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Anti-heroines  
in Jane Austen's Novels

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# Introduction

I remember feeling at once amused and outraged when first presented with Plato's concept of art during my high school years. The allegory of the cave was awkward enough, with its statement that everything which we see and touch is just an image of something intangible and unreachable, which constitutes the true essence of reality<sup>1</sup>. As though this were not perplexing enough for teenage minds, there came the subsequent idea of the mimetic nature of art, according to which Plato sees every work of art as a copy of the objects found in this world and every such object as a copy of a superior idea constituting the true essence of reality mentioned above<sup>2</sup>. There follows that art is a copy of a copy and thus it is illusory and deceptive<sup>3</sup>. Still, notwithstanding the different positions taken about Plato's perspective both by philosophers through the centuries and by each person in their own time, it seems to me that two irrefutable points are to be drawn from his statements about art. The first is that every work of art refers to something external to itself, representing it, altering it, celebrating it or criticising it. May this 'represented something' be a copy of a higher and truer entity or not, I will simply call it reality, meaning the world around us from which the artists derive their subjects. The second point, opposed and complementary to the first, is that every work of art refers to its very self by employing and displaying the means of representing reality. These acquire an autonomy and dignity of their own and thus release themselves from their status as mere means of hinting at something and hint at themselves in their very act of referring to that external entity which I labelled reality.

Therefore in the analysis of a painting, say Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*, we are on the one hand offered the narration of a story and the representation of a fact, in the given case the creation of man by the hand of God. On the other hand, we are also presented with the formal elements of painting, which have a double function. They *both* enable the narration or representation, having thus a mimetic quality, *and* stand up for themselves and interact with each other, thus creating something new and different from the reality represented: the work of art itself with its intrinsically aesthetic quality. If a religious person may focus on the fact that God in his love and mercy created man by instilling in him his touch of life, an art historian will linger on the sharp line, the powerful volume, the anatomic accuracy and the classical ideal of Michelangelo's work. The double nature of art is immanent in the painting

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<sup>1</sup> Platone, *La Politeia (Libro Settimo)* in *I Dialoghi*, Vol. II, Milano, Rizzoli Editore, 1953, repr. 1964, pp. 343-347.

<sup>2</sup> Platone, *La Politeia (Libro Decimo)* cit., pp. 465-470, 472-475.

<sup>3</sup> Ivi.

and whether we sympathise with the perspective of religious people or with that of art historians, whether we are attracted to the fact of the creation of man or to the means of its representation, both perspectives are in front of us and our picking one or the other is simply a matter of personal choice. Yet, they who want to analyse a piece of art are not given the choice to pick one perspective or the other according to their leisure, but need to consider both the reality represented and the interplay of the elements which serve as means of portraying it.

A further point to state is that the double nature of art I hinted at with my reference to Michelangelo's work is peculiar to every kind of art, be it painting, sculpture or also literature. A good example of this is to be found in Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice*, for instance during Elizabeth's visit to Darcy's manor, when she is shown the picture gallery<sup>4</sup>:

Elizabeth walked on in quest of the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her -- and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile over the face as she remembered to have sometimes seen, when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation.<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth, who «knew nothing of the art»<sup>6</sup> and who thus does not enjoy art for its own sake, is attracted to the painting precisely for its mimetic nature, for its «striking resemblance» to its subject, Mr. Darcy. This passage implies both the aspects of art discussed before and focuses our attention on the special circumstance that the heroine enjoys only one of the two. Elizabeth is here like the abovementioned religious person, fascinated not by the aesthetic elements of a painting, but by its subject.

Meanings do not change if we have a statue instead of a painting, which is the case in Joe Wright's film adaptation of the novel<sup>7</sup>. His choice of employing a different form of art in the portrait episode, substituting sculpture for painting, is justified by the use of a different form of art in the narration of the whole story – his own visual language in the screen version in place of Jane Austen's literature. He claims that the significance of the episode, so well rendered through the employment of a painted portrait in the novel, is better conveyed in

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. also F. Stafford, *Introduction*, in J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* [1813], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. vii-xxxii, pp. ix-x.

<sup>5</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>7</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, director Joe Wright, screenplay Deborah Moggach, Focus Feature, 2005.

the film by substituting the original painting with a sculpture, which renders in a more striking way the emotional involvement of the heroine when her story is retold in the language of film<sup>8</sup>. Elizabeth is thus seen wandering in a sculpture gallery while the camera moves around the walking figure and the statues surrounding it. Finally, it fixes on Darcy's statue, which is initially out of focus and comes gradually into focus while the camera turns around it, until it frames Elizabeth herself, lost «in earnest contemplation» of its «striking resemblance», while Mrs. Gardiner asks her: «Lizzy, is it a true likeness?»<sup>9</sup>. There follows a debate about his being handsome, where the issue is the real man being handsome, not his portrayed image. The result of this substitution of painting with sculpture is indeed a delicate yet emotional rendering of the feelings that Elizabeth might have experienced during those «several minutes» of «earnest contemplation». The replacement of one form of art with the other succeeds precisely because of their common characteristic of hinting both at the subject and at the elements of the representation.

Having stated that both painting and sculpture share the double nature of art discussed in the paragraphs above, I will build my dissertation around the circumstance that the same can be said for literature. If literature too displays specific elements which enable its mimetic function as well as producing its aesthetic quality, there follows that each single element can be analysed from *both* the mimetic *and* the aesthetic perspective. Firstly, the chosen element hints at a certain aspect of reality which, in a way or another, is dealt with in the literary product. Secondly, the given element enters into a complex web of relationships with all the other elements which constitute the work of art. The structure of the work can in fact be seen as constructed of several parts interacting with each other. The aim of my dissertation is precisely to focus on one element of Jane Austen's work – one type of character, the anti-heroine, which is present and central throughout her production. I will firstly analyse the roles and functions that such element has within the universe of the novel and secondly consider the way in which it refers to the real world.

For logic reasons, the other fictional element anti-heroines will be most often compared to and contrasted with are the corresponding heroines, with whom they share sex, age and

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. J. Wright, *Director's Commentary to Pride and Prejudice*, dir. J. Wright cit., Universal Pictures DVD, special Panorama ed. 2008, min. 79:00-81:00.

<sup>9</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. J. Wright cit., min. 79:00-80:00 ca.

predicaments. The notion here chosen of anti-heroines cannot forgo the sharing of these three conditions on the part of the female protagonists and antagonists. In fact, it is precisely because heroines and anti-heroines have so many things in common that their opposite lines of behaviour are so interesting. This notion of anti-heroine also differs in some ways from similar notions to be found in the two most influential theoretical books about the fundamental elements of action in the plot: *Morphology of the Folktale* [1928] by Vladimir Propp and *Logique du Récit* [1976] by Claude Bremond. Propp does not define characters as such either generally or individually. He identifies the basic element of a story in the function, i.e. an action, and the basic structure in the rigid chain of causes and effects in which the functions arrange themselves and through which the story develops.<sup>10</sup> As Bremond summarises, according to Propp:

the constant elements, given in a folktale, are the functions of the characters, *independently from the identity of the executor* and form the way of the execution.<sup>11</sup>

Since Propp regards the action and not the actor as the sole element determining the development of the story, there is no reason for him to provide whatever definition of fictional persons. Bremond takes a step further in regarding characters as such. However, he defines them not in terms of what they are, but in terms of what they do. Admittedly from a different perspective, the action is still the focus of the analysis. Indeed, if Propp is interested in the action itself, Bremond is interested in the action as done by a character who acts in a certain way and produces certain consequences. He thus operates a fundamental distinction between the character who does the action (agent) and one who undergoes it (patient). He then goes on analysing the different characteristics of the one and the other and the different situations in which each can find itself. A patient for example can undergo a process of modification or conservation, of improvement or worsening of a given situation, can do this voluntarily or involuntarily, being aware or unaware of it, and so on. The agent can be an influencer, an informer, a seducer, an intimidator, an obligator, a forbiddor and so on. Most interesting is the fact that Bremond does not attribute to a certain character the role of the agent and to another one the role of the patient, seeing them as carrying such roles from the beginning to the end of the story. He regards characters alternatively as agents and patients

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<sup>10</sup> V. Ja. Propp, *Morfologia della Fiaba*, Torino, Einaudi, 1966, my italics.

<sup>11</sup> C. Bremond, *Logica del Racconto*, Milano, Bompiani, 1977, p. 17, my translation.

depending on the individual actions they do or undergo in a given moment. None is considered as performing a prevailing role, but all shift automatically from one role to the other many times during the unfolding of the story. Every character is defined step by step strictly in terms of what it does in every single action. Bremond does not even mention terms such as protagonist or antagonist, hero or anti-hero. His work is wonderfully neutral, it does not take sides nor pass judgements. E. M. Forster distances himself from both Propp and Bremond in his two beautiful chapters entitled *People* in his *Aspects of the Novel* [1927], where he gives his definition of characters and introduces the terms of their roundness or flatness, which has become a most celebrated distinction<sup>12</sup>. Forster defines fictional characters as the actors of a story, who share with their author and readers their state as human beings and are therefore very tightly linked with their creator and public. A peculiarity of what Forster calls *Homo Fictus*, is that both writer and readers get much more intimate with him than with any other human being in real life<sup>13</sup>:

A character in a book is real [...] when the novelist knows everything about it. He may not choose to tell us all he knows [,] [...] but he will give us the feeling that though the character has not been explained it is explicable, and we get from this a reality of a kind we can never get in daily life.<sup>14</sup>

A 'real' human being, albeit on the pages of a book, who seems even more 'real' than any other human being we encounter in the street. This is basically Forster's definition of a fictional character, identifying the character as a person, as the title of the chapter suggests, instead than as the agent or patient of an action, like Propp and Bremond do.

My dissertation aims at being as neutral and impartial as Bremond's study, and as analytical and yet sympathetic as Forster's work. By defining a character as a heroine and another as an anti-heroine I do not want to elevate the one and belittle the other: in the fictional world of Jane Austen the categories Bremond employs are simply not enough. In her world protagonists and antagonists are necessary. Not because the ones are good and the others are bad, which is really not the case, but because the ones are the focus of the plot, discourse and ending of the story and the others are not. Because the ones adopt certain lines of behaviour

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* [1927], ed. Oliver Stallybrass, London, Penguin Books, 2005, pp. 73-81.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

and make certain choices, which Jane Austen in the end approves, and the others behave and choose differently and incur different fates, which Jane Austen in the end disapproves. Jane Austen's fictional world is intended to mirror a section of the real world in her age and country. Her novels are therefore a faithful portrait of reality, with all the social dynamics that go with it, and although we are still far from the social determination that will be the basis of life and literature for Thomas Hardy some decades later, Jane Austen was too keen a realist and a portraitist not to notice certain chains of causes and effects in the world around her, which she felt bound to render in her novels. She knew that being a woman in her society implied specific conditions and predicaments that women had to cope with, either accepting them or refusing them as her anti-heroines do, or mediating them, as is the case of her heroines. It is therefore indispensable for me to define Jane Austen's characters firstly in terms of what they are and only secondly in terms of what they do. Their choices and actions are just as important as their personalities, but they rise precisely from their being women, and most specifically young women whose life lies still unfolded in front of them.

Let us now return to the notion of Jane Austen's anti-heroines as sharing the heroines' sex, age and predicaments. Sex and age define them most generally – they are female and they are young, just as the heroines are. Their age necessarily excludes other interesting female characters, such as a Mrs. Bennet or a Miss Bates, who also would tell us a great deal about women in fiction and history. Yet, being a young woman is not enough to be an anti-heroine. Many young women in Jane Austen's novels are *not* anti-heroines. To be one, two other conditions are required – the share in the predicaments of the heroine and a different response to them. Taking the example of *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia Bennet is an anti-heroine and Mary Bennet is not. Instinctively, every one agrees. Rationally, some considerations are needed. Mary is not concerned with the issues that engage her other sisters. Engrossed by the theories about society, conduct and character which she finds in idealistic and thus unrealistic conduct books, she does not put herself to the test in the real world as they do. Looking down on other people by the height of her assumed wisdom, she does not conceive society, conduct and character as means of living together with them. Her predicaments are not those of her sisters, if she ever has any. Lydia is a different matter. Albeit in a way and with an outcome totally different from Elizabeth, she faces the same situations. It is not by chance that she and Elizabeth are related beyond their sisterly bounds by their relationship with one and the same male character (same predicament) and it is not by chance that the

first ends up loving him while the latter ends up despising him (different response). Such duality of outcome in different situations is to be found in this novel also as far as such themes as love, passion, marriage, impression, perception, insight, judgement, affirmation of the self and conduct within society are concerned.

In this dissertation then, the list of the anti-heroines analysed for each heroine and each novel is the following: Isabella Thorpe for Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, Lucy Steele for Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*, Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet for Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Crawford for Fanny Price in *Mansfield Park*, Jane Fairfax for Emma in *Emma*, Louisa Musgrove for Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*. Every Austen reader might be surprised and displeased by this list, by reading names they would not have expected and not finding the ones they would expect. In particular, one may ask what has become of Eleanor Tilney, why is Marianne Dashwood not even mentioned and why should not Harriet Smith be the foil to Emma. These issues, alongside with why does Elizabeth Bennet have two anti-heroines, will be dealt with each in the chapter devoted to the novel in question. Let it here suffice that anti-heroines, to be such, must face the same predicaments as the respective heroines and must answer them differently, which is exactly what the characters chosen as subjects of this dissertation do.

Anti-heroines as an element of Jane Austen's novels, however, do not display only a direct interaction with the heroines. They also interact in a broader way within the novel, having their right share in its plot and structure. Once agreed that Jane Austen's novels focus on the process through which a young woman, the heroine of the novel, gets to know herself and enters adulthood and society by way of marrying, a few questions arise. How do anti-heroines interact in such process affecting the heroine directly and the novel just as directly, since every Austen novel, with the only exception of *Sense and Sensibility*, is centred on one main female character? What is then their narrative role within the novel? Such role is the other issue neither Propp nor Bremond discuss. They do not say whether their role is to complicate and obstruct the protagonist's vicissitudes, or to provide a negative, wrong or disapproved of example to the reader and thus exalt the heroine's positive qualities, or rather to offer a different perspective on a given situation. The answers to these questions I consider instead as possible appropriate ways of investigating the roles and functions of the antagonist broadly, and of Jane Austen's anti-heroine specifically. These are the dynamics my dissertation is meant to analyse in the specific chapters devoted to each heroine and anti-

heroine. In my view of Jane Austen's fictional world, the anti-heroine has the main function of serving as a foil to the heroine, highlighting some characteristics of hers and providing obstacles or alternatives to her *Bildung*, so as to help her, by means of substitution, obstruction or alternative example, to get to know herself and the world and to take a position towards her inner self, the people around her and the society in which she lives<sup>15</sup>.

If the first six chapters of my dissertation consider anti-heroines as characters in a book, the last one regards them as representatives of the women of their time, thus dealing with a historical issue – the condition of women in England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. How did women live in those years? With which burdens, limitations and restraints were they to cope? Which means were available or not available to them to deal with their lot? These are some of the points about which these characters, analysed from a historical point of view, may have something to say.

In this perspective, anti-heroines are as interesting as, if not more interesting than, heroines themselves. Admittedly, the heroines are those who carry the meaning and sense of the novel. It is their growth which we witness in the unfolding of the plot, both through the facts and through the thoughts that testify their psychological, intellectual, moral, emotional and social development. It is they who open and close the story and it is their story which is told. It is their perspective that triumphs at the end of the novels, also regarding the condition of women. It is well known that before marrying, they undergo a profound process of self-knowledge, that they do not give themselves away to the first man who comes into their way and that at least half of them play it hard to get. Still, they all marry the men who were from the first intended as their ideal matches, whether this was explicitly stated or implicitly inferred. The anti-heroines, if compared to them, make different choices, adopt different lines of behaviour and consequently have differently meaningful fates. Elopements, secret engagements, marriages of convenience, calculation for social advancement – they do what the protagonists of the novels, because of their sense and prudence, would never even attempt. They represent different types of women from Jane Austen's heroines, the ones who do not triumph at the end of the story, but who are present on the novels' pages as they were present in the houses and on the streets of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England and that are thus just as worthy of consideration.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. also N. Marsh, *Jane Austen. The Novels*, London, Macmillan, 1998, pp. 31, 62.

Chapter 1:

**Isabella Thorpe**  
and ***Northanger Abbey***

## 1.1. Isabella as friend and foil

### 1.1.a. The friend

Chatty, witty, sparkling as a girl. Warm, affectionate, involving as a friend. This was Isabella Thorpe to Catherine Morland the first time they met. What a relief her acquaintance must have been for the latter after that first week in Bath, spent in the mere society of dull Mrs. Allen. With Isabella, Catherine's social and cultural panorama undergoes a deep change. She has now someone to be with, to talk to and to share her interests with. The two girls, in an immediate and almost automatic way, rush all the steps that take them from strangers to acquaintances, then to friends, then to «dearest creature[s]»<sup>1</sup>. After only one week, Isabella might have told Catherine what Celia told Rosalind in *As You Like It*:

And wheresoe'er we went, like Juno's swans,  
Still we went coupled and inseparable.<sup>2</sup>

In entering a ball room, for instance:

they [would follow] their chaperons, arm in arm, into the ball-room, whispering to each other whenever a thought occurred, and supplying the place of many ideas by a squeeze of the hand or a smile of affection.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.1.b. The foil

Notwithstanding this promising beginning, Isabella's story is a shooting star. The four stages of its rise and fall are her strong friendship with Catherine; her engagement to James Morland (Catherine's brother); her flirting with Frederick Tilney (Henry and Eleanor Tilney's brother) and her final loss of Catherine as a friend and James as a fiancé.

One of the narrative procedures used by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* consists in creating expectations in the reader and then disappointing them immediately and unexpectedly<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* [1817], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> W. Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Michael Hattaway, Cambridge, The New Cambridge Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, 2000, repr. 2004, I, 3, lines 65-66.

<sup>3</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 35.

Accordingly, Mrs. Allen, the Morlands family friend and Catherine's host in Bath, is first presented as «a good-humoured woman, fond of Miss Morland, and probably aware that if adventures will not befall a young lady in her own village, she must seek them abroad [...]»<sup>5</sup> From this description, Mrs. Allen would seem a cheerful, affectionate and shrewd woman. Yet after only two pages we come across a less flattering and more fitting description of her:

she had neither beauty, genius, accomplishment, nor manner[,] [but] the air of a gentlewoman, a great deal of quiet, inactive good temper, and a trifling turn of mind [...].<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, the first description of General Tilney presents him as an upright gentleman whose aspect and manners convey a sense of stability and firmness:

He was a very handsome man, of a commanding aspect, past the bloom, but not past the vigour of life [...].<sup>7</sup>

So Catherine cannot avoid thinking «'How handsome a family [the Tilneys] are!'».<sup>8</sup> Yet on a closer acquaintance, she will find him severe, impatient and bad-tempered. Northanger Abbey itself proves to be so modern and comfortable a building that «[Catherine] doubted, as she looked around the room, whether any thing within her observation, would have given her the consciousness [of being in an abbey].»<sup>9</sup> There follows a faithful description of windows, arches, furniture and ornaments:

in all the profusion and elegance of modern taste. [...] To an imagination which had hoped for the smallest divisions, and the heaviest stone-work, for painted glass, dirt and cobwebs, the difference was very distressing.<sup>10</sup>

The same procedure of asserting and undercutting a statement is used in the depiction of Isabella's character and friendship with Catherine. The reader soon realises that the initial idyll will not last. After witnessing the acquaintance of the two girls in chapter IV and the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel. 'Northanger Abbey', 'Sense and Sensibility' and 'Pride and Prejudice'*, London, Macmillan, 1983, pp. 24-26.

<sup>5</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. II, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. X, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. V, p. 117.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 118.

deepening of their friendship in chapter V, in chapter VI he is made aware of something disturbing in Isabella, an air of affectation and conceit which plays wonderfully against Catherine's spontaneity. Two opposite types of persons are presented here. Yet while the reader acknowledges the difference almost immediately, Catherine's process of recognition will be much longer and harder. It will take her a whole novel and several mistakes and mortifications and it will end in her seeing through not only her former friend, but her very self.

### 1.1.c. Speaking and acting

Wherein then lies the alleged difference between Isabella and Catherine, who initially appear to share attitudes, interests and perspectives? Coherently with one theme of the novel, i.e. reading, the answer could be provided by the saying: do not judge a book by its cover. Just as *Northanger Abbey* may appear at first as a sister novel to *The Castle of Otranto*, at least as far as the title is concerned, and then it is revealed not to be so, Isabella may appear at first as a sister character to Catherine, and then it is revealed not to be so. Yet, if the title of *Northanger Abbey* declares it to be a Gothic novel, Isabella's initial statements declare her to be the most perfect woman on earth. Take her apology of love at first sight, talked of both in general and in reference to James Morland:

Where the heart is really attached, I know very well how little one can be pleased with the attention of any body else. Every thing is so insipid, so uninteresting, that does not relate to the beloved object!<sup>11</sup>

The very first moment I beheld him [James Morland] – my heart was irrecoverably gone. [...] I thought I never saw any body so handsome before.<sup>12</sup>

If it is true that there are girls who appear born to be heroines<sup>13</sup>, these words would perfectly fit any of them. Similarly, if it is true that Catherine Morland was not born to be a heroine, but grew into being one<sup>14</sup>, the quotations above would perfectly fit her as well. Instead they seem utterly inappropriate to a character like Isabella. As for the first statement, Isabella is

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<sup>11</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 26.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XV, p. 87.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. I, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ivi*.

pleased with any attention she receives by anybody, whether it be her fiancé James Morland, her admirer Frederick Tilney or «two odious young men who have been staring at [her] this half hour»<sup>15</sup> in the Pump-room. As for the second statement, Isabella will not think twice before accepting Frederick's advances while engaged to James, so much so for her heart being «irrecoverably gone»!

Apart from the moral implications of such a behaviour, which is not my intent to discuss here, the narrative dynamics it highlights are interesting indeed. Isabella, in these and in other statements of hers, speaks what Catherine refrains from saying. Accordingly, Isabella openly professes her immediate love for James, while Catherine is silent about her just as immediate love for Henry, the novel's hero. Similarly, Isabella betrays her beloved as soon as circumstances allow it, while Catherine keeps faithful to hers, although constantly and insistently pressed by John Thorpe, Isabella's brother. The contrast between the behaviour of the two women is reinforced by Isabella betraying James while actually engaged to him, while Catherine remains loyal to Henry, although not even sure about his feelings towards her. Here words and facts are split among the two friends – the anti-heroine speaks right and the heroine acts right.

#### 1.1.d. The woman and the girl

In Austen's later novels, the reader will be called on to be attentive and penetrating in the comparison among characters. Jane Austen will give hints and clues, but will not hold up the trump card until the very end. Not so in *Northanger Abbey*. In her first completed work, she puts her cards upon the table. It is thus easy to identify another interesting characteristic of Catherine's, highlighted precisely by the comparison with Isabella – her younger age. At the beginning of the novel, as the narrator states, Catherine is just a girl:

Miss Thorpe [...], being four years older than Miss Morland, and at least four years better informed, had a very decided advantage in discussing [...] points [...] such as dress, balls, flirtations, and quizzes. These powers received due admiration from Catherine, to whom they were entirely new [...].<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 27.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 20.

To a difference in personality an age gap is added, which causes their relationship to begin and to develop in an unbalanced way. Isabella is the one who does the talking, who passes judgments, mostly about people's appearance, but also about their character, and who instructs her protégé in the ways of both Gothic fiction and fashionable society. Yet, what best identifies the one as a woman and the other as a girl is not the different roles they take up in relation to each other, but the different concerns and priorities they harbour. After having talked indiscriminately of books and of men,

after remaining a few moments silent, [Catherine] was on the point of reverting to what interested her at that time rather more than anything else in the world, Laurentina's skeleton [from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*]; when her friend prevented her, by saying, - 'For Heaven's sake! let us move away from this end of the room. Do you know, there are two odious young men who have been staring at me this half hour. [...]'<sup>17</sup>

Typically, the younger woman's thoughts are engrossed in a book, while the elder woman's attention is fixed on men. Yet Catherine's situation is not only common in the real world, but also proper for *Bildung* – adult women do not develop, but young girls do, as we will see later in this chapter.

#### 1.1.e. Isabella's faults and Catherine's merits

Besides the split between speaking and acting and the gap between girlhood and womanhood, there are other differences between the two friends which Isabella emphasizes with her behaviour. The intention of Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* was to create a heroine whose strength is precisely her unpretentiousness and unaffectedness. These characteristics, alongside with humbleness, backwardness, propriety etc. might easily go unnoticed, if not emphasized. Elizabeth Bennet's wit or Emma Woodhouse's imagination shine and sparkle, so as to display themselves plainly. But among Jane Austen's heroines, they are exceptions. Anne Elliot, Fanny Price, Elinor Dashwood and last but not least Catherine Morland belong to a different kind of people. Their qualities neither shine nor sparkle nor are self-evident. Yet if the heroine does not hint at her own merits, someone else is in charge of doing it. The anti-heroine generally, and Isabella specifically, have here their reason for existence. Isabella's conceit, affectation and self-centredness highlight Catherine's simplicity and

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<sup>17</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 27.

artlessness<sup>18</sup>. The former's insensitivity highlights the latter's delicacy<sup>19</sup>. The «boasted prowess in handling men»<sup>20</sup> of the one highlights the shyness and humbleness of the other. Catherine is thus presented chiefly through the comparison and contrast with Isabella. It is as if we did not know her until we have known her opposite.

Although we are told that «her heart was affectionate, her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind»<sup>21</sup>, it is as if we saw all these traits in a condition of stillness, but not yet of motion; as if we had been informed about the theory, but had not yet witnessed the practice. Such motion and practice are what Isabella sets moving. She is indeed the character we see through first, for she is presented as openly as can be in her attitudes and motives. No other Austen anti-heroine is portrayed in such a plain way, so much so that the reader unintentionally smiles at the clash between Isabella's good intentions and her evil actions. He cannot help being amused at the candour with which she herself says one thing and makes another and at the candour with which the Morland siblings listen to her words and overlook the facts. Isabella is comic because she is excessive in everything – both in her words, which are hyperboles of kindness, selflessness and rectitude; in her deeds, which mirror exactly the reverse of the qualities she professes to possess; and in the cheekiness with which she preaches something and practices exactly the opposite. Yet Catherine is just as comic because of her being just as extreme, albeit at the other end of the spectrum, where sincerity, honesty, loyalty and affection lie. How else is such a clear-cut heroine to be dealt with, if not by relating her to an equally clear-cut anti-heroine? If Catherine is to be so helplessly and fascinatingly naïve, Isabella has to be shamelessly false. If Catherine is to be so pure and simple as to be unable to detect artifice<sup>22</sup>, Isabella has to be artifice par excellence. Here is a point which links the two women – both are crystal clear in their behaviour, each in her own way. Where Isabella is affected, conceited, self-centred and light-hearted, Catherine is spontaneous, kind-hearted, good-tempered and naïve. So much so, that the latter does not see through the former until much later in the novel, beginning to sense something during the first volume, but not really acknowledging the truth until the very end.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Hardy, *Jane Austen's Heroines. Intimacy in Human Relationships*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984, pp. 2 -7.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>21</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. II, pp. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

## 1.2. Isabella and Gothic

### 1.2.a. A Gothic character

In the paragraph above, I considered how Isabella's extreme attitudes and behaviour, in the first place, emphasize Catherine's equally extreme and yet diametrically opposed features and, in the second place, provide much of the comedy of the novel. In this paragraph, I will linger over the characterisation of Isabella as a caricature. Such presentation of her has in fact a third function, besides the two mentioned above – it contributes to the building of a Gothic world within common and ordinary society. Such world is the world which Catherine first looks for in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, in her trip to Blaize Castle<sup>23</sup>, and in her stay at Northanger Abbey<sup>24</sup>, the world which she then rejects after the humiliations she undergoes at the abbey, and which she eventually acknowledges as mingled and absorbed in ordinary life<sup>25</sup>. Yet, how is it possible to find a Gothic world in the real world, if even the most terrific-looking heavy chests and Japan cabinets contain nothing but clean linens and washing bills? The relationship of *Northanger Abbey* with Gothic fiction has been extensively dealt with<sup>26</sup>. The single elements and episodes which parody and assert Gothic clichés have been thoroughly examined. There follows a short and partial list, including Catherine not being born to be a heroine<sup>27</sup>; Henry not looking like a hero, because «not quite handsome», although «very near it»<sup>28</sup>; the abduction scene being substituted with a forced ride; the villain being here a «commonplace bore» instead of an «exotic villain»<sup>29</sup>; the second villain of the novel being guilty not of murdering or imprisoning his wife, but of turning a young woman

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<sup>23</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XI, p. 60.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. V, pp. 114-117.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. also the relationship between books and life as described in I. Grundy, *Jane Austen and literary traditions*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 189-210, p. 207.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. among others: C. L. Johnson, *Introduction*, in *Northanger Abbey* cit., pp. vii-xxxiv, pp. ix-xxv, T. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, London, Macmillan, 1987, pp. 43-74, R. M. Brownstein, *Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 32-57, pp. 36-42, J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-38, M. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [1975], Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 172-181.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. I, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> C. L. Johnson, *Introduction*, p. xxii.

out of his house<sup>30</sup>. Even the abovementioned chest and cabinet, alongside with the dead mother's apartment in chapter IX of volume II, prove to be no more than common objects and places. Yet, the replacement of the «alarms of romance» by the «anxieties of common life»<sup>31</sup> brings about not an invalidation, but a confirmation of romance. If clean linens and washing bills are somewhat disappointing, being thrown out in haste and rudeness by General Tilney and being then run after by his son declaring his love in spite of his father's disapprobation is certainly more rewarding in itself and rather consistent with romance<sup>32</sup>. Romantic events, sensational episodes and Gothic characters are thus to be found in common life as much as in Gothic fiction. General Tilney and John Thorpe have already provided convincing examples of this<sup>33</sup>, but Isabella is not usually considered as a Gothic character transposed into common life. Yet she is just as caricatured in her attitudes and behaviour as the two male villains. Her boasted affection for Catherine resembles General Tilney's overstated attention to her. Her obsession with clothes as a means of being admired resembles John Thorpe's obsession with horses and carriages as a means of being envied. These three characters all display an inverted relationship between what they say and what they do. All of them are exaggerated in their inconsistency. All of them embody the sensational nature of Gothic dramatic personae. All of them are caricatures of Gothic characters as well as of ordinary people, blending together in themselves the essence of fiction and that of reality.

### 1.2.b. A Gothic friendship

As we have seen, Gothic characters are expected to behave consistently with their established, unalterable and above all clear-cut roles. The heroine is supposed to be a heroine from infancy, the hero must be identified as such at the first glance and the villain is not entitled to any lesser crime than abduction, imprisonment or murder. In this perspective, also Isabella's friendship with Catherine is itself quite Gothic. In fact, it is wonderfully black and white. This happens at least at the beginning and at the end of the novel, when Gothic modes are believed in, first only by Catherine and then also by the reader. During the central

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. C. L. Johnson, *Introduction*, p. xxiii..

<sup>31</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. X, p. 148.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. note 26 above.

part of the novel, Catherine slowly moves from one clear-cut opinion of Isabella to its very opposite. As we have seen, their friendship begins in an atmosphere of total empathy, «pass[ing] [...] rapidly through every gradation of tenderness [...]. They called each other by their Christian name, were always arm in arm when they walked, [...] and were not to be divided in the set [...].»<sup>34</sup>

Yet at the end «of their very warm attachment, and of the delicacy, discretion, originality of thought, and literary taste which marked the reasonableness of that attachment»<sup>35</sup> nothing remains but Catherine's will of «tr[ying] to think no more of it.»<sup>36</sup> Such depiction of the relationship between the two women is consistent with the nature of Isabella, of other characters and of the novel itself as Gothic caricatures having a double purpose. They are intended first to undermine the expectation that the Gothic world is to be found inside the ordinary one, and then to show how the Gothic and the common world are tightly mingled together.

### 1.3. Recognition – the reader

Provided that her *Bildung* process will take Catherine through many steps of disillusionment and recognition towards final enlightenment, let us now consider an interesting question – why does the reader recognise Isabella's true nature much earlier than the heroine? Catherine's characteristics discussed in the paragraphs above may provide a possible answer. If she is genuine and naïve in her personality and young and inexperienced in her age, not too much discernment is to be expected from her. Yet this accounts for Catherine being misled by, not for the reader being disenchanted in, Isabella. In this respect, readers cannot boast a keener insight or a clearer understanding, but must admit the advantage they gain over Catherine on having the narrator on their side. The irony with which the story is told is in fact a tool for discernment which the narrator grants the reader but denies the heroine. It has the double effect of never dropping the comedy and never leaving the reader at the mercy of the characters. An ironic tone makes us alert to Isabella's true nature for the first time when she scolds Catherine for having left her waiting «these ten ages at least»<sup>37</sup>. We

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<sup>34</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 24.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 161.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 24.

cannot possibly be deceived by Isabella's distressing waiting, for the narrator anticipates that she «had arrived nearly five minutes before her friend»<sup>38</sup>. Isabella's comic raillery might be left to linger simply as the amused caricature of a common and innocent tendency to exaggeration, were not other passages and dialogues suffused with irony too. They have the double function of undermining Isabella's credibility and proving her falsity instead. The ones I find most evident refer to subjects which most women would regard with respect, if not with devotion – love and marriage. When recollecting her first encounter with James Morland, whom she declares to be head over heels in love with, Isabella spends as many words about him as about her recollection of «[wearing] my yellow gown, my hair done up in braids»<sup>39</sup>. When thinking about her marriage, «her imagination took a rapid flight over its attendant felicity». My personal reaction to this sentence the first time I read the novel was picturing myself a comfortable yet modest house, the seat of conjugal and parental happiness, a garden, an orchard, many children and several dogs, the husband placidly coming home from his duties in the parish and the wife proudly telling him of a little son's crawling progresses. Not Isabella – her thoughts are engrossed in

the gaze and admiration of every new acquaintance at Fullerton, the envy of every valued old friend in Putney, with a carriage at her command, a new name on her tickets, and a brilliant exhibition of hoop rings on her finger.<sup>40</sup>

The irony which tinges this and many other passages in the novel serves to enlighten the reader's, but not Catherine's, understanding of Isabella, so that at the end what is obvious to the reader has never even crossed Catherine's mind.

#### **1.4. Recognition – Catherine**

The author's unobtrusiveness in Catherine's process of recognition of Isabella is the main reason why discernment is much more difficult for the heroine than for the reader. As we have seen, Jane Austen treats Isabella poignantly or even sarcastically, yet she is never disrespectful. She shows Isabella to the reader for what she is, through the device of irony, but allows Catherine to relate to Isabella in her own way. She shows the deceit and

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<sup>38</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 24.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XV, p. 86.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 90.

affectation of some characters to the reader, but allows Catherine to make her own observations and draw her own conclusions. Most importantly, she allows Catherine to make her own mistakes, which will eventually lead her towards her *Bildung*. Jane Austen takes the position of the insightful yet unintruding spectator of a game, who elbows her fellow spectator (the reader) to the cheating of a player, but does not cry out to the other player to watch out. She waits for the given player to get aware of the cheating themselves. In other words, she lies in waiting for Catherine's recognition of Isabella's true character in a quiet and patient way. The anti-heroine's function then is not only to stress the heroine's attitude towards herself, the other characters and the fictional world of the novel, but also to highlight the author's own attitude towards her protagonist.

#### 1.4.a. Tentative recognition of Isabella

Not only does Catherine's process of recognition begin much later, but it is also much slower. It starts with her noticing certain incongruous attitudes in Isabella, albeit without ever criticising them. The very first episode happens, significantly, at the very ball during which Eleanor Tilney, whom we will consider later in this chapter, is first introduced in the novel and to the heroine. Catherine has been longing to point out Henry to Isabella for a few days already and Isabella has been declaring her desperate desire to see him all along («I die to see him.»<sup>41</sup>). Yet, when the occasion arises, Isabella is too busy teasing James to care:

and the original subject [Mr. Tilney] seemed entirely forgotten; and though Catherine was very well pleased to have it dropped for a while, she could not avoid a little suspicion at the total suspension of all Isabella's impatient desire to see Mr. Tilney.<sup>42</sup>

A similar episode happens on the evening of the first and failed trip to Clifton and Blaize Castle. Catherine has engaged herself to walk with the Tilneys, but the rainy morning and the Thorpes' insistent invitation for a drive in the country persuade her that the Tilneys would not keep their appointment. John has just hoisted Catherine in his gig and spurred his horse, when Catherine sees the Tilneys coming her way. Catherine's unheard plead that the carriage would stop and John's disregarding determination to go on form the core of this

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<sup>41</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Ivi.

peculiar abduction scene. This distressing event leaves Catherine «angry and vexed»<sup>43</sup> the whole day (spent on the trip) and the whole evening (spent at the Thorpes'). Yet her friend either does not notice or does not bother:

Catherine could almost have accused Isabella of being wanting in tenderness towards herself and her sorrows; so very little did they appear to dwell on her mind, and so very inadequate was the comfort she offered.<sup>44</sup>

#### 1.4.b. Immediate recognition of John

In the two episodes Catherine's feeling is of the same nature, but of different intensity. In both she is disappointed, but her «little suspicion» in the first nearly gives way to an accusation in the second – why? Firstly, some time has passed between the two events. Secondly, there is one factor which probably contributes to accelerate Catherine's process of recognition – her acquaintance with John Thorpe. In him, Catherine is disillusioned as soon as she first sets her eyes on him. After walking with him from the town centre to the Thorpes' lodgings, she has her mind made up about him – «[John's] manners did not please her»<sup>45</sup>. Yet she has her mind made up about her future attitude towards him just as well: since «he was James's friend and Isabella's brother»<sup>46</sup> she will not hurt her brother and her friend with disapproving comments about John and she will trust the two of them more than herself. As James asks her opinion on his friend:

instead of answering, as she probably would have done, had there been no friendship [...] in the case, 'I do not like him at all;' she directly replied, 'I like him very much; he seems very agreeable.'<sup>47</sup>

Although unable to disregard James and Isabella's favourable opinion, her own judgement of John soon grows in strength and insight. On the second day of their acquaintance, as he takes her out for a ride, he simultaneously warns her about his horse's frisky nature and assures her about his exceptional skill in driving it. Catherine, in her simplicity and

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<sup>43</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XI, p. 62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 33.

<sup>46</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>47</sup> *Ivi*.

unaffectedness, «could not help wondering that with such perfect command of his horse, he should think it necessary to alarm her with a relation of its tricks»<sup>48</sup>:

Little as Catherine was in the habit of judging for herself, and unfixed as were her general notions of what men ought to be, she could not entirely repress a doubt [...] of his being altogether completely agreeable.<sup>49</sup>

#### 1.4.c. Assessing characters – insight and distance

Catherine's judgement is never flawed in John. The question is why then it is constantly flawed in Isabella. The issue gains in relevance insofar as the two Thorpe siblings perfectly resemble each other. It is significant that the shrewdest description of John's attitudes made by both the heroine and the narrator during the above mentioned first ride fits Isabella just as well:

Catherine listened with astonishment; she knew not how to reconcile two such different accounts of the same thing; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle, nor to know to how many idle assertions and impudent falsehoods the excess of vanity will lead. Her own family [...] were not in the habit [...] of telling lies to increase their importance, or of asserting at one moment what they would contradict the next. <sup>50</sup>

Does not also Isabella provide different versions of the same facts? Is she not herself a rattle? Does she not make idle assertions and say impudent falsehoods because of an excess of vanity?

One and the same description fits both John and Isabella because the structure of the novel is built on the similarity between a brother and a sister and on the comparison and contrast among three couples of siblings<sup>51</sup>. Catherine and James Morland are affectionate and naïve and it is not by chance that they both let themselves be taken in by Isabella, the first as a friend, the second as a lover. Henry and Eleanor Tilney are intelligent and attentive. Isabella and John Thorpe are self-centred and affected. The relationship within each couple of siblings is very tight. Expressions of affection between brother and sister are spread

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<sup>48</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. IX, p. 43.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 46.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 178.

throughout the novel and presented as unquestionably sincere. Admittedly, every couple has its own manners, which range from the warmth of the Morlands through the delicacy of the Tilneys to the roughness of the Thorpes. Still, such expressions, whatever their style, are honest proofs of brotherly and sisterly love. Accordingly, Isabella warmly advocates John's proposal with Catherine<sup>52</sup>, James openly confesses to Catherine his wretchedness and distress after breaking off with Isabella<sup>53</sup> and Eleanor subtly encourages Henry to propose to Catherine<sup>54</sup>. In all the three couples the brother and the sister share common features and participate in each other's joys and sorrows.

Let us now consider the question of Catherine's different assessments of the two Thorpes. First of all, the open contrast which the reader notices from the outside may be not so plain when seen from the inside by the characters themselves. To gain such insight, characters must be *not only* attentive and sharp, *but also* not directly involved in the dynamics which are to be observed, just as the readers are not. We may therefore expect that a character like Henry would see into the relationship between Catherine and Isabella, firstly because he is shrewd himself and secondly because he is not directly involved in the friendship between heroine and anti-heroine. Bearing this in mind, we may attempt to answer the question of why Catherine is disenchanted in John and deceived in Isabella. The first point to state is that Catherine has in herself both naivety and discernment. In fact, if she had no discernment whatsoever, how could she move from credulity to detection, as she does through the novel? How could she preserve her morality from the start, as she does in the two episodes regarding the trip to Clifton? In the first episode, as we have seen, Catherine is driven on by John Thorpe although she pleads with him to stop at the sight of Henry and Eleanor Tilney. In the second, she is almost tricked by the same John Thorpe into postponing her engagement with the Tilneys. She manages to keep her engagement only on the second occasion, yet her morality is never flawed. The first condition for a character to understand other characters is that the character in question is capable of discernment. Such condition, as far as Catherine is concerned, is then fulfilled. The second requirement, that the character be not directly involved in the dynamics they are to clearly see through, is also fulfilled, but only as far as John is concerned. Catherine is linked to him only as far as she is his friend's

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. III, pp. 103-106.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. X, pp. 148-149.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 151-152.

sister and his sister's friend – she has no direct relationship with him and is detached from him enough to detect his real character. She *first* perceives her dislike of him and only *then* thinks she is wrong, before finally convincing herself that she is right instead. With Isabella it is a different matter. Firstly, Isabella is not a person met through common acquaintances, but an old intimate friend, at least in Catherine's perception. Secondly, Isabella and Catherine are both women and their mutual bonds are naturally stronger than any relationship with the other sex, except the sentimental one. The understanding, confidence and intimacy which develop between two women in general and between Catherine and Isabella in particular, are strong enough motives to prevent Catherine from seeing through Isabella, even if she perfectly sees through her brother.

#### 1.4.d. Further insight and disillusion in Isabella

However, as late, slow and tentative as she is, Catherine steadily progresses in recognising Isabella's true character. After witnessing the abovementioned incongruities in her friend, Catherine is put into the unpleasant circumstance of not only disapproving of Isabella's behaviour, but of openly and assertively opposing it. This happens for the first time during the arrangement for the second drive to Clifton, when she declines Isabella and John's invitation because of her engagement with the Tilneys:

But that she *must* and *should* retract, was instantly the eager cry of both the Thorpes [...] and they would not hear of a refusal. *Catherine was distressed, but not subdued.* 'Do not urge me, Isabella. I am engaged to Miss Tilney, I cannot go.' [...] But Isabella became only more and more urgent; calling on her in the most affectionate manner; addressing her by the most endearing names. [...] But all in vain; Catherine felt herself to be in the right. [...] Isabella appeared to her ungenerous and selfish, regardless of every thing but her own gratification. [...] [Catherine] proposed a compromise. [...] But 'No, no, no!' was the immediate answer [...]. Catherine was sorry, but could do no more.<sup>55</sup>

What a development in a girl «little [...] in the habit of judging for herself»<sup>56</sup>! Indeed, on the one hand, Catherine's morality is never flawed and on the other hand, her process of recognition is proceeding. Not only does the episode above prove Catherine's integrity and development. It also provides a further confirmation of the fact that one friend is the foil to

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<sup>55</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VII, pp. 70-71, my italics in line 2.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. IX, p. 47.

the other. Catherine is impartial – she is determined to walk with the Tilneys because she has taken an engagement with them, whereas Isabella is selfish – she wants Catherine to drive with her because she herself feels more at leisure with than without her. Catherine stands up for what she believes to be right, whereas Isabella struggles for her own comfort, independently from any implication regarding morality or propriety. The episode of Catherine refusing to drive with the Thorpes to walk with the Tilneys is a further, but not yet final step towards enlightenment. Catherine will have to undergo several other disillusionments in order to complete her *Bildung*. Yet the necessary requirements to go through such process are already here – Catherine can be both discriminating and assertive. She even goes as far as replying to John Thorpe's declaration «I only go for the sake of driving you»<sup>57</sup>: «That is a compliment which gives me no pleasure.»<sup>58</sup> Could any of us young people of the twenty-first century have been more outspoken? Yet «her words were lost on Thorpe, who had turned abruptly away.»<sup>59</sup>

Catherine's growing consciousness of Isabella's character is rendered also in the narrator's approach. In the following passage, for once, the heroine and the narrator wonderfully mingle their voices in disapprobation. Walking through the town centre in order

to pay her visit, explain her conduct, and be forgiven [by Eleanor for not keeping her engagement]; [Catherine] tripp[ed] lightly through the churchyard, and resolutely *turn[ed] away* her eyes, that she might not be *obliged to see* her *beloved* Isabella and her *dear* family, who, she had reason to believe, were in a shop hard by.<sup>60</sup>

Irony, as we have seen, is the tool the narrator uses in order to alert the reader to the true nature of her characters. Here it permeates even the heroine's own perspective. On the one hand, it proves her growing awareness of her friend's real character. On the other hand, it conveys the pain of her disillusionment in a delightfully poignant way.

Throughout her stay in Bath and her direct intercourse with Isabella, Catherine is more and more discerning in single events, yet still deceived on the whole. She still asserts that «Isabella is very firm in general»<sup>61</sup> even after having seen her dance with Frederick Tilney while James Morland is away. We have past the middle of the novel, Catherine has already

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<sup>57</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 71.

<sup>58</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XII, p. 65, my italics.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. I, p. 97.

detected several incongruities and inconsistencies in Isabella and yet she still comes up with such a foolish assurance of her friend's firmness! Even the most indulgent reader gets instinctively irritated with her and maliciously counterfeits Mrs. Allen's later words in: 'I really have no patience with Catherine'<sup>62</sup>. Yet the reader must acknowledge that the heroine's development cannot go further than this under the present circumstances. Other experiences are needed to push this process forward. However, our impatient reader will not have to wait long. Catherine's departure for Northanger Abbey is just round the corner, with all that goes with it.

### 1.5. Isabella, Elinor and Catherine' *Bildung*

Catherine's *Bildung* throughout the novel can be subdivided into four stages. In the paragraphs above, I have considered the first stage, with Catherine being in Bath and passing from blind belief and trust in Isabella to disapproval of certain attitudes of hers. The second section, which begins with Catherine's departure for Northanger Abbey, takes her development a step further. If the first stage brings partial disillusionment on the part of Catherine in regard to another person, i.e. Isabella, the second questions and demolishes her whole way of perceiving reality. Catherine's subsequent and climaxing illusions and disenchantments in the contents of chest and cabinet prepare for her final blow – the episode of Mrs. Tilney's apartment. Impressed by Eleanor's affection and by General Tilney's apparent disregard for the mother and wife, Catherine decides to investigate into what could be a real Gothic mystery – General Tilney's alleged murder or imprisonment of his wife. This third Gothic episode differs from the previous two in its narrative depiction, position and relevance. Catherine's opening of the heavy chest is almost immediate – «[o]ne moment might be spared»<sup>63</sup> – and equally effortless – «[h]er resolute effort threw back the lid»<sup>64</sup>. Her opening of the cabinet requires more reasoning, more time and more physical strength, and yet it is over in some minutes. The chest contains nothing but a common set of clean linens. The cabinet affords something more engaging – «a roll of paper pushed back into the further part of the cavity, apparently for concealment»<sup>65</sup>. Yet also this «precious manuscript»<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XV, p. 176.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VI, p. 120.

<sup>64</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 124.

proves to be nothing more than forgotten washing bills written «in coarse and modern characters»<sup>67</sup>. Conversely, Mrs. Tilney's apartment engages Catherine's fantasy for a longer time and in a deeper way. Only after three days, two failed attempts and much personal speculation, circumstances allow its inspection. Yet, again, the apartment is no crime scene or hidden prison. The episode would seem to conclude as the former two, with a poignant but secret humiliation on the part of Catherine, until Henry Tilney catches Catherine in the act at the very moment of her leaving his mother's room. There follows Catherine's embarrassed explanation and Henry's gentle but decided scolding, which constitutes one of the best-known passages in the novel. This episode drives Catherine from believing in Gothic fiction, and broadly in books and fantasy, to acknowledging life as it really is, with its ordinary features such as its «social and literal intercourse»<sup>68</sup> and its «neighbourhood[s] of voluntary spies»<sup>69</sup>.

Right after this last mortification of Catherine's, the third stage of her development opens. Bath enters Northanger Abbey and Isabella creeps into the Tilneys' household. James' letter introduces the news of her outrageous flirting with Frederick Tilney and this episode brings about Catherine's final recognition of her true character. Catherine's disillusionment is made plain in her own words during her dialogue with Henry and Eleanor Tilney on the subject. At first, grieved as she is, she still does not want to explain the matter fully and «[t]o expose a friend, such a friend as Isabella had been to her». On the one hand, she still does not want to betray Isabella, on the other hand, she already refers to their friendship in the past perfect tense, as something being over. Indeed, for Catherine it is over and her words spoken to the Tilneys form a climax which enlightens her new awareness about Isabella:

Isabella – no wonder now I have not heard from her – Isabella has deserted my brother, and is to marry your's! Could you have believed there had been such inconsistency and fickleness, and every thing that is bad in the world?<sup>70</sup> [...] I never was so deceived in any one's character in my life before.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VI, p. 124.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VII, p. 126.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. IX, p. 145.

<sup>69</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. X, p. 150.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 152.

At this point, the reader bursts into cheers and applause. Yet he must acknowledge, that Catherine's *Bildung*, which he has long waited for and which he now rejoices in, could not have been achieved a page earlier. Since her departure from Bath, Catherine has experienced three painful mortifications and has learned to look with disenchanted eyes at chests, cabinets and uninhabited apartments. Now she learns to do the same with people. Northanger Abbey, appearing as a haunted ruin to Catherine's fancy, proves to be a modern and comfortable abode. Similarly, Isabella, appearing as a perfect bosom friend, is now seen for what she is – a selfish deceiver.

Once disillusioned, Catherine does not let herself be taken in any more, not even by Isabella's flattering and manoeuvring letter which follows James' message:

Such a strain of shallow artifice could not impose even upon Catherine. Its inconsistencies, contradictions, and falsehood, struck her from the very first. She was ashamed of Isabella, and ashamed of having ever loved her. Her professions of attachment were now as disgusting as her excuses were empty, and her demands impudent. [...] 'So much for Isabella,' she cried, 'and for all our intimacy! [...] I do not believe she had any regard either for James or for me, and I wish I had never known her.'

<sup>72</sup>

The episode of Isabella's letter is the last in which we hear of her. This supports my argument that Isabella is a tool to bring about Catherine's enlightenment. Once this is completed, she has no longer any reason for existence and disappears from the narration. Actually, Catherine's *Bildung* is not yet finished, but the last and final spur towards a faithful vision of the world, which constitutes the fourth stage of her *Bildung*, cannot be given by Isabella. She has already done everything which was in her power, albeit unconsciously, to make Catherine develop. Her *Bildung* has now to be entrusted, equally unconsciously, to a much more powerful character – General Tilney. His superiority to Isabella is easily stated – he is a middle-aged man, she a young woman; he has fortune and consequence, she has none. From a social viewpoint, he is much more powerful than she is and his prestige applies to the narrative world just as well. His order of expulsion from Northanger Abbey confirms him as a villain, Henry as a hero and Catherine as a heroine. It validates those Gothic expectations Catherine had grown disillusioned with and she has now to grow again aware

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<sup>72</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XII, pp. 160-161.

of. Only, they are no longer to be labelled as «alarms of romance»<sup>73</sup>, but as «anxieties of common life»<sup>74</sup>. Now Catherine's *Bildung* is completed.

The aim of this chapter so far has been to highlight Isabella's contribution to Catherine's *Bildung* by way of suggesting alternative values and attitudes which the heroine has to learn to discern, disapprove of and distance herself from. Actually, Isabella does much more than this. She initiates Catherine to the delights and thrills of Gothic novels. These books not only supply Catherine with a pleasant way to spend her time, but provide her with an entirely new and engaging way of relating to the world. This tendency appears first in her involvement in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, the novel she is presently reading, then in her eagerness to visit Blaize Castle and Northanger Abbey and finally in her awkward attempts to disclose its secrets and mysteries. Until the final blow, when she is scolded by Henry about her Gothic follies, she employs Gothic clichés as a way of perceiving reality and assessing characters. Devouring a book is an innocent pastime, checking the contents of furniture is an equally harmless deed, but taking a respectable man for a murderer is a gross mistake bordering on open slander. I do not want to read too much into it, yet I cannot help thinking that if Isabella had not initiated Catherine to Gothic reading, none of this would have happened. Including Catherine's painful yet successful *Bildung*.

From this viewpoint, Isabella is the occasion for and cause of Catherine's *Bildung* not only in Bath, but also at Northanger Abbey. *She* encourages Catherine's willingness to see life as a romance and *this* causes her to make mistakes, to undergo private and public humiliations and to arrive at a better understanding of reality. Catherine's ultimate folly brings about a greater attention and a warmer attachment on Henry's part, who during their following conversation «earnestly regard[s] her»<sup>75</sup>, «closely observe[s] her»<sup>76</sup>, keeps «his quick eye fixed on her»<sup>77</sup>. Isabella has thus a part in Catherine's misadventures, in her disillusionment and also in the successful outcome of her love story, thus serving many more aims than one might initially think.

After discussing the anti-heroine's role and function in regard to the heroine, the novel and the author, there remains a last issue to consider – why is Isabella the anti-heroine, and not

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<sup>73</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. II, Ch. X, p. 148.

<sup>74</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. IX, p. 144.

<sup>76</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ivi.*

Eleanor? The section below is meant to stress firstly, how Eleanor and Isabella are different from each other, secondly, how the former is like, and the latter is unlike, Catherine, and thirdly, how these similarities and differences among characters are the reasons why Isabella is the anti-heroine and Eleanor is not.

Firstly, the initial description of Eleanor already opposes her to Isabella, both explicitly and implicitly:

Miss Tilney had a good figure, a pretty face, and a very agreeable countenance; and her air, though it had not all the decided pretensions, the resolute stylishness of Miss Thorpe's, had more real elegance. Her manners shewed good sense and good breeding; they were neither shy, nor affectedly open; and she seemed capable of being young, attractive, and at a ball, without wanting to fix the attention of every young man near her, and without exaggerated feelings of extatic delight or inconceivable vexation on every little trifling occurrence.<sup>78</sup>

The difference between Eleanor and Isabella is striking, both in appearance and in manners. Yet the former's similarity to Catherine, although not openly stated in the passage, is equally striking. Both are exempt from the «extatic delight» or the «inconceivable vexation» which affect Isabella.

Secondly, Eleanor and Catherine are, and Isabella is not, morally upright. This is plainly stated in the drive-walk episodes. When asked by John, Eleanor readily consents to postpone her walk with Catherine to permit her to keep her alleged prior engagement. This proves her indulgence and her benevolence towards Catherine. When informed about such arrangement, Catherine in turn hurries to Eleanor to explain John's lie and confirm their appointment. This shows her sincerity and coherence. Isabella, conversely, considers only her own comfort, first convincing Catherine that the Tilneys will not come and then trying to persuade her that their walk should be postponed.

Furthermore, Catherine and Eleanor establish a friendship between equals, where both respect and esteem the other for her qualities and merits. The relationship with Isabella is instead utterly unbalanced, one friend being a worldly, unscrupulous woman and the other being an honest, naïve girl.

Not only the nature of these two relationships, but also their beginning and development are quite different. Isabella's friendship is treated as something immediate and obvious, whereas

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<sup>78</sup> J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 38.

Eleanor's is sought and wanted. It is as if Catherine's struggle for Eleanor's acquaintance, obstructed by the Thorpes, were the first, unconscious step towards her self-improvement. If Isabella is Catherine's opposite, Eleanor is her ideal. If Isabella is what Catherine is not, Eleanor is what Catherine is and what she can and will be. In fact, Catherine already shares Eleanor's unaffectedness and unpretentiousness, but she lacks her keen insight and her delicate assertiveness. During their walk with Henry, for instance, it is Eleanor who notices and interrupts Henry's mockery of women. Catherine would neither have detected Henry's irony nor have had the courage to voice her disapprobation. Yet, gently spurred by Eleanor and Henry, Catherine will in the end learn to detect and discern, thus completing her *Bildung* process. It is not by chance that Isabella is preeminent in the first part of the novel, set in Bath, and Eleanor is central in the second part, set in Northanger Abbey, for if the first half of the book witnesses Catherine's deception, the second half witnesses her enlightenment.

In case there had been no Eleanor, Henry would have been Catherine's only positive spur towards her development and literature would have lost one of its most gentle and elegant characters; but no substantial harm would have been done to Catherine's *Bildung*. If there were no Isabella, instead, the very nature of *Northanger Abbey* as a *Bildungsroman* would be undermined. As we have seen, Isabella has the role of emphasizing Catherine's inexperience, credulousness and naivety. These characteristics *have* to be asserted in the plainest possible way, for they account for Catherine's belief in Gothic topos and for her subsequent disillusionment about them. The reader *has* to perceive her as a deceived simpleton in order to enjoy his own sense of superiority. Only if these conditions have been fulfilled can the final overturn work. Only if the reader self-assuredly regards Catherine as clumsy and credulous can he be astonished at discovering how right she was and how tightly mingled the worries of Gothic novels and of common life are. In order to achieve all this, Catherine *has* to be presented as initially simple and naïve and Isabella, in her role of anti-heroine, serves precisely this aim.

Chapter 2:

**Lucy Steele**  
and ***Sense and Sensibility***

## 2.1. Two protagonists, two antagonists

### 2.1.a. Two protagonists

*Sense and Sensibility* is unique among Jane Austen's novels for its presenting two heroines, Elinor and Marianne Dashwood. They have very similar vicissitudes, but display very different personalities and attitudes – the elder sister is reasonable and thoughtful, while the younger is impulsive and passionate. Marilyn Butler, in her *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* [1975], attributes this structure to a literary trend of the years 1795-96 – two heroines were to be compared and contrasted in their principles and behaviour, to be found in the end one totally right and the other totally wrong<sup>1</sup>. Butler goes on to provide examples from the literature of the time, to consider the implications of this structure and to highlight how Jane Austen employs and modifies it to fit her aims. I will not discuss here Butler's further arguments because I mean to focus on how the presence of two protagonists affects the pattern of characterization of the novel as a whole.

First of all, let us briefly go through their story. Elinor and Marianne are turned out of their house with their mother and their younger sister once their father dies. Before moving away, Elinor falls in love with Edward Ferrars, brother to Fanny Dashwood, wife to John Dashwood, the girls' elder and only brother. In the neighbourhood where their small cottage lies, they make several acquaintances. Marianne's affection is immediately engaged by a charming young man, John Willoughby. Another man, Colonel Brandon, is equally attracted to Marianne, who however despises him for his older age and his serious countenance. Elinor is forced to accept and endure the alleged friendship of Lucy Steele, a young woman secretly engaged to Edward Ferrars. When Lucy discloses her secret, Elinor cannot do anything but suffer in silence. When Willoughby himself abandons Marianne and marries another woman, Marianne is thrown into an almost suicidal state of wretchedness, in direct contrast with Elinor's silent endurance. Marianne's illness makes her rethink her beliefs and conduct and accept the hand of Colonel Brandon, who has been always faithful to her. Elinor, on her part, is in the end free to marry Edward because of Lucy's change of mind about her engagement to him.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

In the introduction and in the first chapter of this dissertation, an argument has been suggested that in literature generally, and in Jane Austen's novels specifically, anti-heroines are employed as foils to highlight, by comparison and contrast, the personalities and behaviour of the heroines. So, if each heroine needs an anti-heroine to enhance her character, there follows that if *Sense and Sensibility* presents two protagonists, it must also present two antagonists, as indeed it does.

### 2.1.b. Two antagonists

At this point, however, one observation is needed. *Sense and Sensibility* is peculiar for its presenting *two* protagonists and *two* antagonists, not for its *not* presenting *one* heroine and *one* anti-heroine. The one-to-one structure is to be found only in two out of the six novels of Jane Austen, precisely in *Mansfield Park* and in *Persuasion*, where Mary Crawford and Louisa Musgrove are the foils to Fanny Price and Anne Elliot respectively. *Northanger Abbey* and *Emma* avail themselves of the structure presenting one heroine, one anti-heroine and another or two other young women, who may seem but are not anti-heroines, namely Elinor Tilney in the former novel and Harriet Smith and Mrs. Elton in the latter. *Pride and Prejudice* employs no less than two anti-heroines, Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet, to play against the only heroine, Elizabeth Bennet. Thus, although heroines and anti-heroines are always present in Jane Austen's books, their numbers can vary considerably.

But why does *Sense and Sensibility* require *two* protagonists and *two* antagonists? In order to answer this question, the aim of the novel must be considered, for it determines its structure and consequently its pattern of characterization. The title itself states that two of the main themes of the book are sense and sensibility. Yet, as Margaret Anne Doody points out in her *Introduction* to the 2008 Oxford edition of the novel, regarding it as «representing 'the effects on the conduct of life, of discreet quiet good sense on the one hand, and an overrefined and excessive susceptibility on the other' [...] is a temptingly easy way in which to read the novel, but we may doubt if such simplicities offer a full or just description of the work.»<sup>2</sup> Jan Fergus, in her *Jane Austen and the Didactic Novel* [1983], denies the clear-cut attribution of

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<sup>2</sup> M. A. Doody, *Introduction*, in J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* [1818], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. vii-xxxix, p. viii. Doody's quotation is from an anonymous article published in the *British Critic* in May 1812.

sense to Elinor and sensibility to Marianne which would imply a final reconciliation of the two<sup>3</sup>. On the contrary, she reads sense and sensibility as both belonging to Elinor. Her function as a character is to stress how having both sense and sensibility is just as necessary as harsh a task<sup>4</sup>:

In *Sense and Sensibility*, 'feeling' for others, a quality endowed with both an emotional and a moral dimension, is an obligation which, however necessary, [...] may easily go unnoticed and unappreciated by those who benefit from it. Moreover, it is painful in itself, comprising the pain of suppressing one's own feelings and the pain of participating in others' sufferings<sup>5</sup>.

Conversely, Marianne embodies the notion of sensibility which was the trend of the time<sup>6</sup>. Such notion is to be proven wrong and to give way to the wiser concept of sensibility which Elinor has been displaying from the start<sup>7</sup>. This reading of the novel suggests that the opposition is not between Elinor as sense and Marianne as sensibility, but between Elinor as having both sense and sensibility, where assumed to have only sense, and Marianne as apparently displaying sensibility, but actually possessing neither traits. Actually, the opposition between the qualities stated in the title, displayed in the novel, but in the end mingled in one of the two apparently opposing characters is to be found also in *Pride and Prejudice*. There, the title suggests Elizabeth to be prejudiced and Darcy to be proud. Yet, although Darcy reveals himself to be proud indeed, Elizabeth proves to be both proud *and* prejudiced, as she herself acknowledges in one of the best-known passages in the novel:

[Elizabeth] grew absolutely ashamed of herself. [...] She had been blind, partial, *prejudiced*, absurd. [...] 'I, who have *prided* myself of my discernment!<sup>8</sup>

Let us now return to the pattern of characterization of *Sense and Sensibility*. The characters in charge of being the foils of the two fascinatingly complex heroines are Lucy Steele for Elinor and John Willoughby for Marianne. They both throw their corresponding heroine in a state

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>5</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Todd, *Introduction*, in M. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, An Historical and Moral View of the French Revolution* [1794], ed. Janet Todd, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, repr. 2008, pp. vii-xxx, p. xxi.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>8</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XIII, p. 159, my italics.

of wretchedness for the loss of their beloved, who are Edward to Elinor and Willoughby himself to Marianne. In this way, they put the two sisters in a crisis which emphasises their respective traits in a clearer and deeper way than their previous vicissitudes may have done. This enables the reader not only to observe their different attitudes, but also to compare, contrast and evaluate them.

At this point, two considerations are needed. First of all, this chapter will analyse Lucy only. As far as Marianne is concerned, she is not only *a* foil to Elinor, but *the* foil to Elinor, just as Elinor is the foil to her. Yet the structure of the novel, openly exploiting comparisons and contrasts, requires *two* foils for each heroine, i.e. the other protagonist and a specific antagonist. Foils for Elinor are thus Marianne *and* Lucy and foils for Marianne are Elinor *and* Willoughby. Still, Marianne, although being in fact the most important among the two foils of Elinor, is not an anti-heroine, but a heroine herself, having in turn her own two foils as enlisted above. This is the reason why she will not be examined extensively in this dissertation. As for Willoughby, he would be an antagonist in his full rights to be considered here, were he not a man instead of a woman. So, since this analysis focuses on female characters, he will be dealt with only marginally.

The second consideration is that in her role as a foil to Elinor, Lucy highlights *all* Elinor's qualities, namely her self-command, her discretion, her sense but also her sensibility. Yet since Elinor herself is a foil to Marianne, Lucy's enlightening of the former's features indirectly stresses the lack of such characteristics in the latter. In this way, Lucy becomes a further, albeit indirect, foil to Marianne. Conversely, Willoughby enhances Marianne's traits, their contrast to Elinor's and thus Elinor's qualities as well. Thus it may reasonably be said that each heroine has in fact three foils – the other heroine, her own antagonist and the other heroine's antagonist as well.

## **2.2. Lucy and Elinor**

### 2.2.a. Features of the rivals and tools of the contest

Let us begin with the question of sense and sensibility. Once stated that Elinor has both these qualities, the question arises of how Lucy contributes to their enhancement in her. The first point to state is that Lucy stresses *both* Elinor's sense *and* her sensibility. Both qualities are

attributed to Elinor as early in the novel as chapter I. She is described as possessing «a strength of understanding», a «coolness of judgment», «an excellent heart», an affectionate disposition and strong feelings<sup>9</sup>. Yet it is Lucy's secret which puts both qualities simultaneously to the test. In disclosing to Elinor her own engagement to Edward, the anti-heroine precipitates the heroine into wretchedness and thus proves to the reader her sensibility. Indeed, Elinor's tender feelings are immediately awakened. At succeeding stages during the interview between Lucy and herself in which the former forces her secret on the latter, she is nearly overwhelmed by her feelings:

Elinor for a few moments remained silent. Her astonishment at what she heard was at first too great for words; but at length [...] she said, with a calmness of manner, which tolerably well concealed her surprise and solicitude –<sup>10</sup>

For a few moments, she was almost overcome – her heart sunk within her, and she could hardly stand; but exertion was indispensably necessary, and she struggled so resolutely against the oppression of her feelings, that her success was speedy [...].<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the quotations above also stress the burden of silent endurance which Lucy imposes upon Elinor or which Elinor imposes upon herself and which proves her sense in various ways. Firstly, she exerts herself enough to conceal from her rival her «power to hurt»<sup>12</sup> and her own pain at being hurt. Secondly, she holds to her upright moral principles which forbid her to reveal another's secret. Thirdly, she saves her mother and sister the pain of worrying for her by concealing her distress. With one interview only, Lucy succeeds in highlighting both Elinor's qualities, not only the one which is rightfully attributed to her from the start (sense), but also the one which she was wrongly thought lacking in (sensibility). In this perspective, Lucy is a most effective anti-heroine.

At this point the question regarding Elinor's share in sense and sensibility may be bounced back to Lucy – she proves that *Elinor* has both, but does *she* have any of these qualities? As for sensibility, she initially appears to have a great deal of it – her declarations boast her engagement to Edward as a romantic attachment, formed in the past and still lasting under the influence of tender feelings. Still, she finally proves to have nothing like sensibility, as her final deeds reveal her engagement to be an arrangement for material comfort and social

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<sup>9</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. I, Ch. I, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102.

<sup>12</sup> J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

advancement only. As for sense, she has it in plenty. Yet hers is as different from Elinor's as can be – Elinor's sense is delicacy towards others, regard for propriety and politeness, balance between the expression and the containment of the self. Elinor's sense is for the sake of others. Lucy's is conversely selfish sense, the ability to play well her cards, be it by flattering an aristocratic woman (Lady Middleton) through the praise of and services paid to her children, be it by entering into an engagement with a young man (Edward) who is to inherit a fortune and not releasing him from it, even when both parties know that affection and attraction have long died out, or be it by alerting a possible rival (Elinor) of her own property over a man by forcing on her the secret of their engagement. Indeed, Lucy has a lot of sense, but it is of a self-interested and self-seeking kind which has nothing to do with the sense Elinor displays and Jane Austen approves of. In the relationship between Elinor and Lucy, Jane Austen exploits the device of providing both heroine and anti-heroine with one and the same trait, yet tending in opposite directions and devoted to different aims. In my perspective, this is just as effective a narrative tool as contrasting two characters by attributing them opposing qualities, as was for instance the case of Catherine and Isabella. In *Northanger Abbey*, the friendship between heroine and anti-heroine was to be overtly contrasting in order to enhance the Gothic feature of the exaggerated and the sensational. In *Sense and Sensibility*, oppositions are much more subtle. Even the contrast stated in the title proves to be partially misleading. In this narrative environment, the fact that both heroine and anti-heroine possess a *different* kind of the *same* quality is consistent with the aim and the structure of the book.

Secrecy is the main means through which Lucy highlights Elinor's sense and sensibility. It is interesting to notice that Lucy's secret enters the novel even *before* she is actually introduced in the plot. As early as in chapter IV, during Edward's stay at Norland, she lies both behind Elinor's description of and wondering about Edward's recurring «want of spirits»<sup>13</sup> and «inquietude»<sup>14</sup>. Elinor rightly but partially attributes it to Mrs. Ferrars' absolute power over and severe strictness with him. The presence of Lucy in Edward's mind is only recognised by the reader on a second reading of the novel and by Elinor, we may guess, on a later recollection of the episode. Yet, either acknowledged or not, Lucy's presence is there. It even

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<sup>13</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> Ivi.

returns a second time during Edward's visit at Barton Cottage. Lucy is in fact the cause of Edward's being initially once again «not in spirits»<sup>15</sup>, a condition which is twice stressed by the narrator and clearly perceived by the characters, so much so that «Mrs. Dashwood, attributing it to some want of liberality in his mother, sat down to table indignant against all selfish parents.»<sup>16</sup>

Further, Lucy is the reason of Edward's startling when Marianne calls him reserved. Marianne was just hinting at his character and manners, not at any secret on his part, of which she could have no suspicion whatsoever. To such innocent consideration, Edward overreacts, asking her «What am I to tell you? What can you suppose?»<sup>17</sup>. Of course, Marianne neither expected any revelation nor had any suspicion, still both Elinor and the reader perceive and wonder at his uneasiness, without being able to explain it in any satisfactory way – yet.

The third and clearest hint at Lucy during Edward's stay at Barton Cottage is provided by the hair encased in a ring which Edward wears on his finger. Notwithstanding the fact that he assures the hair to belong to his sister and that the Dashwood girls believe it to have been either given by or stolen from Elinor<sup>18</sup>, the situation is unclear. Elinor tries and succeeds in silencing her uneasiness, but the reader cannot possibly miss Edward's distress, portrayed by the narrator as plainly as can be:

Edward's embarrassment lasted some time, and it ended in an absence of mind still more settled. He was particularly grave the whole morning.<sup>19</sup>

Lucy's presence, suffusing the novel almost from its start and being introduced in so thorough and unacknowledged a manner, so that characters and readers are aware that something is in the air, but do not know what it is, has two implications. Firstly, it announces Lucy's importance in the pattern of characterization of the novel – no trifling character would be given so much narrative space even before its name was written on the page for the first time. Secondly, it identifies Lucy as a character related to secrecy in some way or other – and indeed, so it is. Even at the very moment of her introduction, her real

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<sup>15</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XVII, p. 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 72.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XVII, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Ivi.*

presentation is deferred. Chapter XXI of volume I opens with the arrival into the Middletons' social circle of a couple of siblings, met in Exeter and invited to Barton Park by Mrs. Jennings and Sir John. Yet before the Steele and the Dashwood girls are allowed to meet, the author spends two whole pages in talking about the former before actually presenting them as physical characters. Lucy therefore *is* a secret even before *introducing* her secret into the novel's plot and Elinor's life.

The acquaintance between Elinor and Lucy is not only thoroughly prepared, but decidedly forced upon Elinor. As soon as the Steeles arrive at Barton Park, Sir John «set off directly for the cottage to tell the Miss Dashwoods of the Miss Steeles' arrival [...]. [He] wanted the whole family to walk to the Park directly and look at its guests»<sup>20</sup>. As though his warm desire for them to meet were not enough, he also puts forward the argument of their being related «you know, after a fashion. You are my cousins, and they are my wife's, so you must be related»<sup>21</sup>. Here begins a time of endurance for Elinor. Not only must she submit to the introduction to Lucy, either as Sir John's guest or as an indirect relation. She must also endure to have a secret revealed, her prospects of happiness ruined and her moral uprightness tested – all because of a secret.

As far as the secrecy theme is concerned, the two protagonist-antagonist couples directly oppose each other. Marianne and Willoughby are all openness, as Jane Austen's words wonderfully declare:

Marianne abhorred all concealment where no real disgrace could attend unreserve; and to aim at the restraint of sentiments which were not in themselves illaudable, appeared to her not merely an unnecessary effort, but a disgraceful subjection of reason to commonplace and mistaken notions. Willoughby thought the same; and their behaviour, at all times, was an illustration of their opinions.<sup>22</sup>

Yet, as it will turn out, their openness is of an unashamed and selfish kind, as the episode of their visiting Mrs. Smith's manor without her knowledge or consent testifies. The behaviour of both is wrong. Both will be chastised. Only, Marianne recovers as a better person, while Willoughby continues to be the same man.

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<sup>20</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXI, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XI, p. 41.

Conversely, Elinor and Lucy share the attitude of concealment. Yet, while in Lucy it is a means of performing her machinations and achieving her purposes, Elinor employs it to the benefit of the people around her, not to make them worry or not to offend their feelings. They use concealment to opposing ends, the anti-heroine for her own good and the heroine for the sake of others, just as they do with sense, as already pointed out.

The opposition between openness and concealment, just as the one between freedom and containment in the expression of the self, are thus embodied in the contrast between the two couples protagonist-antagonist. Each couple takes one position – Marianne and Willoughby stand for openness and freedom and Elinor and Lucy stand for concealment and containment. Yet each couple displays interesting dynamics not only when compared to the opposing couple, but also when its two members are confronted with each other. The attitude of the protagonist and of the antagonist of one couple appears to be the same, but proves to be different in the end. Not only does Willoughby employ either openness or concealment in a conscious and selfish way, but he also turns out to be inconsistent with the very principles professed. Notwithstanding his preached and practiced openness, he is careful to avoid a certain subject in his conversations – his shameful treatment of Eliza Williams, Colonel Brandon's protégé, whom he seduced and abandoned before coming to Barton. Lucy, for all her boasted concealment, discretion and reserve, is ready and willing to reveal her secret in order to remove an obstacle (Elinor) from her way towards matrimony and thus material comfort and financial security.

In the paragraphs above it has been argued firstly, that Elinor and Lucy possess different kinds of the same traits – sense and an attitude to concealment; secondly, that both Elinor's sense and sensibility are enlightened by Lucy's secret. There is actually one last similarity between heroine and anti-heroine, which is precisely what permits the secrecy mechanism to work – insight. Both Lucy and Elinor see through each other from the very first. Lucy immediately detects Elinor's moral integrity and understands that she would never reveal a secret, be it even her rival's engagement to the man she herself loves. Having perceived Elinor's character, Lucy foresees the success of her device. That is why she embarks in her machinations, which, had the heroine less steadfast principles or were she less coherent to them, would imply a relevant risk to Lucy herself. Elinor, on her part, «is conscious that she

is playing into Lucy's hands»<sup>23</sup>. Yet, she can do nothing more or different from what she does – staying away from Edward and keeping Lucy's secret. Once again, Jane Austen attributes a good deal of the same quality to both heroine and anti-heroine, depicting the opposite ways in which the two employ them – the one for the benefit of others, the other for the benefit of herself only.

Not only insight, but also deviousness is a chief trait of Lucy's machinations, as her two interviews with Elinor show. During the first, she approaches the topic of her engagement indirectly, initially enquiring about Mrs. Ferrars. She next pretends to feel of having gone too far in her questions and of owing an explanation to Elinor. Only then does she give her communication (that she is engaged to Edward) and her attached warning (that Elinor should stay away from him). Her whole speech, which is rather a monologue than a dialogue, is specifically constructed to intentionally convey a message under the disguise of an unwilling but necessary explanation. Similarly, the further description of the state of their engagement is provided apparently for the sake of Elinor's curiosity, but actually for the sake of Lucy's safety in her arrangement. Her expanding and deepening of the subject serves precisely the aim of getting rid of her rival without endangering her own position. Firstly, Lucy further demolishes Elinor's belief that Edward corresponds her love by assuring her that he loves her as a sister. Secondly, she stresses her own reliance on Elinor's discretion, thus bounding the heroine to her secret and condemning her to solitary and silent suffering. The gist of Lucy's speech could be summarised as follows: Edward is mine, so do not bother him and me with your presence; I can warn you because I know that you are morally upright and that you will not betray me; and, anyway, you are nothing but a sister to him. In an interview which may have not lasted more than fifteen minutes, Lucy dismantles Elinor's hopes of affection and prospects of happiness and throws her into a state of wretchedness. This is a masterpiece of evil, as mean as it is polished. It is as if Lucy slapped Elinor on the face while amiably smiling at her.

Her second interview with Elinor continues her enterprise of demolishing Elinor's hopes by providing further proofs of the closeness and stability of Edward's attachment to herself. She assures Elinor that Edward's love has been put to a hard test by time and hardships and

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<sup>23</sup> J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p.22.

it has stood the trial so well, that I should be unpardonable to doubt it now. I can safely say that he has never gave me one moment's alarm on that account from the first.<sup>24</sup>

Lucy is basically saying that Edward has already faced and passed many hard tests – Elinor cannot suppose to be a harder one and thus cannot hope to succeed in drawing Edward to herself. Therefore, it is implied, do not even try. Lucy is also anticipating what she will linger on some lines below, namely that Edward has never given her reason to think that he betrayed her. Which is to say: not even with you. Elinor could indeed have wondered about Lucy as Catherine did about John alternately alarming and reassuring her about the tricks of his horse and his own skill as a driver: if one regards it as impossible that a certain thing should happen (either that John's horse shies or that Lucy's fiancé falls in love with another woman), why should they alarm their passenger with or warn their rival about such a prospect?

If this story was written or set not in the eighteenth century, but in our own time, Lucy's device of disclosing to Elinor the secret of her engagement to Edward would be not only harmless, but even senseless. Twenty-first-century Elinor would take out her cell-phone, send a message or give a call to Edward and ask him whether he is «out of [his] senses, to be [engaged to] this [woman]»<sup>25</sup>. An explanation would follow, their reciprocal love would be declared and Edward's engagement to and Elinor's acquaintance with Lucy would be dropped immediately. Edward and Elinor would get engaged, with or without their parent's consent, live together for a while, get married and live happily ever after. Luckily for Lucy, the novel was indeed written and set in the eighteenth century, the scenario sketched above is unconceivable and her disclosure to Elinor is enough to drive the latter away from Edward. The reason why Lucy's device works in her time and would not in our own lies in the different concepts of morals. Lucy's deviousness works precisely because of the moral code of the time, which Elinor takes as her creed and which required manners to be more discreet and relationships to be more bounding than nowadays. Elinor's moral uprightness does not allow her to interfere in an engagement, be it directly, by openly questioning Edward about it, or be it even indirectly, by furthering her own acquaintance with him. She is not even allowed to mention such secret to anyone. She must stay away from Edward so

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<sup>24</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. II, Ch. II, p. 110.

<sup>25</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVII, p. 288.

as not to interfere in his engagement once it is known to her and keep the secret in solitude and silence.

Lucy's trick, or better Lucy's trap, functions precisely because the anti-heroine is devious and unscrupulous and the heroine is upright and coherent. In this characterisation, Jane Austen does employ the device of attributing contrasting qualities to heroine and anti-heroine and make them clash to exalt each other and their respective behaviour and principles. Elinor and Lucy have been analysed as both possessing sense, albeit different kinds of it, and as both employing secrecy and insight, albeit to different aims. Yet here their similarities end. Lucy has *none* of Elinor's integrity and Elinor has *none* of Lucy's cunning. Precisely because Elinor has no cunning, Lucy can employ her own and call upon Elinor's loyalty to stay away from Edward while holding her secret. In this circumstance, the opposite qualities of heroine and anti-heroine, when manoeuvred by the anti-heroine's selfishness, both interact for the benefit of only one of the parties – the anti-heroine herself.

#### 2.2.b. The battlefield – the property question

The battlefield on which Lucy's weapons are displayed and Elinor's principles are tested is property. This is a central theme in the novel, so much so that the story opens, as it often happens in Austen's novels, with a property issue<sup>26</sup>. At the death of their husband and father, the Dashwood women are left with no land or house of their own and with almost no money. All that Mr. Dashwood could dispose of for his wife and daughters was a promise to provide for them wrought from and broken by his elder son, who was to inherit his estate. The Dashwood women face «the dangers inherent in relying on the kindness of male relatives»<sup>27</sup> and «the conditions of females who are subjected to the loss of home»<sup>28</sup>. The book is scattered with hints at estates and money. Thanks to the conversation between John and Fanny Dashwood, which constitutes the wonderful second chapter of the novel, we are acquainted with how many hundred pounds each sister will own. Fanny's intruding insight in the Dashwood women's economy masterly conveys the harshness of the issue:

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. M. A. Doody, *op. cit.*, pp. viii-xi.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. x.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*, p. ix.

Do but consider, my dear Mr. Dashwood, how excessively comfortable your mother-in-law and her daughters may live on the interest of seven thousand pounds, besides the thousand pounds belonging to each of the girls, which brings them in fifty pounds a-year a-piece [...]. Altogether, they will have five hundred a-year amongst them, and what on earth can four women want more than that? – They will live so cheap! Their house-keeping will be nothing at all. They will have no carriage, no horses, and hardly any servants; they will keep no company, and can have no expences of any kind!<sup>29</sup>

From the unfolding of their story, we also know that Mrs. Dashwood turns down many offers of more expensive houses before moving to a little cottage, employs only a couple of servants and has neither horse nor carriage. This last circumstance is made plain when Willoughby offers Marianne a horse and Elinor convinces her to refuse it, since «it was not in her mother's plan to keep any horse, [and] if she were to alter her resolution in favour of this gift, she must buy another for the servant, and keep a servant to ride it, and after all, build a stable to receive them»<sup>30</sup>, since, in other words, they cannot afford keeping a horse.

If the property issue affects such themes as money, land, houses, carriages, horses and servants, it may well be expected that also human relationships may be treated in the same matter-of-fact perspective. This is precisely what Lucy does. Her flattery of Lady Middleton as a connection always worth having and her engagement to Edward for strictly material purposes have been already pointed out. Yet the property question conditions also her device for keeping Elinor away from Edward both in its purpose and in its method. Its purpose consists in Lucy *achieving* property (her property *of* Edward and *through* Edward). Its method consists in her *asserting* her property (Edward is *hers*). Conversely, Elinor takes the opposing stand towards the property matter. Her love for Edward is not in the least affected by what his future income might be. The ending of the story makes their different positions crystal clear. Once it turns out that Edward has lost every prospect of future wealth by displeasing his mother with his engagement to Lucy, she deserts him and attaches herself to the new heir to Mrs. Ferrars' fortune, Robert. Elinor, on the other hand, could not be happier about the circumstance, since Lucy's breaking off with Edward allows her to step in as his fiancée, regardless of his small present income.

Such differences of perspective between heroine and anti-heroine is highlighted by the similarity of their conditions. Both have no fortune, no connections and depend on others for their maintenance. Yet Lucy is «blatant in acknowledging the necessity of catching a man in

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<sup>29</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XII, p. 44.

order to achieve material success»<sup>31</sup>, whereas Elinor could not care less about financial aggrandizement. In this, Jane Austen is compliant – she grants each of them what they most strove for. Lucy’s priority was getting up in the world, and so she does through her marriage to Robert. Elinor, although not equally blatant, wished for a sincere and affectionate attachment, which is exactly what her marriage to Edward is. Furthermore, as far as property is concerned, Elinor and Lucy go in opposite directions<sup>32</sup>. Elinor is the first daughter of a landowning gentleman, yet she ends up marrying a first son dismissed to the position of a second child, who moreover takes up a job as a country clergyman<sup>33</sup>. Lucy, on the contrary, begins as the second daughter of a nobody, with no land and no money, and ends up as the wife of a second son elevated to the rights of primogeniture<sup>34</sup>.

Property is thus the realm in which heroine and anti-heroine engage their principles, display their attitudes and assert their priorities, which are material advantage for Lucy and sentimental happiness for Elinor. The requirement stated in the introduction to this dissertation, i.e. that heroine and anti-heroine face the same predicaments, but take up different perspectives and arrive at different outcomes is fulfilled. Both Elinor and Lucy are faced with the questions of financial hardships and future happiness. However, while the anti-heroine regards material comfort as the only possible way to happiness, the heroine regards happiness as unaffected by and independent from economic grandeur. For the anti-heroine, happiness can only be achieved through wealth. For the heroine, happiness can be achieved in spite of it.

### 2.2.c. The outcome – punishment and reward

It is interesting to notice that while in the couple Marianne-Willoughby *both* are unfeeling towards others and *both* are punished for it, in the couple Elinor-Lucy, the evil character is not punished, but rewarded. Thanks to all her intrigues, Lucy does in the end marry the heir to Mrs. Ferrars’ fortune. Jane Austen was not a moralist, but a realist. In letting Lucy get away with it she depicted reality as it is – not always evil people get punished. Yet she was still far from a Hardy-type world-view, according to which kind-hearted and well-meaning

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<sup>31</sup> M. A. Doody, *op. cit.*, p. xi.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. xxxix.

<sup>33</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ivi.*

protagonists are doomed to a tragic ending, as it happens to Tess and Jude. In her novels, anti-heroines may occasionally get round with their mischief, but heroines are always rewarded for their goodness. Accordingly, Lucy may have all the money she desires, but we know that Elinor has taken the chance of a lifetime in marrying Edward, who will give her little money, but all his respect, his esteem and his love.

In contrasting heroine and anti-heroine, Jane Austen enlightens their peculiar features and enacts a clash between the values they represent. We may expect that after a whole story based on comparisons and contrasts, the author would enforce her moral in the end. Yet this is not the case. Neither the structure nor the ending of the novel force any coercive implication on the reader. With her usual delicacy and discretion, Jane Austen does not compel or threaten him to adopt one line of behaviour against the other. Heroine and anti-heroine *both* end up well and *both* achieve what they strove for. It is just a matter of what the reader considers worth achieving, whether it is the comfort provided by materialism or the happiness derived from love.

### **2.3. Lucy, Elinor and Marianne**

#### 2.3.a. Similarities and differences

After having analysed Lucy's function in regard to Elinor, let us expand the range of comparison among characters and consider the relationship between Lucy, Elinor and Marianne. Interestingly enough, Lucy displays features belonging to both sisters. Elinor is an exemplary character, Marianne an improving one and they both are definitely positive, so much so that they are the novel's heroines. On the contrary, although presenting some of the heroines' features, Lucy is an evil character – why so? The following paragraphs are meant to consider which traits peculiar to which heroine are shared by the anti-heroine and how the latter employs them and why she is an evil character in spite of this.

First of all, Lucy shares both Elinor's propriety and Marianne's selfishness. Both these features are exemplified in the passage below, recounting Elinor and Marianne's journey to London with Mrs. Jennings.

They were three days on their journey, and Marianne's behaviour as they travelled was a happy specimen of what her future complaisance and companionableness to Mrs. Jennings might be expected to be. She sat in silence almost all the way, wrapt in her own meditations, and hardly ever voluntarily speaking [...]. To atone for this conduct therefore, Elinor [...] behaved with the greatest attention to Mrs. Jennings, talked with her, laughed with her, and listened to her whenever she could [...].<sup>35</sup>

As for Elinor, her propriety is the consequence of a sincere respect and regard for others. In the episode above, she does not take upon herself to be attentive to Mrs. Jennings for propriety's sake or to make herself agreeable, but to make Mrs. Jennings comfortable, in spite of Marianne's unfriendliness. In his wonderful *Jane Austen* [1987], Tony Tanner provides an insightful explanation of the social function of manners, which perfectly fits Elinor's principles and conduct:

It was not [...] decorum for its own sake: good manners and morals were seen as essential to the preservation of order in society. [...] They became England's answer to the French Revolution. Whereas in the earlier part of the eighteenth century the ruling class had often been associated with libertinism, [...] coarseness and boorishness, it was now felt that only by reforming their principles and conduct could they preserve their position, their property and [...] the peace of the country as a whole. Jane Austen's profound concern with good manners [...] was a form of politics – an [...] attempt to save the nation by correcting [...] its morals.<sup>36</sup>

Lucy's propriety is instead of a different nature – its only purpose is to make her agreeable when her own interest is at stake. The example of her flattery of Lady Middleton through her children has already been considered. Yet a further episode provides a confirmation for this argument – the John Dashwoods dinner, to which the Steele girls are invited during their stay in London with the Middletons:

So well had [the Miss Steeles] recommended themselves to Lady Middleton, [...] that though Lucy was certainly not elegant, and her sister not even genteel, she was as ready as Sir John to ask them to spend a week or two in Conduit-street [the Middleton's residence in London] [...] and Lucy, who had long wanted to have an opportunity of endeavouring to please [the John Dashwoods], had seldom been happier in her life [...].<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. II, Ch. IV, p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>37</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 175.

Both Elinor and Lucy share a deep concern in manners, but while for Elinor manners are a means of conveying her regard for others, for Lucy they are a tool to achieve her selfish aims. Again: same form, different substance.

If in manners Lucy resembles Elinor, in her nature she has something of Marianne – a tendency to put herself before others. Lucy's flattery of the Middletons and the Dashwoods, her betrayal of Edward for Robert, her warning to Elinor and so on are all signs of her selfishness. Marianne has a good deal of it too. Her behaviour during her journey to London as reported above is a demonstration of it. Further examples follow: her survey of the Allenham estate with Willoughby, who was to inherit it, without the knowledge or the permission of Mrs. Smith, its present owner; the exclusive way in which she and Willoughby spent times with each other although being in other people's company; her indulged-in despair after Willoughby's desertion; the disregard for the pain she was giving to her mother and sister with her self-complacent grief. Yet Marianne's selfish behaviour is a combination of passion and rashness and a deficient education in which the concept of sensibility has taken too much space. Conversely, Lucy's selfishness originates not in feelings, but in greed. Moreover, it seems more innate in her personality than derived from an unbalanced education. Besides, while Marianne acts wrongly unconsciously and unintentionally, Lucy turns selfishness into a creed and acts according to its dictates.

Elinor-like in form, Marianne-like in essence, Lucy blends together some of the two heroines' features. Yet she has none of the qualities of affection, generosity and compassion, which give Elinor's form its warmth and Marianne's principles its innocence. The sisters' features, once embodied in Lucy, become evil precisely because they are taken out of the psychological and moral contexts which render them positive in Elinor and understandable and acceptable in Marianne. Once extracted from such context and attributed to a person naturally prone to greed, they become tools to achieve evil aims.

### 2.3.b. Bildung

The chapter of this dissertation devoted to Isabella Thorpe has been entirely constructed around the way in which the anti-heroine fosters the heroine's *Bildung*, unconsciously but successfully encouraging the latter's discernment and development. In this chapter about Lucy Steele, the concept of *Bildung* has not yet been put forward. The reason for this is easily

explained – whereas Catherine is in desperate need of *Bildung* and Isabella greatly contributes to its achievement, Elinor *does not need* to be spurred to develop, since she *does not need* to develop at all – she is *already* mature as a character and as a person. Just as she is at the beginning, so she is at the end, having endured a lot, but not having changed a bit. *Sense and Sensibility* is the story not of the *Bildung* of *one* character, but of the comparison and contrast between *two* heroines, one of which is an already grown-up young woman. So, how about the other? If Elinor does not need *Bildung*, Marianne does, and does so desperately that her two main foils, Elinor and Willoughby, do not suffice. She needs a further foil – her sister's antagonist – Lucy.

Marianne's *Bildung* proceeds as follows. First she is thrown into sorrow by Willoughby's unexplained sudden departure. Then she sinks further under the weight of the true circumstance of Willoughby's desertion – he is penniless and has to make an advantageous marriage for his financial and economic survival. Afterwards, Marianne discovers the machinations Lucy has employed to prevent Elinor's attachment to Edward and to secure her own engagement to him. She thus understands that her sister has gone through the same kind of crises as herself. Exactly at this point is Lucy's function as foil to *both* Elinor *and* Marianne to be noticed. Elinor is presented as a positive example *to* Marianne and *against* her precisely because she has been put in the same situation as her sister. Had she not faced the same predicament and reacted differently to it, she would not have provided any alternative to Marianne's indulging attitude to her own grief. Elinor is thus extremely important in her sister's *Bildung* process. Yet Elinor would not have had the chance to provide any *alternative* example to Marianne, had she not been put in an *identical* situation. This is precisely what Lucy does. By disclosing to Elinor her secret, she proves Elinor's steadfastness not only to the reader, but also to Marianne, who is thus able to admire her sister's strength and to acknowledge by contrast her own weakness.

Marianne has been presented from the first as a stubborn character, self-conscious and self-assured in all her convictions, be they correct or erroneous. She is anything but a second Catherine Morland, eager to be directed and instructed. As the saying goes: desperate ills demand desperate remedies, and indeed on Marianne every possible measure is applied – Willoughby wrecking her happiness, Lucy wrecking her sister's and Elinor providing an ideal example of how wretchedness may be handled. Yet all this is not enough. None of her three foils succeed in giving the final stroke to her *Bildung*. A stronger blow is to complete

her development, one which only the author is entitled to give – a nearly fatal illness<sup>38</sup>. Only after her recovery is Marianne able to truly recognise and estimate both her and Elinor's behaviour. What before her illness had excited from Marianne a cry of surprise and awe, after her illness brings about in her a serious reflection on both sisters' vicissitudes and behaviour and a deeper understanding of Elinor's endeavours and worth. The passages below provide examples of Marianne's attitudes before and after her illness:

'Oh! Elinor,' she cried, 'you have made me hate myself for ever. – [...] Is this my gratitude! – Is this the only return I can make you? – Because your merit cries out upon myself, I have been trying to do it away.'<sup>39</sup>

[Elinor:] 'Do you [Marianne] compare your conduct with his [Willoughby's]?' 'No. I compare it with what it ought to have been; I compare it with yours.'<sup>40</sup>

The first quotation shows how Lucy's intrigue and Elinor's endurance *have had* a beneficial effect on Marianne – her recognition of Elinor's steadfastness and of her own indulgence in grief is sincere. Yet, in spite of all the exclamation marks and the suspension dashes in her speech, such recognition is not yet strong enough to make her rethink her principles as a whole. After her illness, she goes back to recollect and reconsider what has happened in a less sensational, but more substantial way. Still, from whichever point in time things may be thought over, the importance of the contrast between Elinor's and Marianne's attitude is not lessened. Marianne completes her *Bildung* when she recognises the foolishness of her behaviour and the soundness and goodness of Elinor's. However, such goodness would not have been displayed had it not been enhanced by Lucy's machinations. With her evil actions, Lucy does not bring about Elinor's development, because Elinor does not need to develop. Still, in putting Elinor's uprightness and steadfastness to the test, she provides Marianne with an alternative example to her reaction to Willoughby's desertion. When Marianne discovers it and most of all when she reconsiders it after her illness, Lucy's machination, which precipitate Elinor into sorrow, becomes a final spur towards Marianne's discernment of her own selfish conduct and her sister's selflessness.

## 2.4. Lucy and Isabella

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<sup>38</sup> S. Byrne, *Jane Austen. Mansfield Park*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 66.

<sup>39</sup> J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* cit., Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 199.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. X, p. 262.

#### 2.4.a. Harmlessness and harmfulness

A last theme to be handled in this chapter regards the similarities and differences between Lucy Steele and Isabella Thorpe. These two anti-heroines display many similarities and many differences and a comparison among the two is very interesting. A first and fundamental distinction regards their respective roles in the heroines' story. Lucy and Isabella resemble each other in their nature – they are self-centred, unfaithful and social-climbing characters. Yet, these traits are merely nasty aspects in Isabella's personality, which the heroine may decide whether to tolerate or not. In Lucy, conversely, they are active tools to pursue her self-interest, disregarding the feelings and prospects of the heroine. While Isabella is a foil to Catherine only by displaying her own character in contrast to Catherine's, Lucy is more of an active anti-heroine in her intentionally and meticulously employing her resources to achieve her aims in spite of, or better in opposition to, Elinor. Coherently with this view, Isabella's threat to Catherine is either indirect or weak. On the one hand, she makes James wretched. On the other hand, much as Catherine loves James and suffers for his sorrow, Isabella does not inflict any direct harm to her. She gets closer to really affecting her happiness when she attempts to hamper Catherine's acquaintance with the Tilneys. Yet also in this episode, Isabella does not want Catherine to engage herself with her new friends not because she wants to take her away *from them*, but because she wants her *for herself*. The difference in perspective is slight, but relevant. Lucy is indeed much more harmful to Elinor. She is a real threat to Elinor's happiness in so far as she actively tries to and nearly succeeds in taking Elinor's place at the side of the man she loves and she is loved by. Lucy may be regarded as a developed image of Isabella. While Isabella displays her personality spontaneously, Lucy employs it intentionally to pursue her selfish purposes. While Isabella threatens the happiness of the heroine's brother, Lucy directly threatens the heroine's happiness. While Isabella is ineffective in preventing Catherine's acquaintance with Henry, Lucy is successful in preventing Elinor's engagement to Edward, at least as long as she wants him for herself. Lucy is a developed image of Isabella also in so far as Isabella talks incessantly nonsense, while she says only the right thing at the right moment, which serves her aims. Also in this, she is much more insidious and dangerous than her predecessor.

#### 2.4.b. Secrecy, insight, deviousness and property

The themes of secrecy, insight, deviousness and property have been considered as providing a contrasting parallel between Lucy and Elinor. But they also enlighten the similarities and differences between Lucy and Isabella. First of all, both Lucy and Isabella are big liars. For all her professed openness, Isabella is just as secret as Lucy in disguising her real thoughts and feelings. Her boasted affection for Catherine and love for James are just as empty as Lucy's professed esteem of Elinor and love for Edward. Yet, for all the falsity they both say, a difference has to be made. Isabella spontaneously uses a colourful and hyperbolic language because of her innate desire to be considered and admired. Lucy, on her part, intentionally employs deceit as an active tool to pursue her interest. Also in this, Lucy is a more developed and more dangerous version of Isabella.

A further aspect they have in common is their ability to see directly through the heroine. Both immediately detect the heroine's qualities and employ their opposing traits to make them serve their own purposes. Yet such purpose is for Isabella nothing more than having a credulous, adoring little friend to exalt by contrast her own womanhood and worldliness. Lucy's aim, on the contrary, is to keep Elinor away from Edward, so as to keep him to herself.

Also their deviousness is employed slightly differently. Isabella deceives Catherine, confiding in her naivety. Yet no more harm is done than Catherine taking an unfaithful, self-centred and self-interested person for a loyal, attentive and affectionate friend. Lucy, on the other hand, actively entraps Elinor, turning the heroine's moral uprightness and respectful manners against herself.

Last but not least, the property question. Isabella and Lucy display the same professed attitude of declaring their total disregard for money – they say that their attachment to James and Edward is of a most disinterested and affectionate kind, that they are ready and willing to economise, the only hindrance to their immediate marriage being the need to wait for their fiancé to be employed as a curate in a country parish. Very nice and very false declarations. Both Isabella and Lucy regard property much more than affection and both try and go for it when they can, rejecting their alleged love, either disguisedly or officially, in favour of a less attractive but wealthier man – Frederick Tilney and Robert Ferrars respectively. The difference between them lies not in Isabella's and Lucy's intentions, but in the outcome of

their attempts. Isabella does not succeed in attaching Frederick to herself and is left empty-handed. She plays with two men in order to be able to choose the best between them, but does not succeed either to attach the one or to keep the other. Lucy, on the contrary, succeeds just where Isabella failed. She does not limit herself to flirting with Robert as Isabella did with Frederick, but she actually conspires with him, so as to be able to marry Mrs. Ferrars' heir anyway, as indeed she does.

From *Northanger Abbey* to *Sense and Sensibility*, Jane Austen's vision about the possibility of success of wicked people in real life becomes more sombre. If in *Northanger Abbey* good people succeed and evil people fail, in *Sense and Sensibility* characters are allotted less black and white and more realistic destinies. Kind people not always receive all their due share of social prestige and financial comfort. Wicked people, conversely, not always end up in wretchedness, but may even be better off than heroes and heroines.

Chapter 3:

**Charlotte Lucas,  
Lydia Bennet  
and *Pride and Prejudice***

### 3.1. A new pattern of characterization

As we have seen, in order to understand the roles and functions of characters in a novel, it is necessary first of all to comprehend the sense and structure of that novel. Both *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* are peculiar for their pattern of characterization, since *Sense and Sensibility* employs two protagonists and two antagonists and *Pride and Prejudice* employs one protagonist and two antagonists. This difference is part of a wider development running through all Jane Austen's novels and becoming apparent if we consider the dates of the drafting, and not of the publication, of each novel. Jane Austen begins her mature writing career with *Elinor and Marianne*, an epistolary novel written in 1795-96 and published in 1811 as *Sense and Sensibility*<sup>1</sup>. *Pride and Prejudice* follows, drafted in 1796-97 as *First Impressions*, before being published under the present title in 1813<sup>2</sup>. *Northanger Abbey* is written as *Susan* in the two following years, 1798-99, and ready for publication in 1803, although not published until 1817<sup>3</sup>. The fact that *Northanger Abbey* was completed, revised and handed over to a publisher before all other novels probably accounts for the scholarly habit of considering it first in critical works comprehending an analysis of all six books, a convention which I myself followed in this dissertation. In conception, however, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* seem to come first<sup>4</sup> and second respectively. Their being early, although mature, works influences also their patterns of characterization. *Sense and Sensibility* requires two heroines being compared and contrasted with each other to carry its point while *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on one heroine only, Elizabeth Bennet, being the centre of the plot, the engine of the story and the main point of view from which the story is told.

Elizabeth's central role in the book and the nature of the novel as her *Bildungsroman* have been wonderfully analysed by Franco Moretti in the first chapter of *Il Romanzo di Formazione* [1987]<sup>5</sup>. In his book, he considers the *Bildungsroman* as a phenomenon spreading in Europe in the years 1789-1848<sup>6</sup> and reaching its purest forms in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* and Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, which is indeed no Jane Austen novel at random, but the one in which the heroine is most complete. In her first book the protagonist is split into two

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 182, and T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *A Chronology of Jane Austen*, in J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., pp. xli-xlvi, pp. xliii-xlvi.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. xlv-xlvi, and C. Tomalin, *Jane Austen. A Life*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. F. Moretti, *Il Romanzo di Formazione* [1987], Torino, Einaudi, 1999, pp. 17-82.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F. Moretti, *Prefazione 1999*, in *Il Romanzo di Formazione* cit., pp. ix-xxi, p. x.

characters, the Dashwood sisters. In her later works, a single heroine will typify one of two different attitudes, being either Elinor-like, still, silent and thoughtful, as Catherine Morland, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot, or Marianne-like, strong-minded and quick-tongued, as Emma Woodhouse. Gary Kelly clearly explains this pattern of characterization in his essay *Religion and Politics* in the *Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* [1997]:

Austen's plots are resolved [...] by a convergence of will and circumstance [...]. Austen links this plot form to two different kinds of protagonist, the active and the passive, deployed in alternation. *Sense and Sensibility* has both kinds, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma* have active protagonists, and *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion* have passive protagonists. The active protagonists err repeatedly, but act correctly [...] at the decisive moment. Passive protagonists have correct judgement, but seem unable to act, and destined to endure rather than to prevail, until circumstances unexpectedly present the occasion to receive their merited happiness.<sup>7</sup>

The only heroine not fitting this pattern is Elizabeth Bennet, who does not belong to any distinct heroine type, but blends both attitudes which in later novels, starting from *Northanger Abbey*, will be attributed separately to each heroine as enlisted above.

It is not surprising that such complete and balanced heroine needs no less than two anti-heroines. Protagonists embodying one specific position require one antagonist only who takes up the opposing instance. Silent, still and selfless Fanny Price and Anne Elliot are perfectly enlightened by chatty, lively and self-centred Mary Crawford and Louisa Musgrove respectively. Witty and sparkling Emma Woodhouse needs no other foil than an almost motionless and voiceless Jane Fairfax. Elizabeth Bennet is indeed as witty and sparkling as Emma Woodhouse, quick-tongued and quick-footed, «crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles with impatient activity»<sup>8</sup>, but she is also capable of a delicacy of feeling towards others which suffuses the whole story. She silently witnesses the rise, fall and final rise of Jane's attachment to Mr. Bingley and just as silently tries to conceal and atone for her mother's shameful manners. The best proof of Elizabeth's being the most balanced heroine, however, is precisely her need for two anti-heroines to foil her – her best friend Charlotte Lucas and her youngest sister Lydia Bennet.

### 3.2. *Pride and prejudice*

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<sup>7</sup> G. Kelly, *Religion and Politics*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 149-169, p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 24.

### 3.2.a. Elizabeth and Darcy

As in *Sense and Sensibility*, also in *Pride and Prejudice* the two elements of the title initially seem to refer to two separate characters, Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth respectively, but then they reveal themselves much more difficult to attribute. Darcy is proud indeed, but Elizabeth is not less so, as she herself acknowledges at the very beginning of the novel, when she says «I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*»<sup>9</sup>. Elizabeth will not feel the full weight of their respective pride until much later. Right after having been introduced to Darcy and having been mortified by him defining her «tolerable; but not enough to tempt *me*»<sup>10</sup>

Elizabeth [...] [is able to tell] the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition which delighted in anything ridiculous.<sup>11</sup>

Only after going through much development, she will find pride much less ridiculous and much more serious and she will realize that it made her «blind, partial, [...] absurd»<sup>12</sup> and prone to prejudices about Darcy being the villain and Wickham being the victim. As a consequence of having «prided [her]self on [her] discernment»<sup>13</sup> and of having mistaken prejudice for insight, she misreads Darcy's character and her own sentiments, slights and rejects him in a way which would have made any second proposal inconceivable and thus ruins not only his but her own prospects of future happiness. Moving through her *Bildung* process, she learns to distrust pride and detect prejudice.

The distinct attribution of pride to Darcy and prejudice to Elizabeth, however, does not work not only because *Elizabeth alone* possesses *both* qualities, but because *both she and Darcy* possess the one *and* the other. Examples of Darcy's pride *and* prejudice are, among others, his refusal to dance with Elizabeth and his unwillingness to associate with the Bennets because of their social inferiority and vulgar manners, his certainty that Elizabeth would not reject his

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<sup>9</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. XIII, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi*.

hand since it is too good a chance for her to miss and his belief that Jane's backwardness betrayed her indifference to Bingley, while it proved only her own shyness.

The [...] rising action of the plot is a gradual process in which [both] Darcy and Elizabeth readjust their opinions of each other and realize their former faults (Elizabeth by visiting Darcy's estate at Pemberley and Darcy by meeting the reasonable Gardiners which make him revise his opinions about [...] Lizzy's relations).<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, pride and prejudice are not necessarily negative qualities. Pride, at least in its milder version which is self-esteem, makes Elizabeth refuse Darcy's first proposal, thus spurring his process of development and turning him into a less proud and less prejudiced person. Prejudice may indeed induce Elizabeth to assess people and situations wrongly, but when corrected into judgement it helps her to get a clearer picture of the world, which Jane in her attempts to think well of everybody will never have. In her *Bildung*, Elizabeth moves from the negative pole of pride and prejudice to the positive pole of self-esteem and insight.

### 3.2.b. Elizabeth, Charlotte and Lydia

The elements of pride and prejudice, or their lack, characterize not only the two protagonists, but also the two antagonists. While Elizabeth has much pride, more than enough to reject Collins, Charlotte has so little self-regard as to actively encourage him to repeat his proposal to herself<sup>15</sup>. Two opposite world-views clash: Elizabeth would not marry any man (not even one like Mr. Darcy, with ten thousand pounds, high connections and wonderful properties) unless she felt respect and affection for him, whereas Charlotte «accept[s] [Mr. Collins] solely for the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment»<sup>16</sup>. She even goes so far as to openly admit both his unpleasant character («Mr. Collins to be sure was neither sensible nor agreeable; his society was irksome, and his attachment to her must be imaginary»<sup>17</sup>) and her own unsentimental disposition («I am not romantic you know. I never was. I ask only for a

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<sup>14</sup> I. Kutsch, *Lydia's Elopement and its functions in Jane Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice'*, Paper for Hauptseminar '19th Century Women Novelists: Jane Austen, Charlotte and Emily Brontë', RWTH Aachen, English Department, Winter Term 2002-03.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. J. Sutherland, *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet?*, in *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 17-22, pp. 20-22.

<sup>16</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 93.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 94.

comfortable home»<sup>18</sup>). The difference in personality and attitude between the two friends is so great that Elizabeth finds it difficult to acknowledge and accept it:

her astonishment was [...] so great as to overcome at first the bounds of decorum [...]. She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.<sup>19</sup>

Elizabeth's incredulity on the one hand induces the reader to disapprove of Charlotte's choice and to exclaim with Elizabeth: «Engaged to Mr. Collins! my dear Charlotte, – impossible!»<sup>20</sup>. On the other hand it intensifies the reader's esteem of Elizabeth when she, coherently with her principles (not to marry without affection) and her beliefs (that Darcy is a bad man), refuses Darcy's first proposal later in the novel. The heroine's being consistent and bold is stressed by the anti-heroine's being materialistic and conventional. Charlotte's winning Collins over plays thus not only against Elizabeth's turning him down, but also against her turning down such man as Darcy, who even before his development, is a person infinitely better than Collins, although not yet good enough for Elizabeth. Charlotte's total lack of pride enlightens Elizabeth's self-respect and strong-mindedness, which are positive forces accompanying her throughout her *Bildung*.

If Charlotte is not proud and Elizabeth is, Lydia is proud just as well, always wanting to be at the centre of attention, envied by women and adored by men, better if officers. But while Elizabeth's pride is self-respect, Lydia's is self-centredness, so one and the same quality is present in the two sisters in different tinges. Moreover, while Elizabeth's pride is tamed throughout the novel by both external events and personal reflection, Lydia's is not checked by either.

Also as far as prejudice is concerned, the heroine occupies a mid-position between the anti-heroines. Charlotte is over-practical and over-conscious, as her reflections after her engagement to Mr. Collins show:

[marriage] was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest

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<sup>18</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 96.

<sup>19</sup> Ivi.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi.

preservative from want. This preservative had she now obtained; and at the age of twenty-seven, without having ever been handsome, she felt all the good luck of it.<sup>21</sup>

Charlotte regards matrimony as nothing more than an economic contract granting her future comfort, and herself as not handsome enough to aspire to anything more than financial security. She knows what she is doing in getting engaged and married to Mr. Collins and she carries it out with quiet resolution. A couple of months after the wedding, Elizabeth wonders at Charlotte being still so convinced of and pleased with what she did in marrying Mr. Collins and at her «hav[ing] so cheerful an air, with such a companion»<sup>22</sup>:

When Mr. Collins said any thing of which his wife might reasonably be ashamed, which certainly was not unseldom, [...] Charlotte wisely did not hear. [...] Elizabeth admired the command of countenance with which Charlotte talked of the healthfulness of the exercise, and owed she encouraged it as much as possible. [...] When Mr. Collins could be forgotten, there was really a great air of comfort throughout, and by Charlotte's evident enjoyment of it, Elizabeth supposed he must be often forgotten.<sup>23</sup>

Charlotte's behaviour in leading her new life might be put down to her attitude in entering it – no prejudices affected her decision and no disenchantment affects its accomplishment.

Lydia's case is exactly the reverse. She is under so great illusion and deception when she enters her elopement with and marriage to Wickham, that she fancies both him and herself head over heels in love with each other. Whether her prejudice about their mutual love ever gets cleared remains unknown, but we do know that not much later in their relationship (some months after their marriage) and in the novel (in the last chapter), «his affection for her [...] sunk into indifference», while «her lasted [only] a little longer»<sup>24</sup>.

*Pride and Prejudice* is indeed a *Bildungsroman*, but the *Bildung* affects hero and heroine only, while the anti-heroines remain at the end of the book exactly as they were at the beginning. Charlotte needs no *Bildung* because she is already an adult woman, grown into a practical, materialistic and conventional person long before the novel opens. Lydia, conversely, is in great need of development, but unable to achieve it because neither her personal inclination nor outside events spur it. There is no possibility of turning pride into dignity, prejudice into judgement and the girl into a woman – she is a child who will never grow into an adult.

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<sup>21</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 94.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. V, pp. 120-121.

<sup>23</sup> *Ivi*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XIX, p. 297.

Placed between these two extremes, Elizabeth's *Bildung* is exalted in its rightness, difficulty and success.

### 3.3. Balance and completeness

Not only is Elizabeth the only female character who develops in the novel, but she is also the only one who achieves balance and completeness. Charlotte and Lydia are extreme characters standing at the two opposing poles of a spectrum of principles and attitudes between which the heroine tries to find a balance. Practical, materialistic Charlotte is all prudence and marries for purely economic advantage. Thoughtless, regardless Lydia is all passion and marries for sheer sensual attraction. They both add weight to their fixed and extreme positions by marrying men who are just like themselves – Collins being cold, conventional and materialistic and Wickham being thoughtless, regardless and self-centred. Elizabeth alone strives for development and balance by marrying a man different from and complementary to her. Her relationship to Darcy, based on equal respect, regard and esteem, will indeed give the final spur to her *Bildung*, since it blends together antithetical features, which, according to Tony Tanner, are «mutually exclusive qualities coming into unity during the course of the book»<sup>25</sup>:

Indeed, it could be said that it is on the tension between [Elizabeth's] playfulness and [Darcy's] regulation that society depends, and it is the fact that Elizabeth and Darcy are so happily 'united' by the end of the book which generates the satisfaction produced by the match.<sup>26</sup>

Elizabeth, however, even before her marriage, is herself the union of two opposites, the ones embodied in Charlotte and Lydia, which are negative if standing alone, but positive if softened and combined. Elizabeth has enough of Charlotte's prudence to refuse, although only in her daydreams, a marriage to penniless Wickham and enough of Lydia's spontaneity to refuse, after an actual proposal, a marriage to repulsive Collins.

Elizabeth herself, in her role as the heroine of a *Bildungsroman*, is not immune to unbalance and incompleteness, but in her it is a starting point, while in the anti-heroines it is a

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<sup>25</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-137.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi.*

permanent condition. Her initial wavering between her two antagonists, her eventual disapproval of both and her final attachment to the hero are all stages of her difficult but successful development.

Interestingly enough, Elizabeth is not the only heroine in English literature wavering between and turning down two opposing sets of principles and attitudes. Some fifty years later, in 1860, George Eliot will place Maggie Tulliver in exactly the same situation in *The Mill on the Floss*. Elizabeth and Maggie both struggle to find balance in a fictional world constructed on oppositions, which are embodied in *Pride and Prejudice* in Charlotte and Lydia and in *The Mill on the Floss* in Philip and Stephen. The conflict which in *Pride and Prejudice* was enacted in the acceptance or refusal of something external, i.e. a certain set of principles and values, is transposed in *The Mill on the Floss* into the very conscience of the protagonist, called on to choose between two tendencies inborn in the individual, the drive towards pure love (Philip) and the drive towards sensual passion (Stephen). Maggie is either unable or unwilling to choose between her different impulses, to achieve balance, to select a husband and to enter adulthood. Marriage is replaced by a reunion with her brother and adulthood by a regression to childhood. The end of the novel is not the symbolically charged marriage of the logic of the *Bildungsroman*, but the tragic death by water which seems to point to a different narrative logic.

### 3.4. Society and the self

The capacity or incapacity of mediating between different principles and attitudes can be seen also in the relationship between society and the self. As we have already seen in chapter 3 of this dissertation, according to Tony Tanner, manners in Jane Austen's novels are the preservatives of social order and political stability, and he adds:

We are in the proximity of a major problem here [in *Pride and Prejudice*]: namely, that of the relationship and adjustment between individual energy and social forms. If one were to make a single binary reduction about literature, one could say that there are works which stress the existence of, and need for, boundaries; and works which concentrate on everything within the individual [...] which conspires to negate or transcend boundaries.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

While Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is an example of the latter type<sup>28</sup>, Jane Austen's novels are examples of the former, since «in the eighteenth century, [...] the stress was on the need for, or inevitability of, boundaries»<sup>29</sup>. The balance between society and the self is what Jane Austen urges, Elizabeth accomplishes and the anti-heroines want. Charlotte is sensitive to social forms only, marrying Collins «solely for the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment»<sup>30</sup>, which has to be read here not only as economic security, but also as social position, since a married woman enjoyed a higher rank and greater prestige than an unmarried one. Conversely, Lydia has a strong sensual and sexual tendency, depicted in her obsession with officers, and a great self-centredness, stressed in her delight in being married before any other of her sisters to one of the most charming men in the country. According to her nature of a flat, static character undergoing no *Bildung* whatsoever, Lydia follows her desires and disregards manners from the beginning to the end of the book, bringing shame on herself and on her family throughout the novel and eloping with Wickham at the end. The «patched-up business»<sup>31</sup> which her marriage truly is can give a veneer of respectability to her condition, but cannot enforce any regard for propriety in her principles. Also in the relationship between society and the self, the two anti-heroines are placed at the two ends of the spectrum, worshipping either social forms or individual desires, and thus enlightening the difficult yet successful compromise which the heroine achieves.

### 3.5. Obstacles and occasions

Charlotte and Lydia have great narrative importance not only because they enlighten Elizabeth's struggle for mediation and compromise and her achievement of balance and completeness, but also because they constitute both obstacles to and occasions for her development.

First of all, we might say that Lydia finally gets the man whom Elizabeth had initially wanted and had for herself<sup>32</sup>. Albeit Elizabeth and Wickham had always regarded each other as friends, something tender must have been in the air, as Elizabeth herself admits:

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<sup>28</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>30</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 93.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XIV, p. 273.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. C. Tomalin, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

[Wickham's] apparent partiality had subsided, his attentions were over, he was the admirer of someone else. Elizabeth[']s [...] heart had been but slightly touched, and her vanity was satisfied with believing that she would have been his only choice, had fortune permitted it.<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, Lydia's elopement with Elizabeth's first, albeit faint, flame, Wickham, threatens to prevent her marriage to her final and true love, Darcy. In Jane Austen's days, a daughter or a sister's elopement was a shame which fell back on the whole family. The father saw his manliness questioned, since a man's reputation was estimated also insofar as he was able to dispose of the female members of his family<sup>34</sup>, and the sisters saw their prospects of marriage sink, since the dishonour of one was extended to the others and to the household which would welcome them as wives. This is the nearest Lydia gets to constitute an obstacle to Elizabeth's happiness and simultaneously the nearest she gets to constitute a spur to it. To prevent «the shades of Pemberley [from being] thus polluted», Lady Catherine requires first from Elizabeth and then from Darcy the promise that they will never get engaged to each other, thus revealing to Darcy Elizabeth's changed sentiments and inducing him to propose again.

If Lydia harms Elizabeth without either recognising or wanting it, Charlotte harms her both consciously and willingly. To the question of how Lady Catherine might have heard of a possible match between Elizabeth and Darcy, Elizabeth provides a plausible but weak explanation:

she recollected that *his* [Darcy's] being the intimate friend of Bingley, and *her* [Elizabeth's] being the sister of Jane, was enough, at a time when the expectation of one wedding, made every body eager for another, to supply the idea.<sup>35</sup>

John Sutherland, in the chapter about *Pride and Prejudice* of his *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet?* [1999], suggests another possible answer. To the news of Jane and Bingley's engagement, spread in Meryton by the Bennets and to Rosings Parsonage by the Lucases, Charlotte herself might have added the rumour of Elizabeth and Darcy's engagement, so as to instigate Lady

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<sup>33</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. II, Ch. III, p. 115.

<sup>34</sup> I. Kutsch, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>35</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XV, p. 275.

Catherine's indignation and intervention and «settle accounts»<sup>36</sup> with Elizabeth. If Elizabeth had not rejected Collins, she would not have enabled Charlotte to accept him and to end up living her days in the constant company of either him or Lady Catherine.<sup>37</sup> As John Sutherland tells us in a note in which he reports a conversation with Kathleen Glancy, she offers further insight by reminding us of Charlotte's pregnancy, which «can lead to mood swings and irrational behaviour»<sup>38</sup>:

the thought of Lady Catherine dispensing advice on parental care and the rearing of the child and the awful possibility that it would resemble its father might prey on Charlotte's mind and cause her subconsciously to blame Elizabeth for her predicament.<sup>39</sup>

These conjectures might read too much into motives which Jane Austen decided not to linger on. An analysis of the anti-heroines' roles and functions and of the dynamics they set moving in *Pride and Prejudice*, however, would be incomplete without presenting Sutherland and Glancy's idea that Charlotte might have played a part in first directly obstructing and then indirectly promoting Elizabeth and Darcy's happiness.

### **3.6. Comparison with another anti-heroine – Isabella**

Among Jane Austen's other anti-heroines, Isabella seems to have most in common with Charlotte and Lydia. In personality and manners, Isabella is all Lydia. Both are chatty, restless and full of self-consequence. When visiting her family after her wedding, for instance, «Lydia, with anxious parade, walk[ed] up to her mother's right hand, and [...] [said] to her eldest sister, 'Ah! Jane, I take your place now, and you must go lower, because I am a married woman'»<sup>40</sup>, a comment which cannot but remind us of Isabella's own vanity and worldliness.

In the relationship between heroine and anti-heroine, Isabella and Charlotte seem to resemble each other. Starting off as the heroine's best friends, both are first misunderstood and finally recognised in their true characters – Isabella in her being selfish and vain,

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<sup>36</sup> J. Sutherland, *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet?*, in *op. cit.*, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 17-22.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in J. Sutherland, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

<sup>39</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>40</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. III, Ch. IX, p. 240.

Charlotte in her being practical and conventional. There are, however, substantial differences between the two. Firstly, Charlotte sincerely loves Elizabeth, while Isabella cares nothing for Catherine herself, but only for the little adoring friend whom Catherine initially is to her. Secondly, in her total lack of pride, which induces her to accept Collins, Charlotte plays against *both* Elizabeth *and* Isabella. Elizabeth starts off as having an excessive amount of pride and ends up having a reasonable share of it. Isabella has also much pride, which however, being given free rein, plays her a nasty trick – in trying to captivate two men and choose the best, she is deserted by both. Thirdly, although Charlotte has no pride, she has great self-awareness, realising she is neither young nor handsome enough to play it hard to accept reasonable proposals of marriage. Elizabeth has *both* pride *and* self-awareness, knowing that with youth and beauty such as hers, she will surely have other chances in the future. Isabella, conversely, has no self-consciousness whatsoever and allows herself to sport with two men, without realising that, having neither fortune nor morals, she will never be able to retain any of them.

Not only did Jane Austen develop and analyse certain subjects and dynamics in a given book, but she also resumed and further developed them in her following works. This is what makes comparisons among characters from different novels interesting and rewarding, and what makes Jane Austen an all the more skilful and fascinating novelist.

Chapter 4:

**Mary Crawford**  
and ***Mansfield Park***

#### 4.1. Some peculiar characters

*Mansfield Park* is the most complex and debated among Jane Austen's novels<sup>1</sup> for a number of reasons, regarding in particular its characters<sup>2</sup>. The heroine, Fanny Price, has often been regarded as weak, sickly, priggish, tedious<sup>3</sup> – in a word, inapt to be a heroine. She spends her days either thinking and grieving in her room or obeying her aunts, who send her on errands and charge her with the most difficult and boring parts of their needlework<sup>4</sup>. The anti-heroine, Mary Crawford, has all the appeal, liveliness, playfulness and boldness Fanny lacks, and at a first reading of the novel, she is often perceived as the rightful heroine, dispossessed of her role by a strange authorial trick<sup>5</sup>. The hero, usually a steadfast upright young man spurring the heroine towards her *Bildung*, is also a problematic figure. Henry Crawford, although possessing promising external features such as wit, charm, manners and fortune, has no principles and ends up being not the hero, but the villain. Edmund Bertram, who has brought Fanny up since her arrival at Mansfield Park and taught her all which is good and just, not only deserts her at the moment of putting these notions to the test, but he also tries to persuade her to do what she feels wrong, i.e. marrying someone she neither esteems nor loves<sup>6</sup>.

#### 4.2. The novel's sense and structure

These peculiarities are justified by the sense and structure of the novel, which presents a conflict much more dramatic and profound than those enacted in the previous Jane Austen novels. While *Northanger Abbey* depicts the relationship between fiction and reality, *Sense and*

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *Introduction*, in J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* [1814], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. xvii-xxxvi, p. vii, T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 143, S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 6, I. Armstrong, *Jane Austen. Mansfield Park*, London, Penguin Books, 1988, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. among others: R. Farrer, *Jane Austen's 'Gran Rifiuto'* [1917], in B. Southam ed., *Jane Austen. 'Sense and Sensibility', 'Pride and Prejudice' and 'Mansfield Park'*, London, A Casebook, Macmillan, 1976, pp. 209-212, D. W. Harding, *The Priggishness of 'Mansfield Park'* [1940], in B. Southam ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 213-215, L. Trilling, *'Mansfield Park'* [1954], in B. Southam ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 216-235, pp. 220-227, K. Amis, *What Became of Jane Austen? 'Mansfield Park'* [1957], in B. Southam ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 243-246, and A. Shea, *'I am a wild beast'. Patricia Rozema's forward Fanny*, in *'Persuasion. The Jane Austen Journal'* n° 28, 1 January 2006, pp. 52-58, web, 19 April 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 69, T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 143, J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xvii.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-154.

*Sensibility* the opposition between feelings for the self and feelings for others and *Pride and Prejudice* the difference between knowledge and false assumption about reality, *Mansfield Park* enacts the clash between innovation and conservation<sup>7</sup>. Fanny Price, taken to Mansfield Park and brought up within the Bertram household, the stronghold of conservatism, stability and order<sup>8</sup>, endorses its conservative morals and manners so well as to become their guardian<sup>9</sup> when the Bertrams are led astray by the Crawfords, who bring from London an innovative and disruptive set of values made of charm, wit and easiness. In the end, Fanny is acknowledged to have been right all along, is accepted back at Mansfield Park and is raised to a status of equality with the Bertrams<sup>10</sup>. The conservative values praised in the course of the novel appear restored and strengthened in the end<sup>11</sup>, conveying the idea that novel, heroine and author are conservative through and through. However, the ending of the book presents not a *restoration*, but a *reformation* of conservative values<sup>12</sup>. If the new ways are evil, the old ways as they were are not good either<sup>13</sup>. If the Crawfords' wantonness teaches the Bertram girls immorality, Sir Thomas' severity hampers their feelings of gratitude and affection and his sense of class reinforces their pride and vanity<sup>14</sup>. Conservative values, in order to be preserved, must be regenerated by outside elements such as sweetness, humility and helpfulness (embodied in Fanny) or openness of temper and easiness of manners (embodied in her siblings William and Susan).

However, while Elizabeth Bennet achieves a perfect balance between prudence and passion, pride and dignity, prejudice and insight, Fanny Price succeeds in softening, *and thus* preserving, decidedly conservative values. The real clash in this novel is enacted not between conservation and innovation as such, but between reformed conservatism (Fanny Price) and capricious and materialistic innovation (Henry and Mary Crawford). The pattern of characterization is entirely constructed around this conflict, with the Crawfords seducing, either literally or figuratively, all Mansfield inhabitants, with the Bertrams yielding to their

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 146, and S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 70, and T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-82, 177-178, and M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. I. Armstrong *op. cit.*, p. 8, 55, 101, S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 88, 177-178, A. Fleishman, *A Reading of Mansfield Park. An Essay in Critical Synthesis*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1967, pp. 9-18.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 65-66, 87, 165.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

charm and with Fanny remaining the only repository of the Mansfield values<sup>15</sup>. Fanny *has* to be the way she is to defend conservation from innovation, steadiness from restlessness, stillness from movement and coherence from opportunism<sup>16</sup>:

Jane Austen [...] was aware of an England which was passing away [...], she appreciated the value of 'the quiet thing', and knew [...] the incredible moral strength required to achieve and maintain it. And that, above all, is what Mansfield Park is about.<sup>17</sup>

### 4.3. A comparison between Fanny and Mary

#### 4.3.a. Silence and outspokenness, stillness and restlessness

In her role as an advocate of stillness, Fanny hardly ever speaks<sup>18</sup>. When Edmund, Mrs. Norris and Lady Bertram discuss the advisability of sending her to cut and carry roses in a very hot day, Fanny is neither able nor willing to get a word in edgeways, so that three pages go by without her saying more than a couple of sentences. When forced to reply to a comment of Henry some time later, Fanny says two dry sentences comprised in no more than four lines, yet «she had never spoken so much at once to [Mr. Crawford] in her life before»<sup>19</sup>. Although silent to the public eye, Fanny is active in consulting with Edmund and thinking to herself, showing her lively mind, upright principles and shyness with everybody but her cousin. Besides, although she says nothing, she sees everything. She observes Henry's behaviour and understands his personality, notices Julia's distress and Maria's flirting, realizes the real nature of Mary's character while witnessing Edmund's blind love for her<sup>20</sup>.

Fanny not only seems not to speak, but she also seems not to act, only doing what she is told, including staying in the garden cutting roses and running about carrying them even if this causes her a headache. Yet, although Fanny indeed *does* nothing, she is *not* passive<sup>21</sup>. Ready and willing to comply with the demands of others when these do not conflict with her principles, nothing can persuade her into submission when they do, be it her cousins

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 150, 154-156, 173- 175, and J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xii.

<sup>17</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 143.

<sup>19</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park cit.*, Vol. II, Ch. V, p. 177.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 143.

pleading her to act in their play or be it her uncle blackmailing her into marrying Henry Crawford. In *Fanny Price*, Jane Austen displays her most subtle and refined writing skills, presenting us a character who seems *passive*, but who, in its stillness, *actively* upholds a whole set of values and way of life<sup>22</sup>. Undeceived and unwavering, she is the true heroine of *Mansfield Park*<sup>23</sup>.

Just as Fanny is silent and motionless, Mary is chatty and restless<sup>24</sup>. During the visit to Sotherton, when the young people take a walk on the grounds, Fanny, soon tired, needs to sit down on a bench, while Mary «after sitting a while [...] was up again: «'I must move,' said she, 'resting fatigues me [...]»<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, learning how to ride comes absolutely natural to Mary, while it had cost Fanny much persuasion and exertion:

'It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding!' said [the old coachman]. 'I never see one sit a horse better. She did not seem to have a thought of fear. Very different from you, miss, when you first began [...]!'<sup>26</sup>

For Jane Austen, however, the evil does not lie in being an untiring walker or a skilful rider. It lies in the «unquiet mind»<sup>27</sup> of which Mary's restlessness is an outside symptom:

For Jane Austen, steadiness and at times literal stillness are [...] signs of virtue, while restlessness [...] and 'unquiet' minds [...] may well be signs of incipient dereliction or even latent vice.<sup>28</sup>

Mary is not only tireless, but also outspoken, as Fanny and Edmund immediately notice:

'Well Fanny, and how do you like Miss Crawford *now?*' [...] 'Very well – very much. I like to hear her talk. She entertains me [...].' [...] 'But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you Fanny, as not quite right?' 'Oh! yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite astonished. [...]'<sup>29</sup>

Edmund then points out, with a clarity which he possesses only at the very beginning and at the very end of his acquaintance with Mary, that «her *opinions* [are not to be censured]; but

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 143.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 154, 161.

<sup>25</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. X, p. 76.

<sup>26</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>27</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>29</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park cit.*, Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 50.

there certainly *is* impropriety in making them public»<sup>30</sup>. In fact, precisely by declaring her opinions about Maria and Henry's elopement before Edmund, Mary reveals to him her real principles, based on convention, advantage and selfishness:

she saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure. [...] It was the detection, not the offence which brought things to extremity, and obliged her brother to give up every dear plan [of marrying Fanny], in order to fly with her.<sup>31</sup>

Had Mary kept silent on the subject, «the charm [would not have been] broken[,] [Edmund's] eyes [would not have been] opened»<sup>32</sup> and he would have willingly married Mary and unconsciously ruined Fanny's prospects of happiness<sup>33</sup>.

#### 4.3.b. Appearing and being

Besides the conflict between conservation and innovation, stillness and movement, containment and expression of the self, *Mansfield Park* also deals with another series of oppositions:

[the] clash between appearance and reality, [between] the Crawford's stylishness [and] Fanny's [...] genuineness [,] [between] the joys of personality and the rigours of principle [,] [...] [between] the delightfulness of wit [and] [...] the soberness of wisdom.<sup>34</sup>

Fanny, who thinks it improper to be acting while Sir Thomas is not at home and possibly in danger and who therefore refuses to participate in the theatricals, personifies principle and wisdom. Mary, who seizes the opportunity to charm Edmund by displaying her liveliness and playfulness, stands for personality and wit.

The difference between appearing and being is enacted firstly in Mary being a handsome and fashionable young woman and in Fanny being something in-between a poor relation and an upper-servant, and in Mary enjoying admiration and in Fanny dreading it, as Edmund openly acknowledges:

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<sup>30</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 50.p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 357.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 358.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>34</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

Your uncle thinks you very pretty, my dear Fanny [...]. Anybody but myself would have made something more of it, and anybody but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty before [...] – Nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it [...]. You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at. – You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman.<sup>35</sup>

Secondly, while Fanny is all substance, Mary is most of all form. Maria and Henry's elopement, for Fanny an unattonable crime, is for Mary a drawback only in its formal consequences, which besides can be overcome by giving an *appearance* of respectability to the whole affair:

when once married, and properly supported by [Maria's] own family, people of respectability as they are, she may recover the footing in society to a certain degree. In some circles, we know, she would never be admitted, but with good dinners, and large parties, there will always be those who will be glad of her acquaintance [...].<sup>36</sup>

Thirdly, while Fanny is always herself from beginning to end, Mary appears a different person from what she actually is for the greatest part of the novel, taking in even initially upright and steadfast Edmund:

I had never understood her before, and [...] as far as related to my mind, it had been the creature of my own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that I had been apt to dwell on for many months past. [...] How have I been deceived!<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.3.c. Manners and morals

The question of *how* this could have happened brings us back to the issue of manners, whose positive function as «essential to the preservation of order in society»<sup>38</sup> has been mentioned in the preceding chapters. Here, however, one negative effect must be considered:

a skilful [...] person can [...] manipulate the signs in such a way that it can become very difficult [...] to distinguish 'true' good manners from [...] 'simulated' ones. Since it is all a kind of theatre anyway, how can you tell who is 'acting' his acting?<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. II, Ch. III, pp. 154-155.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 359.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 361.

<sup>38</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 29.

This is the very predicament in which many Jane Austen characters find themselves. Catherine is deceived in *Isabella*, Marianne in *Willoughby*, Elizabeth in *Wickham*, Emma in *Mr. Elton* and *Mr. Churchill* and Edmund in *Mary and Henry*. These antagonists are insidious characters<sup>40</sup> precisely because their charming manners present them as most agreeable and pleasant people<sup>41</sup>. Yet morals and manners go hand in hand and the ones cannot do without the others. For all his good principles and actions, Darcy is misunderstood in his character by everyone, including Elizabeth, because his manners, instead of being easy and open, are proud and arrogant. He learns the importance of manners at his own expense, when, after his proposal to Elizabeth and the angry discussion following it, he is told:

You are mistaken, Mr. Darcy, if you suppose that the mode of your declaration affected me in any other way, than as it spared me the concern which I might have felt in refusing you, had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner.<sup>42</sup>

This was a lesson well deserved and well learnt. As Darcy himself acknowledges to Elizabeth some time later, in fact, «though your accusations were ill-founded, formed on mistaken premises, my behaviour to you at the time, had merited the severest reproof. [...] The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me.»<sup>43</sup> Luckily for Darcy, manners *can* be learnt. Unluckily for the Crawfords, morals *cannot*. Henry and Mary are unprincipled characters both at their arrival at *Mansfield* and at their dismissal from it, initially succeeding but eventually failing to supply their want of principles with charming attitudes.

Fanny, who rates morals higher than manners, distrusts the Crawfords, with their engaging behaviour and corrupted mind, and loves Edmund, with his unceremonious manners and unshakeable morals (at least before being led astray by Mary). *Mansfield Park* completes the debate about form and substance opened in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*: if in the previous novels Jane Austen considered the necessity for manners, in *Mansfield Park* she stresses the greatest importance of morals.

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 154.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 149.

<sup>42</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XI, p. 148.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 281.

#### 4.3.d. No clear-cut character

One last element which makes Mary an all the more complex and insidious character is her absolutely not clear-cut nature. If in *Isabella Thorpe* the heroine was deluded but the reader was disillusioned, if in *Lucy Steele* neither heroine nor reader were deceived, with *Mary Crawford* things are different. The heroine assesses her immediately as a corrupted character, but the reader is constantly double-minded about her, engaged by Mary's charm on the one hand and suspicious about her principles and behaviour, which appear alternatively good and evil, on the other hand. As far as falsehood and sincerity are concerned, her last attempt to ensnare Edmund speaks for her deceiving attitude:

I had gone a few steps, Fanny, when I heard the door open behind me. "Mr. Bertram," said she, with a smile – but it was a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy, playful smile, seeming to invite, in order to subdue me [...].<sup>44</sup>

Few pages afterwards, however, we are told that Mary's attachment to Edmund had been so sincere, that she «was long in finding [a man] who could satisfy the better taste she acquired at Mansfield [...] or put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head»<sup>45</sup>.

As for the conflict between affection and fortune, Mary wavers between the two, considering the former indispensable, but the latter not unwelcome:

I am so glad your eldest cousin is gone that [Edmund] *may* be Mr. Bertram again. There is something in the sound of Mr. *Edmund* Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it.<sup>46</sup>

Yet, in spite of his inheritance, the first born himself, Tom Bertram, does not stand a chance with Mary:

he arrived [...] to give [Mary] the fullest conviction, by the power of actual comparison, of her preferring his younger brother. It was very vexatious, and she was heartily sorry for it; but so it was; and so far from now meaning to marry the elder, [...] and his indifference was so much more than equalled by her own, that were he now to step forth as the owner of Mansfield park, [...] she did not believe she could accept him.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVI, pp. 360-361.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVII, p. 369.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. IV, p. 165.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XII, p. 91.

Mary's choosing Edmund nonetheless cannot but win our complete approval, which however sinks again when Mary wishes Tom to die and Edmund to inherit Mansfield Park:

'Poor young man! [referred to Tom] – If he is to die, there will be *two* poor young men less in the world [Tom and Edmund]; and with a fearless face and bold voice would I say to any one, that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them.<sup>48</sup>

When Fanny is slighted by Mrs. Norris for refusing to act in the play, however, Mary is the only creature in the room who tries to console her<sup>49</sup>,

moving away her chair to the opposite side of the table close to Fanny, saying to her in a kind low whisper as she placed herself, 'Never mind, my dear Miss Price – this is a cross evening, – everybody is cross and teasing – but do not let us mind them;' and with pointed attention continued to talk to her and endeavour to raise her spirits, although being out of spirits herself.<sup>50</sup>

Throughout the novel, Mary is shown as alternatively disinterested and calculating, genuine and hypocritical, so that the reader is unable to clearly assess her character. Edmund makes an attempt in this direction when talking about her with Fanny for the last time:

Cruel[...], do you call [her]? – We differ there. No, her's is not a cruel nature. [...] Her's are not faults of temper. She would not voluntarily give unnecessary pain to any one [...] – Her's are faults of principle, Fanny, of blunder delicacy and a corrupted, vitiated mind.<sup>51</sup>

In Mary, good nature and good temper have been spoilt by upbringing and deviated by wrong principles<sup>52</sup>. No other Jane Austen anti-heroine blends in herself the clash between nature and education, between good and evil, as Mary does, and precisely therein lies her greatest peculiarity as a character.

#### 4.4. The interaction between Fanny and Mary

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<sup>48</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XIV, pp. 340-341.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, pp. xxvii-xxviii.

<sup>50</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XV, p. 116.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 358.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 40, 66.

#### 4.4.a. Foils

Mary is a capital anti-heroine also in her role as Fanny's foil. Fanny may be initially perceived as intransigent, but when Mary is revealed to be opportunistic, Fanny's apparent intransigence turns out to be actual steadfastness<sup>53</sup>. Similarly, in *Persuasion*, only after witnessing Louisa's nearly suicidal stubbornness does Captain Wentworth understand Anne's reasonableness. Fanny has also been perceived as celestial, angelic and perfect<sup>54</sup>, but in her relationship to Mary she proves to be very human instead. Firstly, although aware of how kind-hearted Mary can be and of how improper her own feelings are, throughout the period of Edmund's infatuation for Mary, Fanny «was full of jealousy and agitation»<sup>55</sup>, hardly able to listen or speak to her rival. Secondly, her repressed feelings of envy and resentment come eventually to the surface when «Fanny, now at liberty to speak openly [after Edmund's disillusion in Mary], felt more than justified in adding to his knowledge of her real character, by some hint of what share his brother's state of health might be supposed to have in her wish for a complete reconciliation»<sup>56</sup>. Fanny's action seems to be dictated not by a disinterested love of truth, but by a desire of revenge, which may not be very noble, but which is certainly very natural. This episode shows, on the one hand, how Fanny herself is an imperfect and thus a very human and very round character. On the other hand, it shows how anti-heroines in Jane Austen's novels serve also to allow the author to depict some unpleasant psychological traits of the heroine's personality, and the reader to appreciate her in all her humanity, which is made of much good, but also some little evil<sup>57</sup>.

Interestingly enough, poor, humble and meek Fanny reveals herself more stubborn and troublesome than rich, assertive and exuberant Mary. In her refusal to marry Henry, she opposes her uncle's will, other people's expectations and the social pillars of «commercial power» and «paternal authority»<sup>58</sup>. Mary, conversely, does not question, but complies with the assumption that a woman's role in life is to be a wife and a mother: «*matrimony was her*

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 143, S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, pp. 98, 153-154.

<sup>55</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XVII, p. 125.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 361.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. also N. Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xxxii, cf. also J Litvak, *Reading Characters; Self, Society, and Text in 'Emma'*, in D. Monaghan ed., *Emma*, London, New Casebooks, Macmillan, 1992, pp. 89-109, p. 89.

*object*, provided she could marry well»<sup>59</sup>. In this, she greatly resembles Charlotte: «without thinking highly either of men or of matrimony, *marriage had always been her object*»<sup>60</sup>. However different Mary and Charlotte may be in social position, financial situation and personality, both marry *because* expected to. Elizabeth Bennet and Fanny Price, on the other hand, resemble each other, and oppose Mary and Charlotte, in refusing one or more suitors *although* expected to accept him, especially since it might be their only offer:

[Mr. Collins to Elizabeth:] My situation in life, my connections with the family of De Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour and you should take it into farther consideration that in spite of your manifold attractions, *it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you*.<sup>61</sup>

[Lady Bertram to Fanny:] I should not think of missing you, *when such an offer as this comes in your way*. [...] You must be aware, Fanny, that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this.<sup>62</sup>

Compared with the anti-heroines' conventional choices, Fanny and Elizabeth stand out as exceptionally strong-minded and self-assertive young women.

#### 4.4.b. Obstacles

As suggested earlier in this dissertation, in *Sense and Sensibility*, as later in *Emma*, heroine and anti-heroines are mutual obstacles to the achievement of hopes and plans, Elinor and Lucy threatening each other's attachment to Edward, Emma and Jane apparently competing for Frank, and Emma and Harriet actually contending for Mr. Knightley. *Mansfield Park* presents a new dynamic – Mary *is* an obstacle to Fanny's happiness, but Fanny *is not* an obstacle to Mary's, and *may be* a spur to it instead. Mary's enthusiasm at the news of a possible match between Henry and Fanny arises from the expectation that it could favour an attachment between Edmund and herself: «Mary was in a state of mind to rejoice in a connection with the Bertram family [...]»<sup>63</sup> Unluckily for Mary, Fanny stubbornly refuses to marry Henry

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<sup>59</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 33, my italics.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. XII, p. 94, my italics.

<sup>61</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XIX, p. 83, my italics.

<sup>62</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. III, pp. 260-261, my italics.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 228.

and thus to spur Mary and Edmund's union. Yet, she neither provides an obstacle to it. The final blow to Mary's prospects is, as we have seen, totally self-inflicted.

#### 4.4.c Substitutes

If in *Pride and Prejudice* Charlotte and Lydia substitute Elizabeth Bennet in marriages she refused, in *Mansfield Park* Mary tries to substitute Fanny in a match she desires. Fanny is very unlike Elizabeth or Emma, who need much time to realise their feelings. If Elizabeth's acknowledgement of her partiality for Darcy gradually develops through the book together with her *Bildung*, and if the fact «that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself» «dart[s] through [Emma] [...] with the speed of an arrow»<sup>64</sup> very late in the novel, Fanny realizes her feelings for Edmund ever since he arranges her visit to Sotherton:

Fanny's gratitude, when she heard of the plan, was [...] much greater than her pleasure. She felt Edmund's kindness with all, and more than all, the sensibility which he, *unsuspicious of her fond attachment*, could be aware of [...].<sup>65</sup>

This makes Mary's attempts to replace Fanny in Edmund's life all the more dramatic. During the walk on Sotherton grounds, Mary gradually takes Fanny's place at Edmund's side, being first offered Edmund's *other* arm when all three walk together towards the wood and being then given his *whole* attention when the two stroll around it on themselves, while Fanny is left alone on a bench. In the episode of the theatricals, Mary takes up *in a play* the role of Edmund's beloved, which Fanny would like to have *in real life*. Mary's taking Fanny's place in Sotherton wood and Fanny's role on the Mansfield domestic stage is trifling in itself, but dangerous inasmuch as it anticipates her attempt to replace Fanny in Edmund's heart and in his life. Luckily, Mary fails on all fronts – Sir Thomas' return interrupts the rehearsals and Maria and Henry's elopement reveals Mary's real character.

Mary, however, threatens to substitute Fanny not only in her relationship to Edmund, but also within the universe of Mansfield Park. Mary, although personifying innovation and change and having corrupted principles and a calculating mind, is nearly accepted as a rightful element of Mansfield Park through her expected engagement to Edmund. Fanny,

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<sup>64</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* [1815], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, Vol. III, Ch. XI, p. 320.

<sup>65</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VIII, p. 63, my italics.

conversely, although upright, steadfast, humble and serviceable, is expelled from it as a morbid element, «self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful»<sup>66</sup>, after daring her only act of disobedience towards the establishment. Fanny Price is the Jane Austen heroine to whom the greatest share of suffering is allotted and *Mansfield Park* is the novel which is charged with the harshest presentation of «the incredible moral strength required to [...] maintain»<sup>67</sup> steadfast and upright principles in a corrupted world<sup>68</sup>. The paradoxical swapping of places between heroine and anti-heroine, adding insult to injury before the truth is unfolded and order is restored, enhances Fanny as a suffering, but successful, heroine<sup>69</sup> and *Mansfield Parks* as a world needing, and achieving, regeneration.

Mary Crawford, in her role as the *Mansfield Park* anti-heroine, serves several aims in relationship both to the heroine and to the novel. Firstly, she enhances the heroine's qualities by comparison with her own opposing features, she provides alternative examples stressing the heroine's different conduct and she constitutes an obstacle to the heroine's happiness. Secondly, she personifies an innovative set of values, which clash with the heroine's conservative one<sup>70</sup>. In her rightful expulsion from *Mansfield Park*, Mary shows that unrestrained innovation is an inadequate answer to the problems of the English society of the time. Improvement had better come from reformed conservatism, which is the very perspective which Fanny Price clearly personifies and which Jane Austen, at least in this novel, fully upholds.

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<sup>66</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. I, p. 250.

<sup>67</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, pp. 171-172.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 156.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. J. Stabler, *op. cit.*, p. xxxvi.

Chapter 5:  
**Jane Fairfax**  
and *Emma*

## 5.1. The heroine and her foils

All Jane Austen's novels present, besides heroine and anti-heroine, a number of other young female characters whom the heroine is in different ways compared to and contrasted with: Eleanor Tilney in *Northanger Abbey*, the Bennet sisters and Miss Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*, the Bertram sisters in *Mansfield Park*, Henrietta Musgrove (the anti-heroine's sister) and Elizabeth and Mary Elliot (the heroine's sisters) in *Persuasion*. *Emma*, however, is the book in which the young non protagonist women have the tightest relationship with the heroine and the greatest importance within the novel.

Harriet Smith, Mrs. Elton and Jane Fairfax all foil Emma in their own way. Harriet, a parlour-border at the village school, «short, plump and fair, with a fine bloom, blue eyes, light hair, regular features, and a look of great sweetness»<sup>1</sup> enlightens firstly Emma's tendency to educate people and make matches. After her governess marries a neighbour and leaves her, Emma regards her development as completed and herself as mature enough to try and form other people. By introducing Harriet into her own social circle and by flattering her self-esteem, Emma raises Harriet's ambitions and expectations beyond her own knowledge. Eventually, Harriet ends up despising both the man she had wanted to marry (the farmer Mr. Martin) and the ones Emma had wanted her to marry (the clergyman Mr. Elton and the gentleman Frank Churchill) and aspires to Mr. Knightley, whom Emma had always, albeit unconsciously, intended for herself. The relationship between maker and made is an important theme in the novel<sup>2</sup>. It is enacted as a sound phenomenon in the relationship between Emma and Mr. Knightley, «the responsible active male»<sup>3</sup>, who has been directing and determining Emma's character for her whole life, and in its morbid dynamics in the relationship between Harriet and Emma, who tries to rearrange Harriet's character, self-consciousness and social position in a way which is agreeable to her, but disruptive to Harriet herself. Secondly, Harriet enlightens Emma's repressed and sublimated desires. As Tony Tanner suggests, Emma uses Harriet «as a fantasy sexual object. Is Emma's imagination [...] stirred at [...] Mr. Elton? She pushes and promotes Harriet in every way so that they should form a 'union'. And Frank Churchill? [...] Harriet again is really put

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<sup>1</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. I, Ch. III, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 176-183.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 180.

forward – indeed, one might say, exhibited – as the sexual bait»<sup>4</sup>. At the end of the book, Emma will own this all: «Harriet was nothing; [...] she was everything herself; [...] what she had been saying relative to Harriet had been all taken as the language of her own feelings»<sup>5</sup>. Actually, Harriet is very important in the novel inasmuch as she provides Emma with an opportunity *not only* to *sublimate* her impulses, *but also* to *realize* her sentiments<sup>6</sup>. In confessing to Emma her ambitions about Mr. Knightley, Harriet gives Emma the chance to recognise her own attachment to him<sup>7</sup>:

A few minutes were sufficient for making [Emma] acquainted with her own heart. [...] She touched – she admitted – she acknowledged the whole truth. Why was it so much worse that Harriet should be in love with Mr. Knightley, than with Frank Churchill? Why was the evil so dreadfully increased by Harriet's having some hope of a return? It darted through her, with the speed of an arrow, that Mr. Knightley must marry no one but herself!<sup>8</sup>

Harriet *is* indeed a foil to Emma, and yet she is *no* anti-heroine, as Emma herself acknowledges by defining Harriet a mere nothing and by admitting Harriet's alleged sentiments to be actually Emma's own<sup>9</sup>.

If Harriet Smith is Emma's puppet, Mrs. Elton is Emma's caricature. Not only does she try to direct Jane's life just as Emma tries to arrange Harriet's character<sup>10</sup>, but «she is [also] determined, like Emma, to dictate taste as the first lady of Highbury. [...] [Her] character is structured to mirror the defects of Emma's in grosser [...] form. [...] The real difference between Mrs. Elton and Emma [...] is not one of substance, but of manner[:] in her vulgarity, Mrs. Elton verbalises the attitudes that Emma only thinks. [...] Like Harriet Smith, Mrs. Elton mirrors back to Emma her own desires, thus leading her from conceit and illusion to a truer estimate of her relation to others.»<sup>11</sup> Just like Harriet, Mrs. Elton is a *reflection* of Emma's own self, and as such she is a foil to the heroine, but no anti-heroine herself.

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<sup>4</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>5</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XIII, p. 338.

<sup>6</sup> A. Pinch, *Introduction*, in *Emma* cit., pp. vii-xxiv, p. viii.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. B. Marie, '*Emma*' and the *Democracy of Desire*, in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 52-67, p. 58 and J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

<sup>8</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XI, p. 320.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. also D. A. Miller, '*Emma*': *Good Riddance*, in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 68-76, p. 74.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>11</sup> B. Marie, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

## 5.2. The heroine and the anti-heroine

The novel's only anti-heroine is Jane Fairfax for a number of reasons. First of all, «Jane [...] is Emma's only real peer»<sup>12</sup>: «unlike Harriet [and Mrs. Elton][,] [Emma and] Jane [are] tall and elegant»<sup>13</sup>, were born in the same village and in the same year and «have been children and women together»<sup>14</sup>. Most importantly, Jane enlightens and counterbalances some of Emma's tendencies and spurs her towards her *Bildung*.

### 5.2.a. Openness and reserve

The most outstanding difference between heroine and anti-heroine regards Emma's openness and Jane's reserve. According to Kelly's character scheme reported in chapter 4 of this dissertation, Emma Woodhouse and Elizabeth Bennet are the only active heroines in Jane Austen's novels. Yet Emma is the most assertive, self-conscious and self-assured of the two, enjoying not only a lively mind and a ready wit, but also high rank and undisputed consequence<sup>15</sup>. Elizabeth, albeit being a gentleman's daughter, has to share her social position with her other sisters, will be denied any inheritance by the entailing practice and is often humbled by the vulgar behaviour of some of her relatives. Emma, conversely, has almost absolute power on her family and household, since her mother died and her sister married and since her father is not only «a much older man in ways than in years»<sup>16</sup>, but also an invalid (as he defines himself) and an hypochondriac (as an objective observer would describe him), always worried about people catching cold and eating badly. Moreover, «Highbury, the large and populous village almost amounting to a town, to which Hartfield [the Woodhouses' estate], in spite of its separate lawn and shrubberies and name, did really belong, afforded [Emma] no equals. The Woodhouses were first in consequence there. All looked up to them.»<sup>17</sup> With only Mr. Knightley equalling her in conversation and reasoning, and daring to alert and censure her<sup>18</sup>, Emma «claims a right of unrestricted liberty of

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<sup>12</sup> R. Perry, *Interrupted Friendship in 'Emma'* in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 127-147, p. 136.

<sup>13</sup> B. Stovel, *Comic Symmetry in 'Emma'*, in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 20-34, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VI, p. 159.

<sup>15</sup> A. Pinch, *op.cit.*, p. viii.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. I, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-182.

speech»<sup>19</sup>, which provides the novel with many witty passages, but also with one most painful episode. During the trip to Box Hill, Emma, annoyed at «a languor, a want of spirits, a want of union, which could not be got over»<sup>20</sup> and irritated by Frank being «silent and stupid»<sup>21</sup>, slights the kind-hearted but excessively chatty Miss Bates:

[Frank Churchill:] '[...] Ladies and gentlemen – I am ordered by Miss Woodhouse to say, that she [...] demands from each of you either one thing very clever – or two things moderately clever – or three things very dull indeed [...]'. [Miss Bates:] '[...] "Three things very dull indeed." That will do for me, you know. I shall be sure to say three dull things as soon as I open my mouth, shan't I? [...]' Emma could not resist. 'Ah! ma'am, but there may be a difficulty. Pardon me – but you will be limited as to number – only three at once.'<sup>22</sup>

There Mr. Knightley intervenes, scolding Emma for her «unfeeling», «insolent»<sup>23</sup> words and inducing her to be more tolerant and attentive to Miss. Bates in the future. This episode makes clear how «Emma has to be taught the necessity of some reserve[,] [...] [which] involves her learning not to speak, and her becoming more private, more distant, and more enclosed, in short, more like Jane»<sup>24</sup>.

Reserve is indeed Jane's chief characteristic, as both Emma and Mr. Knightley respectively acknowledge:

[Emma:] It is natural to suppose that we should be intimate, – that we should have taken to each other [...]. But we never did. I hardly know how it has happened; a little, perhaps, from that wickedness on my side to take disgust towards a girl so idolized [...]. And then, her reserve – I never could attach myself to any one so completely reserved.<sup>25</sup>

[Mr. Knightley:] Jane Fairfax is a very charming young woman – but not even Jane Fairfax is perfect. She has a fault. She has not the open temper which a man would wish for in a wife. [...] Her temper [...] wants openness. She is reserved, more reserved, I think, than she used to be –<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

<sup>20</sup> J. Austen, *Emma cit.*, Vol. III, Ch. VII, p. 288.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 289.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 291.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 294.

<sup>24</sup> J. Thompson, *Intimacy in 'Emma'*, in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 110-126, p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>26</sup> J. Austen, *Emma cit.*, Vol. II, Ch. XVI, p. 226.

The reader himself clearly perceives Jane's reserve. He is hardly ever presented with either her words or her thoughts, which is most striking since *Emma* is chiefly constructed around «conversations in which the characters make themselves known as they discuss themselves or others»<sup>27</sup> and, most importantly, around the heroine's free indirect speech<sup>28</sup>. From her first to her last novel, Jane Austen presents us with a greater and greater insight into the heroine's psychology<sup>29</sup>, which is usually counterbalanced by a deeper and deeper acquaintance with the anti-heroine's thoughts. If Isabella Thorpe, Lucy Steele and Lydia Bennet are known to the reader only through their actions and words, Charlotte Lucas and Mary Crawford are presented also in their opinions, expectations and ambitions. Both these two antagonists and their corresponding protagonists are granted a more intimate relationship with the reader than that allowed to their predecessors. In *Emma*, this trend seems to be reversed. Yet, just as Fanny's meekness may be explained by the sense and structure of *Mansfield Park*, Jane's reserve may be understood in relation to the structure of the novel as a whole. If Emma is such an assertive, outspoken heroine, in fact, she needs an anti-heroine embodying the opposing attitude of reserve and silence, which she, spurred by the hero, will have to move forward to in order to achieve balance and approach maturity.

#### 5.2.b. Fantasy and reality

Emma's lively mind has already been hinted at in relation to Harriet, whom Emma assumes to be a gentleman's daughter and, as a consequence, expects to marry a gentleman. And yet, Emma knows so *little* about Harriet as to make these assumptions and expectations groundless. Jane's case is all the more telling. Emma imagines a complicated and improbable love story between Jane and Mr. Dixon, and pretends to understand her feelings, although she knows absolutely *nothing* about either Jane's past or her present.

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<sup>27</sup> J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 135, cf. also N. Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 30, cf. also the rendering of Fanny's thoughts and Anne's impressions as described in J. Burrows, *Style*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 170-188, p. 171.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also J. Burrows, *op. cit.*, p. 171, A. Pinch, *op. cit.*, pp. xvii-xviii.

An ingenious and animating suspicion enter[ed] Emma's brain with regard to Jane Fairfax [and] this charming Mr. Dixon [...].<sup>30</sup> It might be simple, single, successful love on her side alone. She might have been unconsciously suckling in the sad poison, while a sharer of [Mr. Dixon's] conversation with [Miss Campbell – Jane's friend and Mr. Dixon's fiancée]; and from the best, the purest of motives, might now be resolving to divide herself effectually from him and his connections [...].<sup>31</sup> [Or maybe] there [...] was something more to conceal than her own preference; Mr. Dixon, perhaps, had been very near changing one friend for the other, or been fixed only to Miss Campbell, for the sake of the future twelve thousand pounds.<sup>32</sup> Emma suspected [Jane] might have been glad to change feelings with Harriet, very glad to have purchased the mortification of having loved [...] by the surrender of all the dangerous pleasure of knowing herself beloved by the husband of her friend.<sup>33</sup>

If the reader may regard Emma's speculations about Harriet as amusing, he cannot possibly perceive her fantasies about Jane as anything but illegitimate. As if this were not enough, another character intervenes to enhance Emma's foolish reveries. Frank Churchill, secretly engaged to Jane, tries to hide his relationship with her not only by flirting with Emma, but also by encouraging Emma in her speculations about Jane:

[Frank to Emma:] You, who have known Miss Fairfax from a child, must be a better judge of her character, and of how she is likely to conduce herself in critical situations, than I can be.<sup>34</sup> [Indeed,] your reasonings carry my judgment along with them entirely. At first, while I supposed you satisfied that Col. Campbell was the giver [of the piano Jane received from an unknown sender], I saw it only as paternal kindness, and thought it the most natural thing in the world. But when you mentioned Mrs. Dixon, I felt how much more probable that it should be the tribute of warm female friendship. And now I can see it in no other light than as an offering of love.<sup>35</sup>

Emma's propensity to imagination is exalted also by Jane's involvement in reality, who consciously experiences the real world and her social condition in all its harshness. She lives with her grandmother and aunt on such restricted income that she often has to rely on the charity of others, most of all of Mr. Knightley sending them his apples or offering them his carriage. And she prepares to go and work as a governess to earn her living:

With the fortitude of a devoted novice, she had resolved at one-and-twenty to complete the sacrifice, and retire from all the pleasures of life, of rational intercourse, equal society,

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<sup>30</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. I, p. 125.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. III, pp. 131-132.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VIII, p. 172.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VI, p. 159.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VIII, pp. 171-172.

peace and hope, to penance and mortification for ever.<sup>36</sup> When [Emma] considered what all [Jane's] elegance was destined to, what she was going to sink from, how she was going to live, it seemed impossible to feel any thing but compassion and respect [...].<sup>37</sup>

Jane enlightens Emma's unrestrained imagination firstly by providing a subject for Emma's illegitimate speculation, secondly by being the reason for another character to exploit Emma's assumptions in order to lead her astray and thirdly by actively facing reality, which Emma herself always tries to escape.

### 5.2.c. Shaping characters and arranging lives

Emma's delight in shaping characters and arranging lives, *enlightened* by Harriet's submission and Mrs. Elton's emulation, is *counterbalanced* by Jane's condition and attitude. Emma, either consciously or unconsciously, pretends to be the mature woman whom Jane is already, but whom Emma herself is not (yet). She thinks that her education, like Jane's, is complete, that she, like Jane, does not need to develop *herself*, and that she, like Jane, can help *others* develop. There follows from these convictions that Emma takes up the role of an educator, which *she* is not entitled to, and which *Jane* is intended for, thus swapping their respective places and reversing their respective roles. Jane, who was educated to educate others, and who would be perfectly able to do it, never gets nearer achieving her lot than by accepting an offer of employment and rejecting it after a couple of days. Emma, conversely, who was educated simply to be barely accomplished herself, actively engages in educating others, doing them, however, more harm than good.

Also in match-making heroine and anti-heroine are linked through an inverted relationship in which the one accomplishes what the other struggled for. Emma, who regards match-making as «the greatest amusement in the world»<sup>38</sup>, strives to create unions for others for the length of a whole book, failing her attempts one after the other, while Jane, who had no marriage in view for anybody, let alone for herself, enters a most successful engagement in a single stroke of luck, even before her introduction in the novel. In order to achieve her *Bildung*, after giving up sublimating her own desires in other people and planning unions for them, Emma will have to do as Jane did: she will have to commit herself in marriage, which,

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<sup>36</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. II, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 131.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. I, p. 10.

as always in Jane Austen's novels, will eventually prove her *Bildung* to be completed and successful.

#### 5.2.d. The heroine – *Bildung*

Jane's function as the novel's anti-heroine, just as Mr. Knightley's function as the novel's hero, is to spur Emma towards her *Bildung*, a task which Jane performs by providing Emma with examples of alternative attitudes and behaviour, and Mr. Knightley performs by checking her impulses and imagination and by encouraging her judgement. In her role as a *positive* foil to the heroine's character and as a *positive* spur to the heroine's development, Jane is a most uncommon anti-heroine. All other anti-heroines counterbalance the heroine's qualities with their own defects: Catherine's naiveté is enhanced by Isabella's worldliness, Elinor's uprightness by Lucy's opportunism, Elizabeth's balance by Charlotte's convenience and Lydia's thoughtlessness, and Fanny's steadiness by Mary's inconstancy. Jane, conversely, is always presented as an ideal which Emma should aspire to. More than once Mr. Knightley laments Emma's want of application in reading, music or drawing and sets Jane as an example for her high accomplishments:

Mr. Knightley had once told [Emma] [that she disliked Jane] because she saw in her the really accomplished young woman, which she wanted to be thought herself; and though the accusation had been eagerly refuted at the time, there were moments of self-examination in which her conscience could not quite acquit her.<sup>39</sup>

Jane Austen's narrative complicates in her last books. In *Mansfield Park*, the anti-heroine is more charming and engaging than the heroine and only at the very end is the heroine revealed to be the good character and the anti-heroine to be the evil one, moreover not because of her defective nature, but because of a faulty education. Although we end up sympathising with Fanny, we do go on having mixed feelings about Mary, censuring her for her principles, but also appreciating her for her heart. In *Emma*, the pattern complicates further. The relationship between heroine and anti-heroine is no longer enacted in a broad opposition between a positive protagonist and a negative antagonist, since *both* heroine *and* anti-heroine are put forward as positive characters. Both Emma's openness and Jane's

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<sup>39</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. II, p. 130.

reserve are potentially advantageous traits, for the former fosters sociability and companionship and the latter grants discretion and sensibility towards others. The same can be said for Emma's delight in imagination, which enlivens the mind, and Jane's sense of reality, which enables to cope with everyday life. In *Emma*, the heroine does not develop by *avoiding* and *opposing* the anti-heroine's negative traits, but by *blending together* the positive features embodied in herself with those embodied in the anti-heroine. Taken together, these qualities end up exalting and checking one another and turning the heroine into an all the more round and complete character. The *usual* aim, the heroine's *Bildung*, is thus achieved in *Emma* for the first time through a *different* mean: not through opposition to, but through emulation of the anti-heroine's attitudes.

#### 5.2.e. The anti-heroine – no development, but some change

If Jane is an uncommon anti-heroine inasmuch as she spurs the heroine's *Bildung* through positive example, she is an ordinary one inasmuch as she fosters the heroine's development without actually developing herself. Just as Charlotte Lucas, Jane *does not* develop, since she *does not need* to develop, being moreover not simply an adult woman, but also a future governess, « fully competent to the office of instruction [...] [already] at eighteen or nineteen [...], as far as such an early age can be qualified for the care of children»<sup>40</sup>.

Nonetheless, although it is the anti-heroine's task to spur the heroine's *Bildung*, and not the other way round, the anti-heroine may be somehow affected by her relationship with the heroine and may undergo certain changes by imbibing some of the heroine's traits, as it actually happens to both Mary Crawford and Jane Fairfax.

As stated at the end of *Mansfield Park*, «Mary [...] was long in finding [...] any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, whose character and manners could authorise a hope of the domestic happiness she had there learnt to estimate».<sup>41</sup> Thanks to her stay at Mansfield and probably also thanks to her expulsion from it, Mary moves from opportunism and convenience to the appreciation of an affectionate heart, a steady temper and a strong mind, thus becoming much more like Fanny.

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<sup>40</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. II, p. 129.

<sup>41</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 369.

After the announcement of her engagement to Frank at the end of the book, Jane herself moves from her own reserve and concealment to Emma's spontaneity and sincerity, thus doing away her only fault, identified by Mr. Knightley in her want of openness : «'Oh!' cried Jane, with a blush and an hesitation which Emma thought infinitely more becoming than all the elegance of all her usual composure – [...] I know what my manners were to you. – So cold and artificial! – I had a part to act. – It was a life of deceit! [...]».<sup>42</sup>

### 5.3. The novel and the anti-heroine

As already suggested, the anti-heroine's function in an Austen novel consists not only in foiling the heroine's character and spurring her development, but also in providing an alternative perspective on the universe of the novel. Isabella and Lucy speak for fortune in place of affection, Charlotte and Lydia for convenience and sensuality in place of a balance between prudence and passion, Mary for unrestrained innovation in place of reformed conservation. All these alternatives to the heroines' choices, however, are treated critically by the author, who makes the heroine's values triumph and the anti-heroine's values succumb in the end. *Emma* is a peculiar novel also insofar as it presents, in the character of Jane, an alternative to the heroine's choices and to the novel's morals, which, if not recommended, is nonetheless accepted. Emma and Jane embody two different attitudes towards love, Emma personifying love based on rational esteem and brotherly affection, Jane personifying love grounded in passion. Emma's feeling developed, albeit unconsciously, through years of friendship with and tuition by Mr. Knightley, Jane's sentiment arose at the very first sight of Frank<sup>43</sup>:

[The] intensity [of Jane and Frank's attachment] [...] is all the more remarkable because it conflicts with, or is set up in opposition to, the notion of companionate love that is developed through the novel's focus on Emma. For *Emma*, which celebrates rational marriage, also offers credence to passionate and reckless love.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 361.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. J. Wiltshire, 'Mansfield Park, Emma, Persuasion', in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 58-83, p. 72.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi.

A comparison between Jane Fairfax and Frank Churchill, and Lydia Bennet and George Wickham, the two Jane Austen couples united by «passionate and recklessness» feelings, shows how deeply Jane Austen's view of love developed throughout her work. The kind of attachment which in *Pride and Prejudice* was censured by being attributed to immature, inconsiderate characters and by being destined to wretchedness and early exhaustion, is presented in *Emma* on the one hand as evil throughout, being not only contemptible for society, but also painful to the parts involved, but on the other hand as calling for condescension and toleration because embodied in such gentle and engaging characters like Jane and Frank respectively are. As in the other Jane Austen's novels, also in *Emma* the anti-heroine personifies an alternative set of values and modes of conduct to those upheld by the heroine and the novel. Yet here, for the first time, the anti-heroine does not embody a negative example to be censured or exorcised, but suggests a topic which has to be thought over and dealt with carefully.

Chapter 6:

**Louisa Musgrove**  
and *Persuasion*

### 6.1. The anti-heroine as foil, substitute, obstacle and occasion

At a first reading of *Persuasion*, it is not initially clear, who the anti-heroine is. Anne Elliot, the heroine of the novel, is placed among a considerable number of minor female characters, all of whom differ from her and thus enlighten some of her traits. Anne's elder sister Elizabeth, in her vanity and self-consequence, highlights Anne's genuineness and modesty. Mary, her younger sister, self-centred and capricious, stresses Anne's selflessness and altruism. Henrietta and Louisa, the Musgrove sisters, enlighten firstly Anne's delight in quietness and her tendency to reflection with their own liveliness and impetuosity, and secondly her faithful and constant heart with their initial infatuation for Captain Wentworth and final engagement to another man. In *Persuasion*, these other young women are in greater number and of less individual importance than the two in *Emma*, so that the reader is initially doubtful about whom among them will be the anti-heroine, but finally sure of her being Louisa Musgrove, the only minor female character who *both* foils Anne *and* substitutes her.

Louisa is not contrasted with Anne in her character and principles in themselves more directly than the other young women. Louisa, together with her elder sister Henrietta, is presented as much more similar to Anne than the heroine's own two sisters, neither of whom is presented in a positive light. Elizabeth is the copy of Sir Walter, only more irritating and distressing for being young, so as to personify the transmission of the Elliots' defects (vanity, pride and self-centredness) from one generation to another and their survival in the future. Mary is a comic caricature of the same Elliotts' qualities, which assume an ironic tinge only because embodied in such a silly flat character as herself. Louisa and Henrietta, indeed, constitute more a parallel to Anne than a contrast with her, being praised by author and heroine as positive characters, having «extremely good» spirits, «unembarrassed and pleasant» manners and being «of consequence at home, and favourites abroad» and on the whole «some of the happiest creatures of [Anne's] acquaintance»<sup>1</sup>.

How Louisa enlightens Anne's character is seen not immediately at her introduction in the novel, but later in the unfolding of her story, when she is set in opposition to Anne and taken as her substitute by the very hero, Captain Wentworth. Eight years before the events

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<sup>1</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* [1818], ed. James Kinsley, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, Vol. I, Ch. V, p. 38.

narrated in the novel, Anne and Captain Wentworth had got to know each other, fallen in love and entered an engagement, which Anne had subsequently broken after being persuaded of its imprudence by Lady Russell, her friend and guardian, who considered Wentworth, at that time only a commander, too sanguine in his expectations of advancement and fortune. The two lovers had parted, Anne had remained who and where she was, a single woman in her father's house, while Wentworth had travelled around the world and advanced in naval military rank, but retained feelings of anger and resentment towards Anne:

She had used him ill; deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a febleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. [...] It had been the effects of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.<sup>2</sup>

Returning, because of fortuitous circumstances, in Anne's neighbourhood, he is confident of having forgotten Anne and determined to «settle as soon as he could be properly tempted; actually looking round, ready to fall in love with all the speed which a clear head and quick taste could allow. He had a heart [...] for any pleasing woman who came in his way [...]. 'A strong mind, with sweetness of manner,' made the first and the last of the description.»<sup>3</sup> «Anne Elliot was not out of his thoughts, when he described [...] [in this way] the woman he should wish to meet with.»<sup>4</sup> Wentworth does not realize, however, of there being only one such woman and of her being Anne Elliot<sup>5</sup>, and tries to attach himself to the other woman most resembling his ideal: Louisa Musgrove. Louisa foils Anne therefore not in herself, but insofar as she is actively employed as Anne's substitute by Captain Wentworth, who constantly and consciously contrasts his past, real lover (Anne) and his present, assumed one (Louisa).

The first explicit comparison he draws between the two women plunges directly into the heart of the matter. When walking with and talking to Louisa, while Anne is seated nearby and screened by a hedgerow, Wentworth openly praises firmness and deprecates weakness

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<sup>2</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VII, p. 54, cf. also D. S. Lynch, *Introduction*, in J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., pp. vii-xxxiii, p. xix.

<sup>3</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>5</sup> Cf. T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

of character, subtly attributing the first to Louisa and the second to Anne<sup>6</sup>. While Louisa misses the hint, Anne does not:

[Wentworth:] [‘]Your sister [Henrietta] is an amiable creature; but *yours* [Louisa’s] is the character of decision and firmness [...]. It is the worst evil of too yielding and indecisive a character, that no influence over it can be depended on. – You are never sure of a good impression being durable. Every body may sway it [...]. – Here is a nut, [...] which, blessed with original strength, has outlived all the storms of autumn [...] while so many of its brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot [...]. My first wish for all, whom I am interested in, is that they should be firm. [...]’ He had done, – and was unanswered. It would have surprised Anne, if Louisa could have readily answered such a speech. [...] [Anne] saw now how her own character was considered by Captain Wentworth [...].<sup>7</sup>

As it has been pointed out in the preceding chapters, anti-heroines often substitute the heroines in their relationship with the male characters. In the earlier novels three modes of substitution had been displayed. In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Mansfield Park*, the anti-heroine actively tries to substitute the heroine in her attachment to the hero, almost succeeding but eventually failing in her attempt. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the two anti-heroines effectively substitute the heroine in the matches with the two anti-heroes, which she has rejected. In *Emma* the pattern complicates. Here, instead of taking the anti-heroine in place of the heroine as Mr. Collins and Mr. Wickham do in *Pride and Prejudice* by substituting Elizabeth with Charlotte and Lydia respectively, the anti-hero (Frank Churchill) operates an apparent and fictitious substitution between heroine (Emma) and anti-heroine (Jane). He substitutes the anti-heroine, to whom he is secretly engaged, with the heroine, whom he courts and flatters only to cover his relationship with the anti-heroine, *to the public eye*, and substitutes the heroine, whom everyone thought him attracted by, with the anti-heroine, whom he really loves, *in his private conscience*. Emma is Jane’s substitute in the public opinion, while Jane is Emma’s in Frank’s heart. Never before, however, had the hero actively tried to substitute the heroine with the anti-heroine, both in the public opinion and in his private feelings. By courting Louisa, Wentworth firstly tries to separate himself from Anne; secondly, he tries to convince himself, Anne and the world of having successfully got over her; and thirdly, he might also be trying, albeit unconsciously, to arise in Anne some of that jealousy which he will later experience himself when perceiving Mr. Elliot’s attention towards her. In

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 144, J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115, M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 278.

<sup>7</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. I, Ch. X, pp. 74-75.

*Persuasion*, the anti-heroine is actively placed by the wounded and resentful hero on the heroine's path as an obstacle to her achievement of happiness, which consists in a renewal of their mutual relationship.

Louisa, however, just as Charlotte Lucas and Lydia Bennet, constitutes not only an obstacle to, but also an occasion for the fulfilment of the heroine's wishes. After having been told of Louisa's engagement with Captain Benwick notwithstanding her prior, almost official and apparently returned attachment to Captain Wentworth, Anne cannot help wondering how Wentworth might be feeling, and hoping that «he had quitted the field, had given Louisa up, had ceased to love her, had found he did not love her»<sup>8</sup>. Her hopes receive confirmation from conversations on the subject first with Admiral Croft and then with Captain Wentworth himself:

[Admiral Croft:] You would not guess, from his way of writing, that he had ever thought of this Miss (what's her name?) for himself. He very handsomely hopes they will be happy together, and there is nothing very unforgiving in that, I think<sup>9</sup>

[Wentworth:] I confess that I do think there is a disparity, too great a disparity, and in a point no less essential than mind. – I regard Louisa Musgrove as a very amiable, sweet-tempered girl, and not deficient in understanding; but Benwick is something more.<sup>10</sup>  
[Through this conversation with Wentworth,] she had learnt, in the last ten minutes, more of his feelings towards Louisa, more of all his feelings, than she dared to think of!<sup>11</sup>  
His opinion of Louisa Musgrove's inferiority, an opinion which he had seemed solicitous to give, his wonder at Captain Benwick, his feelings as to a first, strong attachment, – [...] all, all declared that he had a heart returning to her at least [...]<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to Louisa, more specifically thanks to the news of her engagement to Benwick, Anne has the occasion to suspect, and Wentworth has the occasion to confirm, that his affections are still all hers. Consequently, Anne will adjust her behaviour so as to discreetly but clearly encourage Wentworth to hope that also *her* affections are still all *his*.

## 6.2. The anti-heroine's function

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<sup>8</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VI, p. 135.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VII, p. 140.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. VIII, pp. 147-148.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 149.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 150.

Louisa's main function in the novel consists in bringing Wentworth back to Anne. Wentworth, in his resentment towards Anne and in his attachment to Louisa, had operated under the illusion of Anne being persuadable and of Louisa being firm, as the nut passage above shows.

But Louisa's decision and firmness reveal themselves [...] on the Cobb [at Lyme]. [...] Louisa has the habit of 'doing as she liked' [,] [...] [which] this time [...] involves jumping from the steps into the arms of Wentworth. [...] She expresses a wish and an intention to do it again. Wentworth 'reasoned' against it, but 'in vain': she smiled and said, 'I am determined I will.' [...] She jumps too precipitously [...] and [...] she falls and suffers a dangerous concussion. There lies the 'nut' of 'decision and firmness'! She [...] would not 'yield' to any 'persuasion' [...] and she will not be 'swayed'. But how 'meritorious' and 'admirable' is that now?<sup>13</sup> Louisa, in jumping at will, shows herself to have a very 'yielding' character, but she yields to her own whims and caprices. [...] In this novel it is the apparently yielding but actually steadfast Anne who becomes the authority to whom others turn<sup>14</sup> [since] she is the only one who does not lose her presence of mind.<sup>15</sup>

Who does not lose her head, one might say. Headless Louisa teaches Wentworth the difference between firmness and stubbornness, between 'persuadableness' and reasonableness<sup>16</sup>, between Anne's strength and her own wilfulness<sup>17</sup>. She reveals their respective characters, which are exactly the reverse of each other, and exactly the reverse of what Wentworth had assumed them to be: «Louisa's fall [serves] to bring home to Wentworth Anne's true worth».<sup>18</sup> When Anne sees Wentworth again after a longer period of reflection on his part following Louisa's incident at Lyme, in fact, she perceives a difference in him: «Time had changed him, or Louisa had changed him. There was consciousness of some sort or other»<sup>19</sup>, the consciousness of having finally acknowledged Anne's real character and his own feelings towards her, a process which Louisa, in her role as the anti-heroine, is fully responsible for.

### 6.3. The hero's *Bildung*

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<sup>13</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 234-235.

<sup>15</sup> J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Ivi, T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Butler, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>18</sup> J. Hardy, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>19</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VII, p. 142, cf. also D. S. Lynch, *op. cit.*, pp. xviii-xix.

A peculiar dynamic is displayed in *Persuasion*: the anti-heroine foils the *heroine's* character, but spurs the *hero's* development. Just as Elinor Dashwood and Fanny Price before her, Anne does not need to develop, being already mature and completed at the beginning of the novel. Just as Edmund Bertram, conversely, Wentworth does. Neither Edmund nor Wentworth initially appreciate the heroine's full worth as a person and as a possible wife. Both need the anti-heroine to step in, to try and replace the heroine (either actively or passively), to turn out a bad substitute and to reveal the heroine's true value. This dynamic, however, which had already been tentatively employed in *Mansfield Park*, is thoroughly exploited only in *Persuasion*. In the former novel, Edmund first becomes disillusioned in Mary, *then* gets almost over her, and *afterwards* falls for Fanny:

scarcely had he done regretting Mary Crawford, and observing to Fanny how impossible it was that he should ever meet with such another woman, before it began to strike him whether a different woman might not do just as well – or a great deal better; whether Fanny herself were not *growing* as dear, as important to him [...] as Mary Crawford *had ever been* [...]. I [...] entreat 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 did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny, as Fanny herself could desire.<sup>20</sup>

In *Persuasion*, the hero accomplishes the three passages of disillusionment in the anti-heroine's character, recovery from the anti-heroine's attachment and acknowledgement of the heroine's merits and of his own feelings almost simultaneously. *As soon as* Wentworth understands Louisa's stubbornness and capriciousness, he also understands Anne's firmness and reasonableness. *As soon as* he realizes his indifference for Louisa, he also realizes his love for Anne. In *Mansfield Park*, there was a *sequence* of acknowledgements and realizations on the part of Edmund regarding Mary and Fanny. In *Persuasion*, these acknowledgements and realizations come one as a direct *consequence* of the other. Once again, Jane Austen has developed in a later novel a dynamic which she had anticipated in an earlier one.

The full exploitation and the powerful effect of the dynamic according to which the anti-heroine spurs the hero's, not the heroine's, *Bildung* is possible in *Persuasion* because the heroine-and-hero couple is much more closely linked in this novel than in any previous one. Only Elizabeth and Darcy might be compared with Anne and Wentworth in their mutual interaction, but *Pride and Prejudice* presents such a great number of other characters, that their

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<sup>20</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVII, p. 369, my italics.

relationship, although just as tight, is not so *exclusive*. In *Persuasion*, conversely, heroine and hero are nearly obsessed with each other. Anne «could not hear that Captain Wentworth's sister was likely to live at Kellynch, without a revival of former pain»<sup>21</sup> and «could not speak [his] name, and look straight forward to Lady Russell's eye, till she had adopted the expedience of telling her [...] what she thought of the attachment between him and Louisa»<sup>22</sup>, and Wentworth, in his letter to Anne, declares: «I have loved *none* but you. [...] For you *alone* I think and plan.»<sup>23</sup> Facing such a close-knit couple, the anti-heroine as a narrative force may well intervene either on the heroine *or* the hero, being sure of affecting *both*. Accordingly, Louisa's spurring Wentworth towards the recognition firstly of the illusion he had been under in his assessment of her and Anne's characters, and secondly of his own feelings, provides him with the opportunity of becoming a developed, completed man, finally fit to match the already mature heroine and to make the happiness of both:

Who can be in doubt of what followed? When any two young people take into their heads to marry, they are pretty sure by perseverance to carry their point [...] and if such parties succeed, how should a Captain Wentworth and an Anne Elliot, *with the advantage of maturity of mind [eventually in both]*, consciousness of right, and one independent fortune between them, fail of bearing down every opposition?<sup>24</sup>

#### 6.4. The anti-heroine's change

If the heroine does not develop and the hero does, what about the anti-heroine? As we have seen in the preceding chapters, no Jane Austen anti-heroine really develops. Yet in the first three novels the anti-heroines remain at the end of the book just as they were at the beginning, while in the following two they undergo a certain change. *Persuasion* follows and enhances this trend. If Louisa, just as Mary Crawford and Jane Fairfax, changes throughout the book, she undergoes a much deeper mutation than her two predecessors. Throughout *Mansfield Park*, Mary takes up some of Fanny's traits which are alien to her corrupted principles, but familiar to her original nature. At the end of *Emma*, Jane is free to drop secrecy and reserve and becomes more open and spontaneous, more like Emma and more like her previous self:

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<sup>21</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. I, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. XI, p. 191, my italics.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. XII, p. 199, my italics.

[Mr. Knightley:] [Jane] is reserved, *more reserved, I think, than she used to be* <sup>25</sup>

In both novels, thanks to the contact with the heroine, the anti-heroine recovers in the end something of her initial self, before it was spoilt by education or hampered by secrecy. In *Persuasion*, more radically, the anti-heroine fully changes, becoming a completely different person, as Anne supposes and Charles Musgrove, Anne's brother-in-law and Louisa's brother, confirms:

[Anne:] The day at Lyme, the fall from the Cobb, might influence her health, her nerves, her courage, her character to the end of her life [...].<sup>26</sup>

[Charles:] [Louisa] is altered: there is no running or jumping about, no laughing or dancing; it is quite different.<sup>27</sup>

Louisa has undergone the ultimate treatment which Jane Austen employs for her certainly charming, but otherwise irrecoverable characters and which she has already applied to Marianne Dashwood and Tom Bertram: a nearly fatal illness<sup>28</sup>.

## 6.5. Jane Austen's attitude towards modernity

Louisa needs to be chastened not because she is intrinsically bad, but because she embodies modernity, with all its pros *and* cons, which has to be respectively praised *and* corrected. *Mansfield Park* is the other Jane Austen novel which most explicitly considers the change affecting the English society of the time. Yet in *Mansfield Park* the conflict is enacted in relation to innovation, while in *Persuasion* it is enacted in relation to modernity. In *Manfield Park* there is an atmosphere of progressive mutation, with the characters militating either for or against it, staging a war of principles (see the issues regarding theatricals and improvement) and ending up either winners or losers. The novel itself is a plea for reformed conservatism against unrestrained innovation. In *Persuasion*, the sense of process has

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<sup>25</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XVI, p. 226, my italics.

<sup>26</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VI, pp. 135-136.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. II, Ch. X, p. 176.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. S. Byrne, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

disappeared, there is no more taking sides and fighting battles, things are simply stated as they are:

The Musgroves, like their house, were in a state of alteration, perhaps of improvement. The father and mother were in the old English style, and the young people in the new. Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove were a very good sort of people; friendly and hospitable, not much educated, not at all elegant. Their children had more modern minds and manners.<sup>29</sup>

There is no atmosphere of diffidence, let alone of condemnation, «in the old-fashioned square parlour, with a small carpet and shining floor, to which the present daughters of the house were gradually giving the proper air of confusion [...]. Oh! could the originals of the portraits against the wainscot, could the gentlemen in brown velvet and the ladies in blue satin have seen what was going on, have been conscious of such an overthrow of all order and neatness! The portraits themselves seemed to be staring in astonishment.»<sup>30</sup> Unlike the portraits, the reader is conveyed the feeling of a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere. I myself cannot help imagining Anne standing at the door, slightly perplexed, but quite amused at the scene.

If things have to be described as they are, however, nothing should be omitted – neither the stiffness and emptiness of the old-fashioned Elliots, nor the friendliness and hospitality of the just as old-fashioned Musgroves<sup>31</sup>; neither the good spirits and easy manners of the new-style Musgrove children, nor, however, the danger of their modern attitudes and principles. Just as Mary Crawford is punished for personifying not innovation itself, but *unrestrained* innovation, Louisa is chastened for embodying not modernity itself, but *headless* modernity:

Jane Austen cannot [wholly] identify with these ‘modern minds and manners’, just as Anne ‘would not have given up her own more elegant and cultivated mind for all their enjoyments’. But both Anne and her author can recognise their genuine happiness and ‘[...] affection’. Society [...] is altering, perhaps improving. Jane Austen does not take sides; she neither mocks the old style nor reprobates the new. Her stance is Anne’s. But she is clearly undertaking a radical [...] revision of her system of values. [...] A new relativism has entered Jane Austen’s tone. [She] is amused, but not censorious [...]. I do not think Jane Austen could have written [anything like this] at the time of *Mansfield Park*.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. I, Ch. VI, p. 38.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem* p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. Fergus, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

<sup>32</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, pp. 225-226.

In *Persuasion*, unlike in *Mansfield Park*, there is no *condemnation* of, but a *warning* about, the new. New ways *can* be positive, but *will* be negative if they heedlessly run or spring forward. English society, in this time of change, can decide whether to «jump to its own destruction[,] [...] like Louisa[,] [or] [...] reconstitute itself»<sup>33</sup> through recollection, reflection and renovation, like Anne. Also with her last novel, Jane Austen writes more than a book. She depicts nothing less than the development of a young generation and of the whole English society in a time in which the old turns out unsatisfactory and incomplete, but the new, in order to be constructive instead of destructive, has to be handled with care.

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<sup>33</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

Chapter 7:

**Anti-heroines between  
fictional characters  
and real women**

## 7.1. The marriage issue

The preceding chapters have offered an analysis of the anti-heroines' interaction in the fictional universe of Jane Austen's novels. The present one proposes an overview of their relationship with English society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When questioned about the condition of women in their time and country, Jane Austen's anti-heroines will turn out to be talking chiefly of marriage, explaining why women had to marry, what they avoided by marrying and what they could gain through it.

As Ruth Perry points out in her essay *Interrupted Friendship In 'Emma'*, «women are insufficient by themselves to face the world alone»<sup>1</sup>, both financially and socially. Not entitled to earn their living, their only way to gain financial security and social respectability was to marry<sup>2</sup>:

For Jane Austen 'marriageableness' is [...] the key to existence as she knew it. While [...] her novels depict many ill-suited couples [...] this is all the more reason why it is so imperative for the heroine to struggle for the right kind of marriage, which is so central to society that it cannot be written aside [...]. It is, for Jane Austen, the metaphor of the most desirable kind of relationship [...].<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Jane Austen's heroines all make satisfactory marriages. Their husbands not only offer the financial security and social respectability mentioned above, but they also display moral uprightness, steady affection and high intellect. Conversely, her anti-heroines all make problematic marriages. Lucy Steele ends up marrying not a specific man, but a given social position and financial income when she swaps the disinherited eldest son Edward Ferrars with the second born and now only heir Robert Ferrars. Charlotte Lucas marries a man who is «worse than merely ridiculous[,] he is disgustingly repellent»<sup>4</sup>, for the sake of marriage itself, while Lydia Bennet marries a charming but unattached and unscrupulous person for his gallant manners and red uniform. Mary Crawford will eventually find someone resembling Edmund Bertram enough for her to be sufficiently attracted by and attached to, but who will however remain a second choice. Jane Fairfax will finally get her Frank

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<sup>1</sup> R. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. L. Stone, *The family, Sex and Marriage*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1990, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 10, cf. also F. Stafford, *op. cit.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>4</sup> C. Tomalin, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

Churchill, but «we can never be sure Frank Churchill would have been willing to give up his fortune for [her]»<sup>5</sup>:

had the domineering Mrs. Churchill not fortuitously died, would [he] still have married Jane and saved her at the eleventh hour from a life of 'slavery'?<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, if we share Mr. Knightley's view that Frank is the gainer and Jane is the loser in the match («I am sorry for *her*. She deserves a better fate.»<sup>7</sup> «Jane, Jane, you will be a miserable creature.»<sup>8</sup>), we cannot but be distressed by the novel's ending in regard to the anti-heroine. Also Louisa's marriage arises doubts in the hero and possibly in the reader:

[Anne:] '[...] I should hope it would be a very happy match. There are on both sides good principles and good temper.' 'Yes,' said [Wentworth], looking not exactly forward – but there I think ends the resemblance. [...] I confess that I do think there is a disparity, too great a disparity, and in a point no less essential than mind. [...]'<sup>9</sup>

The reason why heroines make satisfactory marriages and anti-heroines make problematic ones lies in the different function they have in Jane Austen's fictional world. Heroines are entrusted to personify not perfect, maybe not even ideal situations, but situations which Jane Austen nonetheless advocated, «faults and all»<sup>10</sup>. Anti-heroines, conversely, are entrusted to personify real situations, the ones which most women had to face and manage. We must refrain, however, from equating *problematic* marriages with *evil* ones. Firstly, Jane Austen did not qualify the destiny she allotted her anti-heroines, but described it as it was. Secondly, in his book *The Family, Sex and Marriage* [1990], Lawrence Stone warns about the misleading tendency to judge past situations with present eyes:

It is necessary to rid ourselves of three modern Western [...] preconceptions. The first is that there is a clear dichotomy between marriage for interest [...] and marriage for affect [...]. In the sixteenth century, [as also in smaller degrees in the following two centuries until Jane Austen's time,] no such distinction existed; and if it did, affect was of secondary importance to interest, while romantic love and lust were strongly condemned as ephemeral and irrational grounds for marriage. The second [...] preconception is that

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<sup>5</sup> B. Stovel, *Comic Symmetry in 'Emma'* cit., p. 27.

<sup>6</sup> A. Duckworth, *'Emma' and the Dangers of Individualism*, in D. Monaghan ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 35-51, p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XIII, p. 334.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 335.

<sup>9</sup> J. Austen, *Persuasion* cit., Vol. II, Ch. VIII, p. 147.

<sup>10</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVII, p. 363.

sexual intercourse unaccompanied by an emotional relationship is immoral, and that marriage for interest is therefore a form of prostitution. The third is that personal [...] happiness is paramount [...].<sup>11</sup>

We need not approve of the anti-heroines' life choices, but we must understand the circumstances which induced these fictional characters and their historic counterparts to act as they did. Charlotte Lucas is the anti-heroine whose marriage we are most sceptical about, yet she does nothing but conform to the views expressed by Stone in the quotation above:

I am not romantic, you know. I never was. I ask only for a comfortable home; and considering Mr. Collin's character, connections, and situation in life, I am convinced that my chance of happiness with him is as fair, as most people can boast on entering the marriage state.<sup>12</sup>

Elizabeth, who has a more modern mind and a higher opinion of marriage, cannot but be astonished:

She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.<sup>13</sup>

The question arises here whether Charlotte «sacrifice[s] every better feeling to worldly advantage» or rather to unavoidable circumstances. Joe Wright provides his own answer in his film version of *Pride and Prejudice*, where he makes his Charlotte speak out what Jane Austen's character only implied: «I'm twenty-seven years old, I've no money and no prospects, I'm already a burden to my parents»<sup>14</sup>. With her marriage, the burden dissolves:

The whole family [...] were properly overjoyed on the occasion. [...] Lady Lucas began directly to calculate [...] how many years longer Mr. Bennet was likely to live[,] [...] the younger girls formed hopes of coming out a year or two sooner than they might otherwise have done; and the boys were relieved from their apprehension of Charlotte's dying an old maid.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> L. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 96.

<sup>13</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>14</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*, dir. J. Wright cit., min. 53:20-53:30 ca.

<sup>15</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. I, Ch. XXII, p. 94.

According to Clair Tomalin, «Austen [herself] allows that Charlotte, ten years older than Lizzy, is making what is for her a reasonable decision in buying herself a social position as a married woman, escaping the humiliations of a dependent daughter at home in exchange for sexual and domestic services»<sup>16</sup>. Her understanding of Charlotte's motives, however, does not prevent the author from declaring her own disapprobation of them by decidedly supporting the heroine's stance.

If in her marriage Charlotte chooses the old ways of tradition, prudence and security, Lydia makes the opposite choice of rebellion, autonomy and individualism, following the new practice of making love before getting married which was «on the increase in the early seventeenth century and after»<sup>17</sup>:

Even in the middle of the eighteenth century, most influential men and women were firmly opposed to the idea, but by then they were fighting a losing battle against the mounting flood of romantic novels and poems. [...] Thanks to notions imbibed from this reading, young people fell headlong into the arms of whoever took their fancy, and, if their parents raised objections, they ran away to Scotland to get married [...] in contempt to the Marriage Act [demanding parental consent if under twenty-one][.] [...] Women of little experience [were] apt to mistake the urgency of bodily wants with the violence of a delicate passion [...] [and] were likely to mistake male lust for the emotion they read about in novels[.]<sup>18</sup>

In matching Stone's description, Lydia offers a faithful representation of a new possibility open to women – choosing their spouse in defiance of parental permission and social approbation. This practice represented a further answer, albeit illegitimate and risky, to the difficult situations women had to live in.

Elizabeth, Charlotte and Lydia *all* provide personal, plausible responses to the issues and dilemmas of their time. Although the author approves of Elizabeth's ways, questions Charlotte's and condemns Lydia's, she nonetheless allows them *all* to have a place in her fictional world – conservative and innovative attitudes are respectively embodied in the rational, cautious and traditional Charlotte and in the irreverent, irritating and exquisitely modern Lydia.

## 7.2. Spinsterhood and employment

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<sup>16</sup> C. Tomalin, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

<sup>17</sup> L. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 189-190.

In case, however, a woman should *not* marry, she was doomed to live to the end of her days in economic hardships and social contempt, a condition wonderfully embodied in Miss. Bates, Jane Fairfax's aunt, in *Emma*:

As a result of the shortage of suitable males, owing to the level of nuptiality among younger sons and to the rise in the cost of marriage portions, there developed in the eighteenth century a new and troublesome social phenomenon, the spinster lady who never married[.]<sup>19</sup> The worst feature of the condition was 'that coarse and contemptuous raillery with which the ancient maiden is perpetually insulted'. The three obstacles to any solution to the spinster problem were social snobbery, which made most business occupations beyond the pale of a girl of genteel upbringing; the non-vocational educational training of women; and the lack of openings in the professions[.]<sup>20</sup>

«It was not until the very end of the eighteenth century that another occupation opened up for well-educated spinsters from decent homes»<sup>21</sup>: the employment as a governesses. Although «the governess in the nineteenth-century novel becomes a culture heroine for the sad army of economically vulnerable single women, who had virtually no means of acquiring independence outside marriage»<sup>22</sup>, her lot was just a little better than that of a spinster. She earned her low wage through a nomadic life and great struggle: she worked seven days a week from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, was relegated to the mere school-room and the limiting company of her pupils and was spurned as inferior by the masters and as posh by the servants<sup>23</sup>:

Not a relation, not a guest, not a mistress, not a servant, the governess lived in a kind of status limbo. By reasons of her position, she was also treated as almost sexless. Not a [...] servant and so open to seduction, not a daughter [...] and so open to marriage offers, she was nothing.<sup>24</sup>

Given such degrading economic, social and working conditions, it does not surprise that Jane Fairfax expresses herself so poignantly about the profession<sup>25</sup>:

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<sup>19</sup> L. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 243.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 245.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.

<sup>22</sup> J. McMaster, *Class*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 115-130, p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. L. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 244.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. McMaster, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

There are place in town, offices, where enquiry would soon produce something – Offices for the sale – not quite of human flesh – but of human intellect. [...] I did not mean, I was not thinking of the slave-trade, [...] governess-trade [...] was all that I had in view; widely different certainly as to the guilt of those who carry it on; but as to the greater misery of the victims, I do not know where it lies.<sup>26</sup>

«The greater misery of the victims» will be experienced, however, neither by Jane Austen's Jane Fairfax nor by Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre, the most famous governess in English literature, but by Anne Brontë's Agnes Grey, who enjoys smaller notoriety, but experiences deeper suffering than her elder sister's heroine. Agnes perfectly represents the oppressing and frustrating lot of the governess. Employed for the education first of children, then of adolescents, she is allotted the full share of a governess' lot as described by Stone in the passages above as by herself in the excerpt below:

My work [was] a more arduous task than any one can imagine, who has not felt something like the misery of being charged with the care and direction of a set of mischievous turbulent rebels, whom his utmost exertions cannot bind to their duty; while, at the same time, he is responsible for their conduct to a higher power, who exacts from him what cannot be achieved without the aid of the superior's more potent authority, which, either from indolence, or the fear of becoming unpopular with the said rebellious gang, the latter refuses to give. I can conceive few situations more harassing than that wherein, however you may long for success, however you may labour to fulfil your duty, your efforts are baffled and set at naught by those beneath you, and unjustly censured and misjudged by those above.<sup>27</sup>

Agnes undergoes all possible humiliations, being blamed by the parents for the «uncultivated manners» and the «unruly tempers»<sup>28</sup> of their children («This [Mrs. Bloomfield] attributed to a want of sufficient firmness, and diligent, persevering care on my part»<sup>29</sup>), being tormented by her pupils («I had to run after my pupils, to catch them, to carry, or drag them to the table, and often forcibly to hold them there, till the lesson was done»<sup>30</sup>) and being slighted by both household servants («They entirely neglected my comfort, despised my requests, and slighted my directions [although] I frequently stood up for *them*, at the risk of some injury to myself, against the tyranny and injustice of their young masters

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<sup>26</sup> J. Austen, *Emma* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XVII, p. 235.

<sup>27</sup> A. Brontë, *Agnes Grey* [1847], ed. Hilda Marsden and Robert Inglesfield, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988, Ch. IV, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> A. Brontë, *op. cit.*, Ch. V, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> *Ivi.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, Ch. III, p. 29.

and mistresses; and I always endeavoured to give them as little trouble as possible»<sup>31</sup>) and family acquaintances («When I did walk [with my pupils], the first half of the journey [home from church] was generally a great nuisance to me. As none of the before-mentioned ladies and gentlemen ever noticed me, it was disagreeable to walk beside them, as if listening to what they said, or wishing to be thought one of them, while they talked over me or across; and if their eyes, in speaking, chanced to fall on me, it seemed as if they looked on vacancy—as if they either did not see me, or were very desirous to make it appear so.»<sup>32</sup>)

Although Jane Fairfax is actually spared the governess' lot by the unexpected intervention of Frank Churchill, in her character Jane Austen sketches a real and problematic female condition which will be vividly described some forty years later, in 1847, by the eldest and especially the youngest of the Brontë sisters.

### 7.3. Fortune and rank

Women married not only to *avoid* a life as dependant spinsters or despised governesses, but also to *gain* fortune and rank. Money and class were no trifling issues in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, neither for men nor for women. Women, admittedly, could not inherit any peerage<sup>33</sup>, but they could benefit from the title of their father or husband. When coming before the first name, the title of 'Lady' indicated the daughter of a noble (Lady Catherine de Bourgh), when coming before the last name, it indicated the wife (Lady Bertram)<sup>34</sup>. Daughters of nobility retained their own title independently from their husband's status, while widows would lose theirs in case they remarried<sup>35</sup>. Marriage greatly affected not only the social condition, but also the economic situation of women. While they remained single, their father, brothers or relatives provided for them. After they married, they were dependent on their husband. Neither as daughters nor as wives did women have any financial autonomy. Still, marriage could greatly improve a woman's comfort, providing for example Charlotte Lucas with «her home and her housekeeping, her parish and her

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<sup>31</sup> A. Brontë, *op. cit.*, Ch. VII, pp. 73-74.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, Ch. XIII, p. 111.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. J. McMaster, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ivi*.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Ivi*.

poultry»<sup>36</sup> and Maria Bertram with «one of the best houses in Wimpole Street» and with the feeling, «to use a vulgar phrase[,] that she has got her pennyworth for her penny»<sup>37</sup>. This last consideration regarding Maria's gain comes from Mary Crawford, the *Mansfield Park* anti-heroine. Alongside with Lucy Steele, Mary Crawford has the greatest awareness about money and rank in their relationship to marriage, which she displays at her very entrance in the novel:

I would have every body marry if they can do it properly; I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but every body should marry as soon as they can do it *to advantage*.<sup>38</sup> There is not one in a hundred of either sex, who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so; [...] speaking from my own observations, [marriage] is a manoeuvring business.<sup>39</sup>

Coherently with her principles, Mary does try to marry well, «fix[ing] [at first] on Tom Bertram [:] [...] the eldest son of a baronet was not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds, [...] and having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be made to his person than to his situation in life.»<sup>40</sup> Things, however, complicate when she gets to know both Tom and his younger brother Edmund:

Mary must decide whether she is willing to marry the man she loves, Edmund Bertram, on their potential married income of £ 1,700 a year [...], or try for better stakes in the London market. [...] £ 1,700 a year is a strikingly good income for a clergyman, [...] but it is not good enough for Mary, who wants a house in town [just like Maria Bertram] and the income to go with it. In the end, she wants this more than she wants Edmund.<sup>41</sup>

Called on to choose between fortune and rank on the one side and love and affection on the other, Mary Crawford and Lucy Steele prefer wealth and consequence, a choice which is presently unpopular, but in their time perfectly plausible and legitimate. Mary and Lucy may not have a right to our sympathy, but they surely deserve our respect in advocating one possible answer to the «larger problem of the position, role, and scope [...] of women in Jane Austen's society. Which is another way of describing what her novels are all about.»<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* cit., Vol. II, Ch. XV, p. 165.

<sup>37</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. IX, p. 309.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 34, my italics.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, Vol. I, Ch. V, pp. 36-37.

<sup>40</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. I, Ch. IV, p. 33.

<sup>41</sup> E. Copeland, *Money*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 131-146, pp. 139-140.

<sup>42</sup> T. Tanner, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

In her feminist study *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* [1989]<sup>43</sup>, Alison Sulloway writes:

Austen's heroines are [...] surrounded by exploitive men and [...] opportunistic women, and readers sensitive to their difficulty will interpret their internal monologues as silent cries for help that arrives [...] in the conventional form of a husband who could never solve their problems even if he were aware of them.<sup>44</sup>

I leave it to someone else to defend Jane Austen's heroes from such condemnation. I myself want to defend the anti-heroines. In a discourse based on common sense, many anti-heroines are opportunistic indeed, like Isabella Thorpe, Lucy Steele, Mary Crawford and also Charlotte Lucas. The analysis carried out in the present chapter, however, stresses how the anti-heroines' attitudes, behaviour and principles were positive responses to the social and economic condition of women in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England. Jane Austen's anti-heroines, representing better than the heroines the real living condition of women, are great spokespeople of the issues and dilemmas which women had to cope with and of the different ways of dealing with them.

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<sup>43</sup> B. Stovel, *Further Reading*, in E. Copeland and J. McMaster eds., *op. cit.*, pp. 227-243, p. 236.

<sup>44</sup> A. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989, p. 80.

# Conclusion

Jane Austen's novels are strikingly different from George Eliot's in one main point regarding their pattern of characterization. The role attributed to each character is much more definite and evident in Jane Austen's novels than in George Eliot's. In *Adam Bede* [1859], the reader remains unsure about who is the female protagonist. Dinah Morris is surely the positive female character and Hetty Sorrell the negative one, but who is the novel really about? Is it the story of an unpretentious but assertive woman preacher, or the story of a vain and helpless unmarried mother? As chapter XV, entitled *The Two Bed-Chambers*, highlights, the two girls bear, in all their diversities, an equal weight within the novel, which will remain different in kind but similar in magnitude as the story develops. *The Mill on the Floss* [1860] presents an equally unclear pattern of characterization. Is Tom Tulliver a protagonist or an antagonist? Who is the real hero of the story, who can match the heroine Maggie Tulliver, her brother Tom or her beloved Philip? In *Middlemarch* [1871-72], the three streams building the novel focus on Dorothea Brooke, Tertius Lydgate and Fred Vincy respectively, who however gain importance very slowly and very gradually throughout the unfolding of their stories. Beside them, there are other characters claiming a relevant weight within the novel: Edward Casaubon (Dorothea's first husband), Will Ladislaw (Dorothea's second husband), Rosamond Vincy (Lydgate's wife) and Mary Garth (Fred's fiancée). Within this compound and complex group of important characters, it is not immediately plain who the protagonists are, who the co-protagonists and who the antagonists.

Jane Austen's novels greatly differ from George Eliot's also inasmuch as their pattern of characterization is crystal clear. Admittedly, there are cases in which it becomes decidedly complex. In *Mansfield Park*, heroine and anti-heroine tend now and then to mingle and mix in the reader's perception, while in *Emma* the reader might feel more sympathy for the silent and suffering Jane than for the sometimes over-confident and strong-headed Emma. Nonetheless, in no Jane Austen novel there can be a doubt about the role attributed to each character. Each book focuses on a young woman who either develops herself, like Catherine Morland, Marianne Dashwood, Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse, or keeps her place while the other characters waver and stray, like Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price and Anne Elliot. Each book places a young man beside the heroine, whose function is to either spur her towards her *Bildung*, like Henry Tilney and George Knightley masterfully do, or indirectly and unconsciously test her steadiness and uprightness, like Edward Ferrars, Edmund Bertram and Frederick Wentworth do, while Fitzwilliam Darcy accomplishes both tasks. As

if the pattern of characterization of each novel were not complex enough with heroines and heroes alone, another class of characters turns up to complicate things. The antagonists, both male and female, bear a great importance because of their individual depiction, their relationship with the protagonists and with the author, and their interaction both within the fictional universe of the novel and with the corresponding real world.

Precisely because of the complexity and yet the consistency of Jane Austen's patterns of characterization, an analysis of the roles and functions of a specific class of characters is particularly interesting. This dissertation has focused on the anti-heroines, who act as foils and substitutes to the heroine and constitute either obstacles to or occasions for her development, if she needs to develop; for her resistance, if she needs to oppose change; and for her achievement of happiness in any case.

Anti-heroines interact also with other characters within the novel, primarily with the hero and the anti-hero, thus helping to construct an articulate net of characters embodying different perspectives and making different choices, among whom the author has the right, and the reader has the chance, to take a stand. Jane Austen's authorial intervention is open but discreet<sup>1</sup>. She does take up a definite set of values, which the protagonists embody and the novel upholds. However, she also leaves the reader free to have a different point of view. She presents *various* characters personifying *various* principles and attitudes. She allots them *all* a more or less satisfactory destiny, since no antagonist dies, none is destined to misery or despair, and none is denied the freedom to choose his own lot. She thus allows the reader to make his own considerations, to pass his own judgements, and to bestow his own sympathy. Anti-heroines, therefore, serve also to present the reader with characters whom the author does *not* approve of, or even *disapproves* of, but to whom the reader can relate with autonomy and independence. Most striking examples of this authorial attitude are Jane Austen's last three novels. In *Mansfield Park*, Mary Crawford is depicted as a character in which evil and good are inextricably mingled. Her «vitiating mind»<sup>2</sup> is derived not from her nature, but from her upbringing, a circumstance which partially unburdens the anti-heroine of the responsibility for her present principles and attitudes. In *Emma*, Jane Fairfax is attributed many qualities which Emma herself lacks and is presented as a positive character

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. I. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel. Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1957, p. 297.

<sup>2</sup> J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* cit., Vol. III, Ch. XVI, p. 358.

in a *different* way, but to an *equal* degree as Emma. In *Persuasion*, even the initial reserve which in *Emma* heroine and author share towards the anti-heroine is done away. Louisa Musgrove is immediately presented as a good person, however easy-going and light-headed. No initial suspicion and no subsequent disillusion affect the relationship between heroine, author or reader and the anti-heroine of *Persuasion*.

The last but not least function of Jane Austen's anti-heroines regards their reference to the real world of which the novels are the fictional counterparts. The relationship between heroine and anti-heroine is actually similar to the relationship between the fictional and the real world. While heroines chiefly embody the author's stance about how things *should* or *could* be, anti-heroines represent actual women settled in the real world, showing things as they *are*. In her heroines, Jane Austen pours her hopes, wishes and suggestions, thus taking an active part in the renovation and reformation of English society. Heroines are not perfect, but they make the best of their imperfect personalities and circumstances. Just to name a few, Catherine is fanciful, but in her fancy she detects General Tilney's evil character; Elizabeth is proud and prejudiced, but she learns how to turn pride into dignity and prejudice into insight; Fanny is stiff, but she employs this trait to uphold a whole set of values and style of life; Emma is unfeeling towards Miss Bates, but once she realises it, she atones for her insensitivity with a greater attention towards her. In her anti-heroines, conversely, Jane Austen shows her deep awareness of the real conditions women had to live in, and of the real issues and dilemmas they had to cope with. However gentle and kind, Jane Fairfax is nearly destined to the unattractive life of a governess. Charlotte Lucas, willing or unwilling, has to marry a «ridiculous» and «repellent»<sup>3</sup> man to avoid economic indigence and social contempt. Lucy Steele and Mary Crawford, striving for a status and an income which they are not entitled to achieve by themselves, turn down a good man for a rich and titled one. This interaction between fiction and reality, between advocated suggestions and acknowledged circumstances is one further reason why the relationship between heroine and anti-heroine is so interesting and why Jane Austen's literature is so fascinating and multi-faceted.

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<sup>3</sup> C. Tomalin, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

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