Marianne Dashwood are left virtually penniless after the death of their father. Their brother and his wife, John and Fanny Dashwood, inherit Norland, their father’s estate, and feel they are not obligated to help their sisters financially. Elinor falls in love with Edward Ferrars, Fanny’s brother, but Fanny makes it clear that his family expects him to marry a richer woman. Elinor and Marianne move with their mother to Barton Cottage, a more modest house that they can afford on their income, offered to them by Sir John, one of their mother’s cousins. Colonel Brandon, a friend of Sir John’s, falls in love with Marianne, but she sees him as too old and melancholy to be of any interest.

Marianne meets and falls in love with the dashing Willoughby, and the two of them become the source of neighborhood gossip due to mutual displays of affection, which is cause for concern for the discreet Elinor. Willoughby leaves abruptly for London, leaving Marianne confused and anguished. Meanwhile, Elinor meets a young woman named Lucy Steele who tells her that she has been secretly engaged to Edward for years. Elinor is heartbroken, but does not reveal her feelings to anyone.

Marianne and Elinor go to London to visit a friend, an old widow named Mrs. Jennings who is Sir John’s mother-in-law. There, Marianne learns that Willoughby has become engaged to another woman and becomes distraught. Colonel Brandon, wishing to soothe Marianne to some extent, reveals to Elinor that Willoughby has seduced and abandoned a protégée of his, and that he had to resort to marry an heiress because he was himself disinherited. When Elinor and Marianne are returning home, Marianne takes a walk in the rain and catches a violent cold that nearly takes her life. This brush with death makes her decide to have a better hold over her feelings in the future.

Edward’s engagement to Lucy becomes public and he is disinherited by his mother. After Marianne and Elinor return home, Elinor learns that Lucy has married Mr. Ferrars. Edward appears at Barton Cottage and tells Elinor that Lucy chose to marry his brother, who was to inherit all the family money. Elinor and Edward get married and settle in Delaford Parsonage, Colonel Brandon’s parish. Marianne learns to reciprocate Colonel Brandon’s feelings and marries him, settling in Delaford, very near her beloved sister Elinor.

Pride and Prejudice (1813)

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet have five daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty and Lydia, and live in an estate named Longbourn, near the village of Meryton. Because they have no male heir, their property will be inherited by a distant cousin, which will leave the women of the family comparatively poor after Mr. Bennet's death. Mrs. Bennet knows that the only way their daughters will manage to maintain their status is if they marry well. Jane and Elizabeth are rational, sensible young women, but Mary, Kitty and Lydia are all very silly, and neither of their parents tries to correct their ways.

A rich young man named Bingley rents a mansion in the neighborhood, bringing with him his two sisters, Mrs. Hurst and Miss Bingley, and his even richer friend, Mr. Darcy. Bingley and Jane immediately become enamored of each other. Mr. Darcy, who is extremely reserved, is regarded as proud by all at Meryton, who find him extremely disagreeable – particularly Elizabeth, who overhears him say that she is not beautiful enough to dance with.

Jane becomes ill while at a visit in Bingley's house and Elizabeth stays there also to take care of her. Her wit and vivacity bewitch Darcy, but she remains oblivious of his interest, because of his earlier statement about her. Miss Bingley notices that Mr. Darcy is falling in love with Elizabeth and becomes very jealous, because she wishes to marry him herself. Bingley, his sisters and Darcy then suddenly leave for London. Miss Bingley sends Jane a letter stating that she expects his brother will soon marry Darcy's sister. Jane is heartbroken, but Elizabeth, convinced that Bingley was somehow duped by his sister and his friend, is very angry at both. A young man named Wickham enlists in the regiment that is stationed at Meryton and tells Elizabeth that he has known Mr. Darcy since they were children. He affirms that Mr. Darcy's father left him an inheritance that Mr. Darcy refused to pass on, which left him penniless. With this, Elizabeth confirms her worst ideas about Darcy.

Meanwhile, Mr. Collins, the cousin who will inherit the Bennet estate, comes to visit the Bennets for the first time. He becomes interested in Elizabeth and proposes to her. In spite of the financial advantages of the match, Elizabeth refuses, because Mr. Collins is a vain and foolish man in whom she has no interest. Elizabeth's best friend, Charlotte Lucas, accepts a proposal from Mr. Collins, viewing the match in a purely pragmatic light. Elizabeth is horrified by Charlotte's decision to marry Mr. Collins, but nonetheless promises to visit them once they are married.

During this visit, she meets Darcy once again, because he is spending some time in the estate of his aunt, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is Mr. Collins patroness. Elizabeth learns,

though one of Darcy's cousins, that he was the means of separating Jane and Bingley, and becomes enraged. Darcy, completely ignorant of Elizabeth's antipathy for him, proposes to her. Elizabeth refuses angrily, accusing Darcy of having injured both Jane and Wickham. Darcy writes a letter to Elizabeth, confessing that he did convince Bingley that Jane did not care for him, but only because he believed it to be true. However, he states that he never injured Wickham, that he paid him what he owed, but that Wickham, nonetheless, tried to seduce his fifteen-year old sister to put his hands on his fortune. Elizabeth becomes ashamed of her accusations, but decides to reveal the story to no one but Jane, so as not to injure Miss Darcy's character. She then returns home.

Later, Elizabeth's uncle and aunt, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner, invite her to go on a scenic trip that will take them to Derbyshire, where Pemberley, Darcy's estate, is. Elizabeth and Darcy meet accidentally and she is stricken by the change in his behavior. He is much more friendly and open and she is very flattered, imagining that it must all be because of his affections for her. Elizabeth then receives a letter from home with the news that Lydia has eloped with Wickham. On the spur of the moment, she shares this news with Darcy and, when he becomes grave, thinks he must despise her for it. Wickham and Lydia are discovered and convinced to marry. Elizabeth later finds out that Darcy was instrumental in achieving this.

After some time, Bingley and Darcy return to Meryton. Bingley and Jane's love is rekindled by their renewed acquaintance and he proposes to her, who happily accepts. Elizabeth, not able to contain herself, thanks Darcy for convincing Wickham to marry Lydia. Darcy says he is still in love with her, proposes again, and she accepts. Jane and Bingley marry, and so do Darcy and Elizabeth. Bingley purchases a home near Pemberley and the sisters are settled near each other.

Mansfield Park (1814)

Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram decide to help Lady Bertram's poor sister by taking charge of one of her numerous children, a girl of ten years old named Fanny Price. Fanny is sent away from her parents' house and goes to live in Mansfield Park, where the stateliness of the house, the formality of her uncle and the unkindness of her two female cousins, Maria and Julia, all combine to leave her miserable. Her cousin Edmund, the youngest boy, notices her unhappiness and begins to pay attention to her. Fanny grows up as a timid and extremely modest young woman who never thinks of her own wishes and claims, but obliges everyone around her, even her cruel aunt Mrs. Norris, Lady Bertram's other sister.

Sir Thomas makes a long trip to oversee a property he owes in Antigua, leaving Mansfield without its authority figure. The Bertrams then become acquainted with Henry and Mary Crawford, two siblings who are sophisticated and witty, but with lax morals. Maria and Julia become enchanted by Henry Crawford, who flirts with both, in spite of the fact that Maria is engaged to Mr. Rushworth, a rich, but very foolish man. Edmund, in his turn, is entranced by Mary Crawford, to Fanny's great disappointment, because she is in love with Edmund and, furthermore, does not believe that he understands Mary's real character. The Bertrams and the Crawfords decide to stage a private play, something of which Edmund and Fanny disapprove, because they believe it is not a proper pastime for gentlemen and ladies. During the rehearsals, the actors use the play's plot to reveal their real feelings: Henry Crawford makes it clear that he prefers Maria to Julia, leaving the latter enraged; and Maria neglects Mr. Rushworth, who becomes jealous. Mary is happy with the idea of staging a love scene with Edmund, and he ends up agreeing to take part in the play, to Fanny's chagrin. When the play is almost ready to be staged, Sir Thomas returns and puts a stop to everything.

When Maria finds out that Mr. Crawford was only flirting with her, with no serious thoughts of proposing, she renews her attentions to Mr. Rushworth, wishing to leave the constraints of her father's home at all costs. The two of them are married and go on their honeymoon, taking Julia along. Henry Crawford then begins to flirt with Fanny, but, seeing that she is different from her cousins, falls in love with her and asks her uncle for her hand in marriage. Sir Thomas is delighted at such a prodigious match for the penniless Fanny, but she announces that she means to refuse Mr. Crawford. Furious, Sir Thomas sends Fanny to her parents' house for the first time in ten years, so she will learn to value the comforts he believes she is taking for granted. Fanny is extremely unhappy at her parents' house in Portsmouth, where everything is noisy and disorderly. Meanwhile, she learns that her eldest cousin Tom has become severely ill; and that Mr. Crawford and Maria have eloped together, while Julia made an imprudent match that was not sanctioned by her parents. She is then fetched by Edmund and returns to Mansfield Park.

Maria is exiled to a farm with Mrs. Norris. Tom recovers his health and becomes a more prudent heir to Mansfield Park. Edmund finally sees Mary's real character when she considers Henry and Maria's elopement as a mere mistake, and not a cause for real shame. Edmund, after a while, learns to love Fanny and the two of them get married and settle in Mansfield Parsonage.

Emma (1816)

Emma Woodhouse is a beautiful, rich and intelligent young woman who lives in a state of near isolation with her hypochondriac father in Hartfield, their estate in the village of Highbury. She is saddened when her governess marries a man from the neighborhood named Mr. Weston, because she knows it will make her evenings even more tedious than before. Her only regular visitor is Mr. Knightley, whose brother married her older sister, and who is the only one of her acquaintance who ever criticizes her.

Emma meets a pretty young girl named Harriet Smith, who studies in a boarding school in Highbury. She decides to take Harriet under her wing and find a proper match for her. When Harriet is asked in marriage by a farmer named Robert Martin, Emma convinces her to turn him down, believing that she should marry a gentleman. Mr. Knightley is angry when he finds out about this and tells Emma that she has made a mistake, for Harriet would have been lucky to marry Robert Martin. Emma, meanwhile, decides that the parish clergyman, Mr. Elton, will be the perfect husband for Harriet. To Emma's great surprise, Mr. Elton proposes to herself, and she finds that all the attentions she believed were for Harriet were in fact for her. Disgusted with Mr. Elton's presumption, she refuses him.

Jane Fairfax, a young woman who is Emma's age and who is being raised by a tutor, comes to Highbury to visit her aunt and grandmother, two poor old ladies on the borders of gentility. Emma cannot bring herself to like Jane, even though she is intelligent and accomplished, because she is also very reserved. Soon, another visitor comes to the village: Frank Churchill, Mr. Weston's son from a previous marriage, who was adopted by a rich uncle and took his surname. Frank had not been in Highbury for years, always going back on his promises to visit his father and saying that his overbearing aunt, Mrs. Churchill, could never spare him. In spite of his fickleness, Emma is delighted with him, and the two of them flirt openly. Emma begins to imagine that she is in love with Frank Churchill.

Mr. Elton marries a vulgar, talkative woman, leaving Harriet very unhappy. Emma decides that Frank Churchill should marry Harriet, and not her, because she never wishes to leave her father's home and, furthermore, does not fancy herself very much in love with him. Harriet then confesses to Emma that she does not love Frank Churchill, but Mr. Knightley. Emma finally understands that Mr. Knightley is the only man she has ever loved and is desperate with the idea of losing him to Harriet. When Mrs. Churchill dies, Frank is free to publicly announce that he has been engaged to Jane Fairfax for months. Emma is once more shocked with her own blindness and laments all the pain she gave Jane while flirting with

Frank. Mr. Knightley, believing Emma to be heartbroken over Frank Churchill, confesses his own love for her. The two marry, and Mr. Knightley moves to Hartfield, so that Emma doesn't need to leave her father.

Northanger Abbey (1818)

Catherine Morland is an empty-headed, kind-hearted and naïve girl of seventeen that goes to spend a season in the seaside resort of Bath with her rich neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Allen. There, she meets Henry Tilney, a satirical and interesting young man with whom she falls in love, and his sister, the sensible and unaffected Eleanor. She also meets a beautiful young woman named Isabella Thorpe, who does everything in her power to become her friend and soon succeeds. The two become inseparable and, due to Isabella's influence, Catherine begins reading the gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), by Ann Radcliffe, which she finds extremely absorbing. She later learns that Isabella's brother, John Thorpe, goes to Oxford with her own brother James.

James Morland and John Thorpe also come to Bath, and John tries to make himself agreeable to Catherine. Catherine, albeit not very sure of her own opinions, dislikes John, who is boastful and rude. When she makes a plan to go for a walk with the Tilneys, John lies to her, telling her that they left without her, and convincing her to go for a carriage ride with him. Catherine sees the Tilneys from John's carriage and is extremely upset. She later explains herself to Henry Tilney at the theater, and he is touched by her frankness and artlessness. They plan their walk for another day, but John, wishing to take Catherine on another ride, accosts the Tilneys and tells them that she cannot go with them again. Catherine runs after the Tilneys and invades their lodgings to tell them what happened. She is then introduced to their father, General Tilney, who is extremely attentive to her.

Isabella and James announce that they are engaged, to Catherine's surprise and happiness. Isabella is disappointed when she learns James financial situation. When Henry Tilney's older brother, Captain Frederick Tinley, arrives in Bath, he begins to flirt with Isabella, who openly flirts back, to Catherine's confusion.

General Tilney invites Catherine for a visit in his home, Northanger Abbey. Catherine is in raptures, not only because she will be able to see more of Henry and Eleanor, but also because she will see an ancient building like the ones she reads about in her gothic novels. When Catherine arrives at the abbey, she is disappointed, because the house has been modernized and does not look like what she had imagined. Soon, however, she creates a

suspicion that General Tilney murdered his wife, and feels that she is indeed inside a gothic novel. Henry discovers her suspicions, reminds her of how unlikely such an event is and leaves her terribly ashamed. He, however, does not admonish Catherine for having entertained such a thought, and she is grateful and falls even more deeply in love.

James sends a letter to Catherine saying that his engagement with Isabella is broken and that she will probably soon announce her engagement to Captain Tilney. Catherine finally understands that Isabella never cared for James or for her, and was only trying to marry the richest man possible. Catherine then goes on a visit to see the house where Henry, Woodston Parsonage, which is a short ride away from the abbey. She imagines herself living there and sees that the General is imagining the same thing. Her stay in the abbey is extended indefinitely. However, the General comes back from a quick trip inexplicably furious with Catherine and turns her out of his house.

Catherine is mortified when she arrives at her parents' house, without being able to understand the General's behavior. Henry Tilney follows her there, says that he has cut his father off and asks her to marry him. Catherine happily accepts. The narrator then tells us that the General thought that Catherine was a rich heiress, because John Thorpe, eager to boast of all of those he associated with, told him so. Later, after James Morland had broken off his engagement with Isabella, John Thorpe told the General that Catherine's family, far from being rich, were in fact miserable, which made him expel her from his home. After a while, the General discovers that Catherine is neither rich nor poor and becomes reconciled with the idea of the match. Catherine and Henry get married and settle in Woodston Parsonage.

Persuasion (1818)

Anne Elliot is a twenty-seven-year-old woman who still pines for the love of her youth, Frederick Wentworth. The two had become engaged eight years before, when he was still a young sailor without any fortune, but Anne, after having encountered the opposition of her father, Sir Walter, a vain and foolish baronet, and of her mother figure, a neighbor named Lady Russell, broke off the engagement. When Sir Walter is obliged to rent his estate to Frederick's brother-in-law, Admiral Croft, in order to pay off his debts, Frederick and Anne cross paths again.

Frederick made a fortune in the navy and is considered an eminently eligible bachelor, while Anne is considered to have lost the bloom of youth. Anne watches Frederick flirt with Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, her sister Mary's sisters-in-law, deeply jealous, but unable to

believe that he could still care for her. When most of the main characters go on an excursion to Lyme Regis, Louisa, trying to impress Frederick, insists that he help her jump down the stone steps that lead to the beach. This causes her to suffer a nearly fatal fall, for which Frederick feels responsible.

Louisa is left in Lyme to the care of some of Frederick's friends, Captain Harville and his wife, while Frederick himself, to everybody's surprise – since all around him believe him to be in love with Louisa – removes from the scene. Anne then goes to Bath to stay with Sir Walter and Elizabeth, and, there, she becomes more intimate with a cousin of Sir Walter's who will inherit his estate, which is entailed away from the female line and therefore cannot be left to his daughters. Mr. Elliot, who in his youth had snubbed Sir Walter and Elizabeth, is now extremely attentive towards both, and they forgive him fully for the errors of the past. Elizabeth believes that Mr. Elliot's objective in approaching her family is eventually marrying her, and this belief is strengthened by her sycophantic friend Mrs. Clay. Anne, however, sees that Mr. Elliot is in fact interested in herself – but she, alone among her relatives and Lady Russell, does not believe him to be entirely sincere in his behavior towards her sister and her father.

Lady Russell, who is, like all others except Anne, enchanted by Mr. Elliot, tries to convince her to marry him. Momentarily, Anne is enthralled by the idea of becoming Lady Elliot and occupying the place that was her mother's. But she knows that she still loves Frederick, and moreover, that she neither loves nor trusts Mr. Elliot. Later in the novel, a friend of Anne's, Mrs. Smith, reveals to her that she knew Mr. Elliot when he was younger, and proves that he took advantage of her husband and refused to help her when she became a widow, leaving her to shift for herself in poverty and sickness. Anne also learns that Mr. Elliot has only decided to renew the acquaintance with her father because he is afraid that the vain baronet will marry Mrs. Clay and possibly produce another heir, thus cutting him off.

Anne sees that Frederick is jealous of Mr. Elliot, which leaves her filled with joy, but also anxious to express herself to him. Because she cannot address Frederick openly on the subject, Anne must use a third party to convince him of her feelings. While having a conversation about men and women's constancy in love, she says that women's affections endure more than the affections of men. This declaration prompts Frederick to write a note to Anne revealing that he has not forgotten her either. The couple is reunited and later gets married.