



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOXÍA INGLESA E ALEMÁ

FLIRTING 101: AN EXAMINATION OF COURTSHIP AND ROMANCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

Sara González Bernárdez

Supervised by Dr Laura M^a Lojo Rodríguez

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Literatura en Lingua Inglesa

2016/2017

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sara', is located in the bottom left corner of the page.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'V-B', is located in the bottom right corner of the page.



FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

DEPARTAMENTO DE FILOLOXÍA INGLESA E ALEMÁ

FLIRTING 101: AN EXAMINATION OF COURTSHIP AND ROMANCE IN JANE AUSTEN'S NOVELS

Sara González Bernárdez

Supervised by Dr Laura M^a Lojo Rodríguez

Grao en Lingua e Literatura Inglesas

Literatura en Lingua Inglesa

2016/2017

CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION • 1
- 1. JANE AUSTEN IN CONTEXT • 4
- 2. JANE AUSTEN'S ROMANCE • 10
 - 2.1. THE ISSUE OF GENRE: JANE AUSTEN AS A REALIST NOVELIST • 10
 - 2.2. THE ISSUE OF GENRE: JANE AUSTEN AS A ROMANCE WRITER • 15
 - 2.3. JANE AUSTEN ON LOVE: HER ROMANTIC IMAGINATION • 24
- 3. THE PROCESS OF COURTSHIP • 37
- 4. COURTSHIP AND ROMANCE, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE* • 47
- CONCLUSION • 61
- WORKS CITED • 64

INTRODUCTION

I do not remember when I first started reading Jane Austen, but I do remember my expectations when I did so. I expected to read uninteresting, stiff-necked love stories, with a few overused clichés for flavour; I expected constrained characters whom I could not possibly relate to or root for. I do not know where these expectations came from, but they could hardly have been more wrong.

As I made my way through her novels, I realised that what interested me the most about them was, in fact, romance: the way Austen rendered emotion, the way so few words could mean so much, and the way social constraints played in the relationships were fascinating to me. No other romance I had read before quite managed to engross me like Austen's, and I found myself wondering what exactly was so unique about it – what was it that other romances had not, and still do not, manage to reproduce. It was then that the idea for this dissertation was born.

My objective is, put shortly, to examine how Jane Austen represents courtship and romance. If her novels remain so popular with readers even nowadays, it is because they resonate with us despite the seemingly insurmountable temporal and social distance; I believe she manages to achieve such timelessness because her representation deviates from mainstream ideas – of both her age and our own – regarding romance literature, love, and relationships. To find out where the uniqueness of her romance resides, I have employed eighteenth-century conduct manuals, particularly Dr Gregory's, and Jane Austen's own novels and letters as my primary sources, from which I shall draw an analysis helped by the theories discussed in critical essays, most especially essays discussing the forms of courtship, love, and sexuality to be found in

Austen (Fergus', Hardy's and Morris' essays deserve a special mention here). And, though the novels can be interpreted in different ways, I will try to use them as supporting evidence for my own conclusions.

My work begins with a brief contextualisation of Jane Austen's work in order to describe the social factors which particularly influence human relationships and their development, since they play such significant roles within her novels. The second section focuses on Austen's representation of romance and is divided in three subsections. Parts 2.1 and 2.2 review her work in light of the two genres Austen is most often classified as, realism and romance, which might appear unrelated to my thesis. However, it is essential to understand why Austen writes the way she does, and by examining the characteristics of each genre and linking them to her work, it will be easy to see where she follows convention and where she differs from it, thus outlining the peculiarities surrounding her novels. Subsection 2.3 focuses more on the idea of love, on how it was viewed during the Regency Period and how Jane Austen herself viewed it, as well as how these views influenced her depiction of it.

Section 3 discusses the process of courtship in more depth, looking into its social foundations and the different – yet equivocal – ways in which a preference could be conveyed. Finally, section 4 gathers and uses all the knowledge obtained from previous sections to analyse *Pride and Prejudice*, the novel that best exemplifies how well Austen's romance has prevailed; it is also the least prototypical of all seven novels, which I am convinced is not coincidental. My focus shall be on the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy in the novel and, though I shall discuss whether there is courtship between them at all, I will mainly analyse it through three significant aspects: its

antagonism (and *sexual* antagonism), its didacticism (and subsequent equality), and its dialogue. The latter probably plays the most significant part, given that their relationship is, at its core, a constant dialogue – a play of conversation that each of them responds to and that keeps them both on their toes.

With my analysis thus organised, I am hoping to shed some light upon Austen's representation of romantic relationships and on the elements that make it transcend the boundaries of time, in itself a remarkable achievement considering the extremely limited localisation of her work and the great influence context had in it, which will be discussed up next.

1 JANE AUSTEN IN CONTEXT

One cannot begin an analysis of any sort of literary work without first knowing exactly where and when it comes from and how its origin influences it. Context is particularly significant for Jane Austen's novels, because she worked within an extremely specific and limited background – her famous “little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory” (*Letters* 469). Additionally, “she did not write with an eye to posterity” (Pinion 137), but for people of her own time who were thus familiar with what she represented. Therefore, as David Monahan writes in the introduction to *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, “The more accurately the critic can reconstruct Jane Austen's world, the more clearly he is likely to see the macrocosmic significance of the tiny events that she describes [...]” (3). As the available space obliges me to be briefer than I would like, I will offer an overview of the social aspects that most affect human relationships – particularly romantic ones – and their development. I refer to them as “boundaries” because they are socio-culturally established conditions, limits, or codes that would somehow forbid, impede, or regulate social interactions in any way.

Gender, for instance, was a very carefully delimited boundary that separated many aspects of society. Education was one of them: “many families gave sons a professional education”, which afforded them “knowledge, self-discipline and managerial skills” (Kelly 256); women, on the other hand, were “excluded from such broad intellectual and moral education”, kept from any advanced learning or the pursuit of any profession, and instead trained in the so-called ‘accomplishments’” (256), though they did have “basic schooling”, participate in “household management” and receive religious education (256). Accomplishments comprised different areas of art and culture:

Dancing, singing and playing music displayed the young woman's body and bearing at social occasions to attract a suitor. Drawing, painting, fashionable modern languages (especially French and Italian) and decorative needlework demonstrated taste and 'polite' knowledge as markers of social distinction, as did the social arts of conversation and letter-writing, with accompanying knowledge of the 'belles-lettres'. (Kelly 257)

Accomplishments were meant to show the culture and refinement suited to higher society, and young ladies were required to be "accomplished" – proficient at several of these – if they were to attract potential suitors. A woman without accomplishments was merely "notable", which meant she was incapable of "cultivated socialising" (Kelly 258) in a higher-class society. However, even being "notable" was preferable to being "learned": "'Learning' meant knowledge proper to male education and restricted to male participation" (Kelly 258), and women familiar with it would be mocked, regarded as "unfit [...] for the marriage market, genteel society, and even 'notability'" (Kelly 258).

Leisure was also separated by gender: "Women's pursuits [...] were mostly indoor and domestic, men's outdoor and sporting" (Gay 337), so the activities they could enjoy together were rather specific. "Walking or driving outdoors" (337), "making music together" (338), playing cards, or reading were popular "for both men and women" (339). Outside of these unisex activities, though, the pastimes for each sex did not mingle, so that it would have been unthinkable for a lady to pursue a masculine activity like hunting.

These separations between genders were intrinsically related and mostly due to the belief in the doctrine of the two spheres:

This doctrine defined a male sphere that was public – one concerned with the regulated world of government, trade, business, and law, from which women were largely excluded – and a women’s sphere that was private – encompassing the unregulated realm of home, family, and child rearing. (Kuersten 16)

This separation was ingrained through education, as explained before: men were raised for social roles, to be politicians, lawyers, or clerics; women were raised for domestic roles, to be wives and mothers; and both were convinced this was the natural order of things. Because, even though the origin of this doctrine is purely socio-cultural, much of the discourse in favour of this separation was based on erroneous biological assumptions:

There is something genetically inherent in the male of the species, so the biological determinists would argue, that makes them the naturally dominant sex; that ‘something’ is lacking in females, and as a result women are not only naturally subordinate but in general quite satisfied with their position, since it affords them protection and the opportunity to maximize maternal pleasures, which to them are the most satisfying experiences of life. (Ortner 25)

However genuine these beliefs might be, it cannot be denied that the theory of the two spheres has largely contributed to the normalisation and perpetuation of traditional gender roles; after all, the fact that women were *naturally* suited for domesticity also meant they were *naturally* unsuited to occupy positions of power, be it within or outside the home. The influence of this separation was not limited to the social position of each sex, however. Since the boundary established where men and women would find themselves most often (outdoors versus indoors, for instance), it meant that there were few chances to meet members of the opposite sex who did not belong to the same family, even when they lived near one another. The scarce chances to meet the

opposite sex presented themselves in the form of balls, dinners, or public events in general, which also meant that whatever relationship developed between sexes would have to take place in public. This publicity is not simply due to the separation between male and female realms, however – it also has to do with a perhaps even more intrusive boundary, that of etiquette and codes of propriety.

There are few societies for which etiquette and manners were as important as they were for Austen's eighteenth-century England. Firstly, because manners were considered to be directly related to one's social status: the better one's manners, the higher one's social class. However, this was already beginning to change by Austen's time, as the lower classes became increasingly cultured and acquired better, more polished manners that imitated those of the higher classes, which meant etiquette was starting to lack its distinctive power. An example of this change is Mr. Martin, who behaves like a gentleman despite having to work for a living and proves himself to be better-read than even Emma herself, which dismantles her class prejudice.

Secondly, manners were important because they were thought to be directly related to one's character. They were joined together with morality so that a good breeding was thought to imply a good heart: "in theory, 'politeness' embodied both elegance of manner and the virtues of 'good humour and kindness'" (Byrne 304). Good breeding was the ticket to getting accepted into "polite" society, as well as the best way to becoming widely liked within it, even if the heart within was not as good as the outward manner promised. Austen herself clearly did not agree with this myth, which she deconstructs through characters like George Wickham or Henry Crawford, whose polished manners mask their questionable values and wrongful actions.

Given the importance of etiquette, much emphasis was put in achieving a perfect knowledge of these rigid codes, as any ignorance of their nuances made it very easy to make mistakes and come across as rude. As such, etiquette obstructed friendly and/or romantic relationships because it regulated practically every aspect of human interaction, dictating exactly when, where, how, and for how long people could interact; its specific regulations greatly restricted the freedom that we nowadays have and which makes intimacy possible. For starters, it made it unacceptable for conversation to include any personal topics aside from the usual polite enquiries; usually, men had “conversations on politics” and other such public affairs (Byrne 302) and women spoke mostly of “neighbours, frocks and balls” (303) – all insipid, safe topics that did not touch upon the personal life of the interlocutors. The sharing of secrets, speaking upfront about personal issues or feelings, is a great part of what builds up intimacy, but protocol deemed these conversations rude, prying, or too forthcoming. In addition, it determined when and how men and women could speak to each other, since talking for too long and with undivided attention would indicate a clear preference; they could not be together without a chaperone, nor write to each other, unless they were engaged. Anything else was improper, and this lack of private conversations resulted in a painful lack of intimacy.

Despite this importance, though, “Austen was often less interested in observing the customs of the day than in showing her heroines transgressing them” (Byrne 303). The most obvious example is probably Elizabeth’s walking to Netherfield alone and without a carriage, which was indecorous, undignified, and even dangerous for her and her reputation; however, since Lizzy is going to see her sick sister, she is clearly depicted as being morally justified as well as doing the right thing, despite breaching

conventional etiquette. Through scenes like this, Austen clearly conveys her “loathing of hypocrisy and snobbery, and her conviction that sincerely good manners are bound up with goodness of heart rather than social status” (Byrne 300). To her, the truly well-mannered individual is not concerned about perfect etiquette, but shows unaffected manners, sincere intentions, and an honest desire to be kind or helpful to others, to make them feel at ease. Thus, the good breeding she portrays has less to do with etiquette and more to do with genuine goodness.

In conclusion, Austen portrays a society “where ignorance as to the feelings of others and error as to their motives are not only possible, but likely; where the rigidities governing manners, and especially the social relations of the sexes, normally make so difficult the establishing of sympathetic understanding” (Morris 91).

2 JANE AUSTEN'S ROMANCE

2.1 THE ISSUE OF GENRE: JANE AUSTEN AS A REALIST NOVELIST

Jane Austen is often classified by critics as a realist writer, and Ian Watt in fact holds her as an exemplar of the genre:

She was able to combine into a harmonious unity the advantages both of realism of presentation and realism of assessment, of the internal and of the external approaches to character; her novels have authenticity without diffuseness or trickery, wisdom of social comment without a garrulous essayist, and a sense of social order which is not achieved at the expense of the individuality and autonomy of the characters. (338)

Her realism is peculiar, however, because of her consciously limited setting: the daily lives of the gentry in the English countryside during the Regency period. Since she chose to write “about what she knew at first hand” and keep “events extraneous to her experience in the background” (Pinion 27), we must look on the novels as representations “[...] of history itself, of events being lived” (Kent 96). This is qualified as social realism, because her novels are not so much concerned with history as with representing the nuances of daily social life:

That they were praised by her contemporaries for their accuracy is a good warrant for reading them as vivid views of gentry life in the southern counties during the late Georgian period seen through the eyes of a clever woman. The language, the moral tone, the social concerns, the recreations, the basic rhythms of life are there to be shared by the reader [...]. (Kent 95)

This type of realism is but a different way of documenting history. Instead of seeing only the broader picture, Austen focuses on the “largely undocumented lives,

attitudes and activities of the ordinary people” (Kent 101) and closely examines private daily life, a part of history that has remained widely unknown. She details the delicate subtleties that characterised social interaction at the time, showing how they functioned in a society where every action was publicly judged and could be understood (or misunderstood) very differently, and her work is valuable precisely because of it.

More significantly for this essay, her realism is also a psychological one. Her novels are characteristically focalised through a single character’s conscience, which is most prominent in her later novels *Emma* and *Persuasion* but can also be found in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Elizabeth’s conscience takes the central stage, and *Sense and Sensibility*, viewed through Elinor most of the time. However, and although the focalised characters’ consciences do take a prominent place within the novel, “Austen continually adjusts her point of view [...]. Clearly such shifts in presentation, which are not restricted to the central characters, demand great alertness in reading” (Pinion 144). She was one of the first writers to attempt this technique in order to offer her heroine’s partial, subjective view of the world (favouring dramatic irony) without forfeiting the authorial control and the opportunity to voice her own thoughts that a third person narrator afforded.

This technique is often called free indirect discourse in literary theory. However, Cohn realized this denomination was too broad and coined the term “narrated monologue” to narrow it: this specifically refers to a type of free indirect discourse consisting on the third person rendition of a character’s “vision of reality” (Todorov, quoted in Cohn 110). The term implies a “correspondence to a (potential) quoted monologue” (110), only this monologue is not quoted directly. According to Cohn, this narrative technique develops “when third-person fiction enters the domain previously

reserved for first-person fiction [...], and begins to focus on the mental and emotional life of its characters” (113), which is precisely where Jane Austen’s interest lay. She was “one of the first writers to use the narrated monologue frequently and extensively”, transposing “the rhythm of inner debate [...] into narrative language, without explicit quotation or authorial explication” (113). In spite of this, and although the “identification” of the narrator “with the character’s mentality” was considerably increased with this method, the author never did disappear completely; “the employment of third-person references indicates, no matter how unobtrusively, the continued presence of a narrator” (Cohn 112), which adds a layer of complexity that favours the confusion of the author’s voice with that of the character. Since Austen’s third-person narrator (and implied author) often adopts a critical position, without agreeing with or condoning the actions of her chosen focaliser, it is especially important to distinguish her voice from her characters’.

Austen’s use of the narrated monologue has another significant objective: “maintaining sympathy despite almost crippling faults” (Booth 245). Austen presents us with three essentially flawed heroines: Catherine, Elizabeth, and Emma all have faults that Austen never allows the reader to forget. They are not sympathetic faults, either, not flaws that are really “excesses of virtue” (Booth 246) to make them even more loveable: pride, vanity, prejudice, naïveté... true flaws that cripple their endeavours and interfere in their paths to happiness. The third-person narrator is an objective voice that distances itself from the character, thus making the reader perceive their bias and their errors in judgement, which was not difficult with characters like these. The real difficulty was to make the heroines be loved *despite* their flaws. With such a flawed heroine narrating in first person, “[t]hough we might easily be led to laugh at her, we

could never be made to laugh sympathetically. While the final unmasking of her faults and her humiliation would make artistic sense to an unsympathetic reader, her marriage [...] would become irrelevant if not meaningless” (Booth 246). If Austen did not manage to make the reader love her heroines and cheer for their happiness, the romantic endings would not – could not – make sense. The narrated monologue is how she accomplishes it, because “the sustained inside view leads the reader to hope for good fortune for the character with whom he travels, quite independently of the qualities revealed” (246). Not only does the internal point of view favour this empathy, it also allows to illustrate the character’s “redeeming qualities that do not appear on the surface” (Booth 245) without needing to do so through the author’s words; it is rather more powerful to show evidence of these good qualities through the character’s own thoughts and emotions than to simply have to take the narrator’s word for it.

However, if executed incorrectly, the narrated monologue may have an undesired effect: “In reducing the emotional distance, the natural tendency is to reduce [...] moral and intellectual distance as well” (Booth 249). In other words, as we start to empathise with the heroine, we might “not only forgive” her faults, “but overlook them” (250) and start ignoring them entirely. This danger is most apparent with Elizabeth Bennet, who is one of Jane Austen’s best liked heroines in spite of her glaring faults: “The trouble with *Pride and Prejudice* is that many readers do not perceive just how critical the author is of Elizabeth’s way of thinking. The meaning is obscure partly because Elizabeth’s thoughts are insufficiently characterized, and partly because no character in the novel effectively criticizes her” (Butler 216).

Even though Darcy is indeed critical of Elizabeth, and justly so, “the reader [...] tends to reject” his evidence, “since he too is prejudiced” (216). What Butler argues is

basically that, in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's effective use of the narrated monologue worked out in an opposite way to what she (may have) intended: "The reader cannot help admiring Elizabeth's wit and sharing her lively and satirical vision. He enjoys *Pride and Prejudice* largely for its caustic portraits [...]" (216), and therefore her faults become invisible. Sometimes, it might even seem as if her "very errors were attractive" (217) – for instance, she is often almost rude to Darcy, but the reader finds her witty and charming instead. This is clearly counter-productive to the moral effect Austen likely wanted by presenting a flawed heroine in her path to redemption; as quoted earlier, Butler argues that her attempt failed precisely because she did not make as much use of Elizabeth's consciousness as she ought to have, since "with Emma there is no danger, as there is with Elizabeth, that the reader will fail to see the heroine's mistakes for what they are. Emma's train of thought is given in full; it is the medium of the narrative, as Elizabeth's is not; and the whole essence of the presentation is that it is unreliable" (250). This directly contradicts Booth's suggestion that it is greater closeness to the character's voice what results in greater empathy.

However, Butler's assumption is probably incorrect: the flaw may have been in Austen's technique, but not in the sense she suggests. In combining Elizabeth's sharp perspective with equally caustic commentary from the third-person narrator, in placing her among a cast of characters of which the majority are too plain, too annoying, or straight up unlikeable, she made Elizabeth appear as the most attractive individual. Her likeability tremendously increases because her qualities are contrasted with everyone else's much clearer and more criticised faults. Though Austen did not repeat this when she introduced Emma, perhaps it is harsh to deem Elizabeth's likeability a "mistake" as Butler does (218) – perhaps it was no mistake at all. After all, it is precisely this

likeability what makes us instantly side with Elizabeth instead of Darcy, firmly believing her quick-witted, observant mind to be in the right, and so it is precisely what makes us as surprised and overwhelmed as she is to discover she was wrong all along. That she is so likeable is precisely what makes her seem infallible; and we as readers are shocked when we discover that not only did her judgement err terribly, but that we made exactly the same mistakes as she did, our perspective skewed by Elizabeth's own.

In conclusion, Austen manages to create loveable characters we can easily empathise with through a writing technique that was extremely innovative and advanced at the time; as Pinion puts it, she “had the art and genius to *communicate* deep feeling, the heart-ache and the joy” (141), which is likely to be why her writing has prevailed so well with the reading public. The clear localisation of her work in a particular time and society does not make her character's experiences any less universal, nor their feelings any less relatable. Human emotion, after all, does not have an expiration date.

2.2 THE ISSUE OF GENRE: JANE AUSTEN AS A ROMANCE WRITER

The definition of “romance” has acquired many meanings through literary history, so that we must distinguish between romance in the eighteenth-century sense and romance as we understand it nowadays. In general, romance used to be defined as “non-realistic” (Schulz 77) and composed of “supernatural” elements, “extravagant notions of honour and love, exalted rhetoric, etc.” (78). However, the eighteenth-century “romanticized novel or novella” (78) distinguished itself from seventeenth century romances, which took their “plots from mythology, history, legend, or previous literature” (Watt 14) and focused on a romantic relationship between two prototypical protagonists, as well as on the obstacles (usually dramatically exaggerated) which they had to overcome in order to

finally be together. The eighteenth-century romance novel was slightly more complex: it avoided the “extravagancies” typical of earlier romance (Schulz 90), but it retained exaggeration, “sensationalism and erotic sensualism” (90). The attempts at realism that this type of novel made were jeopardized by the inclusion of “outrageous instances of adultery, poisoning, and murder” (90), and so they were most commonly criticized for being so far away from everyday reality and for their scandalous depictions of immorality and vice. From this genre developed the Gothic novel of the later eighteenth century, which shared many of the aforementioned characteristics with the addition of physically removed settings, mostly in central Europe where there were places commonly associated with strange, supernatural, or macabre occurrences.

Jane Austen herself thought very little of these genres, as is made obvious through the parody she makes in *Northanger Abbey*; her own novels could not be any more opposite to them, so there can hardly be any doubt as to the inadequacy of classifying her within this tradition. However, the twentieth and twenty-first centuries radically changed the definition of romance to mean something entirely different, which probably accounts for how usual it is to see Austen’s work classified as classic romance among bookshops and book reviews, rather than any literary criticism. Of course, critics do not ignore the romantic element to her novels, but they do appear to regard realism as the proper current in which Austen belongs. This begs the question, with which this section is concerned, of whether it is appropriate to classify Austen as a romantic writer in the twentieth-century sense of the word.

Firstly, it is important to notice the difference between a romance novel and a novel with a love story: “In a romance the central (and occasionally the only) focus of the plot is on the love relationship and courtship process of the two main characters”

(Ramsdell 4), whereas “the primary plotline of a non-romance, even though it may contain a well-defined love story, revolves around something else entirely. [...] Although the love relationship is important and certainly adds to the story, the main emphasis is on the successful solution” of a plot that has nothing to do with the love story itself (5). Therefore, the gist of romance is that “the resolution of the romantic entanglements” (5) is what interests the reader and keeps them reading on. However, and according to Ramsdell, this is not everything that distinguishes romance: “a book cannot simply describe a love relationship; it must allow the reader to participate in it. As Janice Radway states in her reader’s survey, ‘To qualify as a romance, the story must chronicle not merely the events of a courtship but *what it feels like* to the *object* of one’” (5). This is important because much of the genre’s appeal comes from the fact that it allows the reader to vicariously experience the love relationship, so if the book fails “to connect with the reader’s romantic emotions”, it will likely “not be perceived as a romance; it will simply be a novel about love” (Ramsdell 5). More significantly, however, all romances appear to share a single important quality, which Ramsdell calls “the *satisfactory ending*” (5). This will usually be “the traditional happy one, with the protagonists overcoming whatever obstacles stand in their way and forming some kind of committed relationship” (5), although it does not necessarily have to coincide with it. A lot more variation in this aspect can be found in modern romances, as what constitutes a “satisfactory” ending does not have to imply a happily-ever-after situation.

This is thus a very different genre from what the word “romance” implied in the eighteenth century, though it has doubtlessly inherited some of its prerogatives, and – much like its predecessor – it has been mocked and dismissed as a depthless genre without any literary value, despite (or precisely due to) its constant and ever-growing

popularity. Now, this begs the question of whether Jane Austen's novels really can be called "romantic". The short answer is: it is complicated. Even leaving aside the fact that the aforementioned definition is rather broad and subject to change in a genre whose boundaries are already blurry, there is the problem of applying twenty-first century labels to an eighteenth-century author who wrote so strictly within and for her own time. Initially, though, the answer would be yes – she would, albeit not strictly, be a romance writer in today's terms. Firstly, because it is undeniable that she is the predecessor and inspiration for the modern subgenre of traditional Regency romance, which is "essentially a novel of manners and social custom that focuses on the characters and their relationship to each other and to the strictly structured, upper-class Society" (Ramsdell 277). Secondly, as Ramsdell argues, because Jane Austen would have been a contemporary romance writer in her own period: contemporary romances "were actually written as contemporary love stories and had as their purpose the telling of modern-day love relationships, relevant to the then-current times" (48), which is of course what Austen was doing. The fact remains, though, that there are quite a few things that separate her novels from what Ramsdell defines as romances.

Modern romances are still characterised by what we could call an "excess of perfection". The characters we are supposed to like, particularly the protagonists, are idealised so that they have no flaws – or, if they have any, they are harmless and do not represent obstacles for the character or impede their likeability in any way. This idealisation interferes with the realistic depiction of relationships, since characters are so perfect that they will be able to overcome any obstacle. Whatever dislike they may feel towards each other is annulled by their own perfection, as the reader already knows who they will inevitably fall in love with – the heroine could not possibly choose anyone less

perfect than the hero. Idealisation has also contributed to the establishment of character archetypes, causing any character who shares any archetypal traits to feel overused and clichéd. This is obviously a problem that Austen did not have: she *wanted* to present flawed characters, to highlight their faults and show how they eventually overcame them and learned to become better people. Some would argue that this is not true for characters like Elinor or Fanny, who theoretically represent the ideal female qualities, but even these morally righteous heroines have faults; for instance, “Fanny’s lack of self-assertion constitutes a serious deficiency because it ensures that she is unable to exercise any influence and hence to do anything to halt the gradual corruption of the Bertram family” (Monahan 109). Her meekness, which was generally considered the highest feminine virtue in this age, is exactly why she cannot stop things that could have been prevented – such as Julia’s heartbreak and Maria’s elopement.

Jane Austen also offers a deeper insight into the character’s psychology than a modern romance would, by which I mean she gives a fuller, more complete picture of their psyche than romances usually bother to do. Romance heroines are usually quite flat characters – they rarely ever need to change, since they are already perfect – and so the depiction of their thoughts is usually very limited, as their feelings are only roused by the hero himself. Austen’s psychological insight, on the other hand, does not limit itself to the heroine’s feelings regarding the hero: although it does depict those in detail, it includes many other aspects and is tackled from a self-examining position, by which the heroine reflects upon her actions and morals. In giving a complete picture of her thought process, Austen makes the reader understand why and how the heroine changes throughout the story (or, if she does not, why she did not need to change); this is part of

the psychological realism described earlier, and it is exactly what makes her characters appear as complete human beings.

There is still more that separates Austen from romance, however. The genre has progressively grown “sexier, steamier”, and “the lines between erotica and super sexy romances edged closer” (Ramsdell 16), so much so that it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference. This more or less explicit treatment of sexuality would of course have been unthinkable in Jane Austen’s time, but that she does not treat it explicitly does not mean she overlooks it. In fact, her work is considerably sexually charged, only the forms of sexuality she shows may not be recognisable for modern readers. Though her approach is indeed very different, the sexual charge of the interactions between her main characters cannot be denied; however, it *is* often overlooked and probably not enough to satisfy the modern reader’s ever-present hunger for saucy content. The appeal of the forbidden, which romance exploits through forbidden passions between different characters and the description of their scandalous erotic encounters, is completely absent in Austen. Her time and situation did not allow for more, and I honestly doubt her taste would have allowed her to use the erotic component even if she could; her sexuality is subtle by design, and this subtlety sets her apart from the romance genre.

As a last difference, it could be argued that Austen’s focus is not actually on love. This would mean that her novels are not romances, after all, since – as mentioned before – romance is characterised by its focus on the development of a love relationship between two characters and the obstacles to be overcome for it to reach a satisfying conclusion. Indeed, love relationships are important in Austen’s novels, very much so; readers have read and continue reading her novels as love stories, even though they may come across as unsatisfying because their depiction of love is so different from what

modern readers are used to seeing. It is precisely the reader's view what leaves room for argument: regardless of what keeps them going, is love really the focus of Austen's novels? Is it truly the driving force of the plot, what makes the story in full? I believe the answer to that would have to be no. Love may be important for the novels, but the true focus of their stories lies on the heroine herself: her feelings, her psychology, and above all her moral journey. Austen's heroines are either morally imperfect and thus in need of improvement through a process of learning (as, for instance, Elizabeth and Emma are), or already perfect and thus their morals have to be put to the test (as Anne and Fanny are). This is what drives the plot, and their finding love in a man who is their mental and moral match is their *reward*. The heroine's quest does not have to do with love; they never do actively look for a husband or pursue romance as their only goal, they simply happen to find it. If there is a quest in Jane Austen's novels, it has to do with moral and personal growth. "All the novels are structured to move towards knowledge through testing and misjudgement" (Fergus 74), so that as the novel progresses, the heroine either achieves maturity and moral righteousness, or is reaffirmed into them; it is only after this happens that the love relationship is fulfilled and the heroine thus rewarded.

Still, and despite how effectively she differentiates herself from romance, it is a fact that many of today's romance novels draw inspiration from Austen's characters and plots. This does not mean she had romance in mind when she wrote them; then again, it does not mean she did not, either. This sounds insufferably vague, and it is, but there are no absolutes in literature, and no way to know what the author herself meant to do. I can only speculate to the best of my ability, and as far as my speculation goes, Jane Austen is mostly read as a romance writer "in retrospect"; in other words, because our

conception of romance is only very recent, the way in which we perceive it is entirely new, although the genre is not. And, as we are necessarily reading Jane Austen from our modern standpoint, we find ourselves inclined to reading her as a romance writer. This is the interesting core of the question of genre: regardless of how much I argue for one possibility or the other, in the end the work will be classified according to how it is read. Even so, if it is possible – which it is – to read Austen’s novels as romances despite their distance from the genre, there must be something particular about them that makes such a reading possible (and plausible).

That “something” is exemplified most clearly in one very significant trait that Austen’s novels and the romance genre share: the happy endings. Not only that, but the overall structure of Austen’s plots was also typical of the romantic novels of her era; known as the “courtship-and-marriage” plot, or simply “the courtship plot”, the mode is distinguished by “the depiction of the entrance of a young woman into adult society and her subsequent choice among competing suitors. [...] One of the unstated conventions of the courtship novel is that the lovers must undergo a traumatic experience, a violent shift from innocence to self-knowledge before their union can be consummated” (Hinnant 294). What Austen does is appropriate this model of plot and adapt it to her own ends; although she does not (and perhaps cannot) escape the convention entirely, she does twist and turn the plot in order to subvert the values it stood for, so that her form is “ironic and dialogical rather than sentimental and dogmatic” (296).

She was likely to be among the first, if not the first, to employ this plot ironically; as Hinnant puts it, “if the other patterns she devised have been overlooked, it is because they are seen today as lowbrow, popular, or commercial. In Austen’s time, however, they might very well have been regarded as distinctive [...]” (298). This

accounts for the fact that the overall plot of the prototypical modern romance very obviously follows Austen's own modes:

In a typical plot, the heroine [...] soon encounters – or reencounters [...] the hero (traditionally, but not always, handsome, self-assured – even arrogant – and successful or rich), to whom she takes an instant dislike; however, she is usually “strangely attracted to him” [...]. Through a convenient set of circumstances [...] they are thrown together and eventually fall in love. Inevitably, of course, conflicts arise and the lovers spend a good portion of the book trying to work things out. [...] However, by the end of the story, all differences are resolved, the hero and heroine reconcile, and their happy future is generally assured. (Ramsdell 48)

This is an almost perfect summary of the events in *Pride and Prejudice*, which – rather than implying that the work is somehow unoriginal – speaks volumes of the precedent that Austen was setting for the genre's future. However, what is truly interesting is that no matter how Austen reverses, or changes, or even criticises the courtship-and-marriage plot, one single key element remains the same in all of her novels: the ending. The happily-ever-after is ever-present, a key point of the plot that has commonly been deemed too unrealistic to suit Austen's standard style and as such has often puzzled critics. Since it always involves the satisfactory fulfilment of the love relationships according to the wishes of the heroine, it is central to the romance aspect, and as such I shall try to disclose the reasons behind its mysterious constancy in the next section.

2.3 JANE AUSTEN ON LOVE: HER ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

In the previous sections, it was proven how Austen's thoughts differed from the contemporary mainstream in many significant aspects. It is now time to see whether they also do in the subject of love, which is – as seen before – arguably the pivotal point of all her novels.

In Regency England, love was rarely ever spoken of as a factual possibility. Even though ambitious marriages were frowned upon (“it would be folly to expect [...] that such marriages, however they answer the purpose of interest or ambition, should terminate otherwise than in wretchedness”, *Gisborne* 249), this was still a society where the difficulty to achieve intimacy would make true love scarce. Advisors such as conduct book writers were, of course, well aware of this, and so did not set their hopes very high in this matter and entreated their addressees to do the same. One need only look at Lady Pennington's discouraging statement: “Happy is her lot, who in an husband finds this invaluable friend! Yet so great is the hazard, so disproportioned the chances, that I could almost wish the dangerous die was never to be thrown for any of you!” (137). Dr Gregory further confirms this view: “Indeed, without an unusual share of natural sensibility, and very peculiar good fortune, a woman in this country has very little probability of marrying for love” (28). These statements can probably be accounted for by how, in the process of looking for a spouse, men were the ones with the power to choose who they wished to pay courtship to, while women remained quite an inactive part of the process. They could, however, refuse the man if they so pleased. Dr Gregory calls this “the undoubted [...] privilege of refusing” (33), but Henry Tilney phrases it much more accurately: “Man has the advantage of choice, woman only the

power of refusal” (Austen 950); refusal was indeed a privilege, but not in the sense that Gregory implied, since it was only accessible to those women whose socioeconomic situation allowed it. This is seen, for instance, in Charlotte’s acceptance of Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice*: Elizabeth’s economic situation, though not buoyant, still allows her to refuse a proposal that Charlotte Lucas cannot possibly afford to.

Thus, while women could encourage a proposal by all means possible, in the end they could only take what was offered to them, which explains why young ladies were constantly advised to lower their expectations if they wanted their chances of future happiness to increase. The recommendation was to look for a man of “good sense and good nature” (Pennington 139), which nowadays seems like the bare minimum one might hope to find in a person; but for Regency ladies this was as much as they could ask for, and every other aspect of compatibility between two people was unimportant in comparison. In fact, they were basically told *not* to expect to love their husbands, or at least not from the beginning. Dr Gregory, for instance, writes that “a man of taste and delicacy marries a woman, because he loves her more than any other. A woman of equal taste and delicacy marries him, because she esteems him, and because he gives her that preference” (29-30). Since a woman loves as a consequence of the man’s preference, it follows that she must not love – or show that she does – before he pays his addresses to her: “love is not to begin on your part, but is entirely to be the consequence of our attachment to you” (Dr Gregory 29).

The idea that love must begin because a man feels it is not only deeply patronising, but also an invalidation of female feelings, which Dr Gregory takes even further by suggesting women often confuse attraction for a feeling of gratitude: “What

is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude, a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex; and such a man you often marry, with little of either personal esteem or affection” (28). This is not simply untrue, but also deceived women into thinking that a lack of feelings of love before an engagement was natural. Dr Gregory explains the process as follows:

Some agreeable qualities recommend a gentleman to your common good liking and friendship. In the course of his acquaintance he contracts an attachment to you. When you perceive it, it excites your gratitude; this gratitude rises into a preference; and this preference, perhaps, at last advances to some degree of attachment, especially if it meets with crosses and difficulties; for these [...] are the food of love in both sexes. If attachment was not excited in your sex in this manner, there is not one of a million of you that could ever marry with any degree of love. (29)

Thus, a woman must simply marry a man because he is good-natured and suited to her station, and consider herself lucky to even achieve that; if a mutual affection grows, she will be among the luckiest few, and even then it will merely deserve the name of “affection”, not love. Not very optimistic prospects, indeed.

And what did Jane Austen think? Although we know she, as the implied author, included many of her own thoughts in her novels through the third person narrator, we have no reliable way to know how much of it she really thought and how much she was saying ironically. Her letters are probably more reliable sources, since in writing to close friends and family she would there express her thoughts with more honesty, without hiding behind an authorial façade. Contrary to what her novels may lead to

suppose, Austen had rather practical views on love and marriage. She considers, for instance, the unlikelihood of finding a man who is one's perfect match:

There *are* such beings in the world perhaps, one in a thousand, as the creature you and I should think perfection, where grace & spirit are united to worth, where the manners are equal to the heart & understanding, but such a person may not come in your way, or if he does, he may not be the eldest son of a man of fortune, the brother of your particular friend, & belonging to your own country. (*Letters* 410)

She also reflects upon the likelihood of a woman needing to marry for economic reasons: "Single women have a dreadful propensity for being poor – which is one very strong argument in favour of matrimony" (*Letters* 483). This statement, while ironic, does not appear to be particularly critical of those women, which strikes as odd when one recalls her scathing criticism of ambitious women like Isabella Thorpe or Lucy Steele. However, one must also consider the character of Charlotte Lucas, who is certainly treated differently than the aforementioned two women. Even though Elizabeth disapproves of her friend's decision, the narrator presents it in an understanding light that makes the reader, if not agree, at least empathise with Charlotte: "Without thinking highly of either men or matrimony, marriage had always been her object; it was the only honourable provision for well-educated young women of small fortune, and however uncertain of giving happiness, must be their pleasantest preservative from want" (Austen 266). Her reasons to marry may be regarded as selfish, as the narrator sarcastically remarks: "Miss Lucas, who accepted him solely from the pure and disinterested desire of an establishment" (265); but they are certainly not ambitious, as she "ask[s] only a comfortable home" (267) and simply uses marriage to

procure herself economic stability and save herself and her family from the social scorn that followed a spinster. Aside from that, Charlotte is a positive character, someone who Elizabeth loves and respects and who counterpoints her biased opinions; she is sensible and kind-hearted, qualities which Austen does not associate to her ambitious characters, and is thus different from them in that respect. Charlotte, unlike Lucy Steele or Caroline Bingley, has a personality that makes her deserving of matrimonial felicity; she simply does not have the means to attain it, and as such her marrying for economic reasons comes across as forgivable and even acceptable. Her saying “I am not romantic you know. I never was” (Austen 267) seems to confirm Jane Austen’s view that marriage was often more of a practical transaction than anything else.

Yet that is not all there is to the matter, as Austen explains to her niece Fanny in one of her letters:

His situation in life, family, friends, & above all his character – his uncommonly amiable mind, strict principles, just notions, good habits – *all* that you know so well how to value, *All* that is really of the first importance – everything of this nature pleads his cause most strongly. [...] Oh! My dear Fanny, the more I write about him, the warmer my feelings become, the more strongly I feel the sterling worth of such a young man & the desirableness of your growing in love with him again. (*Letters* 409)

In every practical aspect, this gentleman appears a perfectly good match for Fanny, which makes Austen’s encouragement of the union consistent with her practicality. However, notice how rather than wishing Fanny would accept him, Austen wishes for her to be able to fall in love with him; she shifts the focus from the desirableness of the match to the desirableness of Fanny falling in love in order for the

match to happen. One can infer from this that Austen must place rather more value on love than it would initially seem, a suspicion confirmed when she does not hesitate to tell her niece that “anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection; and if his deficiencies of manner &c &c strike you more than all his good qualities [...] give him up at once” (*Letters* 410). This would not have been exactly uncommon in her time: while the belief that women should marry the most suitable match regardless of affection was still rather rigid, their right to refuse a man they could not love was becoming more accepted, as shown by the fact that even some conduct book writers endorsed it (for instance, “[...] a child is very justifiable in the refusal of her hand, even to the absolute command of a father, where her heart cannot go with it” *Lady Pennington*, 137; or “you would be equally unjust to yourself and your lover, if you gave him your hand when your heart revolted against him”, *Dr Gregory* 36).

Thus, while Austen may accept practical marriages like Charlotte’s, it is clear that she far prefers a relationship where the lovers share a mutual liking and respect, where love can (and will) blossom, and this is what she depicts in her novels. The relationships between her heroes and heroines present love as a gradual feeling (so gradual that it may sometimes not even be noticeable, as it happens with Elizabeth and Emma), born from a high regard for the beloved’s good qualities, which always go beyond external assets like physical appearance or social status. Though such things may be given importance where it is due, Austen’s romantic relationships are never founded upon them, but rather on a meeting of minds from which both parties can learn. This is what has been called Austen’s “didactic” or “pedagogic” love: “More recently, Lionel Trilling has argued that our author ‘was committed to the ideal of “intelligent

love”, according to which the deepest and truest relationship that can exist between humans is pedagogic” (Hardy 10).

Most critics seem to agree that the relationship established between Austen’s heroes and heroines is that of mentorship, so that through “the sexuality inherent in the student-teacher relation, Austen gives the clearest expression to her conviction that knowledge and intimacy are forms of sexuality” (Fergus 75). Usually one of the parties is the teacher or mentor, who helps the other, more flawed party achieve the knowledge needed in order for them to become not only a better, mature person, but also a suitable match for the teacher themselves. It is through this learning process that they achieve an equal standing ground that validates their relationship, since, as was mentioned earlier, only after both parties achieve true knowledge can the relationship blossom. This makes it so that in Austen’s novels “love and knowledge reinforce one another” (Fergus 74), which directly contradicts Dr Gregory’s idea that “satiety and disgust” would be “the certain consequence” of confessing “the full extent of your love” (31).

Personally, however, I find that the terms “pedagogic” or “didactic” present patronising implications that could be easily misinterpreted. The role of mentor is by no means restricted to the hero or heroine in Austen: either of the parties can learn from the other, or both can learn from each other. Therefore, I believe this relationship might be better described as one of intellectual and moral equality. Elizabeth’s mind, Emma’s mind, Anne’s mind, clever and sharp and reflective, could never be satisfied with the intellectual blandness of a Mr. Collins, a Mr. Elton or a Mr. Elliot; neither could a Mr. Darcy be happy with a Caroline Bingley or a Mr. Knightley with a Harriet Smith. The heroes and heroines meet their match in each other, so that their marriage becomes the

natural consequence of the equal grounds on which they stand despite the inequalities that might exist for them in other matters. This is the marriage that Mr. Bennet wished for Elizabeth, and which Austen clearly endorses: “I know that you could be neither happy nor respectable, unless you truly esteemed your husband; unless you looked up to him as a superior. [...] You could scarcely escape discredit and misery. My child, let me not have the grief of seeing *you* unable to respect your partner in life” (Austen 399).

Austen’s point of view thus stands in clear disagreement to that of her contemporaries. If knowledge is vital to the formation of love, then simple gratitude cannot be its foundation as Dr Gregory had suggested, a fallacy that Austen does not hesitate to parody in *Northanger Abbey*:

I must confess that his affection [Henry’s] originated in nothing better than gratitude, or, in other words, that a persuasion of her partiality for him had been the only cause of giving her a serious thought. It is a new circumstance in romance, I acknowledge, and dreadfully derogatory of an heroine’s dignity; but if it be as new in common life, the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own. (Austen 1036)

Here it is Henry who feels grateful to Catherine instead of the other way around, despite the fact that he is shown to be her superior in experience, social consciousness, and perhaps even intellect. In spite of this, though, Austen *did* believe in the notion that gratitude could excite something that may seem akin to love: “Oh! Dear Fanny, your mistake has been one that thousands of women fall into. He was the *first* young man who attached himself to you. That was the charm, & most powerful indeed” (*Letters* 409). She clearly recognises it as a “mistake”, though, and strictly separates this feeling

from real love. Infatuation in Austen “often involves attraction to a consciously predetermined ideal” (Fergus 72): it is based upon circumstances that are too flimsy to create love, but solid enough to ensure a powerful attraction which in turn provokes the idealisation of the object. Such idealisation is not based upon any real evidence, so that “better knowledge” of “the object of one’s feelings” is bound to prove it “unworthy or unreal – a creature of one’s own imagination” (Fergus 73). A very prominent example is Marianne’s infatuation with Willoughby, whom she has just met and yet is certain that she loves: “You are mistaken, Elinor [...] in supposing I know very little of Willoughby. I have not known him long indeed, but I am much better acquainted with him, than I am with any other creature in the world [...]. It is not time or opportunity that is to determine intimacy; – it is disposition alone” (Austen 31-32). That this cannot be true love is confirmed when Willoughby engages himself to another woman, proving that Marianne’s knowledge of him was flawed and her feelings mere infatuation.

Since love is so substantial in Austen’s novels and its representation so nuanced, one might wonder whether she introduces the subject of sexuality at all, as it does not cease to be closely connected to love. Most people who have read her will say she does not, seeing how – as mentioned earlier – modern readers are accustomed to seeing explicit instances of sexuality in modern romances, and Austen appears tame or even prudish by comparison. However, and as stated before, she does represent a different kind of sexuality that is difficult for modern readers to grasp: “Austen’s rendering of everyday sexuality takes for granted in ways unthinkable to her contemporaries and often ignored by moderns that every relationship can carry a sexual charge” (Fergus 83). In Austen’s novels, “sexual response and excitement are [...] so much a part of ordinary social life that in significant ways social intercourse is sexual intercourse” (83-84), and

so she depicts sexuality and sexual response “within everyday social life” (71). This was surprisingly easy despite the constraints of etiquette, given that the acts conveying sexuality appear perfectly harmless and may not be perceived as sexually charged – as they certainly are not nowadays.

Fergus notices, for example, the effect of good looks on Jane Austen’s characters: “Good looks and charm inevitably create favourable responses and biased judgement. [...] This simplest and most instinctive sexual response is always taken for granted in Austen’s novels, not criticised or investigated” (71). Conduct books often warned women against their own vanity, considered their “weakest, most vulnerable point” (Fergus 69) because it made them “particularly susceptible to the elaborate compliments of flirtation, known also as gallantry, coquetry and polite raillery”, but they did only rarely consider “the seducing effects of good looks in men” (69), which Austen is shown to be very well aware of. One need only look at how Wickham’s “countenance, voice, and manner had established him at once in the possession of every virtue” (Austen 308), and how Henry Crawford is recommended to everybody only by his “more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to everybody” (572). And yet Austen does not stop at this rather basic form of sexuality; she goes further to represent “more complicated forms [...] – flirtation, infatuation and the mentor relation, all of which may precede but need not necessarily lead to courtship” (Fergus 72); these will be further discussed in the next section.

I have clarified how Austen understands and represents love, and discussed her subtle representation of sexuality; the last point must be to explain why I speak of romantic imagination in this section’s title. With this phrasing, I do not mean to imply

that she had a penchant for the romantic, which – despite the romance we find in her novels – she was much too practical to have; rather, I mean that the way in which she understood and imagined romance was new and unique, particularly considering her day and circumstances. Her romance might be imaginative, in a way: the hero's appearance is too coincidental, the chain of events that leads to the heroine's happy marriage simply too convenient, the ending too perfect for any of it to be common occurrence in reality. That the culmination of her relationships is so ideal and favourable in every respect might be unrealistic, but the way in which Austen conveys the process of love makes it feel not only satisfactory, but plausible. This is why I call it romantic imagination: despite her realistic and practical inclination, she still had enough of a romantic streak in her to imagine love relationships that would resonate with readers of all ages.

Because if there is one thing about Austen's work that transcends the specificity of its context, it must be love. Love, and all the emotions associated with it – jealousy, anxiety, heartbreak... – are the truly timeless elements in her novels. This compellingly realistic representation of feeling culminates in the happy ending; considering this, such endings must be so much more than simple wish-fulfilment or conformity to an outdated convention, because they give closure to those feelings. Not only that, they “satisfy the conditions for narrative closure by harmonising otherwise contradictory demands” (Tauchert 79), such as:

[...] The heroine's need for rational autonomy, self-regulation, and freedom from undue restraint (which demands at some level a satisfactory exit from the realm of the family); the male partner's need for (re)connection to the affective domain signalled by the ethics of love (mutuality, moderation of desire, and open communication of feeling); [...] as well as the formal literary determinants

of the romance paradigm. Each parallel series must find its proper completion before conditions make the happy ending necessary, sufficient, and hence inevitable. (79)

Therefore, her happy endings cannot merely be a romantic convention: they fulfil the synthesis of realism and romance that Austen carries out through her work by presenting a romantic convention as a possible, plausible outcome. Tauchert declares that “her insistence on representing this final vision of romance, and its feminisation, in spite of the apparent resistance of the ‘raw materials’ available to empirical realism” was perhaps “Austen’s most politically charged move” (32). As she explains, “the romance, as the core narrative form for feminine wish-fulfilment, corresponds to a muted and displaced epistemology, *no longer – if ever – aligned with the credible*” (25, emphasis in the original); lack of realism and excess of imagination were, as mentioned earlier, among of the strongest arguments against romances and novels in general, not only because realism was favoured, but because romances were made that way in order to please their readers. As such, by making her novels as realistic and believable as possible, but ending them in the happiest, most satisfying way, Austen effectively defies the idea that romances can only be unrealistic wish-fulfilment narratives.

Aside from that, the happy endings are also necessary because they represent the heroine’s reward for following her own sense of righteousness. A lot of criticism that Austen’s happy endings receive “seems founded in a belief that the heroine can only be a heroine in isolation, or at best in female community” (Tauchert 78), because if they marry they are somehow complying with societal pressure and expectations. But, though some critics would argue otherwise, Austen’s heroines never lose their agency

as individuals: they make their own choices, regardless of social pressure or of the influences of those around them. In fact, when they do make choices in conformity to other's wishes, they are made to see the wrongness of it (most particularly in *Persuasion*, where Anne's obeying her family and not marrying Wentworth is the root cause of her unhappiness), whereas choices made in accordance to the heroine's own mind and heart are positively represented and yield outcomes that reaffirm their rightness (for example, Fanny's determination not to marry Henry Crawford because she cannot love him, or Elizabeth's refusal to Darcy's first proposal). The marriages they enter in the end are always the result of their own choice and force of will; Elizabeth could have refused Darcy's second proposal, she simply did not want to, and acted just as she proclaimed to Lady Catherine de Bourgh that she would: "in that manner, which will, in my own opinion, constitute my happiness" (Austen 389). Thus, the heroines achieve their personal goals and maturity while also being rewarded with personal happiness in the form of a loving, respectful, and healthy relationship, which they enter out of their own will and wishes. "The happy ending, after all, is only satisfactory if it offers the heroine rational autonomy as well as domestic bliss" (Tauchert 78); if this were not so, it would not be a happy ending at all.

In short, Austen's romantic imagination plays out in the synthesis of these two apparently opposite genres that, together, create a unique representation of love and relationships that has never quite managed to be reproduced. If her imagining of love is still unique today, perhaps it is why she remains strong among readers' favourite novelists.

3 THE PROCESS OF COURTSHIP

The OED defines courtship as “the action or process of paying court to a woman with a view to marriage” (“courtship, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, March 2017. Web. 27 May 2017). Given this definition, it seems absurdly simplistic to refer to Austen’s novels as courtship narratives since “for Austen, the plots involve finding the best possible mate for the best possible life, and that end involves much more than just making a match. To call Austen’s novels courtship novels seems to me unbearably reductive” (Dooley). Still, and though Jane Austen’s novels concern themselves with much more than simply following the heroine’s courtship, that does not negate the importance of this process. It remains a significant social ritual, a part of the formation of romantic relationships, and a convention that Austen exploited in her work, and as such it warrants some closer examination.

Courtship, as Fergus explains, “is the one publicly approved form of sexuality”, so that its “publicity is not merely sanctioned [...] but required” (67). As such, its several stages were to be developed “in full view of the public eye” and “subject to intense social scrutiny” (Fergus 68), and must therefore always happen in social contexts, which demonstrates how socially ingrained courtship and sexuality were. Due to this, certain “courtship conventions” (68) must be followed by the parties involved, which mostly had to do with certain behaviours and social rituals that were traditionally considered to convey a preference and thus the initiation of a courtship. These indications were indeed rather harmless for the most part, not at all dissimilar to simple kindness or courtesy, which made it easy to see a romantic preference where there was none. This subtlety could not be avoided, however, as it was enforced both by the

conventional etiquette of the period (as described earlier) and by the obligatory publicity of the affair, which of course contributed to misunderstandings and to the difficulty of forming intimate connections.

Before courtship begins, the notion of eligibility comes into play, since upon it depended whether society sanctioned or disapproved of the courtship. Whether a subject was eligible was determined by several factors, among which class, fortune, lineage, and respectability were the most pressing ones, with the power to make or break a match; beauty and age were often counted in as well, though the latter was not very restrictive and it was not uncommon to find matches with a wide age gap (as an example Austen has Marianne, who is sixteen when the novel begins, and Colonel Brandon who is almost in his forties). An eligible subject would be one that shared much the same social position and class, if not better, and one who had the fortune and respectability to ensure a comfortable and secure married life; Elizabeth was not an eligible match for Darcy because his fortune, social status, and connections were way beyond the scope of hers. The notion of eligibility, in short, existed to help ensure that both social climbing and imprudent marriages were kept to a minimum by keeping socially acceptable choices under careful restraint. It is another of the reasons why Austen's marriages have been deemed unrealistic: their inequality in terms of social status, wealth, and other such practical aspects made the heroine not at all eligible for the hero, which would have provoked much more serious opposition and comment than they are met with in the novels.

Officially, courtship was considered to begin *after* the engagement was arranged, and to end when the marriage took place. It was customary for the couple to

have a few months of courtship before the union because an established engagement allowed them the freedom to be together more often, with less restrictions and with society's indulgence; this was the moment when they were supposed to get to know each other in better depth. Despite being considered the start of courtship, though, the engagement was also its culmination, since the actual process began well before it was made official. Fergus considers the process starts from the moment where an "initial attraction" (68) is felt, and consequent flirting ensues; it thus encompasses any sort of behaviour or interaction carried out in order to create an intimacy that is supposed to lead to a more serious attachment and, finally, culminate in an engagement. As Austen demonstrates, though, courtship does not always end this way.

Much of the problematic lies within the flirting stage, which makes frequent appearances through Austen's novels. Non-verbal cues, such as looks and smiles, were used and still are nowadays to convey an interest; however, eighteenth-century ladies and gentlemen relied on them much more heavily, which is likely part of the reason why ladies were taught to be so restrained in demeanour – a careless smile, or too warm a reception, could easily give the wrong idea about where a lady stood with a gentleman. Other non-verbal hints included the payment of special attention to the intended in question, such as fretting over their comfort, offering the best seats to them, being particularly engaged with their conversation... Essentially, simply being *particularly* civil, which may indeed give some indication, but does not make for a very good assurance of one's affection. There was very little to be done, except to hope, because there was no security to be had; the modesty so thoroughly enforced in ladies prevented them from giving any clearer indications, since "a lady who displays a liking which is not followed by a proposal from the man so favoured should receive from the

world, not its compassion [...], but [...] its ‘derision for disappointed hopes’” (Morris 92). However, modesty might also cause a lady to inadvertently drive the gentleman away, which happens to Jane Bennet as Charlotte had warned: “In nine cases out of ten, a woman had better show *more* affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on” (Austen 211).

Verbal cues, on the other hand, mostly involved “admiration” and “flattery”, which ladies were repeatedly warned against, for they encouraged vanity, and “teasing” (Fergus 72), which is perhaps the most prevalent form of flirting to be found in Austen. Teasing is peculiarly important as a way to build up intimacy and bring people closer together, even nowadays; it is a stimulating form of word-play that piques the other’s interest and builds a sort of privacy which encourages further sharing and creates private elements within conversation, such as inside jokes. By using these sorts of playful dialogues, Austen effectively shows “the implicit connection between intimacy and teasing” (Hardy 41), and thus contributes to the believability of the intimate connections she tries to display. The fact remains, though, that all these instances of flirting were not as explicit as they could – or perhaps ought – to be, which is when misunderstandings come in.

Though “as Austen treats it, flirtation is often indistinguishable from courtship” since “in the beginning, the same behaviour [...] may be appropriate to both”, they must not “be confused in the end, for courtship ‘means’ something – marriage – and flirtation nothing” (Fergus 72). Austen’s “flirt” types (Henry Crawford, Willoughby, Wickham, Isabella Thorpe...) are meant to show the dangers of this meaningless flirtation, which

is carried out all the more easily due to the blurred boundary between good manners and courtship: “A man of parts, sentiments, and address, if he lays aside all regard to truth and humanity, may engage the hearts of fifty women at the same time, and may likewise conduct his coquetry with so much art, as to put it out of the power of any of them to specify a single expression that could be said to be directly expressive of love” (Gregory 35). This is how, for instance, Henry Crawford manages to engage both Julia and Maria’s affections while escaping the censure of society, because his attentions appeared as simple courteous manners to everyone uninvolved. Read in this way, Austen’s novels – *Mansfield Park* in particular – seem to be a caution against flirts like these, and a negative depiction of flirtation in general as a deceitful practice which can only lead to the harmful infatuation described in the previous section.

However, Austen does not generally regard flirtation negatively unless one of the parties is being deceived into seeing something that is not there. Such deceitful relationships are not the only ones where she shows flirtation at play: Elizabeth and Darcy are probably the most obvious example of teasing as a form of flirtation (albeit unintentional on Lizzie’s part), and Emma Woodhouse flirts with both Frank Churchill and Mr. Knightley. Characteristically, the flirtation the heroines partake on with the heroes is not based upon flattery or empty compliments; the hero never flatters the heroine’s vanity, he gives praise only where it is due, and she does the same with him (the most prominent example being Mr. Knightley, who recognises Emma’s faults and chastises her for them). The opposition between genuine praise and empty flattery thus mirrors that between true feeling and false infatuation, and so does the opposition between genuine teasing, in order to establish a more intimate relationship (like Henry Tilney’s), versus the mocking sort of teasing that is used to establish one’s own

superiority (like Isabella Thorpe's). As examples of both types of flirtation can be found in Austen's novels, we may conclude that "unlike her contemporaries [...], Austen is capable of a number of attitudes toward flirtation. [...] Flirtation is dangerous [when] one character, who is no fool, is deliberately fooling another. In such cases Austen's moral judgement is adverse; but as a rule she delights in flirtation as a form of sexuality [...]" (Fergus 72).

Other ways to court were included in certain social rituals, which played a great part in courtship given that it was publicly carried out. A particularly strict ritual was that of introductions: a man could not speak to a woman – whether in public or in private – unless they were properly introduced, and becoming "properly introduced" could become quite the quest. For starters, men had to be the ones to perform introductions for the women of their household in order to initiate an acquaintance, which is why Mrs. Bennet is so anxious that her husband go pay his respects to Mr. Bingley when he moves in. Etiquette dictated that it was social inferiors who must be introduced to their superiors; in town, the social inferiors must wait for the superiors to call on them if they will, something that frustrates Mr. Eliot and his daughter in *Persuasion*, but in the country it is acceptable for a social inferior to call on a superior in order to welcome them to the neighbourhood, which is the case for Mr. Bennet. However, even when the man had to initiate the acquaintance, it was protocol in social gatherings and such meetings for men to be introduced to women, rather than the opposite. This meant gentlemen would often seek ways to be introduced to the ladies they fancied, either through personal acquaintances or the masters of ceremonies; to be sought after in this way was an indication of interest and a compliment in its own right.

Once the introductions were done with, social calls could begin. This ritual was perhaps even more complex, but much more revealing. When an acquaintance was formally acknowledged, it was polite to make these social calls, either by making a personal visit (the “call” itself) or by leaving a card. As Byrne explains, “sending compliments was the most basic form of polite notice and would require some acknowledgement in return. Compliments were sent to effect introductions, to enquire after health, to take leave and to decline invitations, to offer congratulation and condolence and to express gratitude for hospitality” (299). In order to call at a lady’s home, a gentleman ought to be invited by the mother or chaperone; he could not call upon a daughter of the house directly, even if she is really the one he wishes to see, unless she were a long-standing friend as is the case with Mr. Knightley and Emma. Ladies, of course, never called on gentlemen alone. Thus, protocol was strict enough to make “the paying of social calls [...] signify much” (Morris 97): Charlotte immediately supposes Darcy “must be in love” with Elizabeth, “or he would never have called on us in this familiar way” (Austen 295), and at the end of the novel, Mr. Bingley’s frequent calls at Longbourn that last for “above an hour” (381) are clearly paving the way for his proposal.

Nevertheless, the social ritual that was most popular among young people and likely most useful in courtship was the dance. Dancing was a very popular pastime at the time and Jane Austen certainly uses it very often; as Sutherland explains, “the dancefloor itself allowed young men and women a certain amount of room to experiment. [...] It was a chance to flirt, it was a chance to be more serious”. There were many types of dances of varying complexity, but country dances were quite favoured because they were simpler and gave “opportunities for conversation as couples

awaited their turn to go down the set” (Gay 340). It is still important to remember, though, that while the dancefloor did give the couples comparative freedom to interact, it was still of a restricted kind: “these are highly stylised dances”, which afforded “very little opportunity for actual bodily contact: holding hands, linking arms as you moved up and down the row of the dance... but there was not any really close physical contact” (Sutherland). And, though the dances themselves were rather relaxed, the etiquette surrounding them was quite strict:

It was not etiquette for unengaged couples to dance more than two consecutive dances; more would provoke comment. Once engaged to a dance, a lady was not free to accept another invitation in the absence of her partner; if she refused an invitation, as Elizabeth Bennet refused Mr. Collins after the interval at Netherfield, it was out of her power to accept another partner during the remainder of the ball. To be chosen for the first two dances was, of course, a special favour. (Pinion 48)

This explains Mrs. Bennet’s excitement when Mr. Bingley dances twice with Jane the night they first meet, and Elizabeth’s dismay at Mr. Collins asking her for the first two dances, a most special attention she did not wish for. “Dancing together was one of the signals you sent, both to your partner and to everyone else, that you were interested” (Sutherland), and as such one of the most unequivocal ways to demonstrate a preference that the rituals of courtship afforded, which accounts for how often Austen uses it. It is indicative of the relative privacy and usefulness of dance that Elizabeth and Darcy share one of their most meaningful conversations while they dance, as do Henry and Catherine.

The clearest conclusion obtained from this examination is that publicity is the greatest hindrance to courtship. Publicity encourages “guardedness [...] in man, as in woman” (Morris 96), because public scrutiny makes it so that “a gentleman’s advances need, and indeed can, only be slight – a fact which may as readily leave a lady uncertain of the meaning of his conduct as cause her entirely to misinterpret it” (99). Not only that, but the public’s perception may be deceived: they might see an understanding where in truth there is none, as happened with Elinor and Colonel Brandon, or Emma and Frank Churchill; and sometimes, where there *is* an understanding, the public might see none, as with Elizabeth and Darcy. This is important because public opinion is held to so much significance that whatever the public generally thinks is immediately assumed to be the truth, and so it contributes to the creation of misunderstandings. On the other hand, such publicity and social conventions constitute a sort of protection. As an example, Fergus takes the theatricals that the young people of Mansfield Park put on: “The flirtations [...] are not ‘unsafe amusements’ like the theatricals, for [...] social conventions operate to discharge some of the sexual tension. By contrast, to act in ‘Lover’s Vows’ is to divorce sexuality from social life, from the protection and restraints that social conventions ordinarily supply” (78). “Convention dictates ‘safe’ responses” to flirtation (78), but these cease to work as they normally do in a context like the theatricals, which is hidden from the public eye and thus where social convention does not operate. Therefore, the publicity which makes “the masking of the feelings [...] requisite” is also what makes this subtlety act “as a shield against casual and undesirable attentions” (Morris 110). Even considering this benefit, however, it is undeniable that under such circumstances it was near impossible for privacy to exist in

matters of the heart, which in turn makes “difficult the establishing of sympathetic understanding” (Morris 91) and of true intimacy.

4 COURTSHIP AND ROMANCE, *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

My choice of *Pride and Prejudice* as my main object of analysis probably does not come as a surprise. It is Jane Austen's most famous and generally best loved work, indeed – but it is also the most unique in a fundamental point: the main love relationship it presents, which is far from prototypical. In fact, it is probably the novel that most noticeably subverts the courtship-and-marriage plot out of all six, mostly because between Elizabeth and Darcy there appears to be no courtship whatsoever. Or, if there is indeed courtship, it is not at all traditional. Their relationship is so atypical that it is worthy of examination in itself, but it will also serve as an excellent example of Austen's deviation from the norm when it comes to represent courtship and romance.

Pride and Prejudice is peculiar among Austen's novels because it introduces a love relationship born from initial antagonism. The antagonism-to-love trope is not new nowadays, but it would have been uncommon – if not entirely new – in Austen's own time; in fact, Fergus argues that “before Austen's novels, the possibility that antagonism can include a form of sexual attraction or grow into love is not recognised” (70). In this novel, the hero's first appearance is marked by the instant dislike (instead of instant attraction, as is usually the case in romance) which he sparks not only in the heroine, but in the community around them as a whole *and* on readers themselves. Usually, Austen's heroes are endowed with attractive qualities: all of them are sensible, well-mannered, kind-hearted, and morally ethical (Edward Ferrars is perhaps an exception, mostly due to his involvement with another woman). Sometimes, they have small flaws that are forgiven and/or corrected by the heroine, but in general they are quite perfect role-models. Darcy, though – Darcy is indeed handsome, and intelligent, and rich, but

both reader and Elizabeth spend the whole first half of the novel hating him because of his pride and awful, arrogant manners. Then again, readers rarely realise how Darcy's actions are always filtered through Elizabeth's own biased perspective, which is intentional and necessary "to bring off the chief dramatic effect of the story: overwhelming surprise at his first proposal" (Babb 114). While her prejudice certainly alters our view of him, it is true that Darcy possesses quite an obvious sense of superiority, which must partially be due to his upbringing as he himself explains:

As a child I was taught what was *right*, but I was not taught to correct my temper. I was given good principles, but left to follow them in pride and conceit. Unfortunately an only son [...], I was spoiled by my parents, who though good themselves [...] allowed, encouraged, almost taught me to be selfish and overbearing, to care for none beyond my own family circle, to think meanly of all the rest of the world, [...] of their sense and worth compared with my own. (Austen 395)

However, the part that his current social circle has played in it should not be overlooked. One can hardly forget how much Miss Bingley flatters him, or how Mr. Bingley himself defers to his better judgement even in matters of the heart; his younger sister, of course, looks up to him and would not dream of challenging him. He has therefore grown to think too highly of himself and too lowly of others, which manifests in his bad manners towards anyone he deems unworthy. Being thus flawed makes him atypical for a romantic hero, and perhaps accounts for him remaining among the best loved among Austen's.

It is worth remembering, though, that while Darcy is the first to behave impolitely, Elizabeth repays him with manners that are as bad as his; we simply never

realise it or even excuse it because, as explained in section 2.1, we read entirely from her perspective. In fact, after Darcy refuses to invite her to dance, she herself recognises her bias: “I could easily forgive *his* pride, if he had not mortified *mine*” (210), though this does nothing to check her quick judgement or alter the reader’s opinion, “because her phrasing sounds witty and open-minded” (Babb 116) and because we feel the offence she received justifies her. From that moment forth, Lizzy is always the one who attempts to antagonise him, doing her best to annoy him at any given chance. A peculiar example is their dance at Netherfield: “[...] she began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances [...]; till suddenly fancying that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance” (Austen 248). In this scene, “she taunts him” out of “the silence that she reads as offensive pride” (Babb 134), but she is only pretending politeness to needle him: “she parodies decorum to make his stubbornness clear” (135). Darcy’s response here is interesting, however, because he – unlike Lizzy – is not performing a part: he actually tries to “be emotionally direct” with her (Babb 135) and make her understand that her image of him may be mistaken, as shows when he says “This is no very striking resemblance of your own character, I am sure [...]. How near it may be to *mine*, I cannot pretend to say.– *You* think it a faithful portrait undoubtedly” (Austen 249). But Lizzy “remains oblivious through the rest of the scene, blithely acting out what she thinks of him while ignoring what he reveals of himself” (Babb 136). This demonstrates how she is not only rude to him, but also shuts down “every advance toward mutual understanding” that he attempts to make (Babb 137), and she is thus just as much to blame as Darcy – if not more – for the antagonism that keeps them apart.

If one leaves aside the bias her likeability provokes and analyses her dialogue and actions more closely, it is easy to see that Elizabeth “frequently misjudges, failing to recognize that her reasoning is biased by feelings” (Babb 120), though she claims to be perfectly rational. Darcy’s letter is the eye-opener both Lizzy and the reader needed in order to re-examine their actions and see the extent of their misjudgement, much like Lizzy’s words of rejection make Darcy re-examine his manners. Hence both characters have flaws and must learn from each other how to fix them, which means their relationship can be qualified as “didactic” and as such fits Austen’s ideal. Since each has a quality that the other lacks, their mutual influence must be fundamentally positive: Elizabeth has the playfulness, the “ease and liveliness” by which “his mind might have been softened, his manners improved”, and Darcy has the “judgment, information, and knowledge of the world” that would have given her “benefit of greater importance” (Austen 363). In learning from the other’s good traits, they both become better versions of themselves and are thus able to achieve a “happy marriage” to “teach the admiring multitude what connubial felicity really was” (363).

However, this understanding might never have been possible without their initial antagonism. Indeed, what they share in the beginning is more complex than mere dislike: “Undercurrents of sexual attraction and challenge accompany the antagonism expressed in the early exchanges between Darcy and Elizabeth, an antagonism based on differences in manner and style” (Fergus 74). It is curious that, despite how much she dislikes Darcy, Elizabeth seems to seek him out rather than avoid him; when they are together, she does not ignore him or shut his conversation down. Instead she actively participates in his conversation, deliberately challenges him, and in doing so she is (perhaps inadvertently) partaking on what Fergus calls “sexual antagonism” (73): “Just

as flirtation tries to make sex a game, antagonism makes it a combat, a contest, a power play” (74). No matter how Lizzy argues her indifference, she still responds to his presence and seems to enjoy pushing his buttons. “It is the liveliness with which she seeks to confirm his dislike” that captivates Darcy (Hardy 37), who is a plain example that rivalry does not preclude sexual and personal attraction: if he “is attracted to Elizabeth” it is precisely because “she is always teasing or challenging him, not flattering him like Miss Bingley” (Fergus 74). Even though her attempts are aimed at annoying and repelling him, they present an attractive alternative to what Darcy usually finds, which piques and holds his interest.

The effect of antagonism is not limited to kindling the attraction between them, however. Since Darcy’s environment has done nothing to check his pride or contradict his prejudice against the lower gentry, Elizabeth is the first to do so. By making his “words and manner the target of her wit, she forces him to modify both his own preconceptions and the air of aloof superiority he has too easily arrogated to himself” (Hardy 38). The words with which she explains her reasons to reject Darcy’s proposal can hardly be any plainer or sharper, a breach of civility that readers feel she is justified in committing and a declaration with which, upon later reflection, Darcy himself agrees. Nearing the end of the novel we realise just how much her words have impacted him and his conception of himself:

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. Your reproof, so well-applied, I shall never forget: ‘had you behaved in a more gentleman-like manner’. Those were your words.

You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me [...].

(Austen 394)

At first, that his manners might be flawed does not even cross his mind; he cannot see the arrogance that coats his words, the insult that Elizabeth receives from his scruples, the offence within his security of being accepted. Her words force him to see himself in a different light, and thus her adamant antagonism is part of the didactic relationship in helping him learn and grow.

The last important consequence of antagonism is that it encourages conversation between them. Any analysis of this novel makes it obvious that dialogue holds great importance here; although it is indeed a very significant aspect of all of Austen's novels (except *Persuasion*, which relies much more heavily on the heroine's consciousness), *Pride and Prejudice* makes the most and most effective use of it, mainly due to the fact that dialogue is practically the only part of the novel not coated with Elizabeth's perspective. As such, it becomes fundamental "as our surest source of truth" (Babb 118) to obtain an unbiased knowledge of the other characters, most especially about Darcy, since it is in dialogue where we can "discover" him to be "three-dimensional" (118) instead of the flat, snobbish, too-good-for-you aristocrat that Lizzy characterises him as. Significantly, it is Lizzy herself who draws his true personality through dialogue, though she may not realise it (as in the dance scene at Netherfield).

An important part of their dialogue is Elizabeth's teasing, her attempt to antagonise him – but also a part of flirting, as described earlier. This is something that Darcy is clearly not used to, but seems to enjoy if his smiles are any indication: "‘And your defect is a propensity to hate everybody.’ ‘And yours,’ he replied with a smile, ‘is

wilfully to misunderstand them” (Austen 230-231). This is not the first smile that Elizabeth coaxes out of him, however unintentionally. In fact, Darcy often seems “stilted, even stiff-necked, until a close encounter with Elizabeth prompts him to take on a certain sparkle” (Hardy 51). When Lizzy is teasing him she inadvertently transforms him: he becomes more pliable, less strict, and in general more likeable, which makes him “feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention” (Austen 231). In their conversations Lizzy defies him, but also attempts to draw him out, to get a reaction out of him; the questions she asks during the dance at Netherfield are prying and even rude, and though she claims they are aimed “to the illustration of *your* character” (Austen 250) they are clearly meant to confirm an image of him that she already has accepted in her mind. The conversation during the dance, described earlier, is a great show of Elizabeth’s prejudice against him. The teasing generalisations she makes are barely subtle (for example, “[...] for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible”, Austen 249), and yet, in spite of the anger this particular conversation sparks on him, in spite of himself even, Darcy *is* drawn out. Her teasing may needle him, it may be improper, but it is daringly provoking and manages to engage him fully. Importantly, Lizzy does not let go of this part of their dialogue once they put their differences past them; it has been argued that Lizzy has to change herself in order to become a suitable partner for Darcy, but she loses none of her vivacity in doing so. One need only look at the “good-humoured teasing” she displays after his second proposal, which – unlike the one she employed in the beginning of their relationship – “is meant to be pleasantly provoking, and to this extent is in fact covertly sexual” (Hardy 54).

That is not all, however. While their dialogue does betray the growing attraction between them, particularly on Darcy's part, it is especially significant because "by giving free rein to her lively intelligence, she [Elizabeth] forces Darcy to converse with her as an equal" (Hardy 37). "Any intimacy they will share can only develop from a situation of equality" (47), and so this intellectual equality is necessary for love to develop at all. This achievement of equal grounds through conversation happens with the hero and heroine of most (if not all) of Austen's novels, but it is of particular significance in *Pride and Prejudice* because Darcy starts out seeing Elizabeth as inferior. He "assumes that anyone with middle-class associations must be unworthy" (Monahan 116), but Lizzy challenges his assumption and proves herself equal to him in what really matters – her mind, her principles, her self. Lizzy proves that she is at his same intellectual level, but this is not exactly what manages to create equality; they are on the same playing field indeed, but they play very differently, and they will not see eye to eye in many respects because their "understanding and temper" contrast so much (Austen 363). Equality exists rather because her wit and openness command Darcy's respect, an essential prerequisite as she "cannot give herself wholly where there is anything less than mutual respect or trust" (Hardy 45). And thus, their conversations – thought-provoking and full of meaning – contrast with those they share with others in such a way that it soon becomes obvious nobody else can be their match: when they speak, they always "come to have the conversation between them. Each closely engages with the other's words despite the polite framework of social converse" (Hardy 39), so much so that it is easy to forget there are others in the room with them. "Their conversations together have what only they can share", a "play of wit and intelligence" that Elizabeth starts and that Darcy "has the discrimination and intelligence to

appreciate and respond to” (Hardy 43), and thanks to which they learn to respect the other as an equal.

Given all of this, one might assume that love arising from antagonism means that there can be no actual courtship between the hero and heroine, and initially it would seem so; after all, why would they court someone they are supposed to hate? Alas, one must not forget that it is Elizabeth who insists on antagonism; she alone declares that she cannot stand Darcy, and assumes that he feels the same way. However, the narrator shows the reader a very different reality from quite early on: soon after the assembly where they first meet, Darcy is said to discover her face “was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes”, and “in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness” (Austen 212). This betrays how early attraction begins on Darcy’s part, and even though it mortifies him, it also means that he never does seek to antagonise her – save for his refusal to dance with her at their first meeting – or even dislike her at all. Her social inferiority, which so bothers him, must mean that he never does actively court her before proposing for the first time, but if examined in light of his attraction to her, some of his actions might be interpreted as a form of courtship. During her stay at Netherfield, his eyes are often “fixed on her”, which she thinks is due to “a something about her more wrong and reprehensible [...] than in any other person present” (Austen 227) but is actually a sign of his admiration; he indirectly invites her to dance while Miss Bingley plays at the pianoforte (“Do you not feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?”, 227); and the day before she leaves, he has to *consciously* attempt not to show her any preference: “He wisely resolved to be particularly careful that no signs of admiration should *now* escape him, nothing that

could elevate her with the hope of influencing his felicity” (231). And when he comes to call on Charlotte and Mr. Collins, the former immediately attributes it to a preference for her friend, which proves to be true upon his proposal despite Elizabeth’s disbelief. Indeed, it is curious how Lizzy, when describing Mr. Bingley’s attachment to Jane, appears to be describing Mr. Darcy’s own to herself, and nobody doubts Bingley’s courtship: “He was growing quite inattentive to other people, and wholly engrossed by her. [...] At his own ball he offended two or three young ladies, by not asking them to dance, and I spoke to him twice myself, without receiving an answer. [...] Is not general incivility the very essence of love?” (Austen 275).

And yet, before the first proposal, Elizabeth had not the slightest idea of the attachment she had inspired. Mr. Collins’ proposal often gets the most censure from readers, and yet “Mr. Darcy is just as sudden as Mr. Collins; his avowal is just as unexpected by the lady; he is as completely unaware of her keen disapproval of his manners and actions [...]; and, for good measure, he contrives to speak with an eloquence upon the subject of Elizabeth’s socially disadvantaged condition that surpasses Mr. Collins’s own” (Morris 89). Ironically enough, Mr. Collins makes for a good example of what proper courtship looks like socially: “At Netherfield he continues perseveringly by her side, [...] rejecting her entreaties that he should find other partners” (98), asks her for the first two dances, and insists “that his chief object was by delicate attentions to recommend himself to her” (Austen 255). His insistence is certainly both absurdly blunt and mortifying, but, “though as heavy-footed here as in the dance itself, he knows how things are done” (Morris 98). That his actions can and will be recognised as courtship is proven by Elizabeth’s quick realisation that “*she* was

selected from among her sisters as worthy of being the mistress of the Hunsford Parsonage” (Austen 247).

On the other hand, she does not suspect Darcy at all; she believes she has made her dislike clear enough, and is thus unable to conceive any grounds for his addresses. However, “Darcy is too much a man of feeling and principle to be impelled entirely by self-centred emotion” (Morris 102); arrogance is not enough of a motive for him to overcome the scruples that he so carefully enumerates in order to make an imprudent proposal, so he must have had some sort of encouragement. Either he has convinced himself of her acceptance despite her apparent dislike, or “she has in some way unknown to herself contrived to give him encouragement” (102). We may not believe that possibility at the moment of his proposal, but at the end of the novel Elizabeth admits to it: “My manners must have been in fault, but not intentionally I assure you. I never meant to deceive you, but my spirits might often lead me wrong” (Austen 395). Certainly, “there is a degree of freedom, of directness, and indeed of familiarity” in her manners “which might appear as encouraging in the eyes of the other sex” (Morris 106). Unbeknownst to her, the liveliness and boldness that bordered on impropriety “had all appeared to Darcy in the flattering guise of liking and invitation. She had imagined she was repelling him when all the while her indiscretions were giving him encouragement” (108). The teasing meant to repulse him, combined with the “mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner” (Austen 227) which fails to cause affront, create an intimacy between them that they could not have achieved had she adhered to the demands of propriety. In a society where the constraints of etiquette rigidly regulated human interaction, it is not so difficult to see how Elizabeth’s breaches of propriety might appear to Darcy as a wish to leave aside pleasantries and hold a truthful, meaningful

conversation. Therefore, and though unknowingly, Lizzy has been actively participating in courtship.

After Darcy's letter, a complete shift occurs both in Elizabeth's point of view and in their relationship. The change manifests itself when she visits Pemberley and unexpectedly encounters him: for the first time, the bold Elizabeth Bennet is rendered speechless "with an embarrassment impossible to overcome" (Austen 331), whereas Darcy's manner is "strikingly altered", speaking to her and the Gardiners with "manners so little dignified", with "civility" and "gentleness" (Austen 332). In this moment, when the truth is bare before them, when Lizzy has recognised her prejudice and Darcy his vanity and both are ready to move past their differences, something much more similar to typical courtship begins. Darcy shows his preference through an almost excessive courtesy to her and her family, inviting her uncle to fish and extending utmost civility to her aunt; he also drives his sister over to Lambton to meet Lizzy as soon as they arrive, "an attention to be accounted for by the whole party only in terms of affection [...], Darcy himself having intended no less" (Morris 97). Elizabeth is sensible to such compliments, which make her realise that it may still be in her power to bring about the renewal of his addresses and as such could very well be qualified as courtship.

Do not think I have forgotten about Elizabeth's third suitor, however. George Wickham has a role in this novel of enough importance to justify his being mentioned even after establishing how Elizabeth and Darcy are perfectly suited for each other: he stands for Lizzy's misled infatuation. This is actually rather uncommon for Austen since, out of all her heroines, only Marianne and Elizabeth are attracted by the wrong men for the wrong reasons. Significantly though, with Marianne the reader had Elinor's

judgement to guide them and warn them about Willoughby; in Lizzy's case, she leads both herself and the reader astray because there is no one to contradict her assumptions about Wickham except Darcy himself, who she deems untrustworthy. He interests us precisely because he is opposite to Darcy: "he had all the best part of beauty, a fine countenance, a good figure, and a very pleasing address", as well as "a happy readiness of conversation – a readiness at the same time perfectly correct and unassuming" (Austen 238), with which he earns everybody's indiscriminate liking. Elizabeth is particularly taken with him, of course, but many readers (including myself) will fail to see the "favourable responses and biased judgement" his good looks create, and that "such bias is at work when Elizabeth honours Wickham" (Fergus 71). Once it is pointed out, though, it is easy to see: "Elizabeth honoured him for such feelings, and thought him handsomer than ever as he expressed them" (Austen 242), "A young man too, like *you*, whose very countenance may vouch for your being amiable" (243), "Besides, there was truth in his looks" (246). The physical attraction she clearly feels for him, combined with his easy manners and the gratification to her vanity that his attention provides, create an infatuation that clouds Lizzy's better judgement. So much so that "the impropriety of such communications to a stranger" regarding his relationship with Darcy, and "the indelicacy of putting himself forward as he had done" (Austen 309), completely escape her until the moment she reads Darcy's letter. The prejudice that creates the main conflict between her and Darcy is thus based on the common belief of her age that manners represented one's heart; upon better knowledge she comes to recognise that, despite his rudeness, Darcy is principled and good-hearted, whereas Wickham is a bitter opportunist with excellent manners. Wickham's existence thus

highlights the importance of knowing the object of one's affections, as better knowledge will always support and heighten love.

Therefore, what makes *Pride and Prejudice* so special is the relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy, peculiar in its beginning and unique in its expression. They may dislike each other in the beginning, “yet they do almost immediately notice each other” (Hardy 36), they attract each other's interest; and their conversations have a certain privacy that grants them “the potential for something more – for an intimacy which is out of the ordinary even though it still has to be acknowledged as a process of mutual sharing” (46). The antagonism which Lizzy perpetuates has thus the role that courtship would have had in any other romance, as it serves the same role of creating intimacy and mutual attraction; and yet it proves to be much more effective than courtship itself would have been, as teasing grants them a much faster and easier closeness, an effortless confidence that would have been hard to obtain otherwise. The relationship Austen shows in *Pride and Prejudice* is therefore far from prototypical, but a perfect example of the values that this author upholds: it is based upon mutual knowledge, which in turn leads to respect, trust, and an honest affection, which improve them both without making them lose the liveliness and spark that attracted them to each other in the first place.

CONCLUSION

My major aim in this dissertation was to focus on an examination of Jane Austen's depiction of courtship and romance, and to see whether she deviated from convention in her representation. Each section has analysed one – or several – aspects of Austen's writing, and drawn a conclusion which demonstrates how she differentiated herself from the mainstream.

Austen's realism, both psychological and social, is responsible for the verisimilitude of her characters; that she focused more on the inner life of her heroines than on the historical reality around them has also caused them to become empathic figures that we can relate to regardless of temporal distance. Austen's romance manages to do the same – to connect with the readers – precisely because it is combined with the realism that characterises her. The more imaginative elements she includes, like the closure to her novels, are joined with her down-to-earth depictions of feelings and actions so that they end up seeming plausible, thus creating a unique blend of romanticism and realism that no writer has so far managed to reproduce. Her ideal love is also different from what we usually see, whether in romances from her age or from our own; love in Jane Austen is self-improving yet selfless, based upon knowledge and mutual respect. Even nowadays it is rare to find a romance novel that depicts such healthy relationships, where both parties are completely equal and have a positive mutual influence; this must partly explain the pervasiveness of her love stories and the distinctiveness of her work.

Austen's relationships, however, are also characterised by the rigidity of the society surrounding them, which – as explained in section 1 – controls every aspect of

interaction and makes it difficult for intimacy to form. As argued in section 3, courtship had to take place publicly, which in itself was the greatest obstacle to the formation of relationships. Observation by the public eye made privacy nearly impossible, which makes it all the more impressive that Austen managed to build up romance as believable as hers. Though I have shown that she does make use of conventional courtship rituals in her novels, Austen subverts them and shifts their publicity to her advantage. If I chose Elizabeth and Darcy to exemplify this in the last section, it is because they make such subversion most obvious: their dialogue always takes place in social situations, publicly, which by all accounts – including my own – ought to make their intimacy very difficult to achieve. However, this does not seem to be a problem for them, since by the end of the novel they know each other all too well and are perfectly comfortable in their relationship. It is Austen's masterful control of dialogue and situation that manages this.

Elizabeth and Darcy's conversation is so dexterously managed as to provide a dimension of privacy even when under the scrutiny of so many eyes. As explained, their interest in each other shifts their entire focus to the words of the other, which means they are able to catch deeper meanings to each other's words than other people would. Publicity may render them unable to be as explicit as they should, but Austen employs it to her advantage; not only does this favour the reader's interest and increase dramatic tension, it also makes it obvious that there is something going on between them, an intimacy that goes further than it appears outwardly. This is facilitated, of course, by Elizabeth's witty teasing, which interests Darcy onward in his quest for a deeper knowledge of her, and inadvertently drags Lizzy herself along to a better knowledge of him.

In turn, this makes them an example of what an ideal relationship entailed for Austen. They may start out flawed and consequently misunderstand each other, but they get to know each other in spite of their initial antagonism through their dialogue, which at the same time grants them the equality that Austen always considered necessary for a relationship to progress. Upon better knowledge, their perspective changes and they are both changed as a result, becoming better versions of themselves. This allows them to establish a real, sincere connection which in the end culminates in a happy marriage. Though they are not each other's match according to their position in society, Lizzy and Darcy match perfectly in intellect and principles, which must uphold the importance of such considerations over those of rank or wealth.

Of course there is much I have not been able to discuss, particularly regarding Jane Austen's context, the importance and influence of which would justify dedicating a whole essay to its discussion. This might be an interesting prospect for the future, as would further study on the relationships she represents between characters other than Elizabeth and Darcy, since Austen has plenty of other nuanced, complex interactions to boast of. For now, however, the present essay shall have to suffice to demonstrate and attest to Jane Austen's mastery in the creation and building of credible romance, of love which stirs our deepest feelings even today, within a context where true love appears as an all but impossible achievement.

WORKS CITED

- Austen, Jane. *Seven Novels*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 2006.
- Babb, Howard S. *Jane Austen's Novels: The Fabric of Dialogue*. Ohio State University Press, 1962.
- Butler, Marilyn. *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.
- Booth, Wayne C. *Control of Distance in Jane Austen's Emma*. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983, 243-266.
- Byrne, Paula. "Manners". In *Jane Austen in Context*, edited by Janet Todd. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 297-305.
- Chapman, R.W. *Jane Austen's Letters to Her Sister Cassandra and Others*. London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed., 1952 (reprinted 1959).
<https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.182187>
- Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: University Press, 1978.
- Dooley, Gillian. "'The Bells Rang and Every Body Smiled': Jane Austen's 'Courtship Novels'". *Persuasions On-Line*, vol. 37, n°1. The Jane Austen Society of North America, 2016.
- Fergus, Jan S. "Sex and Social Life in Jane Austen's Novels". In *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, edited by David Monaghan. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981, 66-85.
- Gay, Penny. "Pastimes". In *Jane Austen in Context*, edited by Janet Todd. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 337-345.
- Gisborne, Thomas. *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex*. London: A. Straban Printers, 1801.

- Gregory, John. "A Father's Legacy to His Daughters". In *Angelica's Ladies Library; Or, Parents and Guardians Present*. Printed for J. Hamilton and Co.; and Mrs. Harlow. London: 1794, 1-46.
- Hardy, John. *Jane Austen's Heroines. Intimacy in Human Relationships*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.
- Hinnant, Charles. "Jane Austen's 'Wild Imagination': Romance and the Courtship Plot in the Six Canonical Novels". In *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2006, 294-310.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20107392>
- Kelly, Gary. "Education and accomplishments". In *Jane Austen in Context*, edited by Janet Todd. Cambridge University Press, 2005, 252-261.
- Kent, Christopher. "'Real Solemn History' and Social History". In *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, edited by David Monaghan. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981, 86-104.
- Kuersten, Ashlyn K. "Separate Spheres Doctrine". In *Women and the Law: Leaders, Cases, and Documents*. ABC-CLIO, 2003.
- Monaghan, David (ed.). *Jane Austen in a Social Context*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981.
- Monaghan, David. "Jane Austen and the Position of Women". In *Jane Austen in a Social Context*, edited by David Monaghan. London: The Macmillan Press, 1981, 105-121.
- Morris, Ivor. *Mr Collins Considered: Approaches to Jane Austen*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987.

- Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?". In *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, edited by Joan B. Landes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, 21-45.
- Pennington, Lady Sarah. "An Unfortunate Mother's Advice to her Daughter". In *Angelica's Ladies Library; Or, Parents and Guardians Present*. Printed for J. Hamilton and Co.; and Mrs. Harlow. London: 1794, 107-166.
- Pinion, F.B. *A Jane Austen Companion*. London: The Macmillan Press, 1976.
- Ramsdell, Kristin. *Romance Fiction: A Guide to the Genre*. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited, 2012.
- Schulz, Dieter. "'Novel', 'Romance', and Popular Fiction in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century". In *Studies in Philology*, vol. 70, no.1, 1973, 77-91.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173793>
- Sutherland, Kathryn. "Jane Austen: Public and private space". *Youtube*, uploaded by The British Library, 9 June 2014.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcWjzxFFmqY>
- Tauchert, Ashley. *Romancing Jane Austen: Narrative, Realism, and the Possibility of a Happy Ending*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Todd, Janet (ed.). *Jane Austen in Context*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Watt, Ian. *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*. London: Peregrine Books, 1985.