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JANE AUSTEN AS A MORAL WRITER
DOCTORAL THESIS
SUMMARY

Jane Austen is the type of writer capable of capturing the reality that surrounds her, of observing, evaluating, criticizing, reflecting, expressing opinions and stressing human behaviour in everyday situations, emphasizing the failures and successes of society with regard to social issues, political, economic, family, traditions, customs, mechanisms of expression and thought, or knowledge and behaviour.

The writings of the author are transcendent even today for several reasons. Her writing, her literature, is one of them, but Austen's ability to present human characters, imperfect in the best sense, and stories that speak of values, language, respect, change, judgment and prejudices, first impressions, social character, happiness, pain, suffering, or the importance of staying true to oneself, are examples that constitute an important part of the literary legacy of the English writer, who transforms them with great skill narrative in their works. Her novels usually point to some level, but invariably, the subject of falling in love, the couple and / or marriage, taking a look at the cultural issues of the subject, from their importance or need in some social circles, to the deep reflection of what union ideally means, seen not as the loss of freedom, or the gain of social status, but as a process of mutual coupling and exaltation between the people involved.

Austen talks with her female characters, her heroines, about the importance of being a woman, but in general, about the difficulties that the environment and society sometimes put on people to develop, professionally or personally, either through discrimination, freedom (or lack of freedom) of thought, social rules or how global education sometimes fails to awaken people's interest in progress and growth. The author herself knew of the social limitations imposed by society on women, so that their work was initially published under a pseudonym.

The protagonists in Jane Austen's books usually undertake journeys that make them learn to be better people and more faithful to themselves, even if this involves overcoming obstacles that seem insurmountable, which vary according to the context and time of environment in which live, for example, family pressure, social customs and barriers, the education of each person, the economic level or class location implicit in the characters, or the idealization and

acceptance of oneself and others, what is supposed to be desired and what is really desired the protagonists, all representative examples of the socioeconomic situation of the epoch in which the author wrote.

Analyzing the works of the writer involves analyzing the motivations, customs, thoughts and feelings of their characters and how they motivate them in their decisions, noticing the change in them and the underlying reason why they decide this change, or the lack of it, also observing how the social context, bourgeois or proletarians, influences their way of thinking and seeing life. The material conditions of existence determine the way of being and existence of every human being, and Austen ventures to expose that situation. To analyze Austen means to break down into its parts the layers that make up each of its characters, the echo and reflection of people in the real world.

Her themes are universal, always applicable to everyday life, current or of the time in which she develops her stories: the common situations we encounter every day, the doubts, concerns and desires that humans reproduce repeatedly, hence the relevance of the works of Austen and her adaptations to films, sometimes set in more modern contexts.

Jane Austen is now considered a feminist writer in that she values women's place in domestic life. She also portrays women capable of acting independently against the patriarchal system. Deborah Kaplan talks about the representation of Austen's feminine independence against the patriarchal image of society. She states that especially in *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen creates Elizabeth Bennet as a reflection of feminine activity in response to the ideologies of patriarchal power. Once Elizabeth is convinced of her opinion, she stands firm in the dialogues. What she defines as a female voice can be observed in the rebellious and unconventional talk of Austen's heroines.

Representing the "female voice" is a way of identifying the place of women in society. The female voice is the expression of female experience and vision, which is the reflection of "feminine identity," and the best way to express female self-awareness is through literature. Thus the female voice is established by constructing its own conscience role against the patriarchal system. The female voice, the female identity is not so apparent in the text, but readers often discover the female voice obscured. That is, they tend to regard the deep female voice as something more meaningful than what is seen on the surface of the text. Thus, Austen reaches a level of conceptualization of the heroine in different moral perspectives

within the framework of social relations. Austen builds her characters accurately to reveal the full expression of her female voice. The awareness of Austen's feminine identity is perfect for her manipulation of satire, irony, and comedy work. It builds the consciousness of its heroines, especially by letting them 'laugh'. Austen's heroines do not clearly rebel against social leaders. Instead, they do something more revolutionary: they laugh, they mock. It is a novel structure in which the heroine can laugh at the idealized construction of society. It deals with the ironies of language that can be found between the lines of the dialogues. With the help of the irony of language she attacks societal assumptions that commonly involve a traditional cultural view of women. Her irony produces laughter, and laughter in Austen's novels is presented through a series of ironies between the moral and social excellence of the female protagonist and the social situation in which women can not have roles, they are capable of representing.

Considering the difficulty of discussing the work of a transition writer as Jane Austen, who simultaneously belonged to two periods of English literature and whose work continues to elicit a sustained support in the first decades of the 21st century, and whose writing conveys a message of honesty, self-knowledge, and inter-dependence we have proposed to provide answers to a number of research questions, as follows:

1. Starting from the assertion that Jane Austen is a moral writer, can we find elements to show narrator irony, social judgement and the moral education of Austen's heroine?
2. If Jane Austen is a romantic writer, what elements can we detect that demonstrate the writer's crafting of the heroine's inner life in a novel like *Emma*, Austen's most romantic novel, and the importance of reading as a marker of character?
3. If Jane Austen is a Victorian, and professional writer, to what extent do Jane Austen's novels support the prevailing attitudes to the old social order versus the upward mobility of the professional classes?
4. If Jane Austen is a feminist writer, what is the woman's condition as it can be seen in her novels, and what are her views on the man-woman and woman-woman relationships?
5. Considering the references to the colonial possessions of Britain during Austen's life in *Mansfield Park*, seen as a "metaphor of plantation slavery in eighteenth-century England" (Said 1993:84), can we extend the postcolonial approach to the whole of Austen's work?

Such an approach cannot exhaust the multiple possibilities offered by such a complex writer as Jane Austen. We have not devoted a special chapter to Jane Austen's realism, nor did we go deeper into the economical aspects that motivate the characters' actions.

As a method for our critical discourse we have resorted to hermeneutics, the key concepts of which are "interpretation" and "understanding." We were interpreting not only for the sake of interpreting, but interpreting to understand. Understanding or comprehension is the endpoint of any hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics is a vast discipline, the largest of all, because it includes everything else and because there is no discipline, no matter how precise, that does not use, to a certain extent, interpretation. Hermeneutics is a synchronous and diachronic discipline at the same time, trying to capture the essences of the phenomena, but also their evolution.

First and foremost, in our discussion of Jane Austen as a moral writer we have made use of the working instruments provided by comparative literature, a methodical approach that goes beyond the limits imposed by an isolated literary work, bringing literature closer to other areas of expression or knowledge, or literary facts and texts, in order to better describe, understand and taste them. Regarding the other approaches, we should mention the contextual approach, which allowed for a reading of some of Austen's novels in the context of the literature of the Regency period and the Victorian age; the postcolonial approach, which let us connect Jane Austen and her country gentry to the larger picture of colonial Britain; or the feminist approach, which allowed us to better understand the writer's female characters and their continuous appeal over the centuries.

Our thesis, titled *Jane Austen as a Moral Writer*, is structured in Introduction: *Caring for the Angel in the House*, Part One: *The Moral Jane Austen*, Part Two: *The Multiple Images of the Moral Writer*, *Conclusions: The Moral Writer Reconsidered*, and Works Cited. All the illustrations belong to the public domain.

Introduction: *Caring for the Angel in the House* directs the analysis towards a gendered reading of Victorian women's fiction with the purpose of establishing an intertextual dimension of our critical discourse, starting from Roland Barthes's assertion that narrative is present in all epochs of history in one form or another, in all places and societies, so that we can conclude that it begins with the history of humanity and remains since then. We

demonstrate that the nineteenth-century British novel, is a form of narrative that has as two of its essential ingredients the fictionality and the construction of a narrator that tells the story. The novels are sources of knowledge of the reality of nineteenth century England with their portraits of the situation of women, the family, the British Empire, the middle class or education throughout the century.

The legal status of women in nineteenth-century England greatly separates single from married women, to the clear detriment of the latter. Despite the fact that a single woman of legal age has no right to vote, and she cannot exercise any official functions or practice a liberal profession, she enjoys the same rights as men with regard to personal property or real estate being able to freely dispose of them in life or by will. Once married, the English women of this period spend much of their time at home, conceived as a social unit, where the functions of man and woman are perfectly defined, both being understood as the positive and negative poles of the same reality. The essential function of women is to preserve the home precisely from the corruption coming from the outside world, as the “angel of the house”.

But, as if defying the mainstream of thought, a number of writers such as the social and political activist Mary Wollstonecraft and her daughter, the novelist Mary Shelley, Caroline Norton and George Eliot, Sarah Grand and George Egerton led personal lives that did not accommodate the standards of the patriarchal society and were a challenge to the construction of the masculinity/femininity relationship during the Victorian era. The female novelistic production offers the reading public the possibility of exploring alternative feminine spaces, the possibility of exploring otherness. As examples, we have chosen, among others, Mary Wollstonecraft’s novel *Mary, A Fiction*, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. One conclusion is that the existence of an eminently feminine reading public also confirms the curiosity of the woman of the time to explore her own multiplicity, her otherness.

PART ONE: *The Moral Jane Austen* includes four chapters which deal with different aspects of the ethics and moral in Austen’s work: Chapter One: *The Writer and Her Age*; Chapter Two: *Georgian Ethics and Women’s Novel Writing*; Chapter Three: *Literature, Philosophy and Morals*; Chapter Four: *Literature and Social Construction*. The main purpose of Part One is to create a theoretical background for the subsequent readings of some of Jane Austen’s novels.

Chapter One: *The Writer and Her Age*, far from presenting a biography of the writers, connects significant details from Jane Austen's life with the transition era in which she wrote her novels. Besides biographical elements that contribute to the profile of the writer, we have provided details on the historical context, with a stress on the major changes in British history, resulting in great economic instability, the Industrial Revolution, followed by the period of the Regency which favoured the development of the arts and sciences, including the expansion of literature and printed works in England. The literary context was marked by the writings of such authors as Aphra Behn, William Congreve, Mary Davys, Jane Barker or Eliza Haywood – forerunners of the novelistic genre – and the proliferation of philosophical and religious works that went from a rational to more spiritualistic point of view (Defoe and Samuel Richardson). In this context, the cult of sensitivity was seen as a response to beauty, art and nature. Among other developments, mention should be made to the influence of the epistolary genre, and the success of the Gothic novel (Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, and Matthew Gregory Lewis), all of which exerting an influence on Jane Austen's writing. We should also mention the realist novel, with the novels of Fanny Burney (Madame d'Arbly) – *The Wiltings*, *Cecilia*, *Camilla*, and *The Wanderer* in which the world is seen through the eyes of a young woman who shows her social dependence and the inability to assert herself. On the other hand, the end of the century witnessed the emergence of the Romanticism, as a reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment and classicism.

Last but not least, we have exemplified different aspects of the socio-economic and cultural context as mirrored in Austen's novels: the ritual of the women's "coming out" (*Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*), the conventional hobbies of the landed gentry, such as hunting, shooting, and politics (for the gentlemen), and embroidery, music, reading, dancing (for the ladies) – in *Mansfield Park*. One final remark is that the world of Jane Austen's novels draws the real economy of a state of rapid and disturbing transition where marriage was the legitimate and frequent way to access money, while the source of the family welfare may have unmentioned sources, such as the work of the slaves in the colonies (*Mansfield Park*).

Chapter Two: *Georgian Ethics and Women's Novel Writing* starts with Virginia Woolf's comments on Jane Austen's works, and her statement on the need for women to show their intellectual independence through literature, as a form of expression of talent. We stress the idea that Austen was the first woman writer who dared to openly criticize certain patterns of behaviour and masculine habits of a society that did not give women the same rights as men.

She lived ahead of her time, seeking at all times to fight for her independence, for true love and not for economic convenience, which was the norm in that England of the nineteenth century.

Austen's fiction presents the moral behaviour of her characters in preparation of ethical actions. She gave creative writing the best manifestation of reality, and focuses on important matters related to ethics, and on the inter-dependence and adaptability in social matters and human relationship. She revealed the social standards imposed by the traditional, patriarchal society and revealed the moral and ethical principles that governed the English society during the Regency period. Having been allowed full access to her father's extensive personal library, she was, at the time of the publication of her novels, one of the most educated women writers of the transition years to the Victorian age, when the polite society demanded a new transfer in social manners that required an ideal conversation and cultivated speech.

We have also developed on the idea that the structure of her novels fits the contents. In *Mansfield Park*, for example, we discern a space of fiction over-determined by the Austenian conservatism, an ideology which controls the narrative, and the rhetoric. The writer fuses the real and the symbolic, by her recourse to the conservative type of myth, that of continuity by slow assimilation of progress, which sanctifies organism and harmony (of the edifice, of the ego, of human relations, of society perhaps the nation, perhaps the world, as many concentric circles), and guarantees the truth.

As regards the main topic of our thesis – *Jane Austen as a Moral Writer* – we have stressed the idea that a literary approach to morality makes it possible, precisely, to explode the classical definitions of moral reflection, to show the limits of the “orthodox” conception according to which the cognitive content of the literature could be separated from its emotional content, and the ethic scope of the analysable literature in these terms. The writer sheds light on the dangers of a form of sociability corrupted by hollow, artificial, insincere or manipulative exchanges, but also reveals the extent of the risk threatening the social fabric. In her novels, Austen makes the notion of attachment the keystone of her ethical reflection. The concern for the other person shapes the whole of her thought and establishes her as a true novelist of the union. The motives of marriage, decorum, and land ownership, but also, perhaps more surprisingly, of theatre and illness, highlighting love commitment, sociability, filial transmission, social and sympathy in its clinical sense, appear undeniably linked by a

reflection on the ego in its relations to the other, relations essentially considered in the light of the dialectic altruism / individualism.

Chapter Three: *Literature, Philosophy and Morals* is mostly theoretical and deals with the relationship between morality and literature, essential for our understanding of Jane Austen as a moral writer. Our presentation is based on the thesis advanced by Stanley Cavell, Cora Diamond, Martha Nussbaum, and Gilbert Ryle that the contribution of literature to ethics (the content, the moral significance of literary or cinematographic works) cannot be determined by “knowledge”, “arguments” or “judgments”. We are approaching the topic from different angles of reference: moral experience, literature and human life; literature, ontology and valour; language and practices; the concepts, the imagination and literature; literature and ethics; literature and moral philosophy.

We start from the assumption that the moral content of literary works has to do with a moral experience, and with a human specificity of this experience. As a result, the issue and the definition of ethics emerge transformed from its confrontation to literature, and the question of the combined relationships between ethics, literature, and philosophy refocuses the moral reflection on the properly human capacities to react and respond morally – on a form of life, a moral form of intelligence or competence. Literature describes the complexity of feelings and human life, and a literary approach to morality allows the classical definitions of moral reflection to explode, to show the limits of the “orthodox” conception according to which the cognitive content of the literature could be separated from its emotional content, and the ethical scope of the analysable literature in these terms. It is literature that contributes to our understanding of others, enhancing our capacities of comprehension.

The only discipline that can bring some light into the relationship between literature and ethics is moral philosophy. By re-thinking now a proximity as stimulating as the controversy between philosophy and literature, new topics arise to discussion, while bringing back to the fore influential theories, to the benefit of both disciplines, at least as far as their levels of reflexivity and internal diversification are concerned. Literature responds to a set of rather small but significant expectations for the moment in which practical philosophy is found.

As for Jane Austen, we are of the opinion expressed by Tony Tanner in his monograph, that the moral dimension of her work was informed by the moral philosophers of her time, especially David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). Tanner develops Hume’s

argumentation that impressions are the source of our ideas, and he uses excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice* in support of his demonstration. He finally reaches the conclusion that there are convincing similarities between Hume's philosophy and Jane Austen's views as expressed in her novels. Also, like the first reviewers of Austen's novels, he does not hesitate to find similarities between *Pride and Prejudice* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

Chapter Four: *Literature and Social Construction* brings us closer to Jane Austen's fiction, covering such topics as Jane Austen's universe, the evolution in female solitude in England (17th-19th centuries), Jane Austen's work in historical terms, the stereotype of the spinster, and the discursive constructions in Emma (in *Emma*) and Anne Elliot (in *Persuasion*). We start from the assumption that the domestic universe of Austen's fiction supposes a contrast between the moral conservatism inherited from previous centuries and the processes of feminine individualization in which the protagonists of her work are immersed. The main theme in Austen's work is marriage, and from her works we learn that this was the end of any English woman of this age. The idea of marriage is framed around the social construction of necessity, moral obligation, and the idea of romantic love, and the patriarchal emphasis on the nuclear family will progressively evolve towards affective individualism. We have considered it important to approach the theme of women's solitude interdisciplinary, including information offered by history in order to understand the literary treatment of this topic in Austen's novels. Her characters represent psychological conflicts that develop as the story progresses, and the domestic universe reveals the moral, psychological and rational conflicts of its characters. We exemplify with excerpts from *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*. Single women had authority on their property, and were responsible for their finances and business relationships. The same was true of widowed women, who at the time of death had the legal capacity to manage property and business. They could have independence. We have purposefully digressed on the stereotype of the spinster, as it sheds new light on the level of understanding of the society of the condition of woman, which is clearly echoed by Austen's novels.

On the other hand, the convention of Austen's domestic universe is understood as a result of the ideological panorama prevailing in the eighteenth century and the guidelines established for the ladies. What is remarkable and interesting is Austen's narrative technique, in which irony presupposes the central consciousness of the narrative in her protagonist. Her heroine does not argue in favour of singleness, but in favour of the advantages of her status as a

member of the wealthy class. Emma is a resolute woman, with an independent character and rich reasoning, but the masculine characters which she has in mind exert a subconscious control and that ends up controlling her actions and making her the desired and melded person according to the prevailing moral constructions. In the case of Anne Elliot, we are faced with a figure where the stereotype marked for the spinster does not take the same role. It is a very fluid stereotype, since neither its age, nor beauty, nor social status are determinants in the creation of the stereotype. Emma and Anne represent vital itineraries of women expressing certain social trajectories. Their behaviour, language and relations – in short, the representation that Austen makes of them – bring us closer to the fluidity in which the stereotype was debated. Emma assumes and promotes it to other spinsters, but in turn, in her defence of singleness, we appreciate those features of individualization that are closer to contemporaneity. Anne does not see the spinster's idea as a problem, but we do see how her father and sister treat her with some scorn. It is this swing that gives us the key to a transition stage, where the ideas closest to the Old Regime society clash with new ideological and social processes, as the heroines of Austen demonstrate.

PART TWO: *The Multiple Images of the Moral Writer* is more analytical, and of a more applicative nature, addresses some of the novels chosen from Jane Austen's work from different critical perspectives, apart from the gender approach hinted at in the Introduction, and the contextual approach throughout Part One, as follows: Chapter Five: *Becoming England's Jane*, Chapter Six: *Pride and Prejudice – the Sceptical Enlightenment of the Writer*, Chapter Seven: *Jane Austen – Feminine, Feminist, of Anti-Feminist?*; Chapter Eight: *A Personal, Feminine Reading of Emma*; Chapter Nine: *A Postcolonial Mapping of Mansfield Park*. We show how the Janeite cult appeared and developed, turning the writer into a symbol, then we analyse her novels from different critical perspectives, as feminism and postcolonialism.

Chapter Five: *Becoming England's Jane*, draws a portrait of Jane Austen as viewed from four different perspectives: to cover the critical response of her contemporaries to her published work, Jane Austen's realism, the early feminist touches in her writing, the "Janeite" movement as a later response, marking the beginning of the writer's posthumous transition from "England's Jane" to "everybody's Jane." Even if they were published anonymously, and signed "by a Lady", the first four novels – *Sense and Sensibility*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, and *Emma* – were reviewed in the magazines of the time: *Critical Review*,

British Critic, *Gentleman's Magazine*, and *Quarterly Review*. We mention the importance of Chapman's Oxford edition of Austen's novels, and the references to these novels in significant volumes of criticism signed by Robert Chambers, Anne Katherine Elwood, T. B. Shaw, David Masson, or John Jeaffreson. We consider Jane Austen's realism as a "descriptive realism" in that she describes the places in which the story takes place in such a way that they are capable of transferring the reader and introducing him fully into the core of the story.

As regards the early feminist touches in Austen's novels, we mention her indebtedness to other women writers before her who also wrote for women, and opened the book market to women writing as a profession. We agree with Margaret Kirkham who, in her study, *Jane Austen, Feminism, and Fiction* (1997), that even if Jane Austen's women protagonists are not "self-conscious feminists" they all answer one of the principles stated by Enlightenment feminism: that women share the same moral nature as men. We also discuss the references to Jane Austen in feminist studies written by Marjory Bald, Ida O'Malley, and Virginia Woolf. Jane Austen reputation followed an ascending line, starting with the biographical volumes published by members of her family, and continuing with the references in significant surveys of English literature, written by George Saintsbury, Walter Raleigh, Edmund Gosse, William James Dawson, or – across the Atlantic – Wilbur Cross, Richard Burton, and Clara Whitmore. On the other hand, Chapman's edition and Kipling's short story, "The Janeites", paved the way to the Austen cult.

Chapter Six: *Pride and Prejudice* – the Sceptical Enlightenment of the Writer traces the various interpretations of the novel in view of the gender and feminist criticism, starting from the assumption that, when reading Austen's work from the perspectives of gender and class, the writer, rather than creating final definitions such as resolutions of ideological debates, may have had the purpose of "thinking" and, receiving a subtle treatment, the questions raised by the author would allow for a number of interpretations. If the main topic of the feminist criticism of Austen seems to be the conclusion of the novel with the protagonist's marriage, as an affirmation of patriarchal values, it is important to note that the novels do not end similarly, and that several aspects involved in the completion of the works should to be taken into account. We consider the opinions of outstanding critics as Deborah Kaplan, Claudia L. Johnson, Susan Morgan, who contend that Austen's novels (including *Pride and Prejudice*) affirm patriarchal values with the resolution of marriage, that Elizabeth's

perception is guided by changes in the context of literary analysis and hence by the social ideology that influences this critique. According to Kaplan, for example, one of Elizabeth's distinctions as a heroine of romance is confidence in her views and in the expression of her ideas.

Some critics, like Mary Eagleton, Rachel Brownstein, Patrícia Meyer Spacks discuss the famous first sentence of the novel, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife", and underline the irony contained in it, setting the tone of the narrative, investigating prejudice, bringing to the fore the analyses that are intended to be definitive. Feminist criticism highlights the negative aspects of the resolution of the romance with the marriage of the protagonists, reminding readers that the nineteenth-century institution of marriage enforced women's legal, economic, and social subordination. One of the escape routes usually portrayed by the feminist critics is that of the so-called female friendship, in which the woman would find an alternative to marriage in her relation of friendship with other women, and Jane Austen was accused of promoting patriarchal values, as her novel contained a markedly fairy-tale quality. Critics place Austen's work in a period in which women's access to social life showed some improvement, and a rise in opportunities for women put in check more simplistic studies of the separation of the male and female spheres in that society (Kate O'Brien). A point of departure in our analysis of Jane Austen is an understanding of the problems faced by women writers in a dominant culture (Claudia Johnson). Also, Jane Austen reinvented the building blocks she had at her disposal – the language and genres, conventions and stereotypes of her time (Gilbert and Gubar). The critics' sometimes contradictory interpretations only add to the general discussion of Jane Austen's position and efforts in coming to terms with the patriarchal society in which she lived and wrote her novels.

Chapter Seven: *Jane Austen – Feminine, Feminist, or Anti-Feminist?*, hopefully answers the debate whether Jane Austen's should be read from a feminist perspective, or be placed in the more general category of feminine writing, or even be considered as part of the anti-feminist reaction that followed the death of Mary Wollstonecraft. We start from the general assumption that, when women tried to cross the boundaries imposed by the patriarchal society in the territories traditionally belonging to male writers, they had to cope with the dilemma of being a woman and a writer at the same time. Therefore, we proposed a list of keywords that defines "female" literature, including lack of imagination, lack of composition,

sentimentality, and even narcissism. We have taken for granted Toril Moi's distinction between the three types of writing – female, feminine, and feminist – and developed upon the idea that that feminism is not all-inclusive, that not all female writing belongs to feminist writing, and that there are many women writers who do not respond favourably to the tenets of feminist theory. In Jane Austen's case, as a response to the similarity between *female* and *feminine* imposed by her contemporaries, the feminists denied the alleged inferiority position, and insisted on equal opportunities for women and men.

We consider Jane Austen as the pioneer writer of feminine literature, who redefined British letters, by narrating with intelligence and irony the human relations of the society of the early nineteenth century and dreamed of a world in which women could advance until they reach their desired and deserved social status – well beyond the limits of the traditional “parlour” universe assigned to them by the traditional society, and she could only be sensitive to the abuses of the patriarchal society in which she lived – as justly underlined by the feminist critics Claudia Johnson or Alison G. Sulloway.

We considered it necessary to highlight Jane Austen's contribution to the dissemination of feminist ideas (as promoted by Mary Wollstonecraft), encouraging her readers to make a change in their lives and concentrate on the eradication of patriarchy, which explains our short incursion into the development of feminist ideas up to Austen's time. We have considered the contribution to the Austen criticism of Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler, who support the Jane Austen as a feminist writer, once her objective was to transmit ideas of feminine vindication. We have provided examples of Austen's different treatment of the theme of patriarchy in *Pride and Prejudice*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, *Persuasion* and *Mansfield Park*.

Chapter Eight: A Personal, Feminine Reading of *Emma* continues the discussion in the previous chapter, with a particular stress on *Emma* – the most endearing of Austen's novels – in light of Bakhtin's assertion that “literary language becomes a dialogue of languages that both know about and understand each other” and that in Jane Austen's novels such a polyphony affects the structure of the plot and creates effects of waiting, surprise, disappointment and satisfaction. We have chosen to concentrate on *Emma*, the protagonist of the eponymous novel (apart from the posthumous *Lady Susan*) in which Jane Austen, by studying from a feminine point of view the question of marriage, blames a choice guided solely by interest, but admits that a young girl, whose heart had given herself to another,

marries a man for whom, for lack of love, she may have some sympathy. Our discussion places Emma in the gallery of the other female protagonists existing in an environment that opposes to external influences the resistance of a character and a different personality, reacting according to the law of her temperament and the penchant for her nature: each heroine shows us a new attitude in front of reality.

Emma Woodhouse believes that the forces of destiny and the game of events are often in great need of the intelligent direction she feels capable of giving them. Admirable of construction, with a plot whose progression makes an unexpected outcome the only one that can really satisfy us, *Emma* is also the most advanced psychological study of all the work of Jane Austen. The character of Emma, with her gayety, her frankness and, at the same time, her love of combinations and small manoeuvres, is the finest portrait of a whole gallery of female figures. Our conclusion is that Austen does not reject the whole of society and the patriarchal system, but reaffirms, on the contrary, the centrality of traditional male and female roles in depicting these corrupt forms, these failings of paternal and maternal ideals which it defines as essential to the smooth functioning of a society. It is to realize, finally, that any failure to these traditional roles has an impact on the family, and that the maintenance of these is actually, above all, in the service of a defence of what constitutes the last pillar of conservative ideology. In the same way as land ownership and the institution of marriage, family structure is at the centre of Austen's concerns, which, above and beyond the differences between men and women, is above all concerned with human nature in its wholeness.

Chapter Nine: A Postcolonial Mapping of *Mansfield Park* departs from the feminine/feminist approach in the previous chapters and reveals the elements of colonial thinking in Austen's novels which have been pointed out by postcolonial critics who have not hesitated to underline the writer's family's connections to the exploitation of the slaves' labour in the British colonies. The political dimension of Austen's novels is obvious in the private sphere, in the actions of the individual, who in bland self-delusion sometimes considers himself moral even if he is not. Austen sees through the eyes of people's behaviour: she tells us that one's own view can be very clouded, through love, and through vanity.

Our discussion is based on Edward Said's views as formulated in *Culture and Imperialism*, in which he defines the relationship between literature and the extra-literary social reality which, in the nineteenth century, is essentially marked by colonialism and imperialism: the

nineteenth century novel simultaneously expresses and catalyzes colonialism as the dominant ideology of the time, at least in colonial powers such as France and England. *Mansfield Park* is read by Said according to a “structure of attitudes and references”, with the aim of unveiling allusions to imperial facts and colonial situations interspersed in the fabric of narrative, as well as the moral and social values associated with them. If at *Mansfield Park* the appearance of the empire was still marginal, as the nineteenth century advanced toward the twentieth, the presence of the colonies and colonized in European literature was becoming more dense and problematic. The daily contact with these diverse Others, in lands so distant and different from the metropolitan centres, undermined any possibility of complete separation.

We find references to slavery in three of Austen’s novels: *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, and *Persuasion*. Antigua is mentioned nine times in *Mansfield Park* in a rather *en passant* manner, which accounts for the general impression that the writer was either purposefully avoiding an ample discussion of the source of the wealth of many of her characters – Sir Thomas Bertram, in this case – or she did not have sufficient knowledge of the matter. Several critics – such as Margaret Kirkham, Moira Ferguson, and Joseph Lew – argue that slavery is the dominant topic of *Mansfield Park* and that the very title of the novel is associated with a landmark legal decision of 1772, in which Lord Mansfield declared that all persons of whatsoever race or personal history were free so long as they were on English soil and could not be compelled to return to servitude in the colonies. The conclusion is that Jane Austen, far from being unaware of the sources of wealth for many of her contemporaries, has first-hand knowledge of the existence of the colonies and plantation work, which explains the scarce, almost allusive comments of her characters.

Conclusions: *The Moral Writer Reconsidered* is a concise presentation of the literary adaptations of Jane Austen’s novels, including completions, sequels, adaptations, pastiches, and fictionalizations, retellings, derivatives – mashups, in a word – as a testimony of the writer’s appeal to the 21st-century audience. These are all the consequence of the re-creation of concepts that shifted the artistic gaze to new literary forms, albeit conceived from prearranged angles, that marked the twentieth century. To exempt this process, we referred to two editorial programs: The Austen Project, initiated by the HarperCollins publisher, and the Quirk Books project, which supported the publication of a series of mashups of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*. The Austen Project – a new series of novels written by modern authors whose task is to re-write Austen’s six novels and place them in contemporary settings – includes four novels that have been published thus far: Joanna Trollope’s *Sense & Sensibility*:

A Novel (2013), Val McDermid's *Northanger Abbey* (2014), Alexander McCall-Smith's *Emma: A Modern Retelling* (2016), and Curtis Sittenfeld's *Eligible* (2016).

We have based our demonstration on Derrida's statement that, in this context, the concept of literature gains new meanings, since, from the idea of a dead letter, or testamentary grapheme (Derrida, 1997), which denotes the death of the world that becomes a text, it becomes a literature in which the text becomes again the object of the world, returning, under the bias of adaptation, to the literary system of production, circulation and reception. Such a play between dead and alive in the literary is replicated in the adaptation that this final chapter intends to analyze, under the bias of the literary mashup. In this genre of hybridization between works, Jane Austen's most celebrated novel, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), gives rise to the *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2019). *Pride and Prejudice* would then be a kind of nineteenth-century entertainment literature, not unlike that of *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* in the twenty-first century, although we have traditionally obliterated the linkage of Austen's text to the publishing market of her time. *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* then becomes revolutionary insofar as it relays *Pride and Prejudice* and, to some extent, returns the Austenian romance to the destiny for which it was originally intended.