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## JANE AUSTEN'S CIVILIZED WOMEN: MORALITY, GENDER AND THE CIVILIZING PROCESS

BY

Enit Karafili Steiner



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*To Jürg, Lea and Josh*

## INTRODUCTION

*the civilization which has taken place hitherto in the world has been very partial ... the civilized women of the present century, with a few exceptions, are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect.*<sup>1</sup>

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

The question at the outset of this book concerns the picture that emerges when reading Jane Austen's fiction from the perspective of a civilization in process. Albeit invested in the ways in which men and women, children and adults, navigate civil society, this is not another study about Austen the archetypal author of good manners. While moral development is at the heart of this book, it has been my care to avoid what one scholar has recently lamented 'books that perpetuate the view of Austen as a moral tutor, a sort of Miss Manners for the ages' do, namely, purport an understanding of 'manners as monolithic – as near-universal and timeless behavioural ideas or, worse still, a set of rules to be followed'.<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that such books offer no valuable insights, but that the present study seeks to delve into the implications of Austen's awareness of what Norbert Elias has christened 'the civilizing process' that underlies individuation and social manners. Throughout the book, I make the claim that these implications are far-reaching: they extend from conceptualizations of the relationship between individual and society to diachronic accounts of sociability and rationality; articulations of agency and autonomy; the formation and validity of moral judgement; and what is crucial to this book, to the ways these issues are inflected when gender enters the equation. As these implications are not simply about a distant time, but point up the preoccupations of Western civilization, Austen's fiction has an intense appeal for us. In order to illuminate this appeal and its ramifications, this book draws on distinctly different yet related contexts: on the eighteenth-century philosophical background, particularly Scottish Enlightenment theories of societal development and early-Romantic discourses on gender roles; on Elias's theory of civilization; and on postmodern feminist positions on moral development and interpersonal relations. My central contention is that,



viewing Austen's fiction from these different perspectives, we realize that when she insists on an ongoing sociability which unfolds first in domestic settings and permeates the public realm as well as on the impact of embodied socialization, introspection and self-monitoring, far more is at stake than a proper lady's keen sense of decorum. To put this suggestively, viewed in light of the complexity of a civilizing process, some of the ideas usually associated with Austen's conformism and narrowness transmute into expressions of her feminist investment.

### Civilization and Gender

This study examines sets of ideas regarding the correspondence between individuals and society which developed in the long eighteenth century, in order to pursue the revisions they underwent in later periods and especially in the works of feminist philosophy and literary theory. Keeping in mind that our conceptualization of the self and community is strongly influenced by the ways moral life and civic virtue were conceived in the eighteenth century, by emphasizing twentieth-century approaches, my endeavour will be to point out the connections between discourses that shaped Austen's thought and their reinvestigations in contemporary works which form our understanding as readers of her fiction.<sup>3</sup> Hence, rather than primarily contextualizing her work, I will suggest ways in which her writings – although products of her time and space – open themselves to us as readers, thus anticipating concerns highly debated about gender and civic virtue in our time.

One of the constituent threads running through this book is the question of gender hierarchy and its relationship to morality and manners, for which the insights of the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers and especially of John Millar serve as a point of departure. I cautiously call it a point of departure because, as the following chapters demonstrate, Austen's fiction enables more than a simple retreat into the Enlightenment ideas that we encounter there: more pertinently to the purpose of this book, it illuminates the possibility of revisiting and reformulating those ideas in the light of feminist theory. In her influential study on political ethics, Joan Tronto writes that not only does the Scottish Enlightenment share concerns with feminist philosophy such as the role of gender in the conceptualization of the morally adept private and public life and persona, but it also does so representing a different account of political and moral life than do other moral theories and especially Kantian moral theory.<sup>4</sup> Two particular notions of the Scottish Enlightenment will be of importance here: the idea of the evolution of human societies into civilizations and the connection between civilization and the rank that women occupy in it. Both these notions will be linked to theories of civilization and gender of the twentieth century.

The Scottish Enlightenment is well-known for its contribution in 'conjectural history' and its 'exploration of the relationship between morality, law and social customs (including, prominently, those that affect the status of women) that naturally occur at different economic stages of society.'<sup>5</sup> This approach is also known as 'stadial history' because it conceives human societies as evolving through four stages: hunting, herding, farming and commerce.<sup>6</sup> The cultural trajectory of societies as they develop through these stages comprises the passage from 'savagery' through 'barbarism' to 'civilization'.<sup>7</sup> The underlying assumption of Scottish conjectural historians was that European societies had reached so far the highest point of a global development that steered towards a society of refined manners identified as civilization. Accordingly, it was the shared civilization of manners and commerce out of which the European states grew.<sup>8</sup>

In the eighteenth century, the term 'civilization' referred to this consciousness. While Samuel Johnson mentions only the legal connotation of the word in his dictionary, John Ash in *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language* (1775) describes civilization as 'the state of being civilized, the act of civilizing,' associating it with manners and ways of behaviour or what twentieth-century sociologists have coined the *habitus*.<sup>9</sup> As Frank Palmeri observes, in the twentieth century, conjectural history was neglected and criticized for 'the ethnocentrism of the form and its universal, linear conception of social development'.<sup>10</sup> Also in the twentieth century, while the term 'civilization' became rather unfashionable precisely for its ethnocentric implications, the German sociologist Norbert Elias traced the origins and the cultural backdrop that brought to the fore this notion as part of an ambitious project that he called a 'Theorie der Zivilisation' (a theory of civilization).<sup>11</sup> In *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Elias sets out to explain what the term encompasses, paying attention to the ways it was understood in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries: 'The concept of civilization ... has often been used in a semimetaphysical sense and has remained highly nebulous until today'.<sup>12</sup> Expatriating on the early metaphysical use of the word, Elias equates civilization with the identity formation of the nations of the West:

this concept expresses the self-consciousness of the West. One could even say: the national consciousness. It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or 'more primitive' contemporary ones.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, civilization reflects the self-perception of Western societies as having undergone a development and achieved a superior position culturally, materially and socially. But this is a metaphysical understanding which Elias seeks to abandon precisely for the teleology it purports. Instead of progress, he is interested in the process that produces 'the structural change in people toward an increased

consolidation and differentiation of their affect controls, of their experience and behaviour.<sup>14</sup> By virtue of this process, civilization is continually in movement.

Although wary of this teleological heritage, Elias's account of the civilizing process draws on Scottish conjectural history. Elias worked in the field of sociology and, as David McCrone observes, the discipline of sociology was largely developed by the Scottish Enlightenment, for no other thinkers thought and wrote as extensively about the genesis of civil society as the Scottish Enlightenment philosophers.<sup>15</sup> They continue to be regarded as pioneers of a theory of civilization and Robert van Krieken, who has offered insightful analysis of the work of Elias, emphasizes the link between the latter and the Scottish Enlightenment as an important but rather undeveloped aspect: 'The significance for sociology of the Scottish Enlightenment theorists – which Elias's works can be seen as an extension of – also remains underappreciated.'<sup>16</sup> Elias's definition of civilization expands on the understanding of the civilizing process as a movement towards the reduction of violence, the better treatment of women and children, and the refinement of manners which is delineated by several Scottish Enlightenment philosophers. When he writes of civilization as an expression of the self-consciousness of the West, Elias's observation concurs with the self-reflexive and analytical accounts of Scottish conjectural history that sought to trace back the origins of social institutions, ranks and codes of behaviour. If we agree with Karen O'Brien that conjectural history approached the civilizing process 'in terms of the links between economic and institutional developments in history, and changes in the human personality', then this concomitant trajectory of the social and behavioural evolution of conjectural history is clearly reiterated in the title of Elias's work *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*.<sup>17</sup> Thus, when Elias lists in the opening lines of this study the way in which men and women live and interact together as one of the perspectives from which the notion of civilization has been considered, his account echoes one particular Scottish thinker, namely John Millar, 'who has come to be viewed as second only to Adam Smith among Scottish founders of sociological and anthropological theory'.<sup>18</sup> Millar, more than any other Scottish philosopher, finds answers in the psychological insights that he drew from 'the new "scientific" domain of associationist psychology' prefiguring Elias's framework of psychogenesis.<sup>19</sup>

A student of Adam Smith and Professor of Civil Law at the University of Glasgow, Millar was influenced by the moral philosophy earlier developed by Francis Hutcheson, who took issue with Locke's social contract and with Mandeville's idea that the civilizing process entails the bending of human nature and coercive socialization. Instead, Hutcheson made natural benevolence the cornerstone of his thought, in which society is the outgrowth of familial ties. Richard Olson has argued that Hutcheson's moral philosophy drew on the Dutch legal scholar Samuel Pufendorf, whose views differed greatly from traditional moral

philosophy and Roman Law. While the latter made forms of civic virtue arising from political life the fulcrum of historical reflection, Pufendorf extracted the duties of the citizen from the basic circumstances of human life.<sup>20</sup> Expanding on Pufendorf, Hutcheson elaborated an emphasis on the interdependence of family members that enabled him to formulate 'an unusually egalitarian idea of marriage'.<sup>21</sup> Millar borrows from Hutcheson the importance of familial ties and incorporates it in his seminal work *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which gave rise to Influence and Authority in the Different Members of Society* (1771), where he explores the civilizing process of Western societies by tracing the power ratio within the household, especially between the sexes. His reason for doing so is stated in the very first paragraph:

Of all our passions, it should seem that those which unite the sexes are most easily affected by the peculiar circumstance in which we are placed, and most liable to be influenced by the power of habit and education.<sup>22</sup>

These opening lines signal the very method of the work: Millar centred his theory of civilization around the rank of women, i.e. the position they are accorded in the household and the community, which is why the domestic setting as a place of inculcation is Millar's object of study.

Austen seems to have a similar focus, as Alice Meynell, a poet and essayist, notices in 1894: 'Jane Austen seldom begins a novel without a deliberate chapter – generally a family chapter.'<sup>23</sup> More often than not, this practice has prompted critics to belittle her work as the restrained product of her feminine imagination that ultimately reduces the scope of her art. Yet Austen not only remained true to her perspective, but recommended her niece, Anna Austen, to do the same when the latter was trying her pen: 'You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life; – 3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on ...'<sup>24</sup> It seems that the community shared by three or four families is anything but dull or narrow, since it is a miniature of society. The interest of the novelist reaches its peak when she deals with the heroine's negotiations of her own place within the 'neighbourhood', as her comment to her niece suggests: 'You are now coming to the heart & beauty of your book; till the heroine grows up, the fun must be imperfect' (*Letters* 275). The young girl who takes her place within a social circle becomes representative of the woman who assumes her role within civilization. As the first chapter of this book suggests, already in the juvenilia through the format of the short story, Austen investigates with unrelenting clarity the vicissitudes and relationality of this process also present in Millar's theory.

Millar's account was very influential and pronouncements of the correlation that exists between the rank of women and the degree of civilization can be found in works by other Scottish Enlightenment theorists. Perhaps the most



explicit example is William Alexander's *The History of Women from the Earliest Antiquity to the Present Time* (1779), published after Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks*: 'the rank, therefore, and condition of women mark out with greater precision, the exact point in the scale of civil society, to which people of such country have arrived'.<sup>25</sup> Millar links the improvement of modes of subsistence with the transformation in manners, laws and government and the shaping of social positions and institutions by sub-political kinds of human activities. Hence, he discusses the power-ratio between father and children, the authority of chiefs and sovereigns over their subordinates and that of masters over slaves during the different stages of history.

His work significantly opens with a substantial chapter titled 'Of the Rank and Condition of Women in Different Ages'. The term 'rank' that he introduces to describe women as a social group is used as something more particular than 'class'. O'Brien speaks of Millar using the term 'quasi-scientifically to denote status and authority in different areas of private and political life, but he is also interested in the discursive function of rank as a form of social ascription'.<sup>26</sup> Women, who do not possess a class identity detached from that of their fathers or husbands, have a 'rank' in the world only by ascription.<sup>27</sup> Millar may be the first philosopher to think theoretically about the correlation between gender and rank, yet attentive novel readers could not have been surprised by the idea that gender is a marker of rank. When in Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), Lady Davers opposes her brother's marriage to a servant girl by reversing the circumstances and depicting the shame he would be subjected to, if his sister bestowed herself upon a beggar, Mr B. sharply calls to her attention that rank is contingent on gender:

'Where can the difference be between a beggar's son married by a lady, or a beggar's daughter made a gentleman's wife?'

'Then I'll tell you', replied he; 'the difference is, a man ennobles the woman he takes, be she who she will; and adopts her into his own rank, be it what it will; but a woman, though ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean marriage, and descends from her own rank, to that of him she stoops to marry'.<sup>28</sup>

A woman's rank falls and rises with that of the man to whom she is legally attached, because women by virtue of their sex can only be 'adopted' into a rank. What Mr B. describes as an adoption of rank corresponds to Millar's analysis of rank ascription and is also captured in the language of the opening paragraph of Austen's *Mansfield Park*, where the marriages of the three Ward sisters provide striking examples of social rise and fall: Miss Maria Ward, who manages to attract Sir Thomas Bertram, 'is raised to the rank of a baronet's lady' and her 'elevation' has the potential to benefit her two sisters.<sup>29</sup> While one of them, Mrs Norris, is assisted by her titled brother-in-law, the other, Fanny Price's mother,

marries a man that positions her at the lower end of the social ladder. This exposition makes salient aspects about rank and gender that philosophical discourse can only sketch out, while the novel ultimately substantiates the fact that, no matter how different, all three women's social standings remain attached and vulnerable to the ranks of their husbands.

These fictional examples of characters in complex life situations supply the reader with something that Millar's rhetoric lacks, as philosophical discourse almost always does, and that Martha Nussbaum calls 'the particularity, the emotive appeal, the absorbing plottedness, the variety and interdependency, of good fiction'.<sup>30</sup> According to Eva M. Dadlez, fiction is a particularly fertile format to engage with ethics because it yields instances of recognition through distinct concreteness of incidents, constellation of characters and narrative modes. Unlike Nussbaum, who attributes to literature the ability to sustain an ambiguity more adequate to life than the theoretical principles of philosophical discourse, Dadlez believes that literature can provide us with both clear and complex insights.<sup>31</sup> The opening lines of *Mansfield Park* flesh out with striking clarity what becomes the main concern in Millar's account. As its title *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: or, An Inquiry into the Circumstances which gave rise to Influence and Authority in the Different Members of Society* suggests, the question at the core of the book regards the conditions that bring about different social positions within human communities.

In the very first chapter, which comprises not less than one third of the entire work, Millar argues that because the survival of the community in the hunting stage depends on physical strength, women are assigned to a 'humblar province', are little valued and deemed 'unworthy to engage the attention of persons who command respect by their military accomplishments'.<sup>32</sup> Millar maintains that the rank of women has undergone considerable changes since the hunting stage, an age 'most remote of improvement'.<sup>33</sup> Notably, his argument locates women's inferior rank not in an innate quality or a divinely-sanctioned order, but in the structure (and prejudices) brought about by socio-economic demands. He accounts for women's better treatment through the maturation of male passion, which is nothing else but the sublimation of the sexual drive. When sexual gratification is not delayed, 'delightful anticipations of happiness' are absent and women are of inferior value, since man 'has little regard for pleasures which he can purchase at so easy a rate'.<sup>34</sup> The pastoral stage with the rise of herd ownership and wealth stratification marks a turning point: 'The introduction of wealth, and the distinction of ranks with which it is attended, must interrupt the communication of the sexes, and, in many cases, render it difficult for them to gratify their wishes'.<sup>35</sup> Women are now perceived as attached to a certain clan and their value in the community depends on the economic standing of the family they belong to, so that they transmute 'into a

species of property', i.e. unlike men, they do not acquire property but become property.<sup>36</sup>

Linking property to women, Millar describes (perhaps also prescribes) women's rank as both changeable and fixed: he explains its changeability through women's inferior social standing in the particular circumstances dictated by modes of subsistence rather than by a natural order of gendered hierarchy. Yet, women are held captives as their rank is universally enlocked in the rank of the men who own them. What this encapsulation amounts to is that a distinction of gender automatically inscribes a distinction of rank, as Wollstonecraft keenly observes in a chapter of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), whose title resonates with Millar's work: 'Observations on the State of Degradation to Which Woman is reduced by Various Causes'.<sup>37</sup>

Seeing the changes of this structure as correlated to the rank of women, Millar opened up discourses about femininity to the contingency of transformation. When arguing that 'the power of habit and education' impacted the way women behaved and the way they were perceived and approached by the other sex, he joined the voices of female intellectuals like Mary Astell and Damaris Masham and anticipated the radical writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>38</sup> O'Brien makes a case for the important role that the Scottish Enlightenment and especially Millar attributed to women as an explicit social rank, and 'not [to] just a few celebrated female "worthies"', however acknowledging that 'Even the progressive Millar did not suggest political rights for women'.<sup>39</sup> His merit was of considerable importance, since he pointed out that women have a history 'and this history was bound up with the evolution of natural rights and justice'.<sup>40</sup> As O'Brien argues, Millar's line of Scottish Enlightenment history was paramount to Wollstonecraft's formation, because it enabled her 'to think of gender in evolutionary terms' and provided a theoretical approach to liberate women from their alleged innate inferiority. Yet, Wollstonecraft recognized that Millar's valorization of women did not go far enough, since it explained women's civilizing influence on manners through their 'useful and agreeable talents' and their 'peculiar delicacy, and sensibility', but left unaddressed their development as moral and political subjects. Millar writes:

Possessed of peculiar delicacy, and sensibility, whether derived from original constitution, or from her way of life, she is capable of securing the esteem and affection of her husband, by dividing his cares, by sharing his joys, and by soothing his misfortunes.<sup>41</sup>

Despite his allusions to a possible social construction of gender (expressed in 'or from her way of life'), Millar's emphasis on 'peculiar delicacy, and sensibility' partakes in the discourse of a female propriety that pictures woman as a voiceless entity whose civilizing influence is exercised indirectly through patience and care. His appreciation of a female care-oriented character, whether natural or

imbibed, leaves out the nature and extent of their moral agency in the course of history. Women may, as J. G. A. Pocock has argued, appear to play 'the role of cultural entrepreneurs, encouraging the exchange of politeness and refinement in a variety of forms'; however, it is by being rather passive agents and, as Mary Catherine Moran aptly puts it, 'at once inert and mobile' that they influence the course of civilization.<sup>42</sup>

Investigating women's inertia and mobility within the context of civilization promises to yield more productive insights than viewing Austen's representations of civil society as the 'carefully-fenced, highly cultivated garden' that appalled Charlotte Brontë.<sup>43</sup> This book takes interest in the ways in which in Austen's fiction women learn to empower their environment while empowering themselves. Considering that female propriety 'expressed itself in a self-effacing attitude', Austen pursued the reformulation of female subjectivity, voicing transformations that establish a continuous dialogue between the personal and the political, the private and the public.<sup>44</sup>

### Moral Development in Separate Spheres

Women's rank and mobility in the context of Western civilization are not only inextricably linked to the idea of the domestic being first separated from, and secondly inferior to, the public realm, but are also concomitant with different concepts of history. Several critics have pointed out that one of the greatest merits of the Scottish philosophers was to depart from classical history by displacing historical inquiry from the great deeds of political men to the make-up and function of the family. Millar, argues John Dwyer, was among the first 'to discuss the way society derives its existence from domestic relations and the bonds of private life'.<sup>45</sup> It is not a coincidence that the Scottish moralists frequently address the domestic realm as 'the little society'.<sup>46</sup> The history of the men and women forming this little society, of its modes of subsistence and material reproduction, of child-rearing and of human interaction provides the empirical evidence for the history of society at large. Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* adds an important aspect to this history, as he argues that societies where women leave domestic confinement (and men sublimate sexual drives) experience through the heightened communication among the sexes a refinement of manners. Millar views the confinement of women to the life of the household not only as a marker of barbarism but a condition that precludes civil society. For women are the primary agents that operate between the codes of public and private behaviour, creating that space called 'polite society', which, as Moran sums up, 'is neither public in a political sense nor private in the sense of the household and family'.<sup>47</sup> The coming to existence of such a space achieves the dissolution of 'the distinction between public and private that is one of the founding assumption



of classical historiography', for it represents a channel through which private and public values circulate.<sup>48</sup>

In their study *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the Middle Class 1780–1850*, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall collapse the distinction between public and private. They re-evaluate records of late-eighteenth-century family businesses, concluding that the world of production occupied by *homo economicus* 'has been systematically privileged as central to historical understanding'. Their extensive study of middle-class domestic relations corrects this epistemological distortion by starting from the family and home – 'sites which are accorded no conceptual or analytic importance in social theories'.<sup>49</sup> Identifying the division into separate spheres as another 'unhelpful dichotomy', their investigation of family records uncovers an ignored fact: 'Contrary to the usual conception, the market was never sex-blind. In all societies, family organization has been embedded in systems of kinship'.<sup>50</sup> The research goal of *Family Fortunes* is 'to move beyond the public/private divide and show how "autonomous" male actors were embedded in families, how "dependent" women provided the contacts and capital'.<sup>51</sup> The lives of many women writers such as Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, Felicia Hemans or Harriet Martineau reveal the 'inefficacy of "separate spheres" when questions of familiar survival became pressing'.<sup>52</sup> In Austen's fiction, the illusionist core of masculine self-efficiency becomes glaring and morally questionable in representations of young men who await professional and social integration and have no other resort than the reliance on or exploitation of the women that surround them: in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mr Wickham plans to elope with Georgiana Darcy after negotiations with her brother have failed; in *Mansfield Park*, William Price owes his admission in the Navy to his sister's pleading with Henry Crawford, who having a romantic interest in her, intercedes with his uncle on her brother's behalf. Although not explicitly stated, patronage may have triggered the rise of *Persuasion*'s Captain Wentworth, whose professional standing seems closely monitored and commented upon by his sister and brother-in-law, Admiral Croft.

The ideology of separate spheres continues to have a grip on postmodern society, and philosophers and sociologists still debate concepts that help bridge the private and the public. For example, Jürgen Habermas's concept of a discursive model of public space seeks to enlarge the concept of the public sphere, from a space where a political elite addresses its claims to one where individuals engage in a practical discourse and assess the social and political practices that shape their lives.<sup>53</sup> In this model, the public sphere increases with the democratization of culture; the public is not the sum of state apparatuses, but the stage where bourgeois 'civil society' promotes a rational exchange of ideas beyond the encumbrances of status or traditions. The emphasis on the discursive quality is important since, according to Habermas, the public sphere excludes economic

transactions: debate and exchange of ideas govern this realm instead of the buying and selling of goods. The feminist critique of Habermas's bourgeois public sphere as an emancipatory space of discursive rationality has been twofold: first, it is crucial for Habermas's framework that the public sphere represents a space of unconstrained rational discussion of public matters; second and connected to the first, as Nancy Fraser points out, Habermas insists that the ideal of rational interaction can be maintained only if private interests are 'bracketed' and do not interfere with the public matters discussed in the public sphere.<sup>54</sup> As a result, activities performed traditionally by women such as child-rearing and caring for the sick and elderly, but also the discourses of emotionality and affectivity intrinsic to these activities, are relegated to the backstage.<sup>55</sup>

In order to exercise his unclouded reason, the implicitly masculine citizen participating and debating in the public sphere has to bracket his social and emotional situatedness. Seyla Benhabib, a scholar of philosophy and political science who is greatly influenced by Habermas's work and offers a feminist revaluation to his discourse ethics, believes that both these blind spots can be illuminated once the discourse ethics of the public sphere ceases to commit to the illusion of self-grounding reason. The most important step in this process is the renunciation of an 'Archimedean moral standpoint, situated beyond historical and cultural contingency' (or as the so-called 'view from nowhere').<sup>56</sup> She maintains that the universality of moral principles is ensured when individuals develop the capacity to reverse perspectives and reason from the standpoint of 'concrete' rather than 'generalized' others. This concreteness finds expressions in the particular and unique histories of bodies, minds and emotions. The demystification of universalist claims of the history of the modern subject is powerfully voiced by *Persuasion*'s heroine, Anne Elliot, in her plot-turning conversation with Captain Harville, in which she skilfully rewrites the notion of impartiality by demonstrating that all assumptions generate from specific, gendered social locations.

Elias, although not discussing the gender implications of social theory, anticipates the objections of feminist theorists. He identifies the development of the capacity to transcend one's own standpoint and to reason not as a self-sufficient individual, but as a human being connected to other human beings, as the most important achievement of civilized subjectivity. The realization of this embeddedness of human existence enables the self to distance itself from its own perception of reality and reasoning. This capacity that Elias calls 'detachment' (*Distanzierung*) is characteristic in advanced stages of civilization and enables the civilized habitus to step out of its moral boundaries and to view the 'I' from the viewpoint of others, thereby simultaneously playing the role of the 'external observer' and the person observed.<sup>57</sup> Elias introduces the terms 'engaged' or 'detached' as preferable alternatives to 'rational' and 'irrational' or 'objective' and

'subjective,' because he thinks that the latter pairs 'suggest a static and unbridgeable divide between subject and object,' the individual and the other.<sup>58</sup>

The mechanism of bridging the gap between the self and others through an act of self-detachment is also described by Hannah Arendt as an internal dialogue between the self and the imaginary observer. Hence, 'even if I am quite alone in making up my mind,' this occurs 'in an anticipated communication with others,' a practice that stands for an

enlarged way of thinking, which as judgment knows how to transcend its individual limitations, cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the presence of others 'in whose place' it must think, whose perspective it must take into consideration, and without whom it never has the opportunity to operate at all.<sup>59</sup>

The ego that emerges out of this practice of 'detachment,' in Elias's words, or 'the enlarged way of thinking,' in Arendt's, is not an enclosed, clearly defined and separate entity, but an ego endowed with 'flexible boundaries' through interaction and change of perspectives.<sup>60</sup>

The atomized self-contested by Elias, Arendt and Benhabib is perhaps best illustrated by Hobbes's comparison of human beings to mushrooms that come into existence and grow without any interaction whatsoever. In *The Citizen: Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society* (1651), Hobbes writes: 'consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddenly, like mushrooms come to full maturity, without all kind of engagement with each other.'<sup>61</sup> It follows that Hobbes envisions society as a multitude of individual citizens without accounting for the interdependencies that characterize human existence from beginning to end. As the feminist theorist Christine Di Stefano astutely sums up, 'In the process of extracting an abstract man for rational perusal, Hobbes has also expunged human reproduction and early nurturance, two of the most basic and typically female-identified features of distinctively human life from his account of basic nature.'<sup>62</sup> The metaphor of many unconnected mushrooms rests on the ideology of a self-sufficient citizen whose 'characteristically human capacities need no particular social life forms in which to develop.'<sup>63</sup> It precisely denies the embeddedness of the moral subject that Elias and Benhabib seek to reconstitute to sociological, psychological and political theory. When contesting this model of subjectivity, the point to be made is that the maturity of an ego with 'flexible boundaries' does not depend on the capacity to sublimate human ties (as Freud would have it) but on an ongoing exchange between an 'I' who envisions herself as part of a 'we.'<sup>64</sup> Such conceptualizations of moral judgement contest the independence of the atomistic individual, opening avenues to new forms of autonomy.

Nancy Chodorow is among the first psychoanalysts to debate the gender implications of the atomistic individual. She replaces Freud's negative assessment of female psychological development as showing weaker ego boundaries with the positive account of 'flexible [ego] boundaries'. Chodorow states that if

women appear less individuated in Freudian psychology, it is because women's individuation does not follow the Oedipal separation from the mothering figure, unlike young boys whose initiation into manhood is triggered by this separation as they start experiencing the mothering figure as an Other. When considering the autonomous individual, it is an established tradition to start from the moral development of the male subject, be it in a political or economic sense. As long as autonomy is equated with separation and the ability to do without relationships, the link between autonomy and womanhood seems an oxymoron. So it is not surprising, as O'Neill astutely observes in his study of Burke's and Wollstonecraft's ideas of democracy and civilization, that 'from its inception, feminism was concerned with the necessary interconnections between men and women, and between the public and the private spheres, and insisted that democratic equality must extend to both sexes and both spheres, for the benefit of both.'<sup>65</sup>

Austen's novels advance this very expectation by making visible the private sphere occupied by men and women, collapsing – as feminist theorists in the twentieth century do (and Millar did) – the divide between the public and the private, as they place 'the little society' as well as polite society at the centre of social inquiry. Her fiction also brings to the fore how our conceptions of moral autonomy and universal rights are affected by the concealment of the private sphere and the marginalization of women. This last aspect remains important throughout her work. From her teenage writings to *Persuasion*, Austen's fiction sharpens our awareness that the exclusion of women and their point of view is an omission fraught with social consequences. By calling attention to this moral blind spot that has resulted in an epistemological insufficiency, Austen echoes Wollstonecraft's discontentment that 'the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial.'<sup>66</sup> This observation comes up in the opening lines of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and signals the central message of the whole tract, namely Wollstonecraft's conviction that women's empowerment will advance society to the next level of civilization. *A Vindication* asks for a re-evaluation of a woman's place in the world, her rights and duties. Here Wollstonecraft investigates the assumptions of femininity and masculinity and, while addressing women in their traditional domestic roles, she strives to define moral autonomy out of their social involvement. Wollstonecraft pictures the fulfilled and emancipated woman, not alone, but 'surrounded by her children, reaping the reward of her care. ... She lives to see the virtues which she endeavoured to plant on principles, fixed into habits, to see her children attain a strength of character sufficient to enable them to endure adversity without forgetting their mother's example.'<sup>67</sup> Even in their conventional positions as mothers or teachers, women need to be morally autonomous for their own sake and that of the future generations that rely on them. It follows that for Wol-



lstonecraft, strong character is not cultivated through the child's separation from the mothering figure, but through identification with her. She prefers to talk about 'human duties' being regulated by moral principles that do not give precedence to public concerns over private ones, or male responsibilities over female ones.<sup>68</sup> *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* never loses sight of women's co-existing involvement in private and public life, and by deploying 'quintessentially "private" idioms of domesticity and motherhood precisely as springboards for public activity', Wollstonecraft furthers the public discussion of the privatization of gender politics.<sup>69</sup>

### Resisting Solitary Independence

It is no coincidence that the ideology of the separate spheres poses such a problem in the 1780s. The French Revolution celebrated the rights of the individual male challenging the law of the father and the king. As Joan Landes demonstrates, the republican public sphere clearly defined itself in opposition to salon culture, where women played a dominant role and which the republicans deemed as effeminate and artificial.<sup>70</sup> Romanticism itself was to a great extent about individual identity, and its quest for individuation has had such an appeal for postmodern audiences that we have come to identify the era with what Angela Esterhammer challenges in her work *Romanticism and Improvisation 1750–1850* as 'the long-standing Romantic ideology of solitary genius'.<sup>71</sup> This vision of solitariness was gendered since only masculinity was increasingly associated with independence, while woman was conceived exclusively in the performance of the submissive daughter, sister or wife. By the mid-eighteenth century, Rousseau, the great writer of the social contract and father of the ideal citizen, Emile, uses the rhetoric of female affections to bind women to domestic submissiveness. While man finds an outlet for his physical and mental energy in commercial entrepreneurship, the colonizing quest or the emerging professions, woman's meekness and unquestioned commitment to the hearth emerges as the constant upon which the stability of the new commercial civilization rests.

This is how Rousseau envisioned women's natural place in society and the kind of socialization that should underscore their innate qualities:

Thus the whole education of women ought to relate to men. To please men, to be useful to them, to make herself loved and honoured by them, to raise them when young, to care for them when grown, to counsel them, to console them, to make their lives agreeable and sweet – these are the duties of women at all times, and they ought to be taught from childhood.<sup>72</sup>

Women writers debated over this image. After Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the period registered an increasing sensibility towards female education. Female political tracts express the doubt that the

restrictions on women's public participation could be counterbalanced by their eminence at home. The civilization they witnessed rested on a social practice that empowered man to self-sufficiency, which was a gendered self-fashioning unbecoming to women. Mary Wollstonecraft identifies Rousseau's model of femininity as accountable for the docile female self-fashioning of the day. She regrets that 'the civilized women of the present century ... are only anxious to inspire love, when they ought to cherish a nobler ambition, and by their abilities and virtues exact respect'.<sup>73</sup> Far from rejecting the progress of civilization, Wollstonecraft argues that the improvements of the civilizing process have not gone far enough, especially as regards women, but not exclusively, since she sees the sexes as being in constant interdependence and interaction. Not fortuitously her critique of a partial civilization first comes up in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) in response to Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) and is reiterated in the opening paragraphs of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).<sup>74</sup> Wollstonecraft insists that manners and morals are inextricably linked, because the civilizing process implies on the part of both men and women the ability of introspection that seeks 'to civilize the heart, to make it humane by implanting reasonable principles'.<sup>75</sup> For Wollstonecraft, to be 'civilized women' means to gain respect by the exercise of reason and active social engagement.<sup>76</sup> She warns of a sensibility 'of which the self is the centre'.<sup>77</sup> The self-centred sensibility that Wollstonecraft and Austen encountered in the ladies of their time made women either indolent, such as Lady Bertram in *Mansfield Park*, or despots, such as the eponymous heroine in *Lady Susan*.<sup>78</sup>

One of the questions that drove women's writing of the late-eighteenth century (including Austen's), and is not alien to our time, is whether women's connectedness as mothers, daughters, wives entails an inferior moral development and lesser social participation. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication* (particularly after William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication* in 1798) gave rise to the fear that the new independent woman would trade her caring qualities for self-sufficiency. And if the anchor of female dedication disappeared, who would guarantee the stability or even the preservation of civil society? Mary Darby Robinson addresses precisely this fear in *A Letter to the Women of England on the [Injustice] Cruelties of Mental Subordination* (1799), a few years after and in support of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication*:

Let these mental despots recollect that education cannot unsex a woman; that tenderness of soul, and a love of social intercourse, will still be hers, even though she become a rational friend, and an intellectual companion. She will not by education be less tenacious of an husband's honour; though she may be rendered more capable of defending her own.<sup>79</sup>



As Robinson's text indicates, women's claim to a voice aroused a public apprehension that rational socialization would unsex women by robbing them of their natural 'tenderness of soul' and 'love of social intercourse'. Bluntly put, women's emancipation was considered to be incompatible with human ties. This association was especially intensified by the way the civilized man was being portrayed: self-sufficient and at odds with society.<sup>80</sup> Wollstonecraft, Robinson and Austen lived in a time that registered the beginnings of the cult of the self-made man that would reach its peak in the Victorian period and was also captured in the portrayal of Captain Wentworth in Austen's last finished novel, *Persuasion* (1817).<sup>81</sup> Robinson cannot identify with this kind of subjectivity and her argument does more than rest on the belief that female self-fashioning can be reconciled with female interest in relationships; to Robinson this whole discussion of independence versus relationships is a masculine construction in the first place. Her language is unambiguous: it is a fear which the 'mental despots' project onto women and which Robinson goes all-out to expel from her female contemporaries' minds. Her word choice is deliberate and when she mentions the unsexing of women, she has in mind Richard Polwhele, who in his poem *The Unsex'd Females* (1798) labels women writers who endorsed female education as 'unsex'd females'.<sup>82</sup>

In response to this categorization, Robinson, being herself among the unsex'd females, addresses the women of England, endeavouring to convince them that education and the resulting moral and economic independence will not dehumanize them by depriving them of their affections. Moreover, she requires a form of moral and economic independence that does not exclude women's embeddedness in community, the claim for women's rights should not be understood as the truncation of men's rights. Austen's fiction, along with political and fictional writings like Wollstonecraft's and Robinson's, are expressions of a reformative agenda that refuses to conceive of women's submissiveness as the inevitable price to be paid for the survival of affections. It is an attempt to pave a way between the Romantic self-sufficient (male) ego and the self-effacing woman hailed by Rousseau. Her fiction reformulates civilized womanhood as the balance between an 'I' and a 'we' identity within the individual promoting both independent thought and awareness of human interdependencies.

Austen criticism has generally set off from an oppositional understanding of individual and community and upheld the separation of these two categories. Studies with titles such as *The Opposing Self* (1955) by Lionel Trilling or James Thompson's *Between the Self and the World* (1988) have this dichotomist assumption at the core. Austen is labelled as anti-Jacobin, unless one can demonstrate that she celebrates independent individuality and shuns compromises with her patriarchal environment. Early in her work Marilyn Butler ranked Austen in the same conservative camp as Jane West, while, according to Poovey, if Austen's fic-

tion 'echoes the values of individualism', it does so 'unintentionally'.<sup>83</sup> Attempts to exonerate the novelist's political affiliations follow the aesthetic path: such an orientation argues for a Romantic Austen and takes the isolation of heroines like Marianne Dashwood, Fanny Price or Anne Elliot for female emanations of the Romantic hero. Nina Auerbach, for example, compares Fanny Price's standoffishness to the societal exclusion of Frankenstein's creature: 'this frail, clinging and seemingly passive girl who annoys above all with her shyness is also magnetic ... like Frankenstein as a silent censorious pall ... a killjoy, a blighter of ceremonies, and divider of families. It is precisely this opposition to the traditional patterns of romantic comedy that lends her her disturbing strength'.<sup>84</sup> Poovey draws a similar parallel between Austen's symbolism in her characterization of Fanny Price and Mary Shelley's in her depiction of the creature's solitude.<sup>85</sup> It appears that these readings make the same assumption as the readers of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* or *A Letter to the Women of England*: solitary individualism translates into agency. The difference lies in the fact that late-eighteenth-century society was apprehensive of the solitary woman, whereas postmodern criticism has been critical of the relational one.<sup>86</sup> I believe there is an access to Austen's fiction that has been underrepresented, one that rests on the argument hinted at by Karen Newman that for Austen, 'a woman's freedom is not simply a freedom to parody male models of action', and by investigating new relations between the individual and society, she gives her heroines the freedom to move beyond the assumption that 'what men do is what every human being wants to do'.<sup>87</sup> Austen seems to frustrate our expectations, refusing to emulate masculine independence. The fact that Austen's novels open from the perspective of the family, which itself is embedded in 'the neighbourhood', a metaphor for the social network, and finish their trajectory in what the narrator calls 'the small band of true friends' induces one to ask how our understanding of her work changes if we take embedded subjectivity as our standpoint.<sup>88</sup>

### The Civilizing Process of Socially Related Individuals

One of the guiding questions of this book is what happens to our reading of Austen's fiction if we think beyond the dichotomy individual/community and base our investigation on the embedded and relational self. Marcia Cavell recognizes 'two conflicting strains in psychoanalytic thought: one sees the mind as self-contained; the other claims that the mind arises only within an interpersonal field, in a real material world that the subjects share, and come to know they share'.<sup>89</sup> She deliberately frames her work within the second position arguing that its clinical implications are enormous. Elias makes a similar argument in sociological studies. He is the most prominent figure of a methodology called figurational sociology, which centres not on the abstract individual, but on

evolving networks of interdependent individuals. Hans-Peter Bartels explains that the notion of figuration underlying Elias's thought should be understood as a tool that helps loosen the social constraint to speak and think of 'individual' and 'society' as if these were not only two different entities, but more importantly two antagonistic entities.<sup>90</sup> For Elias, 'the erroneous opposition of "individual" and "society" stood in the way of a proper understanding of the civilizing process while, on the other hand, the theory of the civilizing process could explain why that opposition had taken root so deeply in European culture.'<sup>91</sup>

The shift is significant: Elias's figurational sociology conceptualizes humans as entities in relation to other entities (unlike Hobbes's solipsistic self). The individual as a mushroom, or in Elias's words the 'homo clausus', is a chimera (*Phantasiebild*), a myth in need of revision: 'Over and over again, in the scientific myths of origin no less than in the religious ones, they feel impelled to imagine: In the beginning was a single human being, who was an adult.'<sup>92</sup> Calling on Hume as an ally, who understood that 'a person ... was once a child and is now a man', Elias argues that our reflections as philosophers, sociologists or literary critics should draw on human beings who operate in networks rather than on the human being, since humans always appear in groups and form distinctive constellations that Elias calls 'figurations' (*Figurationen*).<sup>93</sup> To revise the myth would be to acknowledge that there never was a human being, but always human beings who lived together for better and for worse and through their interdependencies formed small or large communities.

The figurational sociology developed by Elias is indebted to the Scottish Enlightenment in at least two respects: first, like Scottish conjectural history, it focuses on the process (*Prozess*) that human communities undergo and not on the state of being (*Zustand*); second, it is not an abstract individual that lies at the heart of its investigation, but networks of humans and the way their evolving interdependencies are linked to changes in human personality as well as in forms of government and institutional developments. Elias's preference for networks of individuals as the centre of sociological theory instead of the single individual resonates with Adam Ferguson's in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), which can 'be read as a battleground of eighteenth-century political idioms'.<sup>94</sup> Ferguson contests Hobbes's metaphor of atomistic individuals, coming to a similar conclusion as Elias later, namely that there is no such a thing as a single individual: 'Mankind have always wandered or settled, agreed or quarrelled, in troops and companies.'<sup>95</sup> Human life and history revolve around a principle of 'alliance and union'.<sup>96</sup> Although he allows for the principle of self-preservation as being necessary to the safeguarding of human existence, Ferguson is reluctant to acknowledge self-interest as the ruling passion. Self-profit or self-preservation 'are even of a feeble texture, when compared to the resolute ardour with which a man adheres to his friend, or to his tribe, after they have for some time run the

career of fortune together'.<sup>97</sup> At the same time Ferguson's principle of union was a counter-response to Rousseau's principle of separation being an innate urge of the pre-social man. As Peter Jimack suggests, *Emile* and its sequel *Émile et Sophie, ou les Solitaires* (1762) conclude that the ideal state is that of 'the emotional self-sufficiency which was the natural state of the primitive, pre-social man, but which for modern man can be attained only by the suppression of his natural inclinations'.<sup>98</sup> For Emile, affections are chains, whereas Ferguson and Elias value them as life-giving and life-sustaining bonds.

What is intriguing about these approaches is that their focus on human interdependencies intersects with feminist research that seeks to identify the ramifications of the binary individual/community. Feminist philosophers, such as Benhabib, contend that this dichotomy has at its core monadic, or, in her words, 'disembedded' and 'disembodied cogitos' that can be traced back to certain thinkers of the Enlightenment.<sup>99</sup> Christopher Berry makes a case that an individualistic and self-oriented subject resides at the core of Social Contract theories which the Scottish Enlightenment sought to counteract. Contractarians placed an enormous emphasis on the agency of self-reasoning subjects: 'The hallmark of Contractarianism is that it makes civil society the outcome of individual rational decision.'<sup>100</sup> They ignored the human sociability upon which the Scottish philosophers capitalized. For Benhabib, the self at the heart of the Social Contract is disembedded, because it refuses to consider that the self 'becomes an individual in that it becomes a "social" being capable of language, interaction and cognition', and disembodied, because it neglects the truth that the physical survival of the self's body depends on the care of the community.<sup>101</sup> When we take disembeddedness and disembodiedness as the foundation of ethical investigations, we abstract ourselves from the finite, suffering and emotive aspects of human experience.<sup>102</sup>

The target of this criticism is, in Elias's words, 'the lonely subject of knowledge', and 'the basic solitude, or transcendental theories of knowledge'.<sup>103</sup> Its claim is that humans' physical and epistemic dependence on other human beings should urge the social sciences to transcend the logic of dichotomy. Instead of thinking of the social character of human life as impairing the process of individuation, Elias argues that it is precisely its relation to a community of other humans that enables the differentiation of the human psyche:

the individuality and the social-relatedness of a person are not only not antithetical to each other, but the special shaping and differentiation of mental functions that we refer to as 'individuality' is only possible for a person who grows up in a group, in a society.<sup>104</sup>

For both Elias and Benhabib, the reason of Descartes and Kant – the self-transparent and self-grounding reason practised by disembodied and disembedded



subjects – is transformed into the 'contingent achievement of linguistically socialized finite and embodied creatures'.<sup>105</sup> Like Benhabib, Elias sees the mystification of the individual as starting in the past: while Benhabib takes issue with contractarians like Hobbes, Elias names the Cartesian reasoning self a 'man of straw'.<sup>106</sup> For Benhabib, the notion of the disembodied and disembedded self has had an enormous impact on the ethical thought of Western civilization. Kant saw the isolated individual as the formulator of universal laws: 'Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.'<sup>107</sup> As she puts it in an enlightening metaphor, Kant envisions the human self as an isolated 'geometer' and society as the multitude of such geometers, who although each enclosed in a room, come up independently of each other with the same answer to a problem.<sup>108</sup> In this 'monological' process of decision-making the Kantian thinking agent abstracts himself from the particularity of other selves; concrete circumstances are felt as intrusions and unnecessary complications to be ignored by pure reason.

However, those who see the necessity of rethinking Kant's model of universal laws have recently displaced the emphasis from the isolated thinking agent to the community of interacting agents. Kant's question is thus reformulated into 'what principles of action can we all recognize or agree to as being valid if we engage in practical discourse or a mutual search for justification'.<sup>109</sup> Awareness of human interdependencies is at the heart of this shift which attempts to articulate a way of life that results from the interaction of reasoning and feeling subjects rather than from the solitary musings of an abstract rational being. As the starting point changes from isolation to connectedness, so does the focus of the critics shift from trying to demonstrate that the 'I' achieves self-realization by becoming self-sufficient to the 'I's primary need to make sense of its life story within a given social framework. I stress that the revision of the 'myth' of self-sufficiency opens up new possible interpretations of Austen's approach to English/Western civilization and especially the form in which she perceives women engage in daily life as civilized subjects. We come to understand that 'Relationships then require a kind of courage and emotional stamina which has long been a strength of women, insufficiently noted and valued'.<sup>110</sup>

Prefiguring this revision, Wollstonecraft acknowledges both the need for relationships and the strength of mind required by them. She cannot separate self-fashioning from human ties, which is why she emphasizes that women need to attend to both exigencies:

Connected with man as daughters, wives, and mothers, their moral character may be estimated by their manners in fulfilling those simple duties; but the end, the great end of their exertions should be to unfold their faculties and acquire the dignity of conscious virtue.<sup>111</sup>

Wollstonecraft understands independence as a virtue connected to the exertion of one's mental powers: 'It is a farce to call any being virtuous whose virtues do not result from the exercise of its own reason.'<sup>112</sup> Thus, independence is not forged through a self-sufficiency that precludes human bonds, but in the very execution of daily responsibilities and affections that ask for active introspection and expansion of mental powers. What I want to suggest is that emphasis on embedded introspection enables us to appreciate Austen's commitment to bring together what Rousseau had excluded: a woman's affection and her voice. Her fiction does not merely reject the male construction that only a voiceless woman could be a good family and society member, but also makes the quality of the relationship dependent on a woman's ability to speak her own mind and to be her own monitor, because self-effacement is as damaging as the alienation from human bonds. The present study aims to demonstrate that Austen in her works, and especially through her heroines, promotes a subjectivity that avoids these extremes: women who are neither powerless nor abusive of power; women who stay in relationships, without silencing themselves; women who enable social transactions without being degraded to mere decorative or submissive creatures. I argue that this psychological development can be traced only if we read Austen's heroines within the constellation of their relationships, social responsibilities and ethical commitments. Austen is truly a keen observer of civil society, not because she reiterates adroitly the code of good manners and proper behaviour, but because her work pursues the formation of what Norbert Elias defines as the ideal of civilized subjectivity:

a more durable balance, a better attunement, between the overall demands of man's social existence on the one hand, and his personal needs and inclinations on the other.<sup>113</sup>

If Wollstonecraft illustrates in *A Vindication* those attitudes that weaken, atrophy and degrade women to mere objects of pleasure, Austen complements her work by portraying women as active agents in the civilizing process. Her emphasis on the self-fashioning of the civilized women as 'political and moral subjects' brings to light alternative conceptions of autonomy and moral reasoning.<sup>114</sup>

### Austen's Civilized Women

Discussions of the socio-politics of gender are prominent in Hazel Jones's *Jane Austen and Marriage*, which explores the ways in which marriage, money and the pursuit of happiness manifest themselves in Austen's life and fiction against the backdrop of contemporary conduct manuals, letters, diaries, journals and newspapers.<sup>115</sup> Jones's focus differs from the present study in its predominantly historical scope. Also Austen's early work has received a good deal of attention



by the Juvenilia Press, whose annotated editions testify to the growing appreciation of these early works. Sharing this appreciation from a different perspective, I situate the juvenilia in a diachronic development that reveals the narrator's keen apprehension of a partial and gender-biased civilization. I am also mindful of Jenny Davidson's *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen*, which links Austen and, more explicitly, *Mansfield Park* to the philosophical tradition of the eighteenth century.<sup>116</sup> Although Davidson takes account of the Scottish philosophers, she makes no reference to John Millar, who scrutinizes the intersection between gender and civilization more deliberately than any other Scottish philosopher. However, the most exhaustive study that delves into the influence that the Anglo-Scottish Enlightenment had on Austen's formation is Peter Knox-Shaw's *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*.<sup>117</sup> Knox-Shaw's awe-inspiring archival research of, among other sources, Austen's childhood library and his tracking down of the works that shaped her mind and pen offer the picture of a knowledgeable writer that with her juvenilia had already embarked on 'the war of ideas'. While Knox-Shaw's book traces the echoes of David Hume and Adam Smith in Austen's fiction, in the chapter on the juvenilia as well as in the rest of the book, its emphasis lies not so much on gender as on the intellectual history that infused Austen's body of thought. This may explain why Millar's work appears to have no significant bearing on his investigation and is eclipsed by those of his predecessors. Having said this, the present study is informed by Knox-Shaw's meticulous analysis of Austen's awareness of the Scottish philosophical tradition and seeks to expand on it by establishing continuity between this legacy and discussions of moral development and civilization in recent feminist and non-feminist inquiries such as Elias's *The Civilizing Process*. For this purpose, I address the question of moral development as part of the processual formation of the civilized habitus and investigate moral judgement by taking into account postmodern and feminist theories. Consequently, the preoccupations of this book are also different from those of recent studies such as Sarah Emsley's *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*, which makes a case for Austen's conception of morality as being grounded in the transcendental virtues of the classical and Christian heritage.<sup>118</sup>

This book builds on the premise elaborated by Nancy Armstrong's *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900*, which argues that the novel played a crucial role in the conceptualization of what it means to be human, to be both a desiring and social being. According to Armstrong, the novel continued where Enlightenment philosophy left off, as it sought to adjust the individual to the social world at the same time that it refused to do so completely.<sup>119</sup> In Armstrong's account, Austen's novels 'represent the perfect synthesis of desiring individual and self-governing citizen', but at the same time her novels come into being at a time when this 'synthesis crumbled under the threat

of social rebellion'.<sup>120</sup> Although Armstrong does not suggest that this synthesis is unproblematic, she tends to emphasize in her reading of *Pride and Prejudice* how 'the novel enhances the potential value of individuals in general'.<sup>121</sup> The present study investigates the nature of this synthesis, while doubting that it is as accomplished a process as Armstrong maintains. The interest here lies in the different forms and figurations in which Austen tests the dialogic relationship between individuality and sociability.

This study begins by tracing changes in the structure of personality that take place within specific social and temporal frameworks. Chapters 1 and 2 engage with Austen's early work (the juvenilia, *Lady Susan* and *Northanger Abbey*) demonstrating that these texts convey in different ways Austen's discontent with a partial civilization. One piece of the juvenilia, 'Henry and Eliza', lends itself to interpretations of the female rank in light of Millar's stadial theory. Without turning woman into a unified natural category, Austen exposes the encapsulation of the female rank within the rank of women's male legal representatives as a principle flaw of her civilization. This for Austen is evidence for gender bias and female exclusion. The juvenilia discussed in Chapter 1, more than other works, undercut all those theories that aligned women's constitution with weak nerves, but also with passive civilizing influence. Women here are endowed with a will-power that clears away the misogynist assumption that they 'merely suffered the experience of the world, in contrast to the wilful engagement and self-fashioning that Lockean psychology promised to all men'.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, the juvenilia include women within a behavioural development that resists conceptions of timeless femininity, paving the way for the individuation of Austen's future female protagonists in the context of a civilizing process.

In Chapter 2, I read the rhetorically superb *Lady Susan* along with the inexperienced Catherine Morland of *Northanger Abbey*, since both works raise the question of voice and exclusion. I argue that the private and its excluded or silenced voices are endowed with epistemological power. At the same time, the narrator suggests that voice needs an audience and unfolds its potential when heard and responded to by others. (This reminds us of Elias saying that even Descartes's 'Cogito ergo sum' asks for an addressee outside the reasoning self.)<sup>123</sup> In *Northanger Abbey*, the impetuousness of the juvenilia is increasingly transformed into introspective behaviour. Most of the events are filtered through Catherine Morland's subjectivity as she tries to find her place within the constellation of her new acquaintances, or in Elias's terminology 'figurations'. What some critics read as Austen's parting with the radical ideas of her youth, I read as an increasingly conscious self-fashioning. In particular, the endings of both narratives suggest that there is a direct link between giving voice to the self and self-monitored behaviour, which Elias recognizes as typical of civilized consciousness.

Acquiring a voice and making it heard is of particular significance in those relationships that generate conflicting moral ideas. Once self-fashioning grows out of self-surveillance and entails to a certain extent a performative choice, Austen draws attention to how the 'I' relates to the 'otherness' of another 'I'. In Chapter 3, comparisons of sisterhoods and partnerships in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* hint at the need for what Seyla Benhabib calls 'interactive universalism', an ethical approach where otherness is not superseded by a dominating ideology, but serves as a starting point for further thought and action. As Benhabib argues, 'interactive universalism' is possible only if we depart from the isolated, disembodied self and engage in the particularities of an embedded and embodied other.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, since these novels discuss competing and publicly debated ideologies through the enactment of familial ties, they bridge the allegedly separate private and public spheres.

The question of dealing with the particularities of the embedded and embodied other becomes especially poignant when that other depends heavily on a given hegemonic ideology. The best example of this 'figuration' is discussed in Chapter 4 through Fanny Price, *Mansfield Park*'s heroine, who is considered to be Austen's least appealing female portrait. If we read the three mature novels as a progression of female consciousness towards a balance between the 'I' identity and 'we' identity, one is tempted to read Fanny's character as a relapse in this process – a shrinking of the 'I' as it encounters the overpowering influence of the 'we' (and some scholars make this case). Yet, I argue that such an assumption has to do with an understanding of autonomy and independent thinking that builds upon an isolated, abstract agent and neglects the network that exercises a performative influence on that agent. In order to counteract this abstractness, I pay close attention to the formative influence of childhood. Here the concept of 'habit', another word for socialization, elaborated by the Scottish philosophers as well as Elias's emphasis on the family as the primary unit where the civilizing process takes place help illuminate the correlation between the behavioural life of parents and children. I also suggest that Judith Butler's concept of performativity points up ways in which autonomy can be defined beyond the extremes of subordination and insurrection.

Chapter 5 moves to *Emma*, which coming right after *Mansfield Park* seems to be as drastic a change as conceivable. Although the two novels centre on two very different heroines – *Mansfield Park* with the almost invisible Fanny and *Emma* with the almost omnipresent heroine – I suggest that they share the theme of autonomy. I read the concept of autonomy in the light of eighteenth-century writings as well as in postmodern sociological and philosophical works. The chapter scrutinizes Austen's depiction of power relations in heterosexual courtship and how and to what extent the novel reformulates eighteenth-century gendered notions such as power and influence. Unlike some critics, I argue

that the complexity of Emma's character cannot be grasped through the rigid and antagonistic categories of individual and society. The novel calls for conceptions of agency that accommodate human failure and self-respect, 'detachment' and 'involvement' with one's own actions and endeavours.

The final chapter addresses Austen's last finished novel, *Persuasion*, whose heroine, Anne Elliot, embodies some strongly debated eighteenth-century dichotomies: virtue versus experience, fortitude versus feeling, individuality versus social participation, domestic versus public. I suggest that *Persuasion*, more directly than any other Austen novel, revisits the essentialist feminine ideal of gentleness furthered by Rousseau only to unburden it from the debilitating by-product of female submissiveness and to root its construction in social practice. To a certain extent, Austen follows Millar's appreciation of female sensibility as a civilizing force, but because only a sensibility that springs from introspection, education and embodied social involvement amends a partial civilization, she is closer to Wollstonecraft. Nonetheless, *Persuasion* aligns Austen with the Scottish philosophers who believed that 'the elaboration of a social role for women is a characteristic of civil society'.<sup>125</sup> This ultimately unsettles the public/private binary heralding the feminist stance that the private is political.



## 1 THE JUVENILIA: UNTYING THE KNOTS

Austen's writing career started at the age of twelve. Between 1787 and 1793 and before becoming a published author, she wrote twenty-seven pieces in prose, drama and verse and organized them in three volumes to which critics now refer as the juvenilia.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Fanny Burney, who destroyed the writings of her youth when she turned fifteen, Austen held on to her early work and revised it as late as in 1809. She clearly considered it as much a part of her artistic achievement as her mature novels. Originally, the pieces of the juvenilia were read to the family, which explains also the dedication of each production to family members and close friends.<sup>2</sup> As Jan Fergus points out, Austen had a clear audience in mind, an intimate circle of family and friends.<sup>3</sup> If we agree with John McAleer, the juvenilia offer a source of information about the novelist's literary formation and 'what interested her during a pivotal stage of her existence'.<sup>4</sup>

The juvenilia are a fitting starting point, because they lend themselves to two fundamental aspects pursued in this book: first, being composed over a period of six years, the juvenilia invite the critic to investigate the diachronic evolution of Austen's fiction. The first aspect then can be described as the 'processual' character that clears away the temptation to see as a fixed state what in fact is dynamic. The 'processual' encourages the search for continuities between earlier and later representations, thus avoiding the pitfall of isolated considerations. It also leads to the second aspect, namely the 'relational' character, which testifies to the embeddedness of Austen's juvenilia in her body of work and in the literary heritage, as well as to her relational understanding of human existence. The 'processual' and 'relational' are associated with Norbert Elias, who argues that the civilizing process needs to be approached as the self's psychological processes or 'psychogenesis', as well as the collective processes of social development or in Elias's word 'sociogenesis'.<sup>5</sup> In fact, what we call society is nothing but the figuration of the different functions that people have for each other, while social changes are first and foremost due to the transformation of these interrelated functions:

in this way each individual person is really tied; he is tied by living in permanent dependence on other people ... And it is this network of the functions which people

have for each other, it and nothing else, that we call 'society'. It represents a special kind of sphere. Its structures are what we call 'social structures'.<sup>6</sup>

Elias suggests that the emergence of those social structures that characterize civil society reflect the transformation of the behavioural life of individuals and of their functions within the figurations they form with each other. In *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, Elias traces back the rise of Western civilization by connecting the social changes recorded in history with the changes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity.

As regards the present book, the emergence of 'civilized women' can be traced back through the uncovering of changes in the structure of female personality and women's positioning within the figurations they form with other humans. First, this chapter argues that the juvenilia provide the foundation for Austen's later definition of human autonomy, because they register the profound awareness that human development operates within a figuration of human interdependencies and that the study of the structure of relations between individuals best reveals the psyche of the individual person.<sup>7</sup> The focus on interdependencies, as Seyla Benhabib argues, considers 'the moral point of view as the contingent achievement of interactive forms of rationality rather than as the timeless standpoint of a legislative reason'.<sup>8</sup> This distinction is the first step towards considering Austen's fiction as a work that looks forward to practices that regulate a more balanced gender power ratio and acknowledge particularistic claims. This kind of morality is the result of embedded and embodied moral agents who engage in interactive processes: it is dynamic, rather than static; 'processual' rather than fixed; 'relational' rather than isolated. Second, I address the relational aspect of the work and then examine how it evolves from the earliest productions of the juvenilia to the latest. In the later pieces of the juvenilia, outward bodily violence is reduced and physical threat is solely meditated, which speaks for the processual character of the three volumes, where the characters undergo stages of behavioural life that one can locate in the civilizing process. I link the reduction of violence with the increase of what Elias calls rationality, the faculty of introspection that makes possible a self-monitored (yet not self-sufficient) projection of the future. I read this as Austen's investment in emancipatory gender politics, rather than, as influential critics have argued, as her distancing from unconventional ideas. The chapter closes with a reading of the short story 'Henry and Eliza', suggesting that Austen locates this emancipatory thrust in the female body whose existence needs to be interpreted and recovered through the unravelling of those discourses that under the guise of the natural place themselves beyond investigation.

## Processual and Relational Consciousness

The interaction between individuals is of interest to the novelist from the start. The opening sentence of the juvenilia and the first line of 'Frederic and Elfrida' ushers the reader into what will be Austen's point of departure during her entire career – the family setting: 'The Uncle of Elfrida was the Father of Frederic; in other words, they were first cousins by the Father's side' (J 4). As a matter of fact, 'Frederic and Elfrida were first cousins by the Father's side' would have been an easier formulation to follow, but it would have failed to convey the linkage that typifies human existence. Linkage is something that humanity has in common with literature. Ellen Martin puts forward the metonymy of literature as 'a web of knots with people and places, events and objects, tied up in a way that lures us to untie and analyse their connections, but also guarantees that we will never complete the task'.<sup>9</sup> On our quest for knowledge, Austen's somewhat twisted language invites us to question, investigate and better comprehend these ties. The very opening sentence of the juvenilia implies that human identity is embedded and an accurate knowledge about it can be gained by taking into account those other subjects from whom the individual acquires knowledge. The same is implied in 'Jack and Alice', the second novel of the juvenilia, in which we learn that Mr Johnson 'was determined to celebrate his next Birth day by giving a Masquerade to his Children and Freinds' (J 13). Just as the individual is born into a family and needs it for his/her survival, so the family is situated within a neighbourhood. In 'Amelia Webster' numerous letters are exchanged between friends who are bound to each other by their love for their friends' siblings. At the end, the reader can hardly keep a record of the entanglements between these young people. A similar constellation can be found in 'Lesley Castle' where a set of sisters are in constant correspondence with their intimate female friends. The focus on a network of relationships that shapes individual knowledge persists.

The implication here is that Austen envisions human subjectivity not in a vacuum, which is the approach of traditional theories of knowledge as opposed to non-reductionist sociological theories which build upon a knower who is embedded in a group as a subject of knowledge. According to Elias:

No one can know anything without acquiring knowledge from others. Without starting from a group of knowers sharing a common fund of knowledge and, as part of it, a group-specific language as a medium indispensable for acquiring any other knowledge, a theory of knowledge remains an artifice that is bound to mislead.<sup>10</sup>

This is also Austen's approach to subjectivity as she explores the civilized habitus without ever losing sight of the 'we' that contribute to its construction. If Austen shows interest in the relationship between the 'I' and the 'we', then it is no wonder that the courtship plot has a particular appeal for her. She does this to

the dismay of some feminist critics who argue that heterosexual love undermines women's interests.<sup>11</sup> Yet, I want to opt for another reading and explain Austen's attention to courtship as being at once generated by self-love and love for the other. As Carol Gilligan's felicitous phrase goes, in love 'the "I" becomes part of a "we", rather than erasing the sense of self, calls it fully into existence. Like voice is called forth by resonance.'<sup>12</sup>

Hence, courtship responds to the human urge of giving and receiving affection. Most of the juvenilia address the desire of young ladies for romance, which is portrayed as a legitimate drive as in the case of 'Frederic and Elfrida', about whom we are told that 'Being both born in one day and being brought up at the same school, it was not wonderful that they should look on each other with something more than bare politeness' (J 4). When Laura in 'Love and Freindship' learns from her servant Mary that a young gentleman and his male servant have lost their way and are asking permission to warm themselves in the cottage where Laura lives with her parents, the young heroine, full of 'natural sensibility', eagerly asks for her father's permission: 'Won't you admit them?' (J 107). She is granted this wish and soon afterwards leaves the cottage with the stranger forever. Not only is Laura's sexual desire acknowledged, but so is that of her servant, Mary. In a scant sentence, we learn that her servant introduces the young gentleman to the hosts, but 'The [male] servant she kept to herself' (J 107). The teenage writer seems to assert in straightforward words that sexual attraction transcends social standing. Neither can it be subdued by rules of propriety as in 'Edgar and Emma', where the heroine has such an urge to see Edgar that she takes quite drastic actions to learn his whereabouts from his mother: 'Mrs Willmot, you do not stir from this House till you let me know how all the rest of the family do, particularly your eldest son' (J 36). One can hardly understand John Halperin's dismissive treatment of this bold, admittedly too romantic a heroine, when he asserts that she 'does little but cry'.<sup>13</sup> Here we meet with a young girl who longs for companionship and takes the matter into her own hands. Emma bids adieu to Rousseau's standard of female meekness or to the model of 'damsel in distress'.

The juvenilia approve of women's pursuing men romantically. The repression of desire for propriety's sake is ridiculed in 'Frederic and Elfrida', where the lovers 'were both determined not to transgress the rules of Propriety by owning their attachment either to the object beloved, or to any one else' – the author's mockery is the natural consequence of this unnatural repression (J 4). Elfrida and Frederic postpone their wedding for over eighteen years and it's not until Elfrida witnesses Frederic's growing partiality for a young girl – who could be his daughter – that she recurs to artifice in order to amend her wrong decision: 'She accordingly fainted and was in such a hurry to have a succession of fainting fits, that she had scarcely patience enough to recover from one before she fell into another' (J 12). Not only does propriety call for artifice, but it is debilitating for

women because it reduces them to an existence at men's mercy, like Elfrida who can marry only after she succeeds in awakening Frederic's pity. As the author puts it, her fainting fits were not in vain, because when needed 'Frederic was as bold as brass yet in other respects his heart was as soft as cotton', soft being a notoriously feminine attribute by which Austen points up a debilitating feminization of body politics (J 12).

Most of the juvenilia's heroines ignore the rules of propriety. In fact, most of them are bold and regard their drives as prerogatives upon which it is only natural to act. Accordingly, friendships, as well as love, happen mostly at first sight and connections are established instinctively, as best illustrated in the encounter of Laura and Sophia in 'Love and Freindship'. The two young ladies of sensibility 'instantly unfolded to each other the most inward Secrets of our Hearts' (J 114, my emphasis). When they meet with an elderly man they feel 'an instinctive Sympathy that whispered to my Heart, that he was my Grandfather' (J 120). Of course, these are common topics of romance and I agree with Frances Beer's remark that Laura and Sophia stand for 'the sentimental ideal of spontaneous attachment', which Austen makes fun of.<sup>14</sup> Austen draws on other such topics, like the element of story-telling, where one character is asked by another to relate the story of her life. The novelist found numerous examples in the literature of her time. It suffices to mention Arabella in Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752), who is so notoriously interested in the adventures of others that one has to invent them in order to win her friendship. Story-telling functions as an instrument of socialization in which younger women identify with more experienced ones and are taught to imbibe the rules that define a woman's place. Yet, the fact that Austen parodies these elements does not simply mean that she rejects them. As Jan Fergus splendidly points out, this is one of 'the most remarkable aspects of Austen's youthful sense of herself: her ability to laugh at her most cherished feelings, to view them ironically, without relinquishing them'.<sup>15</sup> Margaret Anne Doody advances a similar argument when analysing Charlotte Lennox's attitude towards the genre of romance, claiming that the writer of *The Female Quixote* knows the genre too well and consequently enjoys it too much to simply want to ridicule it.<sup>16</sup> In line with these interpretations, I believe that Austen's interest goes beyond parody. Echoing Hume's philosophy of the prevalence of feeling over reason, the spontaneity of friendship and love in the juvenilia gives voice to human drives instead of socially conditioned choices. Austen may approach these themes tongue-in-cheek, but she never abandons them.

Doody takes great pleasure in the general desire for self-gratification embodied by the heroines of the juvenilia and celebrates their universe for being one where moral punishment does not exist.<sup>17</sup> It is true that the juvenilia are full of women who are more powerful, more assertive and entertaining than men.<sup>18</sup> An example is Lucy in 'Jack and Alice' who falls for the stunning and megalomaniac



Charles Adams and is 'determined to make a bold push' and thus writes him 'a very kind letter, offering him with great tenderness' her hand and heart (J 24). Not only does she assume the role of the male suitor, but she is not discouraged even after Charles's absolute refusal, which she explains away as 'the effect of his modesty', a statement that delightfully anticipates Mr Collins's proposal to Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, only with such reversed gender roles as can be found in the radical novels of 1790s and early 1800s (Mary Hays's Emma in the *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* is one of these women who initiate romance). Another sassy example of self-gratification and lack of moral concern is Cassandra of the novel 'The Beautiful Cassandra' who walked alone about the town, 'devoured six ices, refused to pay for them, knocked down the Pastry Cook and walked away' (J 54). Far from being intimidated, she asks for the service of a hackney coach, for which she cannot pay and runs away after having placed her bonnet on the coachman's head. Only after rambling in the streets for seven hours, does she return home to her mother's arms whispering to herself: 'This is a day well spent' (J 56). A similar moral insensibility towards theft is depicted in 'Love and Freindship', where Sophia and Laura think it 'a proper treatment of so vile a Wretch as Macdonald to deprive him of Money' (J 125). Once they are caught red-handed, no feeling of guilt haunts them. On the contrary, they expect Macdonald, their pupil's father, to 'exculpate himself from the crime' of having broken in on Sophia's retirement 'insolently' (J 126). Eliza, in 'Henry and Eliza', steals a fifty-pound note from her adoptive parents and soon afterwards clandestinely marries the son-in-law-to-be of her employer, the Duchess of F. All she leaves behind is a note:

'Madam'  
'We are married and gone.'  
'Henry and Eliza Cecil' (J 41)

Ironically, Austen assures the readers before relating Eliza's misfortunes that her parents' 'first and principal care, was to incite in her a Love of Virtue and a Hatred of Vice' (J 38). In the light of Eliza's adventures, this statement reveals both the limitations of such an education and the domination of inner impulses.

The appreciation of fearless female self-gratification has been prominent in the criticism of the juvenilia and valued as a sign of feminism. Without denying the narrator's feminist attitude, I suggest that female assertiveness and spontaneity of feeling in the teenage work need to be read along with the violence that characterizes the juvenilia: murder, suicide, beating, stealing, kicking, drunkenness and physical abuse abound, especially in the earlier productions. Many a commentator has emphasized the cold-blooded tone of the early work and the creator's distance from her creatures. Peter Sabor rightly observes that the juvenilia are driven by an 'anarchic energy, violence and irreverence' (Jlxvii). Thinking

along the lines of a theory of civilization, the aggressiveness and unpredictability registered in the juvenilia are reminiscent of the crudeness in the beginning of the civilizing process where the individual's emotional state changes as abruptly as fate does. Elias argues that in the early stages of Western civilization (he draws upon documents from the fifteenth century) emotions were vented freely so that joy and sorrow, life and death were only a hair's breadth apart: 'a moment ago they were joking, now they mock each other, one word leads to another, and suddenly from the midst of laughter they find themselves in the fiercest feud'.<sup>19</sup> One of the juvenilia's most hilarious examples for this sudden change of mood is portrayed in the relationship between three families in 'Frederic and Elfrida': 'From this period, the intimacy between the Families of Fitzroy, Drummond, and Falknor, daily encreased till at length it grew to such a pitch, that they did not scruple to kick one another out of the window on the slightest provocation' (J 6). This comic description signals a shrewd awareness of the large scale of human emotions and their abrupt nature, portraying a society where intimacy and violence, love and abuse lie very close. In this scene, they lie so close that they depict the 'sudden switches from the most exuberant pleasure to the deepest despondency and remorse' that Elias locates in the early stages of Western civilization.<sup>20</sup>

The characters' emotional unpredictability is intensified by an atmosphere of arbitrariness. The plot advances by acts of chance, whim or impulse, which gives the work a sense of disconnectedness. For example, in 'Frederic and Elfrida' after three short introductory paragraphs about the reciprocal but yet unacknowledged love between the protagonists, when it is the reader's eager expectation to learn how this love story will unfold, the narrator interrupts the love plot by introducing Elfrida's letter in which she asks her friend Charlotte to buy her a hat. If heart talk would be the logical sequence after such a beginning, we are confronted instead with millinery interests. When the article is purchased and offered to Elfrida, the narrator assures the still-wondering reader: 'so ended this adventure, much to the same satisfaction of all parties' (J 5). In the middle of romance, our expectations are aborted by the pseudo-adventure of a bonnet purchase. Similarly, we never learn the life story of Lady Williams when she is asked about it by Alice in 'Jack and Alice', because the two ladies cannot get over the question of how much colour is becoming to a lady's complexion. If the readers hope to gain any instructional insight about complexion, they are once more disappointed, because all they are offered is Lady Williams's circular logic. When asked why she thinks a complexion can be too red, she answers: 'When a Woman has too great a proportion of red in her cheeks, she must have too much a colour' (J 19). The title of this novella is no less arbitrary. There is no apparent reason why Alice should be the heroine of the novel, since other characters such as Lucy or Lady Williams are equally prominent; and as for Jack, we are told crisply only that he is Alice's brother, who died due 'to his unfortunate

propensity to Liquor, which so completely deprived him of the use of those faculties Nature endowed him with, that he never did anything worth mentioning' (J27). If Jack is a hero not worthy of our acknowledgement, every single word of the play 'The Mystery' is about something we are never allowed to witness. All eight characters are deeply involved in news sharing. The narrator has them enter and exit, whisper and talk to each other for three whole scenes without saying anything worth mentioning. In 'The Beautiful Cassandra', the heroine and her friend Maria see each other on the street and 'trembled, blushed, turned pale and passed each other in a mutual Silence' (J55). No explanation is given for such a reaction. The reader is left with a feeling of arbitrariness of knowledge, with a freedom to interpret the information at her own discretion.

Chance seems to be the ruling element in this universe and the characters' actions are spontaneous responses rather than premeditated intentions. Lady Williams and Alice interrupt their row, because during their walk they discover the injured Lucy, who from then on surprisingly becomes the focus of narration. Sophia and Laura in 'Love and Freindship' become acquainted with their grandfather and two cousins and learn that they are themselves related within less than an hour. Laura, at the end of her wanderings, has a chance meeting in a coach with all the characters that appeared in the novel, thus providing the reader with the account of their adventures. Mr Gower in 'Evelyn' meets with a very amiable family that offers him everything they possess, their house, their purses, their servants and their elder daughter together with 'a handsome portion' (J234). In 'A Letter from a Young Lady', after years of forgery, false witness and murder, Anna Parker 'happened to be passing by the Door of the Court and was beckoned in by the Judge' to witness the forged will of Colonel Martin, who returns the favour by offering her his hand and immense wealth (J223). The randomness of events goes hand in hand with the 'anarchic energy, violence and irreverence' that drive the characters and reflects the unpredictability of human impulses and ultimately of life itself (Jlxvii).

The point here is that the heroine's lack of consideration such as illustrated in 'The Beautiful Cassandra' or the carefree ease with which Laura, Sophia or Eliza involve themselves in one adventure after the other suggests a minimal thought for the future; in Elias's words if a momentary situation brings pleasure 'this is savoured to the full, without calculation or thought of the possible consequences in the future'.<sup>21</sup> Humanity in the juvenilia is oblivious to any direct relation between cause and effect. The characters do not merely evade future consequences, but even past decisions. Mr Harley is one of Austen's amnesiac characters: coming home from sea, he remembers all of a sudden that the lady with whom he has been travelling all along is the one he married six months ago (J46). In 'Henry and Eliza', Lady Harcourt suffers from an even more severe case of amnesia, since it has completely slipped her mind that the adopted Eliza is in

fact her own flesh and blood. Mr Gower in 'Evelyn', once installed in his idyllic home, loses sight of the motive that led him there in the first place, his sister. When the latter is dead, while walking on his grounds a rose reminds him of her name, Rose, and eventually compels him to complete his mission.

### From Spontaneous Outbursts to Introspection

Feminist critics have appreciated the logic-defying transgressions of Austen's early work, so much as to miss it in the mature novels. When investigating the relation between Austen's juvenilia and her later works, Doody regrets that Austen 'could not laugh so loudly in her later works. She could not be as wild as she had been in the notebook volumes. She had to become genteel and act like a lady'.<sup>22</sup> This interpretation places emphasis on Austen's wish to present herself as a respectful novelist and it echoes Poovey's conclusion that Austen shrank away from her unconventional ideas. Discussing its literary indebtedness, Peter Washington sees the novelist's work as a mixture of fantasy and realism, where fantasy stands for representations of the burlesque, violence and incivility or, in Doody's words, of the 'wild'. Washington argues that in the six novels such 'fantasy is kept under control for most of the time' and it only breaks through in characters such as Mr Collins and Lady de Burgh.<sup>23</sup> I believe there exists one crucial continuity between the early and mature work. Instead of breaking with the past, Austen takes to the next stage in her mature work what she had sensed and registered in her early ones.

One of the most valuable contributions of the juvenilia is the 'processual' aspect, thanks to which the novelist registers a shift from physical to verbal violence, from open to more restrained human aggressiveness. In the later productions of the juvenilia, there are hardly any illustrations of hostile physical expression; nonetheless abuse is present, restrained and voiced under the cloak of civility. According to Elias, the emergence of restraint was crucial in the transition from the *courtoisie* of the courts of great feudal lords, to the *civilité* of the monarchic courts of the seventeenth century to the *civilization* of the Enlightenment: '*Courtoisie*, *civilité*, and *civilization* mark three stages of social development'.<sup>24</sup> Thus, the restraint that appears for the first time in some of the juvenilia's late productions and in the mature work can be read as a depiction of the processual character of Western habitus. Austen's body of work resembles a florilegium of a civilization in progress. We have to take into consideration that prior to Austen's mature depiction of the civil society of polished manners, she had registered in her early writings where humanity came from, a time when, as Elias puts in his assessment of the civilizing process, '[t]he drives, the emotions were vented more freely, more directly, more openly than later'.<sup>25</sup> The writings of the juvenilia flow into the six mature novels, registering 'the organic growth



of human consciousness' and the continuity that exists between early and later stages of civilized subjectivity, instinctive and self-monitored behaviour.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that overt physical abuse is mostly present in the earliest pieces supports this argument and a few comparisons will enlighten my point. In 'Frederic and Elfrida', Captain Roger succeeds in marrying Rebecca, only by approaching her mother with a clear physical threat: 'But if you refuse to join their hands in 3 days time, this dagger which I enclose in my left shall be steeped in your heart's blood' (J 10). Death still remains the remedy to obnoxious relatives who hinder romance, but in 'A Collection of Letters', composed five years after 'Frederic and Elfrida', it is only contemplated. The fortune-hunter Musgrove wishes the death of Henrietta's uncle and with him the punishment of all uncles and aunts:

He exclaimed with virulence against Uncles and Aunts; Accused the Laws of England for allowing them to possess their Estates when wanted by their Nephews or Neices, and wished he were in the House of Commons, that he might reform the Legislature, and rectify all its abuses. (J 213)

Furthermore, a new element appears in this later production, an awareness of the interdependencies that exist between human beings. Henrietta's future depends on the bequest of her uncle's fortune to her. The couple have to be patient and exercise self-restraint in their dealings with him, unless they want to jeopardize their prospect of future wealth. Hence, attentiveness to action and consequence, to cause and effect, surfaces – a feature that, according to Elias, signals the emergence of civilized consciousness:

The moderation of spontaneous emotions, the tempering of affects, the extension of mental space beyond the moment into the past and future, the habit of connecting events in terms of chains of cause and effect – all these are different aspects of the same transformation of conduct which necessarily takes place with the monopolization of physical violence, and the lengthening of the chains of social action and interdependence. It is a 'civilizing' change of behaviour.<sup>27</sup>

Anticipating Elias, Millar recognizes the delay of gratification, especially sexual gratification, as a necessary step towards the development of reflection, the ability to project the future and not to arrive 'at the end of his wishes, before they have sufficiently occupied his thoughts, or engaged him in those delightful anticipation of happiness which the imagination is apt to display in the most flattering colours'.<sup>28</sup> Imagination, the act of extending meaning beyond its immediate context, will transform into the sensibility that distinguishes refined manners.

The shift towards restrained violence is also exemplified by the comparison of 'Henry and Eliza' – probably composed in December 1788 – and 'Catharine or the Bower' in August 1792 (J xxviii). Eliza and Catharine are both said to be

orphans, but while Eliza is thrown out of the house for theft, Catharine is merely threatened with punishment for her immoral interest in young men. Her aunt considers her to be 'one of the most impudent Girls that ever existed. I assure you Sir, that I have seen her sit and laugh and whisper with a young Man whom she has not seen above half a dozen times. Her behaviour is indeed scandalous' (J 282). However, her threats affect Catharine indirectly, since her aunt's wrath is transferred *imaginatively* upon the bower, the arbour which to Catharine is a place of comfort, of revived female romantic friendship and of potential romance.<sup>29</sup> Clara Tuite makes a strong case for the bower's symbolizing female homoeroticism between Catharine and her two female friends and heterosexual attraction between Catharine and Edward Stanley, both urges that her aunt attempts to keep at bay with verbal threats: 'I must and will have that arbour pulled down – it will be the death of me' (J 288).<sup>30</sup> 'Death' is ambiguous here: first, the physical death of the aunt or of the niece by catching a cold, but more importantly death as climax of female libido and the end of the niece's virginity. This would be in turn the death of the values of the aunt, for whom female chastity has political implications, since 'the welfare of every Nation depends upon the virtue of it's individuals' (J 287). The sexual energy that at times can be vented more openly in the early productions of the juvenilia is introjected in this later piece. In 'Catharine or the Bower', the tension between intimacy and discord between female friends is only hinted at: 'while the sweetness of their dispositions had prevented any serious Quarrels, the trifling disputes which it was impossible wholly to avoid, had been far from lessening their affection' (J 243). In contrast, in earlier writings discord has physical consequences: the female friends in 'Jack and Alice' end their argument about red cheeks with a hot dispute which almost comes to blows (J 20). Already in the later pieces of the juvenilia outward violence is reduced and physical threat is meditated, which speaks for the processual character of the three volumes, where the characters undergo stages of behavioural life that can be located in the civilizing process.

Another significant point is the relationship between gender and violence. The presence of open female violent behaviour is what spurs Doody to state that the juvenilia's self-gratifying heroines get away with murder. She gleefully emphasizes that neither ideology nor institutions seem capable of containing the characters' urge for self-gratification.<sup>31</sup> However, if one takes a closer look at the outcome of some of these fearless heroines, one cannot shake off the impression that the teenage writer perceives women as enduring violence rather than exercising it. Not all female characters are as lucky as the pastry-devouring and man-beating Cassandra. There are female casualties in the unrestrained pursuit of enjoyment and self-fulfilment. The most illuminating example is Lucy in 'Jack and Alice' who, after her proposal to Charles Adams, leaves her home to follow



him in his country to renew her advances. Unfortunately, before she has a chance of seeing her lover, she is caught in a steel trap on his grounds. As her friend Lady Williams emphatically summarizes, Lucy has fallen victim to Charles Adams physically and emotionally: 'Oh! cruel Charles to wound the hearts and legs of all the fair' (J 24). The episode heralds Maria Edgeworth's treatment eleven years later in *Belinda* of another daring female, when Harriet Freke finds herself entrapped in Lady Delacour's garden. But if, in Edgeworth's novel, Harriet's injury and failure to thwart Lady Delacour's recovery provides the reader with a kind of *Schadenfreude*, in 'Jack and Alice' we lament Lucy's fate, whose only mistake is her openly avowed love for Charles. In her last letter, we learn that all her endeavours have been generated by her wish for a 'home, which of all other things is what I most desire' (J 30). Similarly, after their theft, Sophia and Laura instantly lose their stations as governesses and are turned out of Macdonald Hall. Eliza in 'Henry and Eliza' is turned out of her adoptive home for theft and thrown into the Duchess's dungeon for stealing her daughter's husband. Such experiences overshadow the quest for female self-gratification.

Strikingly, when men follow their instincts they do not suffer severe consequences. No punishment hunts down Sophia's and Laura's cousins, Philander and Gustavus, who rob the ladies of the £100 they received from their grandfather. Nor does any misfortune befall Charles Adams for his cruelty. The fact that gender makes a substantial difference becomes clear if we compare two characters: Charlotte of 'Frederic and Elfrida' and Sir William Montague, the protagonist of the tale with the same name. We are told that, driven by her nature to oblige everyone, Charlotte accepts the marriage proposals from two men, one of whom she genuinely likes. After realizing that she had consented to a double engagement, she 'threw herself into a deep stream' (J 9). Sir William Montague entangles himself in a similar situation, not out of his good-natured disposition, but out of sheer libertinism. He shoots Mr Stanhope in order to marry a Miss Arundel, with whom he is to be united on 27 October. But on the next day, he enters an engagement with his victim's sister, Emma Stanhope, and marries her on 26 October. For a fortnight, Sir William is a happily married man, until his eyes are caught by another beauty, Miss Wentworth, and 'he became again violently in love' (J 49). The tale ends with Sir William's hope to gain 'free access to Miss Wentworth', which suggests a perpetual series of future conquests (J 49). Unlike Charlotte, Sir William not only fails to show any signs of remorse, but he literally gets away with murder. The only exceptions of male misfortune are Augustus and Edward, the two bankrupt heroes of sensibility in 'Love and Freindship': the one is imprisoned and the other killed in a carriage accident. But these heroes are seen as extensions of their female partners, Laura and Sophia, and the men's misfortune accentuates the women's loss. The end of the partnerships is the doom of their utopian vision of secluded lives

and melancholy sensibility. According to Roger Sales, in *Mansfield Park*, 'The novel's resolution highlights the way in which society itself punishes women rather than men like Henry Crawford for being involved in scandals'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, a closer look at the juvenilia leads one to think that Austen learned this lesson before penning the mature novels. Even if the teenage narrator allows women to participate in a culture of violence and to emulate masculine pursuits, she is aware that in societies that rely on essentialist gender constructions women suffer from rather than induce violence. Since, as Freud says, 'the problem before us is how to get rid of the greatest hindrance to civilization – namely, the constitutional inclination of human beings to be aggressive towards one another' – the juvenilia purport that the advancement of civilization is intricately connected to the position of women within human figurations as the gender most subjected to violence.<sup>33</sup>

It may be, as Doody claims, that Austen makes self-gratification available for women as well as for men, but the narratives also imply that gender constructions decide upon the morality of female and male urges. The sense of moral arbitrariness compels the reader to be investigator instead of consumer of linguistic truths. Austen's way of formulating morality starts with the deconstruction of the stock of ideas that she encountered in her society and awakens our alertness to the agenda entailed by the narrative's linguistics. In 'A Collection of Letters', Henrietta is taken in by Lady Scudamore's claim that Musgrove was in love with her at first sight and she answers: 'that is the only kind of love I would give a farthing for' (J 208). First, the language suggests a certain vulgarity from such a romantic heroine as Henrietta, but considering Musgrove's mercenary agenda, it is also quite revealing, since Henrietta will bestow all her fortune on her future husband. In the end, Musgrove's dissembled love at first sight will be dearly bought. Later, Musgrove laments that fate is against his love for Henrietta who has already had proposals from a Colonel: 'I am so well convinced of the little Chance I can have of winning her who is adored by thousands' (J 211). But at this point in the story we know that his only concern is to win the thousands of pounds for which he adores her. Throughout this epistolary production, laudatory language hides abuse, while monetary issues exploit the language of sentimentality. When Henrietta declares herself not ashamed of being in love, as long as her love object is a handsome man and has such beautiful hair as Musgrove, Lady Scudamore exclaims: 'Oh! How I honour you for such Noble Sentiments!' (J 210). Of course, she honours Henrietta's superficiality, because it makes her an easy prey to the fortune-hunting Tom Musgrove. Lady Scudamore's persuasive skills are the more successful with Henrietta, because she has discovered her fondness for romance. She masters the romance lingo and uses it as a tool of manipulation, robbing it of its very essence. The narrator highlights the linguistic practices that abuse and shape discourse by showing the

discrepancy between ideology and experience as much as the metamorphosis of physical violence into linguistic sadism.

Austen's choice of burlesque goes beyond her ridiculing the sentimental novel. The juvenilia, which have been often aligned with Augustan satire and neoclassical common-sense, harbour trenchant political ramifications. More is at stake than a satire of human foibles and the chastisement of hypocrisy, selfishness and vanity in favour of reasonableness, self-control, unity and prudence.<sup>34</sup> Yasmine Gooneratne sees in the juvenilia 'for the most part comic fragments of lighthearted satire [that] take as their starting point her conviction that reason and good sense are more reliable guides for living than the ideas circulated by popular fiction'.<sup>35</sup> Gooneratne explains Austen's loyalty to reason and good sense with 'her appreciation of traditional patterns of behaviour' that the teenage writer saw upheld in the works of eighteenth-century 'moralists and experts on design, all of which taught her the value of a keen sense of proportion, in literature as in life itself'. Accordingly, Austen has already found her sense of proportion by borrowing it from established writers and propagating it in the juvenilia: 'Like Johnson and other critics she admired, it is evident that Austen had a scale of values in mind that she applied to whatever came under her eye'.<sup>36</sup> The voice of the moralist, however, is almost absent in the juvenilia. The authoritative reliable character seems to be simply silenced: if we expect parents, nobility, clergy or male authority to offer the moral contrast, we will have to turn to some other novelist.<sup>37</sup>

Austen's choice of parody takes us back to the origins of the novel, as Bakhtin recognizes it: to the heteroglossia of the clown who ridiculed all languages and dialects, that of the poets, the monks and the scholars.<sup>38</sup> Bakhtin called the languages of this genre 'masks', implying that they cannot be taken at face value. Although one can ill afford to deny the influence of the literary tradition on Austen's formation as a writer, it seems that this consideration has at times been a threshold to engage with her juvenilia as artistic productions that challenge the foundations of the society of her time rather than isolated human foibles. In fact, the scepticism towards its revealing political value has been glossed over either with claims for Austen's compliance with common sense or her natural, unconscious talent. Peter Washington emphasizes the latter in his introduction to the Everyman edition of the juvenilia: 'What most children do not have is a talent for embodying their fantasy in life in send-ups of realistic and sentimental fiction. It is here, I think – and not in her engagement with contemporary politics, as some would have it – that we see the essential Austen: in the sharpest nose for absurdity in both life and literature'.<sup>39</sup> Responding both to the suggestion that Austen's sense of proportion resonated with an implicit *sensus communis*, and to the line of argument that regards the juvenilia as the unconscious by-product of a talented little girl, the following reading of 'Henry and Eliza' seeks to dem-

onstrate that instead of being concerned with human foibles and absurdities, this juvenile production questions social practices and puts to the test socially sanctioned virtues and common sense. The stakes *are* political because 'Henry and Eliza' illustrates how some commonsensical topics such as gender relations, the benevolent aristocracy and the sound judgement of the father are the very source of social injustice.

'Henry and Eliza' is about Eliza's life-story and the confusions pertaining to her social status. At first, we learn that she is a foundling, taken in and adopted by two 'benefactors', as the narrator calls them (J 38). Lady Harcourt and Sir George, these benevolent adoptive parents, take her in and elevate Eliza's station from the haystack to virtuous education, the success of which is explicitly confirmed by the narrator. For this reason, when she is thrown out for stealing the substantial sum of fifty pounds, the reader is puzzled by her criminal deed and the evident inefficacy of that education. We learn in the first lines of the narrative that Sir George and Lady Harcourt follow a clear system to discipline human behaviour: while superintending their tenants, they 'reward' hard work with 'smiles of approbation' and punish idleness 'by a cudgel' (J 38). The cudgel draws attention to a kind of physical violence that compares with the flogging of slaves, an uncivilized act that happened regularly in the colonies but was inconceivable on British ground. Such evidence is to be found in Amelia Opie's 'The Black Man's Lament' (1826), where the black slave appeals to the English for a better treatment by drawing a parallel between West Indian slaves and English peasants. 'Who dares an English peasant flog?' is the rhetorical question of the black slave in this poem that excludes the contingency of physical violence against English peasants.<sup>40</sup> In 'Henry and Eliza', landowners cudgel and this violent detail is inserted between commas, surrounded by a disturbing sense of proportion between reward and punishment that mirrors Lady Harcourt's and Sir George's self-image as poised administrators of generosity and chastisement. The narrator clearly undercuts their sense of proportion, since flogging is as cruel a punishment as 'smiles of approbation' are a ludicrous reward. The first paragraph of this short story, by way of cloaking violent details in a language of rational balance of cause and effect, testifies to its narrator's 'happy command of language'.<sup>41</sup> Attentive critics like Tara G. Wallace remind us that Austen links 'command of language' with 'manipulation' and thus 'denies moral authority to smooth narratives'.<sup>42</sup>

The illusion of a smooth narrative is first sustained by the Harcourts' treatments of Eliza, which present themselves to the reader as acts of balanced generosity: the right mixture of compassion for the innocent foundling meets with the eviction of the sinful thief. Peter Sabor suggests that the stealing of such a considerable sum was a capital offence and the Harcourts are being rather lenient – a detail that should underline their liberality. We have to wait for the



surprising end of the novel, which reveals a corrupted past behind the masks of generosity and benevolence. When, after breaking out of prison, Eliza puts her life once again in their lenient hands, she learns that her reception in the family is not a matter of mercy, but of rights, since she is their natural daughter. The story goes that Lady Harcourt, afraid of her husband's reaction, hid new-born Eliza in the haystack and conveniently forgot about the blood ties that bound them together. Her explanation to her husband is worth quoting:

Four months after you were gone, I was delivered of this Girl, but dreading your just resentment at her not proving the Boy you wished, I took her to a Haycock and laid her under. A few weeks afterwards, you returned, and fortunately for me, made no enquiries on the subject. Satisfied within myself of the welfare of my Child, I soon forgot I had one, inasmuch that when, we shortly after found her in the very Haycock, I had placed her, I had no more idea of her being my own, than you had, and nothing I will venture to say could have recalled the circumstance to my remembrance, but my thus accidentally hearing the voice which now strikes me as being the very counterpart of my own Child's. (J 44)

The once benevolent adoptive parents, the guardians of virtue, are now stricken with frightening alienation: the father does not bother to ask what became of his wife's pregnancy (she was in her fifth month when he left), the mother fears her husband's reaction to the point of endangering the child's life by letting her lie under the haystack for three months and forgetting about her existence altogether. Absurdly enough, after a four-year absence, the mother recognizes her daughter's voice for the first time.

It is a logical question to ask whether Eliza has been voiceless during all the years she spent with the Harcourts. Here, we are confronted with the choice of either dismissing the whole business as sheer nonsense, a childish joke, or following its ideological implications. Jillian Heydt-Stevenson concludes in her study of Austen's mature novels that the unbecoming conjunctions between her spontaneous delight in absurdity and her social criticism reveal that humour frequently provides an outlet for her hostility towards ideologies that dominate women.<sup>43</sup> With this in mind, Lady Harcourt's dread of her husband's 'just resentment' for failing to provide the male heir and her assurance of 'the welfare' of the child questions the notions of justice towards voiceless subjects and of their well-being (my emphasis). The campaign for the rights of women and the abolitionist movement unite their voices to question exactly these notions. When is the welfare of women and slaves assured? What is justice? These are also the questions that the narrator asks through Eliza's life. The fact that the new-born owes her life to Austen's defiance of human physiology asks for an immediate redefinition of human welfare. And, when it comes to justice, Eliza has not only been considered a stranger in her own house, thrown out without the affection due to a child, but she has been deprived physically and morally of her right-

ful territory in the first place – so much for justice. With such a conclusion, the narrative reaches a point where the relation between cause and consequence, crime and punishment, is not only out of proportion, but carries class and gender implications.

If we read Eliza as the embodiment of Austen's preoccupation with gender identity, the story does not provide any abstract, universal truth about femininity or feminine foibles. Instead, what it draws attention to is the fact that female identity can be manipulated by interpretation, elevated and undone by those who hold the power. Eliza's status as a woman anticipates what Priscilla Wakefield laments in *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex with Suggestions for Its Improvement* (1798): 'In civilized nations it has been the misfortune of the sex to be too highly elevated, or too deeply depressed.'<sup>44</sup> Wakefield's observation links to Eliza's story, because it envisions human, and especially female, identity as a relational identity and the production of knowledge about it, in Donna Haraway's terms, as 'situated knowledge'.<sup>45</sup> If we choose Eliza as a representative of the female sex, the question of her place in family and society, the question of her rightful territory is answered through the questioning of those relations that define her status and not by the application of an abstract notion of virtue. It seems that the young novelist was putting to test existing ideas and not adopting what was already available, since Austen deploys the rhetoric of moral virtue only to demystify it through Eliza, a revolutionary – not flawless – but resourceful heroine.

Eliza can be regarded as revolutionary because, strangely, her most peaceful time within the circle of her own young family is spent in France, the country of the Revolution, where everything was thought to be out of balance. Even more significantly, her voice cannot be silenced. She has the last word, or rather the last action. In a gesture of carnivalesque reversal, the former prisoner Eliza gathers her troops and storms the Duchess's prison, notably associated with Newgate, an act that benefits thousands: 'She raised an Army, with which she entirely demolished the Dutchess's Newgate' (J 45). In a Bakhtinian sense, carnival is revolution brought about by marginalized figures that undermine the centre. This is what happens in 'Henry and Eliza' and what occurred only seven months after its composition, when a whole body of marginalized individuals stormed the Bastille, the French Newgate, thus triggering the Revolution that changed the face of Europe. Austen did not date this piece, but critics conjecture that its composition took place December 1788–January 1789, prior to the French Revolution. However, later while revising her juvenilia in 1811, she must have been aware of the striking parallels. Already by June 1793, when she finished Volume the First, the one containing 'Henry and Eliza', dramatic, unprecedented events had taken place: the ransacking of the Tuilleries, the arrest of the French monarchs in their own apartments and, in January 1793, the decapitation of Cit-

izen Louis Capet, the former King Louis XVI. As Claudia Johnson argues, the likes of Lady Harcourt and Sir George are both the centre in Bakhtinian carnival and the centre to whom Edmund Burke will appeal in his *Reflections* (1790) for the safekeeping of social balance by inspiring the respect of their inferiors and cultivating affections within the patriarchal family, both agendas that Austen discredits.<sup>46</sup> The virtuous Sir George starts the narrative as the fair administrator of reward and punishment and ends as the instigator of Eliza's fall. His attempt to hide behind ignorance by addressing his wife, 'You know you never even was with child', backfires. She unambiguously drives home his share of responsibility, harping on the pronoun 'you': 'You must remember Sir George that when you sailed for America, you left me breeding' – a fact on which he refuses to dwell. His swift and reckless answer is 'I do, I do, go on dear Polly' (J44), and with these words he joins collective amnesia. It has usually been argued that in the juvenilia's 'anarchic world of parodic sentimentalism, the heroines can rationalize theft, dishonesty and sheer selfishness.'<sup>47</sup> A less noted aspect remains the implicit rationalization and naturalization of social gender bias that, as 'Henry and Eliza' suggests, attempts to place itself beyond investigation.

The improbable incidents that the narrator borrows from sentimental fiction are used to empower female agency. Eliza's quasi-miraculous escape from prison is reminiscent of Susanna Centlivre's Isabella in *The Wonder! A Woman Keeps a Secret*, performed by the Austens in 1786. However, Isabella jumps out of the window only to fall into the arms of her future husband. When Eliza escapes prison by climbing down a self-crafted ladder, she stands literally and figuratively on her own two feet and, from this point on, the story moves beyond the courtship plot towards self-recognition and the discovery of her identity. During this most revealing and adventurous part of the plot, Eliza is a woman in charge of two babies and without a man. Another such convention is the foundling who turns out to be of noble birth, but again Austen uses it for other purposes. While in Burney's *Evelina* (1778), or later in Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812), the heroine's noble lineage has to be proved so that she can be worthy of a noble hero, Austen lets Eliza have a vindication of identity for her own sake. Eliza does not have to prove anything to anyone. It is undeniable that the writer of the juvenilia, although young, is very informed. Yet, 'Henry and Eliza', far from putting forward teachings of common sense in order to cure sentimental excesses, uncovers what has been repressed. Forgotten through a classical Freudian fit of amnesia, Eliza embodies repressed women's rights, for the Harcourts' memory loss stands in immediate relationship with Sir George's disappointment at Eliza not being the much-expected male heir. Undeniably, the juvenilia draw on the genre of sentimental fiction, but it is equally plausible to sustain that they do so in order to reveal the repressed, rather than simply ridicule excess. George Haggerty convincingly argues that women writers saw

the sentimental genre and the cult of sensibility that it celebrated as opening avenues for the reconstruction of gender relations.<sup>48</sup>

The improbabilities, if not absurdities of the juvenilia are worth ruminating over. In the case of 'Henry and Eliza', Eliza's grotesque (as in the fantastic or fanciful sense of the word) physical survival as a baby abandoned for months or her extraordinary escape from prison lends itself to a fruitful celebration of Bakhtinian carnival, where, according to Caryl Emerson, the individual body 'that never hurts nor dies no matter how much you torment it' stands for 'a collective body of marginalized figures that ceaselessly undermine all centres'.<sup>49</sup> It is precisely the absurdity and the otherness of the body through which carnival makes familiar relations strange, in order to highlight the fact that 'social roles determined by class relations are made not given, culturally produced rather than naturally mandated'.<sup>50</sup> By making familiar relations strange, this narrative stands against the illusion counteracted by carnival that Michael Holquist calls the illusion of 'closed-off static identity and truth' – a claim that comes close to Haraway's 'situated knowledge'.<sup>51</sup> 'Henry and Eliza' illustrates a making of a woman's place that shakes the grounds of universal and natural social figurations: Eliza is displaced as a child, declared a foundling, adopted, cast out as a thief before she is reinstated as the heiress she should have been from the start. The narrative of 'Henry and Eliza' enriches the Bakhtinian paradigm by recognizing gender first as pivotal in the making of social roles, and second as a force that destabilizes the centre.

The ups and downs to which Eliza is subjected calls to mind Wakefield's remark on the arbitrariness that reigns over women's status: 'In civilized nations it has been the misfortune of the sex to be too highly elevated, or too deeply depressed.'<sup>52</sup> Because the heroine's status falls or stands with the social and economic implications of her gender, the narrative establishes a direct link between gender and rank: to be a woman means to have a rank only by ascription. Significantly, this ascription in 'Henry and Eliza' is effectuated by the father. O'Brien argues that the Scottish philosopher John Millar was the first to approach 'the discursive function of rank as a form of a social ascription' and to make a case that 'It is only by ascription that women, who do not possess a class identity separate from that of their husbands or fathers, can be said to have their own "rank" in the world.'<sup>53</sup> This was the innovative idea that Wollstonecraft borrowed from Millar, whose work tellingly titled *The Origins of the Distinction of Ranks* devotes an extensive study to the female sex and treats it as a rank that evolves through the different stages of society. O'Brien astutely argues that Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* demonstrates how manners 'emanate from class and sex roles, since from the perspective of cultural analysis the "distinction of sex" and the distinction of rank are functionally similar'.<sup>54</sup> While denouncing this fact, the juvenilia leave the door open for change, since the rank of women,

like other social ranks, is immersed in a process of development, in the civilizing process.

This chapter started with an emphasis on the centrality of family, friendship and neighbourhood in Austen's early work, a relational character to which she remains faithful in her mature novels. Reading the juvenilia requires what Hara-way asks from postmodern feminist works: 'a doctrine and practice of objectivity that privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections, and hope of transformation of systems of knowledge and ways of seeing'.<sup>55</sup> A first step towards this untying of knots is the recognition (underlying the juvenilia as seen in the story of Eliza) that we need to pay attention to the web of connections that weaves itself into a life story. Eliza's experience supports the starting point of this study, namely that human identity is always a relational identity and we become knowledgeable about it only by questioning the group of individuals that shape it through the years. The fact that Eliza depends on others to make sense of her life exemplifies the critique of hegemonic theories of knowledge proposed by Elias: 'Social theories of knowledge have to break with the firmly entrenched tradition according to which every person in terms of her or his own knowledge is a beginning. No person ever is. Every person, from the word go, enters a pre-existing knowledge stream.'<sup>56</sup> The narrative of 'Henry and Eliza' makes poignant the limitation of a theory of society that takes the isolated individual as a point of departure. In her study of (auto)biographies, the feminist philosopher Adriana Cavarero concurs with Elias's theory, when denouncing the illusory tradition of story-telling that builds on a self-sufficient narratable self: 'The tale of her beginning, the story of her birth, nevertheless can only come to the existent in the form of a narration told by others. The beginning of the narratable self and the beginning of her story are always a tale told by others.'<sup>57</sup> The narratable self is first and foremost a relational 'I' that depends on others for self-knowledge, and this recognition is a decisive step towards adequate theories of gender and civilization.

## 2 LADY SUSAN AND NORTHANGER ABBEY: RIOT IN THE BRAIN

There are at least two good reasons to read *Lady Susan* as a work that bridges the juvenilia and Austen's first finished novel, *Northanger Abbey*. Chronologically, Austen produced a fair copy of the epistolary novella, *Lady Susan*, in 1793–4, a date overlapping with the completion of the juvenilia. Thematically, *Lady Susan* crowns the ruthless quest for self-gratification started in her juvenile writings.<sup>1</sup> If we agree with Mary Poovey that 'The Proper Lady was difficult for contemporaries to challenge', *Lady Susan* carries out this task by turning the tables on the code of propriety.<sup>2</sup> *Lady Susan*'s affiliation with *Northanger Abbey* is justified by the identification of oppressive gender construction as the cause of epistemological uncertainties. Both *Lady Susan*, Austen's most gracefully artificial heroine, and *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland, the most inexperienced, raise the question of a socially sanctioned morality.

The previous chapter made the following two arguments: first, Austen's juvenilia registers a processual behavioural change that expresses itself as the moderation of spontaneous emotions, the reduction of physical violence and the development of the capacity to perceive events in terms of cause-effect reactions. Second, the reading of 'Henry and Eliza' suggested that gender is pivotal in the making of social roles to the extent that the distinction of sex entails a distinction of rank and, as such, it influences the production of knowledge. In this chapter, I expand on each of these two arguments, by suggesting that during the transition from *Lady Susan* to *Northanger Abbey* the female psychological habitus undergoes a shift from social constraint to self-constraint (that is already signalled in the later juvenile writings), heralding new formations of moral judgement. The reading of *Lady Susan* draws on Elias's theory of civilization, which establishes a link between the moderation of emotions, the reduction of aggressiveness and the emergence of civil society. Before publishing his two-volume *The Civilizing Process* in 1939, Elias had worked during his habilitation (1933) on the topic of the habitus and the interrelated changes between changes in human personality (psychogenesis) and the structure of court society (sociogenesis). This study was first published in German in 1969 under the title *Die höfische Gesellschaft*:



*Untersuchungen zur Soziologie des Königtums und der höfischen Aristokratie* (*The Court Society*), the same year as the first volume of *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* in English. The two works are related to the extent that *The History of Manners* grows out of Elias's reflections on the emergence of the court habitus. The common thread running through these works is Elias's argument that the rank of courtiers developed from that of warring knights, this being a transition where interpersonal skills such as linguistic competence and observation superseded physical strength.

*Lady Susan* represents, in a concentrated form (which is particularly brought to fruition by the epistolary exchange) the ability to observe oneself and others. These are capacities that Elias associates with court habitus. This is not to say that *Lady Susan* is alien to bourgeois habitus, which would suggest that bourgeois subjectivity does not share any features with court society. After all, bourgeois habitus represents the subsequent stage. According to Elias, the habitus of commercial societies differs from court society through the emphasis it lays on the distinction between public and private life. In court society, the public position of the individual was of extreme importance and depended on all aspects of one's relationships to others. Therefore, the individual was first and foremost a public persona: 'Rather, the individual is always observed in court society in his social context, as a *person in relation to others*' (emphasis in the original).<sup>3</sup> One's power status was determined by one's representational identity: the capacity to exhibit superior interpersonal skills in a highly competitive exhibition of other performances defined one's status.<sup>4</sup> The mastery of manners and a code of etiquette were the means by which individuals not only claimed their social position but conceptualized all areas of their existence. These features lend themselves to the understanding of the universe of *Lady Susan*. I suggest that in *Lady Susan* the private persona is underrepresented and the distinction between public appearance and private introspection is blurred. Yet, the narrative's awareness of the ideological nature of language and manners prepares the stage for the introspective heroine we meet in *Northanger Abbey*.

Elias argues that there was no public/private divide in court society: the control over spontaneous impulses was crucial in all negotiations, since one's image was affected by the enactment of all relationships, unlike in bourgeois society, where the individual's social position is constructed primarily through one's professional status. It is evident that Elias's account of bourgeois habitus starts from *homo economicus* whose status is generated in the public sphere. With its exclusive approach to the professional world, Elias's analysis is silent on the construction of the female status. Austen, however, makes a case in *Northanger Abbey* (after suggesting it in *Lady Susan*) for the epistemological power of domestic relations and of women as an excluded group of knowers. In both *Lady Susan* and

*Northanger Abbey*, the reader is encouraged to question the objectivity of the assumptions made by those who hold political and/or economic power.

For the development of this line of argument, this chapter is particularly influenced by the philosophical work of Sandra Harding on standpoint theory. Harding, a contemporary philosopher of feminist and postcolonial theory, author of the influential *Whose Knowledge? Whose Science?: Thinking from Women's Lives* (1991), has made a significant contribution to feminist epistemology, which argues that knowledge is always socially situated and that objectivity is maximized by the inclusion of those subjects that the dominant culture implicitly or explicitly ignores. Harding points out that traditional philosophy, going as far back as Aristotle, seeks to achieve epistemological objectivity by assuming a neutral position and excluding social factors from the production of knowledge. She illustrates her arguments invoking Aristotle's statement that man is a political animal who constructs his way of life through public participation. Yet, what Aristotle proposes as an objective definition of humanity was throughout the centuries inaccessible for women. Harding uncovers the same deficiency in more recent theories like Marxism: although Marx's revolutionary reallocation of epistemological morality from power-holders to oppressed groups gives voice to the working class, his proletariat is exclusively male. According to Harding, the objectivity of these theories (be they on human nature or the working classes) can be optimized by recognizing women as a marginalized group of potential knowledge producers.<sup>5</sup> In line with this insight, this chapter pays close attention to the voices that move from the margins into the centre of the narrative and thrust their way through dominant assumptions and expectations.

### *Lady Susan: Exhibiting Power*

Although more often published as coda to the juvenilia or under the title *Minor Works* (in company with unfinished works such as *Sanditon* or *The Watsons*), *Lady Susan* deserves to be taken seriously as a completed literary work in its own right.<sup>6</sup> Peter Washington rightly observes that this epistolary production 'is a joy, not so much a minor work as a miniature masterpiece' that demonstrates Austen's genius and ability to trade such pitfalls of the genre as the wearisome detailing of feeling for an economy of narrative.<sup>7</sup> The plot is constructed around Lady Susan, an attractive widow, whose existence draws its strength from regular flirtations and linguistic manipulation. After the death of her husband Lady Susan has spent several months at the estate of her friend, Mrs Manwaring. The novella opens with her letter to Mr Vernon, the brother of her deceased husband. In this letter, Lady Susan, after having squandered her fortune, asks to join the Vernons under the false pretence of bonding with them. Catherine Vernon, Mr Vernon's wife, is not enthusiastic about this visit because she has some old scores to settle with Lady Susan since the latter almost prevented her marriage to



Mr Vernon. Distrusting Lady Susan from both personal experience and hearsay, she offers the critical eye of the narrative especially in her letters to her mother, Lady de Courcy, and her brother, Reginald de Courcy. The novella builds up suspense as it unfolds Lady Susan's manipulations of Reginald de Courcy and her own daughter, Frederica Vernon. Will Lady Susan eventually trick Reginald into marrying her and will her scheme of marrying Frederica to the silly, but rich, Sir James succeed? The truth about Lady Susan's intentions and morality is the running theme of the novella.

Lady Susan's sense of self feeds on her capacity to manipulate her social status. She shares with Choderlos de Laclos's Mme de Merteuil in *Liaisons Dangereuses* self-gratification through her command of situation, which greatly depends on other people's inability to see through her face, manners and goals. This greatly resonates with Elias's description of observation in court society: 'One must see how these people meticulously weigh the gestures and expressions of everyone else, carefully fathom the intention and meaning of each of their utterance.'<sup>8</sup> Court habitus depends heavily on the ability to penetrate the other with one's gaze. The best observer has the greatest access to the other's schemes and vulnerability. It is a highly competitive quest about catching by surprise and outwitting other competitors. The portrait of Lady Susan stands for the court habitus and embodies an intensification of the ability to foresee long-term consequences that germinates in the latter productions of the juvenilia. The court habitus involved a lot of observation, the observation of oneself and others. According to Elias (and this distinguishes his approach from those of Weber or Foucault, who focus on monastic self-observation as a vehicle for self-discipline), the courtier's self-discipline is strongly relational; it occurs in the midst of and shapes social interactions.<sup>9</sup> Here, it is necessary to observe others in order to decipher their motivations and intentions and to discover their weakness through which one can gain power over them: 'Authenticity was to be avoided at all costs, for it simply gave competitors advantages in the constant struggle for psychological dominance.'<sup>10</sup> The heroine, Lady Susan, with her 'happy command of language, which is too often used ... to make black appear white' exhibits the psychological habitus of the courtier whose sense of identity and personal worth does not spring out of the desire for authenticity, but out of manoeuvrings for social recognition (LS 50). On the other hand, the epistolary narrative compels the reader to question the motivations and truthfulness of each letter's writer.

Accordingly, Lady Susan's never-failing strategy is an avoidance of transparency and an aura of unpredictability. This is not the spontaneous unpredictability of the juvenilia generated by fanciful desire, but a premeditated, carefully constructed one. *Lady Susan* parts with the wildness of the juvenilia: there are neither apparent infractions of temporality, nor random events or characters, nor outward violence. Nevertheless, it is a work that resists and threatens a

civil society where conflicts are not carried out through blows, imprisonment or murder, but through 'the conversation of a woman of high mental powers' (LS 60). These are the abilities that captivate Reginald De Courcy, challenge Mrs Vernon and baffle the reader. The disconnectedness between the reader and Lady Susan is comparable to the one in the juvenilia, however, it is not due to whimsical outbursts, but to shrewd calculations. For this reason the plot of *Lady Susan* necessitates the pronouncements of other characters in order to convey some coherent truth. Particularly in this novel, the truth cannot be grasped if seen only from one perspective, because though an anti-heroine, Lady Susan is a charming and rhetorically skilful one. Moreover, the epistolary genre enhances the impression that this novel resembles an arena where opinions and claims for truth clash. Lady Susan's nature and motives cannot be grasped without their being commented on by those who experience them first-hand.

This is particularly the case in the very first letter, where we know neither her character, nor the veracity of her feelings for the Vernons, whom she is about to visit, nor for the Manwarings, whom she will soon leave, nor for her daughter from whom she will be separated. From this letter we are invited to believe a sanguine attachment to the Vernons, sincere friendship with the Manwarings, who according to her account can hardly bear her departure, and concern for a daughter whose education has taken a bad turn and is soon to be remedied at a prestigious school in London. Had *Lady Susan* been one of the unfinished pieces of the juvenilia, this letter would have been anything but enlightening. Thanks to Lady Susan's second letter to her confidante, Alicia, more knowledge is gained as Lady Susan's character unfolds. Lady Susan will be leaving the Manwarings, after her presence there has become undesirable due to her flirtations with both the master of the house and his daughter's suitor. Later in the novel we find out that her access to the Manwarings is due to her friendship with his wife, but in the second letter she avows: 'At the present nothing goes smoothly. The females of the family are united against me' (LS 44). Her visit to Churchill is but her 'last resource', because she has no other place to go (LS 45). This infamous information is introduced in high spirits and no sign of defeat resonates in her words: 'It grieves me to say how greatly you were mistaken, for I have seldom spent three months more agreeably than those which have just flown away' (LS 44). The same language that gives with one hand what it takes away with the other is applied to her dealings with her daughter. The attentions showed to Miss Manwaring's suitor are justified by her husband-hunting maternal feelings for Frederica: 'If the world could know my motive there, they would honour me' (LS 44). We are almost inclined to allow for Lady Susan's benevolent match-making efforts, when abusive language brings us to our senses: 'if that daughter were not the greatest simpleton on earth, I might have been rewarded for my exertions as I ought' (LS 44). As for her friendship to Mrs Manwaring, whose

marriage to Mr Manwaring has been encouraged by the latter's guardian, Alicia's husband, she avails herself of a similar rhetoric: 'your husband stands my friend, and the kindest, most amiable action of his life was his throwing her off forever on her marriage' (*LS* 44–5).

The careless abuse of the juvenilia has developed in *Lady Susan* into disciplined observation and self-representation. The letters testify to mutual processes of scrutiny and interpretation of facial expression, bodily gestures, said and unsaid words, all this being part of a deliberate strategy of gaining power. In this power struggle, Lady Susan stands out as a typical lady of the court: she rightly sees herself as the primary object of observation and responds to it with calculated self-representation. Like the courtier, she is aware of declared and hidden enemies and adapts her tactics to the fluctuations of the power ratio. Elias's description of court conduct resembles Lady Susan's pattern of behaviour: 'the tactics of his [the courtier] struggles, as of his alliances, demand careful consideration. The degree of aloofness or familiarity with everyone must be carefully measured'.<sup>11</sup> The atmosphere of the novella reminds of court society, where 'each greeting, each conversation has a significance over and above what is actually being said or done'.<sup>12</sup> While in court society, individuals compete for the king's attention, Lady Susan, impoverished as she is, seeks the Vernons' favour and Reginald's or Sir James's fortune. *Lady Susan* is much more than a courtship novel because of its clear preoccupation with status and self-representation. Its heroine is a social gamester and the game comes close to Elias's outline of court society:

All this, favour, influence, importance, this whole complex and dangerous game in which physical force and direct affective outbursts are prohibited and a threat to existence, demands of each participant a constant foresight and an exact knowledge of every other, of his position and value in the network of courtly opinion; it exacts precise attunement of his own behaviour to this value.<sup>13</sup>

With *Lady Susan*, the habitus moves from an unpredictable emotional state (as in the early productions of the juvenilia) to conscious self-fashioning, from a rather organic enactment of urges into meticulous surveillance of the self and the others. The importance of observation is heightened by the co-existence of a web of interpretations and interests that call into question each character's morality.

Significantly, the most diligent process of observation and character-reading involves two dominating females: Lady Susan and Catherine Vernon. Although sisters-in-law, the two ladies have never met before, but their shared history is hinted at: Lady Susan played an 'artful and ungenerous' part in Mrs Vernon's marriage to Mr Vernon, which makes the attentive reader cautious of Mrs Vernon's view of Lady Susan. Mrs Vernon herself is aware of her hostile predisposition when she writes to her brother, Reginald De Courcy: 'I was certainly

not disposed to admire her' (*LS* 49). Indeed, her brother offers one of the most extreme descriptions of Lady Susan. In the fourth letter, in a libertine tone we are informed that he cannot wait to lay his masculine gaze on 'the most accomplished coquette in England' and 'a very distinguished flirt' (*LS* 47). One has to note that from the beginning Lady Susan does not enjoy the irrefutable reputation of Mme de Merteuil; on the contrary, although she is known to be 'a captivating Lady' and a coquette, she still manages to be admitted where she asks for admission (*LS* 47). Thus, it is not the construction of a moral myth which needs to be guarded fanatically that empowers her double play. It is Lady Susan's immediate influence over people that carries out the task of deconstructing whatever truths or lies may have been told about her and replaces them with the truths or lies of her choice. She succeeds where Mme de Merteuil fails – defying the general opinion that 'one can interpret a woman's essence by her context – by her reputation or her "situation"'.<sup>14</sup>

Both Mrs Vernon and Reginald underestimate the source of Lady Susan's power. Mrs Vernon looks forward to showing Lady Susan to her brother as a kind of discredited trophy, because she relies on the information he holds against her and the reader is led to think that Lady Susan will be confronted with her evil past. Similarly, Reginald anticipates his meeting with Lady Susan as a spectator 'of those bewitching powers which can do so much – engaging in the same time and in the same house the affections of two men who were neither of them at liberty to bestow them' (*LS* 47). Reginald's attention is brought to gossip about the flirtations of Lady Susan in the Manwaring household. Both Reginald and Catherine Vernon think themselves armed with the moral truth against those charms. But when Reginald meets Lady Susan, he is induced to reconsider what he regarded as true, while Mrs Vernon is spellbound when dealing with a woman of Lady Susan's powers. Despite the unpleasant early history with Lady Susan, Mrs Vernon is quite struck by the latter's ladylike demeanour: 'I was myself prepared for an improper degree of confidence in Lady Susan; but her countenance is absolutely sweet, and her voice and manner winningly mild' (*LS* 50). After their first meeting, Mrs Vernon still has some of the suspicions that 'her resentful heart' cannot overcome, but Lady Susan's double adulterous behaviour such as reported by Reginald is rejected as a lie, because she witnesses Lady Susan's correspondence with Manwaring's wife (*LS* 50). Little does Catherine Vernon or Reginald guess that the artful Lady Susan passes off her love letters as being addressed to Mrs Manwaring or to Alicia Johnson. Finding the truth about Lady Susan is a challenge.

How can knowledge be acquired? Mrs Vernon puzzles over this question when confronted with quite a different Lady Susan from that anticipated. Mrs Vernon has preconceptions not only about Lady Susan's character, but also about how it can be recognized and retraced. Demeanour and language are the signs to



look for, because she believes that 'One is apt ... to connect assurance of manner with coquetry, and to expect that an impudent address will necessarily attend an impudent mind' (*LS* 49–50). Mrs Vernon's is quite an accurate rendering of the significant connection between language and character that prevailed in late-eighteenth-century England. Olivia Smith's analysis of *The Politics of Language* confirms this view: 'The political and social effectiveness of ideas about language derived from the presupposition that language revealed the mind.'<sup>15</sup> The whole notion of propriety rests on the assumption that a woman's subjective feelings can be construed from her 'look and manner'.<sup>16</sup> Lady Susan is all too aware of this association, and one can safely say that reading and producing the desired signs is the only discipline she imposes on herself throughout the novel. It is also the only indulgence she does not allow herself, as she sternly confesses to Alicia Johnson: 'Those women are inexcusable who forget what is due to themselves and the opinion of the world' (*LS* 65). Lady Susan's strategy to disconcert Reginald's 'sauciness' is 'calm reserve', an attitude verging on prudery and apt to excite male curiosity (*LS* 52). It is the most convincing element of the Proper Lady, a silence that speaks volumes in the name of female modesty, expressing without words what is worth knowing and more apt to excite male eroticism.<sup>17</sup> In *Mansfield Park*, Fanny Price's reserved presence attracts the libertine Henry Crawford, who associates it with female modesty and virtue. The same model of femininity appeals to Reginald, and once Lady Susan caters to this weakness, her success is immediate. The delicacy she inspires is reflected in Reginald's behaviour:

There is a sort of ridiculous delicacy about him which requires the fullest explanation of whatever he may have heard to my disadvantage, and is never satisfied till he thinks he has ascertained the beginning and the end of everything. (*LS* 64–5)

His delicacy is both natural and ridiculous: natural because it strives for a vindication of Lady Susan's past as soon as he identifies her 'calm reserve' with female modesty, but ridiculous to that lady because it is mechanically and predictably triggered by her. Lady Susan not only possesses 'a happy command of language', but also a happy knowledge of her audience's expectations. Her use of language illustrates Mme de Merteuil's instructions to Vicomte de Valmont: 'Believe me Vicomte, we seldom acquire abilities that we do not need.'<sup>18</sup>

When discussing Reginald De Courcy, Michael Kramp argues that Austen warns of the danger of becoming 'a slave to his emotions', but here imminent danger comes from indoctrination rather than emotions.<sup>19</sup> It is Reginald's construction of femininity, his enslavement to a patriarchal production of morality that empowers Lady Susan to play the role of the despot. Wollstonecraft warned of the language of false delicacy and saw it as a construction of male ideology: 'This has ever been the language of men, and the fear of departing from a supposed sexual character, has made even women of superior sense adopt the same

sentiment.'<sup>20</sup> One of these women was Anna Laetitia Barbauld, who praised female delicacy as 'emblems of innocence, and beauty', 'whose SWEETEST empire is TO PLEASE.'<sup>21</sup> Wollstonecraft may be puzzled by Barbauld's endorsement of male ideology, but does not deny her superior powers. Similarly, Austen acknowledges Lady Susan's ability to embody the delicacy men admired in women. However, Lady Susan's female delicacy is not endorsed but dissimulated so that its rottenness is exposed from inside out. Hence, Barbauld may be serving patriarchy unwittingly, whereas Lady Susan exploits it with diligent fervour. She knows too well that female delicacy is due to the world and that it leads either to slavery or despotism – Mrs Manwaring or her daughter are convincing examples of the former. Lady Susan seems to confirm Wollstonecraft's experience: 'It is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave or a despot.'<sup>22</sup>

Lady Susan has decided to be a despot rather than a slave. She confesses that her 'desire of dominion was never more decided' than when entering the Vernon household. Mrs Vernon's hostility and Reginald's familiarity fuel Lady Susan's vengeful project:

It shall be my endeavour to humble the pride of these self-important De Courcys still lower, to convince Mrs. Vernon that her sisterly cautions have been bestowed in vain, and to persuade Reginald that she has scandalously belied me. (*LS* 52)

We gather how much the De Courcys are humbled when no less than the head of such a great family, Sir Reginald De Courcy, intervenes, followed by his wife's correspondence to Catherine Vernon. Lady Susan has so well succeeded in disturbing the peace of the family that Sir Reginald can only appeal to his son's regard for him. Lacking economic control over him, Sir Reginald writes: 'You know your own rights, and that it is out of my power to prevent your inheriting the family estate ... I do not wish to work on your fears, but on your sense and affections' (*LS* 58). His words draw heavily on the rhetoric of sentimentality, such as proposed by Burke in his *Reflections*. Not economic fear, but anxiety for the well-being of his father and the moral obligation 'as representative of an ancient family' should call him to his senses (*LS* 57). Reginald's neglect of these moral considerations will result in his falling out of his father's affection, which the latter equates with 'the death of that honest pride, with which I have hitherto considered my son' (*LS* 58). Sir Reginald's strategy is that of a generation that has a great deal to lose but no material power to prevent that loss. Ironically, the complicity between the father and his heir, the connection that according to Burke ensured the continuity of the patriarchal society, is threatened by those elements, which like Lady Susan have internalized the options of such society. No wonder that the Burkean arguments of Sir Reginald's letter remain fruitless. His son's judgement has been assimilated by Lady Susan's version of the truth and she is vindicated by him as an 'unexceptionable' mother, an anxious sister

in-law to Mr and Mrs Vernon and a woman whose 'prudence and economy are exemplary' (LS 62). Lady Susan's doubtful character and prodigal lifestyle appear now the conjectures of malicious gossip. In order to quiet his father's greatest fear, he insists that the difference of age could never allow him to pursue matrimonial goals with Lady Susan. All these turn out to be the very argumentations to fit into Sir Reginald's system of belief, because we learn that he is satisfied and writes no more. Thus, Lady Susan has won over England's past and future moral guards.

Barbara Horwitz asserts that Lady Susan's ability to appropriate and use the language of her enemies is remarkable.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the narrative suggests that Lady Susan's linguistic success more than anything is gendered. The men in *Lady Susan* cannot see the truth about a woman, because they are part of an ideological system that calls forth Lady Susan's language. Interestingly, Lady De Courcy's and Catherine's apprehensions are not so easily appeased as Sir Reginald's. In this novel, women are more clear-sighted than men and distrust male discretion, thus standing as subjects of a group that Sandra Harding calls a 'shared consciousness'.<sup>24</sup> For instance, Catherine Vernon is convinced that, had she been the one to fetch Frederica, Lady Susan's daughter, in London instead of her husband: 'I think I should have discovered the truth in the course of a thirty mile journey' (LS 66). Intimacy depends on shared experience and this is something that Lady Susan cherishes and fears, because she knows its power. Just as her intimacy with Alicia reveals her to the readers, she is afraid that the intimacy between Frederica and Catherine Vernon will betray her own character. But Austen does not seem to allow Catherine Vernon as much power of action as the latter would assume. Although Catherine Vernon senses the truth and has a plausible analysis ready for Lady Susan's actions, her point of view is always marred by her own infatuation with power. When discussing her daughter's friendship with Catherine Vernon, Lady Susan writes: 'She is exactly the companion for Mrs. Vernon, who dearly loves to be first, and to have all the sense and all the wit of the conversation' (LS 69). Seen from Lady Susan's perspective, Catherine Vernon is drawn to Frederica for selfish reasons, so that her production of knowledge has to be questioned. She may be an authoritative female voice but the uncovering of the truth cannot be entirely due to her merit.

Hence, *Lady Susan* questions 'the relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power' which is the core of the standpoint theory, a feminist epistemological methodology that argues that objectivity is optimized by starting with a specific group of subjects who have been excluded from the production of knowledge.<sup>25</sup> This theory lends itself particularly well in support of *Lady Susan*'s denouement. Here, objectivity comes from quite unsuspected quarters. Two women are truly injured and threatened by Lady Susan: her own daughter and Mrs Manwaring. Theirs are the marginalized voices that Lady Susan tries to subdue and that the prevailing ideology (represented by Reginald)

will not listen to. Frederica's letter to Reginald is the first contribution to revealing the truth about the mother-daughter relationship. Much of Lady Susan's reputation within the Vernon household stands or falls with the representation of this relationship. Catherine Vernon cannot wait to gain access to Frederica in order to discover the truth but, due to her rivalry with Lady Susan, Frederica cannot trust her with the delicate task of intercession. Her letter to Reginald seriously shakes his world, but Lady Susan's dexterous persuasions prevail. We have to wait for the appearance of Mrs Manwaring, who is portrayed as a victim of marital libertinage, on the one hand, and her guardian, Mr Johnson, who arranged her marriage to Manwaring, on the other. Mrs Manwaring reminds one of Wollstonecraft's Maria in *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*, whose marriage to the libertine George Venables was arranged by her father. Similarly, Mrs Manwaring's appeal to Mr Johnson is the rebellion of a wronged woman; her intervention will hardly manage to keep Manwaring away from Lady Susan, but exposing her experience throws in Mr Johnson's face his poor choice and eventually breaks the spell Lady Susan has over Reginald: 'The spell is removed. I see you as you are' (LS 95). The fact that the discovery of the truth, the gaining of objectivity, is achieved by bringing to light the experiences of two wronged women shows both the obduracy of the prevailing ideologies and the importance of the integration of different standpoints in storytelling and moral judgements. This is characteristic of the standpoint theory whose aim is 'to create oppressed people as collective "subjects" of research rather than only as objects of other's observations'.<sup>26</sup>

*Lady Susan* makes an argument for the false representation of female identity, thus teaching a lesson to the society of Austen's time. However, it also speaks to our time, because it reveals truths about human nature. Lady Susan is unable to adopt viewpoints other than her own, so much so that Beatrice Anderson has made a case for her being a sociopath, and as such she can be found in any human society.<sup>27</sup> Lady Susan celebrates in civil society what most of the juvenilia's heroines are driven to: self-gratification at any cost, or, to put it in Mudrick's words, she displays 'the same hard unapologetic attitudes so individually embodied in the juvenilia'.<sup>28</sup> Only that, in *Lady Susan*, we have a heroine who draws her power from relationships, not from pastry, bonnets or cooking. Without people to manipulate, Lady Susan can never be who she is, which makes her quest for self-gratification problematic, since it refuses to acknowledge the right to self-gratification in every other person: 'she takes for granted that any demands she makes on others will be met ... without her having any need to reciprocate'.<sup>29</sup> Lady Susan fascinates with her abilities and commitment to self-gratification, but outrages with her parasitism. As readers, we are torn between admiration, anger, and a sense of disconnection that is hard to shake off.



As long as the story focuses on the sociopath or, in Wollstonecraft's words, on the female 'despot', a sense of alienation is unavoidable. This is particularly conveyed by the ending of *Lady Susan*. A. W. Litz is rather dismissive of the disruptive nature of the conclusion with its authorial intervention that parts with the epistolary genre. Perhaps it is the unsatisfactory ending that motivates Litz to state that 'in terms of style and narrative technique, [*Lady Susan*] is neither as brilliant as *Love and Freindship* nor as promising as *Catharine*'.<sup>30</sup> For him, the denouement is the obvious sign of Austen's not yet fully developed technical skills, of her tiredness of the epistolary genre and her difficulties while dealing with what he calls 'a dead end, an interesting but unsuccessful experiment in a dying form'.<sup>31</sup> However, one can speak of 'a dead end' only if one considers the narrative plot of *Lady Susan* to display a linear movement. I argue that, because it focuses on Lady Susan, it has a circular structure: we make Lady Susan's acquaintance as she is about to enter the Vernon family, after having shaken to the ground the Manwaring household and we are about to take leave of her when she has entered her own household, where she will have plenty of occasions to behave as badly to Sir James as she did to her deceased husband. What the reader experiences is one season in Lady Susan's life, her pattern of behaviour that will repeat itself until her last breath.

In her last letter she writes triumphantly that Manwaring is more devoted to her than ever, which leads the reader to think that a new cycle of adultery and flirtation is about to unfold right under her husband's nose. She will be so much her own old self that Austen cannot help admitting: 'Sir James may seem to have drawn a harder lot than mere folly merited' (*LS* 100). Lady Susan will take advantage of both his fortune and docility which is what she wants most from men.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, it is impossible to see her as a victim, as Mudrick does when arguing: 'The world defeats Lady Susan, not because it recognizes her vices, but because her virtues have no room in it'.<sup>33</sup> When one recalls the punishment Lady Susan has in mind for Reginald by 'marrying and teasing him for ever', then we know that she is never the victim in a marriage (*LS* 86). Her last words to Alicia are: 'I never was more at ease, or better satisfied with myself and everything about me, than at the present hour' (*LS* 98). Being addressed to Alicia, this account may represent Lady Susan's truthful state of mind. But again, how can we know that Lady Susan has been revealing her private thoughts to Alicia and not engaged in another power game with her too? Confronted with such a letter, we doubt that there is a 'private' sphere to Lady Susan's life and are induced to take with a grain of salt all her previous correspondence with Alicia.

The private persona of Lady Susan remains a mystery, as unsettling as the ending Austen chose for her story. How is her triumph to be interpreted? The narrator invites us to judge Lady Susan's happiness from 'probability' (*LS* 103). It is highly improbable that Lady Susan will lose her status in society, because

her reputation has suffered no material damage during the events: she starts the novel as a penniless flirt and ends it as a well-married one. Here, once again the difference between her and Mme de Merteuil becomes significant. To put it suggestively, Lady Susan cannot be defeated by the prevailing ideology, because she endorses and embodies its duplicity. The denouement of *Liaisons Dangereuses* conveys the hope that vice is punished (Mme Merteuil is publicly exposed), while *Lady Susan* does not admit such a probability. The anti-heroine's reliance on a superficial female education, blind filial obedience and the repression of mental powers – except hers – are constituent parts of the system she exploits. She lives femininity as a rank whose obligations and particular manners she not simply masters but internalizes. Thus, her beliefs and abilities will always secure her a place within society, because they contribute to its *status quo*.

*Lady Susan* represents in Austen's body of work what court habitus does in Elias's theory of civilization: they register the emergence of what we today call a 'psychological' approach to human beings that comprises the individual's capacity to circumspectly observe others and the self and to oversee intertwined chains of actions and motivations.<sup>34</sup> This is a necessary step towards the formation of a private persona in whose psychological recesses we gain insights in *Northanger Abbey*. Moreover, the novel suggests that civil society is redeemed rather than threatened by 'the vindication of the rights of woman' such as represented in Frederica and Mrs Manwaring. Danger, which was associated with the French Revolution, is here a symptom of the prevailing ideology of propriety and decorum.

### *Northanger Abbey*: Suspicious of Power

*Lady Susan* questions the construction of moral judgement by linking received morality with artifice and despotism. It engages in the process of the production of knowledge, suggesting that objectivity is optimized when voices that have been marginalized by despotism are allowed to be heard. Domestic despotism remains Austen's concern in *Northanger Abbey* and its threat overtly emanates from General Tilney's presence. This novel is, on the one hand, an homage to Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) while, on the other, it advances Austen's reflections on power, morality and gender. The gothic genre enables Austen to expand on some of the issues thematized in *Lady Susan*. Helene Meyers aptly summarizes the main features of the gothic novel: '[e]pistemological uncertainty, rupture of narrative, and multiple points of view'.<sup>35</sup> All these features interplay in support of the genre's main project, namely the mapping of 'a plot of domestic victimization'.<sup>36</sup> In male gothic novels, such as Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796), the gothic plot focuses on the power of darkness, embodied by the villain, while female writers

make 'the heroine's relation to him/them as well as her connection to another, victimized woman' the centre of their narration.<sup>37</sup> Going back to the etymology of the word, Donna Heiland argues that if the gothic genre owes any meaning to the Goths, then it is because the latter brought about the fall of Roman civilization.<sup>38</sup> The genre itself registers transgression and invasion; gothic literature by women novelists, in particular, detects and articulates through the female relational self domestic injustices that threaten civil society.

Transgression in *Northanger Abbey* is experienced by Catherine Morland and effectuated by General Tilney, the father of Catherine's suitor, Henry Tilney, and his sister Eleanor. Being a military man and a father – both roles connected by conservative ideology to protection and patronage – General Tilney is exactly the opposite of what a man of his stature should be. Tony Tanner sees him as the parental authority whose 'utter egoism, hardness, cruelty and insensitivity of the human heart' is responsible for the anger in the abbey, 'which is the real hidden horror'.<sup>39</sup> He is as much a disappointment to the advocates of filial obedience as a confirmation of the worst fears of those propagating the rights of the individual. For example, Hannah More, who explicitly emphasized the need for obedience on the part of the younger generation, equally pointed out that parental austerity leads to 'artifice' and 'despair' and drives children to 'impunity' instead of 'reformation'.<sup>40</sup> Impunity is best illustrated in the description of Captain Tilney, the black sheep of the family, implying the parasitism and libertinism of the standing armies, as Wollstonecraft does in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (or Austen in her description of Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice*): 'Standing armies can never consist of resolute, robust men ... Like the fair sex the business of their lives is gallantry'.<sup>41</sup> It is striking that the black sheep in *Northanger Abbey* and in *Mansfield Park* is the heir of the family estate, which suggests that the system corrupts not only present, but also future power holders. Captain Tilney's anger at his father is clearly seen when, after having borne silently with reproaches concerning his laziness, he whispers to Eleanor with 'affected' spirits: 'How glad I shall be when you are all off'.<sup>42</sup> This is the only instance when Catherine is sympathetic towards Captain Tilney and even 'pained by the severity of his father's reproof, which seemed disproportionate to the offence' (NA 147). At the end of her stay in the abbey, Catherine will have learned that the general resorts usually to disproportionate measures to vent his disappointments. Dissatisfied that his friends Marquis de Longtown and General Courtney are not in Bath, he decides to break his sojourn there without taking into account his children's plans or inclinations. The moment he discovers that Catherine is not Mr Allen's heiress, he dispatches her home first thing in the morning, without money or explanation. This capricious manner of disposing of others, his own children included, is reminiscent of Lady Susan's lack of consideration. They both become very disagreeable when their expectations are not

met and their plans are thwarted. Austen's depiction of the general as someone 'Enraged with almost everybody in the world but himself' can be as accurately applied to Lady Susan (NA 230). In both cases, parental despotism includes self-centredness, thus generating the oppression of individual rights.

If we turn to Eleanor, we encounter the 'despair' detected by Hannah More as a result of parental austerity. Eleanor has things in common with Frederica in *Lady Susan*, since both appear to be their parents' prisoners or, to put it in Henry's words, 'uncomfortably circumstanced' (NA 149). Eleanor's spirits are dampened in her father's presence as Frederica's are in Lady Susan's. They are not only denied a voice, but they have to carry the burden of knowing their parents' true character, unwillingly participating in their schemes. Regardless of her own benefit in having Catherine as a companion at the abbey, Eleanor suspects machinations behind her father's invitation to Catherine. This explains the daughter's embarrassment and earnestness when the plan is proposed by her father (NA 132–3). But, when charged with the unwelcome task of breaking to Catherine her expulsion from the abbey, Eleanor can no longer hide the evidence of her repression: 'You must have been long enough in this house to see that I am but a nominal mistress of it, that my real power is nothing' (NA 210). The nature of the relationships that the general entertains with his family members raises suspicions of whether the abbey has ever known anything but a 'nominal mistress'. There is no hint that Mrs Tilney was endowed with more power than her daughter. On the contrary, Eleanor's character is framed by a continual identification with her mother. Austen insists on this connection when she creates symbolic spaces shared by mother and daughter, such as the damp and gloomy walk that General Tilney never enters. This path, we are told, is endeared to Eleanor by the memory of past moments spent there with her mother. The fact that the general refuses to share this space is not only strikingly suspicious in Catherine's eyes, but it increases Eleanor's solitude and repression. The general's dislike of this walk imposes a censure on the revival of memories and restrains the mourning process. Mother and daughter are further linked by what Catherine regards as 'a dejection of spirits' that makes them partial to this solitary walk (NA 170). In *Northanger Abbey*, willingness to enter into spaces of 'shared consciousness' is crucial to the heroine's maturity and to the readers' understanding.<sup>43</sup>

The narrator sets up a scene in the present so that the past can be understood: Mrs Tilney does not live to tell her own story, but her daughter's existence helps reconstruct it. Catherine takes on the task of comprehending the past through interpretations of the present, soon realizing that mother and daughter share more common ground than a damp walk and occasional sadness. Do they prefer this walk precisely because the general dislikes it? Is this a safe way to be out of his commanding presence? Are these some of the



few moments they can escape submissiveness? These are the presentiments that lead Catherine to embark on a gothic romance, in search of proof for General Tilney's abuse of his wife. Though her hopes to find the evidence in the deceased lady's apartment are dashed, she discovers when following Mrs Tilney's chosen path that she 'was shocked to find how much her spirits were relieved by the separation' from the general (NA 169). Almost ashamed, she acknowledges the 'easy gaiety' that accompanies the longed for liberation from his presence. Her release from imposed submissiveness echoes that of Mrs Tilney and Eleanor, and Catherine joins mother and daughter in that space removed from oppression.

The voiceless place occupied by Mrs Tilney and Eleanor becomes obvious during Catherine's tour inside and outside the abbey, an event that she has impatiently anticipated. Catherine's infatuation with historical sites and ancient buildings has been inspired by reading Mrs Radcliffe's novels. She is willing to put up with John Thorpe's nonsensical talking and reckless riding only to get a glimpse of Blaize Castle. This interest is stronger than her love of nature and, were she given a choice, she would have preferred a tour within the abbey to the one in the gardens.<sup>44</sup> But the general has his obsession with fixed hours and daily habits with which everyone has to comply – guests included. No matter how great her curiosity, the tour has an unexpected effect on Catherine: 'she was heartily weary of seeing and wondering' (NA 169). If we keep in mind Catherine's unsympathetic approach to history, these feelings of exhaustion speak volumes. When Eleanor expresses her appreciation of history, Catherine identifies it as a source of irritation or weariness: 'I read it a little as a duty; but it tells me nothing that does not either vex or weary me. The quarrels of popes and kings, with wars and pestilences in every page; the men all so good for nothing, and hardly any women at all' (NA 104). The tour of the abbey resembles an instruction in history. It is told exclusively from a male point of view and leads to 'lassitude' (NA 171). Like history it will be dominated by male representations and it will not allow female voices to be heard. As Tony Tanner points out, Austen draws attention to a dissatisfaction that has become more articulate in our time.<sup>45</sup> What Catherine mostly hears about on this tour is 'the general's improving hand,' 'his endowments' and how 'when the genius of others had failed, his own had often produced the perfection wanted' (NA 173). The general decides what 'could be worth her notice' and how it has to be shown (NA 175). Eleanor dares offer three contributions to the tour. The first is her mother's preferred walk, which is considered by the general an intrusion not to be repeated: 'Eleanor was called back in half a minute to receive a strict charge against taking her friend round the abbey till his return' (NA 171). Eleanor's second contribution is to show Catherine to her mother's apartment, but the general reminds her 'rather angrily' that there is nothing to be seen in that quarter (NA 175). When

his daughter, with 'dejected' countenance makes another attempt to let Catherine see the late Mrs Tilney's apartment, the general will prevent it with his 'dreaded figure' and bring upon Catherine 'terror upon terror' (NA 180).

The general silences his daughter on three occasions, and he does not utter a single syllable in remembrance of the contributions of the former mistress of the abbey, although we learn in the beginning that Mrs Tilney brought her husband twenty thousand pounds, which eventually must have financed his improvements (NA 66). Austen rewrites onto General Tilney, Montoni's greed for his wife's fortune in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) – a project that Montoni attempts to carry out by locking her in a turret. Mrs Tilney's whole existence is to be summarized in a 'highly strained epitaph, in which every virtue was ascribed to her' (NA 179). The only entry she makes in the general's version of domestic history is as an angel-like but voiceless being, which stands for the kind of femininity the general wants to see practised in his house. His daughter, Eleanor, is portrayed as obedient and virtuous, but her obedience is the result of powerlessness rather than conviction. Austen's portrayal of Eleanor suggests that, like Wollstonecraft, she rejects the notion propagated by Rousseau and prescriptive literature that submissiveness was the woman's way of ruling. Governing by obeying is not valid in the universe of *Northanger Abbey*.<sup>46</sup> On the contrary, Eleanor's anxiety and depression hint at the cramping of faculties that Wollstonecraft considered the result of subordination.<sup>47</sup>

*Northanger Abbey* approaches female subjectivity from different angles. If we compare Eleanor to the wilful females of the juvenilia, we will find but faint traces of legitimate self-gratification. Eleanor's submission to the will of the general is performed at the expense of her own wishes. She is accustomed to neglecting her urges: when Catherine, afraid of having overstayed her invitation at the abbey, asks for Eleanor's opinion, the latter admits almost ashamed that she herself has strongly hoped that her friend would be her guest for many more weeks. Another instance of her self-effacing tendency is when she solicits Catherine to write to her under cover, once arrived in Fullerton, a request that Catherine's piqued pride at first rejects. Eleanor, regardless of her wish, sorrowfully submits: 'I cannot wonder at your feelings. I will not importune you' (NA 214). A similar and yet very different exchange happens between Catherine and Isabella, when the latter after weeks of silence exhorts her friend in a letter to plead her cause to her brother, James, whom she has shamefully abused. Manipulations such as 'I trust you will convince him' or 'Pray explain everything to his satisfaction' or 'Pray send me some news of [your brother]' are concluded by a last order: 'Lose no time, my dearest Catherine, in writing to him and to me' (NA 202, 203). This letter opens Catherine's eyes to the 'shallow artifice' she has failed to see in Isabella (NA 203).

In *Northanger Abbey*, as in *Lady Susan*, artifice is depicted as a means of achieving a kind of self-gratification that outrages with its inconsideration. Isabella is Lady Susan's spiritual daughter; she lacks her experience but has internalized the same lessons. Lady Susan poses as a loving mother, because she knows that selflessness is expected of a respectable woman. Isabella plays the same card while planning her social ascension: 'For myself ... [money] is nothing. I never think of myself' (NA 139). (General Tilney is the other character in the novel who professes his indifference to money. Strikingly, the ending proves that nothing could be closer to his heart than wealth.) But here the contrast and the arising conflicts are more explicit than in *Lady Susan*, because in *Northanger Abbey* Austen further develops the narcissistic figure by imagining it, as Patricia Meyer Spacks writes, 'in a context of others less radically self-absorbed', such as Catherine or Eleanor.<sup>48</sup> Artifice disguises repression and love of dominion. When Isabella's wishes are opposed, she makes use of the power she holds as despotically as Lady Susan or General Tilney. She expects Catherine to step into her schemes, without allowing her to consult her own inclination or previous engagements, as in the case of the trip to Clifton. Should Catherine resist Isabella's patronizing designs, then the latter's artifice will play upon the power of friendship: 'I see myself slighted for strangers, I, who love you so excessively! When once my affections are placed, it is not in the power of anything to change them' (NA 94). But this will not do with Catherine. She can see that there can be no friendship where the ego reigns: 'Isabella appeared to her ungenerous and selfish, regardless of everything but her own gratification' (NA 94). Diane Hoeveler connects artifice with the Bath section of the novel as corresponding to a feminine world, 'a species of imprisonment', and the Northanger section to a 'masculine' world where imprisonment is effectuated by 'psychic artifice' and 'mercenary motives'.<sup>49</sup> Though different, these worlds are not in juxtaposition as the gendered values would suggest: they are essentially the same and both rejected by Catherine. The friendships Catherine forms in Bath and in the abbey confront her with two types of femininity: the meek and the despotic, both products of the same ideology. The meek Eleanor is constrained to self-effacing existence and the despotic Isabella to artificial selflessness. Moreover, while in Bath, Catherine has to free herself from Isabella's alluring dominion; in Northanger, she has to resist the submissiveness required by the general and to a certain extent by Henry Tilney.

Before addressing Catherine's formation, we have to consider Henry's role in the novel, since his character has provoked versatile, if not opposing interpretations. John Halperin is so enthusiastic in his praise as to claim that Henry is not only the narrator's mouthpiece, but he 'is nearly perfect. He is a male Elizabeth Bennet'.<sup>50</sup> Halperin continues, quoting Marvin Mudrick: 'Henry Tilney is the willfully ironic and detached spectator as no one except the author herself is in any other of Austen's novels'.<sup>51</sup> Alistar M. Duckworth assigns him only lim-

ited influence, arguing that Henry and Catherine learn from each other, while Allison G. Sullo way sees him as the 'archetypal male pedagogue'.<sup>52</sup> More than one critic has been tempted to read Henry Tilney as the rational hero who sets himself the task of curing a young lady's mind of nonsensical romance. For Frank Bradbrook, the heroine is brought back to normal by her common sense and the enlightening hints of Henry Tilney.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Bradbrook recognizes the influence of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* on Austen, especially since Austen particularly enjoyed Charlotte Lennox's work.<sup>54</sup> But, compared with *The Female Quixote*'s hero, Henry Tilney lacks Gainesville's tenderness and admiration for Catherine. On the contrary, as Tanner argues, he is taken in by her admiration of him, a sign of narcissism that can hardly raise him in the reader's estimation.<sup>55</sup>

There is a certain 'pedantry and affectation' about Henry, qualities that Austen attributed to Hannah More's Coelebs, another male pedagogue in search of female perfection.<sup>56</sup> His pedantry is recognizable when lecturing Catherine on the sanctity of social engagements such as dancing or marriage, or when ranting against female understanding: 'Perhaps the abilities of women are neither sound nor acute – neither vigorous nor keen. Perhaps they may want observation, discernment, judgement, fire, genius, wit' (NA 108). When Eleanor thinks that Catherine speaks of a riot in London, when she in fact refers to a novel, he scolds his sister: 'My dear Eleanor, the riot is only in your brain' (NA 108). He will treat Catherine's suspicions as another riot in the brain and as an unjustified projection of the gothic plot onto the life in the abbey. Henry's manner of talking displays both 'archness and pleasantry' (NA 25). Archness is a loaded term when used in a gothic context, where architectural features resonate with human subjectivity:

... his [Henry's] immediate hope of her having been undisturbed by the tempest, with an *arch* reference to the character of the building they inhabited was rather distressing. (NA 164, my emphasis)

In the high-arched passage, paved with stone, which already she had trodden with peculiar *awe*, she well remembered the doors to which the *general* had given no account. (NA 177–8, my emphasis)

Linguistically, Catherine's observation suggests that father, son and the abbey share an awe-inspiring archness, and eventually each of them turns out to become 'some instrument of torture': the uncivil general, the instructing son and the gothic imagination (NA 151). With Henry Tilney's unsettling character, Austen expands on Radcliffe's strategy to enhance the gothic's 'epistemological uncertainties' by rendering the villain and the hero at times indistinguishable.<sup>57</sup>

There are several hints that align Henry, the hero, with the general, the gothic villain. There is a disturbing detail that crops up during the conversation on muslin dresses. We learn that Henry is not simply an observer of female fash-



ion, but a consumer. He claims to have the habit of choosing his sister's muslins. Considering the restrictions Eleanor Tilney has to live with and the few liberties she enjoys in the abbey, the possibility of clothing her own body being taken from her is an aggravating limitation of her free will. Eleanor's body is literally 'covered' by her brother and legally by her father.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Henry differs not much from the general who, satisfied with one breakfast set he has bought for his son (that 'forced itself on Catherine's notice'), cannot wait to buy a new one upon the latter's wedding (*NA* 165–6). The general and his son both presume that they know what others want or ought to want. Is it not Henry who eagerly asks Catherine 'Shall I tell you what you ought to say?' (*NA* 33). And does not the general guess Catherine's desires when choosing whether to give preference to the gardens or the abbey?

Which would she prefer? He was equally at her service. Which did his daughter think would most accord with her friend's wishes? But he thought *he could* discern. Yes, *he certainly read* in Miss Morland's eyes a judicious desire of making use of the present smiling weather. But when did she judge amiss? (*NA* 167, my emphasis)

Little does he know that the abbey is Catherine's primary object of interest. She does not say a word just as we never have an opportunity of learning what Miss Tilney really thinks of her brother's buying muslins in her stead. Remarkably, we learn from Mrs Allen that Miss Tilney always wears white, the colour of chastity (*NA* 87). Can it be a coincidence that Eleanor appears predominantly in white muslins? One is urged to think that Henry Tilney's female ideal resembles Richardson's angel-like Clarissa or his mother's description in the general's epitaph – as a virtuous woman whose voice is silenced by male violence.<sup>59</sup>

Henry's reconstruction of Radcliffe's gothic is another hint of his self-assurance as a knower of what the female readership expected from the gothic genre. The drive to Northanger Abbey resembles a gothic scene set up by Henry, who has internalized all props required for such a performance: a 'ponderous' chest, 'remains of a broken lute', 'the portrait of some handsome warrior' and 'some instruments of torture' (*NA* 150, 151). Henry assumes the role of the narrator and assigns to Catherine that of the heroine, with which she identifies to such an extent as to cry: 'Oh! Mr Tilney, how frightful! This is just like a book!' (*NA* 150). His gothic performance is skilful and the excitement he has aroused in Catherine is as amusing to him as one of Ann Radcliffe's novels. It is important to notice that his reconstruction of the gothic plot contains the sensational horror and suspense that characterizes the genre, but when it comes to its underlying motives, he stops to tell Catherine 'to use her own fancy in the perusal of Mathilda's woes' (*NA* 152). Yet, Henry has underestimated Catherine's identification with the gothic, and when Catherine takes to heart his advice to peruse the woes that underlie the gothic plot, his indignation is aroused. Instead of

Mathilda's journal, Catherine embarks on the investigation of Mrs Tilney's past only to be humbled by the most compelling of Henry's lectures on England's laws. To him, the gothic is only props and suspense, nothing but entertaining artifice. His limited comprehension of the gothic illustrates Claudia L. Johnson's point that Henry Tilney consumes novels without attributing any substantial truths to them: 'Henry categorically denies the gothic any legitimately mimetic provenance.'<sup>60</sup> When Catherine is caught in gothic imagination, she enacts what Henry's narration has triggered and holds Henry responsible for her awakened imagination: 'And it was in a great measure his own doing' (*NA* 164). But his gratification is satisfied as long as Catherine moves within the frame he has set to the genre and recoils to moralizing speeches as soon as Catherine's 'sympathetic imagination' establishes connections outside that frame.<sup>61</sup> Henry's contradictions betray his insecurity with female imagination that dives beneath the surface of gothic plot – or gender artifice for that matter – in order to explore the mechanism that gives birth to such artifice in the first place.

In this point, he resembles his father's control over the female gaze. After the tour of the abbey and the prohibition against entering Mrs Tilney's chamber, the general sends Catherine to her room with the following words:

'I have many pamphlets to finish,' said he to Catherine, 'before I can close my eyes, and perhaps may be poring over *the affairs of the nation* for hours after you are asleep. Can either of us be more *meetly* employed? My eyes will be blinding for the *good of others*, and yours preparing by rest for future *mischiefs*.' (*NA* 177, my emphasis)

First, while the male gaze is linked to political discourse, female eyes are confined to a decorative and coquettish function, which is a limitation Catherine will defy by entering Mrs Tilney's chamber. Second, General Tilney's being a representative of those who hold England's political power undercuts Henry's reliance on the infallibility of the laws of England: 'Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them?' (*NA* 186). The novel's ending implies that neither education nor the legal system succeeds in preventing domestic tyranny. Since Catherine's eyes penetrate the general's tyranny, they reveal that the nation's welfare is in abusive hands and England's laws do oppress. General Tilney's characterization feeds into the political dimension that radical writers such as Godwin endowed upon the gothic. Catherine's choice of vocabulary when analysing the general bears a striking resemblance with Godwin's in the preface to *The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, such as it appeared in its second edition in 1795: 'Accordingly it was proposed, in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the *destroyer* of man.' While Catherine thinks: 'the perusal of the highly strained epitaph, in which every virtue was ascribed to her [Mrs

Tilney] by the inconsolable husband, who must have been in some way or other her *destroyer*, affected her even to tears' (NA 181, my emphasis).<sup>62</sup> Seen in this light, the heroine's eyes are indeed linked to mischief, but not the coquettish kind meant by the general.

Moralizing was also Richardson's strategy of putting boundaries to his readers' imagination. Like Henry Tilney, he specialized in his knowledge of women and surrounded himself with female readers.<sup>63</sup> Richardson saw his novels as a means of instruction and his correspondence with his female admirers helped him stay in touch with their appropriation of the morality he was promoting. However, due to the possibility of misinterpretation and misreading permitted by the epistolary genre, Richardson felt compelled to channel his readers' views and aspirations by supplementing his third edition of *Clarissa* with footnotes – considering them to be the editor's guidance and advice.<sup>64</sup> For example, he went to great lengths to contain his readers' fascination with Lovelace, who saw him not as a picture of perfect wickedness, but rather as a mixed character. Many of Richardson's footnotes amplified Lovelace's machinations in order to remind the reader that identification with him would be immoral. Henry follows a similar strategy, pointing out to Catherine not only the improbability, but more importantly the immorality of the equation of the general with a Montoni.

Yet, Henry does not radiate the same threat as his father, because his archness is counterbalanced by his being 'not so ignorant of young ladies' ways' (NA 27). He knows how to ingratiate himself in society, especially in that of women. It is noteworthy that we never hear him engage in conversation with other men, as we experience, for example, Darcy and Bingley. He skilfully engages in every discussion that interests his female companions, be it novels, muslins or journal-keeping. No so-called female subject is beneath him, which is exactly what secures Mrs Allen's and Catherine's good opinion. He bonds with Mrs Allen thanks to his knowledge of muslins and establishes with Catherine a connection where John Thorpe had failed, through the appreciation of novels. The authenticity of his interest in these subjects is disputable. His first conversation with Catherine is marked by artificiality, while he tries to entertain her playing off "the simpering" manners of a Bath beau.<sup>65</sup> His gestures emphasize his theatricality: 'forming his features into a set smile, and affectedly softening his voice' (NA 26). His questions on Catherine's Bath engagements come in the correct order, because he knows his performance by heart. For Hoeveler, Henry's artificiality is a mere satire of social conventions.<sup>66</sup> I rather link it with his constructions of femininity, since theatricality was usually seen as an inherently female characteristic and women 'as duplicitous, deceptive, costumed, showy, and thus as a sex inherently theatrical'.<sup>67</sup> Through his adoption of theatricality, Henry believes he is catering to the feminine needs of his companions. One could say Catherine is too naive to embark on his satire, but one can as safely

say that she disappoints his clichéd expectations. By the end of the discussion on muslins, Catherine will have spotted Henry's flaw, namely 'that he indulged himself a little too much with the foibles of others' (NA 29). Henry's self-gratification feeds upon the weaknesses of the others such as frivolity, inexperience or ignorance. No wonder he is attracted to Catherine, since 'To come with a well-informed mind is to come with an inability of administering to the vanity of others' (NA 106). Isabella is attracted to Catherine, because her being younger, inexperienced and not exactly beautiful excludes rivalry or resistance. Henry's motives are not less vain. His love for Catherine has its roots in 'nothing better than gratitude' (NA 227). In educational manuals such as *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1761), female love is generated by gratitude for the male attention she receives:

What is commonly called love among you is rather gratitude, and a partiality to the man who prefers you to the rest of your sex ... 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 ... If attachment was not excited in your sex in this manner, there is not one of a million of you that could marry with any degree of love.<sup>68</sup>

This is another sign of Henry's immersion in gender ideology and of the novel's experimental vein, because Austen reverses gender expectations.

Catherine encounters different modes of femininity, and the conflicts she has to solve 'between right conduct and self-gratification suggest a certain growth of conscience'.<sup>69</sup> Although clearer signs of her growth are seen in the abbey section, Catherine's process starts earlier when the Clifton scheme prompts her to break the engagement with the Tilneys, and when she starts questioning the behaviour of Isabella, the Thorpes and Henry. For example, she expects an explanation as to why Henry was less ready than Eleanor to forgive her for having broken their engagement for a walk: 'But, Mr Tilney, why were *you* less generous than your sister? If she felt such confidence in my good intentions, and could suppose it to be only a mistake, why should you be so ready to take offence?' (NA 90). Henry evades her direct question, but the reader can hardly get over his unjustified mistrust. Henry always expects his questions to be answered and when he is refused an answer, he will 'tease' Catherine, for 'nothing in the world advances intimacy so much' (NA 29). But when Catherine 'teases' him about Mrs Tilney's life story, which will surely lead to intimate exchange, his aim will be to contain teasing and intimacy.

The same inconsistency characterizes Henry's attitude to promises and social contracts. He may well mock Isabella's empty promises, but he at times is guilty of the same crime, as when he had agreed with Eleanor to read Mrs Radcliffe's book together – a book that notably belongs to his sister – but that he continues



to read on his own. This incident implies that Henry has a tendency to take into account only his own gratification, since Eleanor's ownership and suspended desire is not considered. The promise is broken and Henry declares: 'I am proud when I reflect on it' (NA 103). A similar reluctance to be critical is displayed in his tolerance towards his brother's intrusive flirtations with Isabella, who is known to be engaged to Catherine's brother.<sup>70</sup> How different his treatment of John Thorpe's competition is, can be best recognized when Henry posits: 'those men who do not choose to dance or marry themselves, have no business with the partners or wives of their neighbours' (NA 74). However, he fails to hold his brother responsible for flirting with Isabella while she is being courted by James Morland.

Henry has a keen sense of social contracts, as his comparison of dancing to marriage suggests, but if he seems progressive enough not to endorse his father's incivility, he is blind to his brother's trespassing. He is the child of those social contract theorists, like Locke, who, according to Carol Pateman, questioned a civil society based on paternal authority, but only to replace it by a fraternal one as it happened during the French Revolution.<sup>71</sup> Progressive as it is to distribute political agency between fraternal citizens, it is a change of power that excludes women's participation from the social order and preserves the partial progress of civilization that Wollstonecraft contends in *A Vindication*. Catherine's experience hints at Henry's unspoken solidarity and complicity with his brother. Henry's character loses credibility when Catherine recognizes that his camouflaged misogyny is coupled with a reluctance to address male shortcomings. When she thinks at the end of the novel that 'in suspecting General Tilney of either murdering or shutting up his wife, she had scarcely sinned against his character, or magnified his cruelty', the process of stepping out of Henry's shadow and making her own statement is complete (NA 230). By arguing against the silencing of the wife, of the sister and of the female guest, Catherine participates in the critique of a partial progress of civilization. The novel supports her by turning the tables on Henry: considering that Rousseau saw blushing as a typically non-verbal female reaction, a result of both their nature and artificiality, Henry's blushing at his father's incivility to Catherine suggests that the gender binaries he has set up throughout the novel are broken down.<sup>72</sup>

Catherine is surrounded by different embodiments of moral artifice and, although she makes her entrance into the world rather naively, she permanently inquires after the morality of human actions: is it moral to drive on the curriole with a young man? Is it right for a father to impose his wishes and habits on the rest of the household? Is it moral to condemn female flirtation and allow for unlimited male courtship? Is there a medium between selfish artifice such as practiced by Isabella and silenced selfhood such as embodied by Eleanor? A case in point of her development are the negotiations regarding the Clifton scheme,

where her relationships to the Tilneys, Isabella and James are at stake. She sides with the Tilneys, because she has formed with them a prior engagement. But her decision cannot be simply seen as an act of duty; she also wants to be in the Tilneys' company. Both obligation and inclination motivate her decision-making:

She had not been withstanding them on selfish principles alone, she had not consulted merely her own gratification; *that* might have been ensured in some degree by the excursion itself, by seeing Blaize Castle; no, she had attended to what was due to others, and to her own character in their opinion. (NA 97)

I want to draw attention to the words 'merely' and 'alone', because they suggest Catherine's awareness of the impossibility and undesirability of a complete effacement of selfishness and consequently of self-gratification in all human behaviour. Catherine need not declare that she never thinks of herself like Isabella, who illustrates Amelia Opie's observation: 'Egotism loves a becoming dress, and is always on the watch to hide her ugliness by the robe of benevolence.'<sup>73</sup> Once Catherine has considered both what is 'due to others' and to her self-image, she can insist on her righteousness: 'If I am wrong, I am doing what I believe to be right' (NA 95). The actions she takes are based upon the personal belief that a young woman has a right to consider her own inclinations as much as those of others and that her decisions should reflect her personal convictions. Catherine's experience testifies to Wollstonecraft's observation that individuality and 'individual education' require an environment and not the isolation preferred by Rousseau:

To prevent any misconstruction, I must add, that I do not believe that a private education can work the wonders which some sanguine writers have attributed to it. Men and women must be educated, in a great degree, by the opinions and manners of the society they live in.<sup>74</sup>

In the midst of social influence and through a proper education, men and women will learn to think for themselves, not in solitude will they become individuals, but in the midst of a 'society of individuals.'<sup>75</sup>

In *Northanger Abbey*, moral lectures from older brothers or authority figures cannot replace the individual process of decision making. The individual has to weigh self-interest and what is due to others: morality is not external, but the result of internal reflections that undergo change through constant interaction with the external world. From the Clifton scheme on, Catherine needs no moral approval either from Isabella or James, the latter of whom chastises her: 'I did not think you had been so obstinate, Catherine' (NA 95). However, her stubbornness has the narrator's approval: 'But Catherine could be stubborn too' (NA 139). Catherine's stubbornness cannot be contained, even by General

Tilney, when it comes to entering Mrs Tilney's apartment. She must have her curiosity satisfied, but when she realizes that it might have repercussions on Eleanor, she decides to dare it on her own: 'To involve her [Eleanor] in the danger of a second detection, to court her into an apartment which must wring her heart, could not be the office of a friend' (NA 181). Friendship, sisterhood, gothic imagination and heterosexual love are shown as the ingredients that fuel Catherine's gratification and they are all pursued avidly. As a matter of fact, Catherine resembles the juvenilia's Lucy in 'Jack and Alice' with her unrestrained pursuit of Henry. Her undisguised inquiry after him unfolds to Eleanor all her feelings. Hence, the quest for self-gratification is not abandoned by Austen, but in *Northanger Abbey* it is complemented by a participation in the desires and sorrows of others, which is Isabella's greatest deficiency, as Catherine notices: 'Catherine could almost have accused Isabella of being wanting in tenderness towards herself and her sorrows, so very little did they appear to dwell on her mind' (NA 86).

Catherine's growth of conscience and socialization is reflected in the increased use of free indirect speech after she has left Bath, displaying her analysis of gothic symbolism and character.<sup>76</sup> Clara Tuite points out that the free indirect narration introduces a new kind of 'drama of surveillance and chastisement, of self-surveillance and self-chastisement'.<sup>77</sup> The endings of *Lady Susan* and *Northanger Abbey* illustrate this point, as they both impose almost forcefully upon the readers the necessity to draw their own conclusions:

Whether Lady Susan was or was not happy in her second choice, I do not see how it can ever be ascertained; for who would take her assurance of it on either side of the question? The world must judge from probability; she had nothing against her but her husband, and her conscience. (LS 103)

... professing myself moreover convinced, that the General's unjust interference, so far from being really injurious to their felicity, was perhaps rather conducive to it, by improving their knowledge of each other, and adding strength to their attachment, I leave it to be settled, by whomsoever it may concern, whether the tendency of this work be altogether to recommend parental tyranny, or reward filial disobedience. (NA 235)

Austen refuses to play the role of the older brother or instructing narrator who adopts the patronizing voice of morality. Unlike Richardson, she reminds the readers of morality without guiding their reasoning. She is not afraid of leaving mixed characters uncensored by the narrator's moral judgement. Margaret Kirkham argues that this ambiguous attitude distinguishes Austen from Samuel Johnson, who propounded that 'characters in whom good and bad qualities were confused should not in familiar histories, be sympathetically represented, nor should they be allowed to be seen to prosper'.<sup>78</sup> Kirkham comments on Johnson's criticism in *Rambler* 4, where he singles out the novel as a genre whose 'power of example is so great as to take possession of the memory by a kind of violence,

and produce effects almost without the intervention of the will'.<sup>79</sup> Johnson's apprehension of this mental violence mirrors Henry Tilney's attempt to contain the riots in the brains of his sister and Catherine. Due to the novel's ambivalent nature as a kind of fiction that provokes in readers the urge for emulation, Johnson demands that novel writers censure their choice of material, because 'the best examples only should be exhibited; and that which is likely to operate so strongly should not be mischievous or uncertain in its effects'.<sup>80</sup> *Lady Susan's* ending resists external surveillance also at a historical level. As Mary A. Favret has shown, it is significant that the letter exchange breaks down as a result of a mishap at the Post Office, because *Lady Susan's* composition and revision coincides with the decades during which 'Pitt's ministry in Great Britain had elevated the Post Office into a highly – and corrupt – bureaucracy'.<sup>81</sup> Not only did these years mark an unprecedented rise of the price of a single letter, but never had warrants for opening letters been so easily granted and private correspondence so often intruded upon. Indeed, Lady Susan's existence as a life under ongoing observation proves to be right, since private correspondence is overshadowed by this implicit governmental surveillance. The failure of the Post Office signifies an intervention that confiscates surveillance from the centres of power and disseminates it among the readers, who are urged to judge for themselves.

The emphasis on Lady Susan's conscience and 'probabilities' opens the narrative to interpretations or as one critic writes, to 'speculation'.<sup>82</sup> Speculation has a tinge of uncertainty and unsettledness, but more importantly it allows for different voices, for the Bakhtinian dialogue between the characters themselves, the characters and the readers and ultimately the narrator and the readers. But even more than speculation, the narrator presents her readers with 'an honest directive to practice what modern critical discourse calls the hermeneutics of suspicion'.<sup>83</sup> It takes the power of criticism from the minds of a savant elite and places it on the judgement of the common reader. Self-surveillance undergoes a shift from *Lady Susan* to *Northanger Abbey*: in *Lady Susan*, the regulation of affective life is more the result of 'the social constraint' produced by the awareness of being under continual observation and the desire to ensure one's social status, whereas in *Northanger Abbey* social constraint develops into 'all-embracing' habitual introspection.<sup>84</sup> Such a shift characterizes the transition of habitus from court society to commercial civilization.

Accordingly, the ending of *Northanger Abbey* appeals to the reader to extract morality by making use of the 'self-surveillance' already promoted in the heroine and that ultimately signals the emergence of civilized habitus. In doing so, the narrator vindicates the scope of the novel and with that the realm of feminine imagination. Kirkham rightly states that novels were a new kind of genre that opened unknown avenues of identification and interpretation and 'undermined established authority'.<sup>85</sup> Austen's productions are novels, as the narrator declares:



'Yes, novels; for I will not adopt that ungenerous and impolitic custom so common with novel-writers, of degrading by their contemptuous censure the very performances to the number of which they are themselves adding' (NA 36). Here, Austen alludes to *Belinda* and not arbitrarily, for although she liked Maria Edgeworth, she seems to have resented Edgeworth's naming *Belinda* 'a moral tale' instead of a novel (NA 36). This is not to say that Austen is negligent of the moral purpose of fiction, but that morality in her novels is internal rather than external. Clifford Siskin astutely asserts that her 'flippant tone ... is not meant to trivialize moral judgements but to mark them as complex – more specifically, as resistant to simplistic cause-and-effect analysis.'<sup>86</sup> The novel should encourage active thinking and feeling which leads to a recognition of human rights in the self as much as in the other. This is the process that Catherine undergoes in *Northanger Abbey* and which eventually bestows upon her the status of the heroine. While in Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Montoni is an individual doomed to fail, General Tilney represents the military man whose political power remains materially uncontested. However, social critique and potential improvement is brought forth by Catherine, whose eyes detect mischief. If we agree with Helen Meyers that, when the gothic heroine displays an 'adventurous and curious' spirit, but also defiance and critical thinking, she becomes 'a prototypical feminist', then Catherine's contribution is to destabilize received morality and posit the empowerment of female subjectivity in the production of knowledge.<sup>87</sup> If the readers can enter into her feelings, as she acts upon human instincts, such as the need for attachment and self-realization, the attractions of friendship and love, if they can identify with her imaginative powers and the restraints she faces, if the readers' eyes have been trained to see mischief (like Catherine's and unlike Reginald de Courcy's or Henry Tilney's), then they have been producers rather than consumers of moral judgement.

### 3 SENSE AND SENSIBILITY AND PRIDE AND PREJUDICE: ALLOWING FOR DIFFERENCE

If *Northanger Abbey* foregrounds the emergence of a sense of self, the formation of a thinking moral agent whose questioning of dominant culture reshapes morality, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* wrestle with the question of otherness. These two novels deal less with hierarchical relationships than *Northanger Abbey* or *Lady Susan*; here the pivotal issue revolves around intersubjective understanding between more or less equal subjects rather than despotism. The question then is how relationships can be enacted and sustained when participants disagree on points they think crucial to their understanding of each other. Indeed, if we agree with Hobbes that manners go beyond the 'small morals' of decent behaviour and comprise the 'qualities of mankind, that concern their living together in peace and unity', then the present chapter is about manners.<sup>1</sup>

The desire for 'peace and unity' and the claim for social agreement was becoming increasingly important in a society that steered towards normative claims such as freedom, equality and reciprocity, these being notions elaborated by Rousseau in *The Social Contract* (1762). For Rousseau, the conditions of freedom, equality and reciprocity ensured the legitimacy of the social bond. He saw them as essential ingredients required for the crystallization of a general will that pursued the common good. Unlike in the state of nature, in civil society under the social contract, the will of all ceases to represent the private interests of the individuals: once 'the excesses and insufficiencies' of the 'private interests' are bracketed, 'the common element remaining from the different desires is the general will'.<sup>2</sup> Rousseau conceptualizes the social contract as operating among equal subjects with equal interests, whose will is voiced in the public assembly. As Julia Simon-Ingram explains, the function of the public assembly is 'to explicitly affirm the implicit consensus and unanimity represented by the general will'.<sup>3</sup> Rousseau's belief in the automatic unanimity among equals is echoed in Kant's account of moral judgement, which he defined as a maxim that an individual could will without self-contradiction to be a universal maxim for all. Consequently, in these theories, moral judgement is the monological outcome of a

homogenous group of citizens. Seyla Benhabib compares Kant's moral agents to 'geometricians in different rooms, who reasoning alone for themselves, all arrive at the same solution to a problem'.<sup>4</sup> The comparison seeks to highlight the monological nature of moral judgement in Kant's thought. It is important to note that both Kant's formation of moral judgement and Rousseau's social contract build upon isolated moral agents and neglect the situation – namely, the particular history, the body and the emotional constitution of each moral agent. They gloss over the unique genesis, unique embeddedness and embodiedness that characterize human life and distinguish one individual from the other. This erases the otherness that not only resides between 'I' and the 'other', but also the dialogic nature of existence that, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, the father of dialogism, always perceives the other 'in terms that are specified socially and historically'.<sup>5</sup>

Recent moral theories seek to reassess two aspects of Rousseau's social contract: first, they contest the monological character of moral judgement and define universalizability 'as an intersubjective procedure of argumentation, geared to attain agreement'.<sup>6</sup> This reformulation is proposed by Jürgen Habermas's communicative ethics and endorsed by those who recognize the strength of communicative ethics to be the moral conversation between moral agents. Unlike Rousseau's social contract which makes use of free discussion in the assembly merely to mediate disagreement (which seldom occurs), Habermas's theory is grounded in a communicative practice. Here, all moral judgement and agreement is the result of debate and argumentation. Second, feminist thinkers go further than Habermas and call into question the moral consensus that he borrows from Rousseau. The most prominent reformulation of Habermas's social theory has been made by Benhabib, who has closely worked with Habermas. According to Benhabib, the universal nature of moral judgement does not mean that 'everybody could and would agree to the same set of principles, but that these principles have been adopted as a result of a procedure, whether of moral reasoning or of public debate, which we are ready to deem "reasonable and fair"'.<sup>7</sup> Compared to Habermas's stance, Benhabib's account of communicative ethics offers a significant modification by reallocating 'the burden of moral test in communicative ethics from *consensus* to the idea of an ongoing *moral conversation*'.<sup>8</sup> Hence, like Habermas, Benhabib puts emphasis on conversation and rational dialogue. However, she liberates it from the necessity of achieving consensus, which, in her view, can at times constitute a relapse into monological discourse. For Benhabib, the reconciliation between self and otherness is not effectuated upon agreement but already in the moral conversation that they keep alive, because 'to sustain an ongoing human relationship means to know what it means to be an "I" and a "me", to know that I am an "other" to you and that likewise you are an "I" to yourself, but an "other" to me'.<sup>9</sup> From this per-

spective, otherness is neither ignored, nor rephrased as an obstacle that has to be overcome through dialogue; rather, it is seen as a necessary condition that triggers conversation and promotes the development of moral thinking agents.

Benhabib's emphasis on the transformational potential of moral conversation concurs with Norbert Elias's assessment of dialogue. Elias takes human conversation as one of the simplest and most illuminating examples for transformation in human societies. Between conversing partners an exchange of ideas comes to pass that neither partner can control:

The ideas of either party may change in the course of the conversation. It may be, for example, that a certain agreement is arrived at by the partners in the course of the conversation. One might convince the other. Then something from one passes into the other. It is assimilated into his or her individual structure of ideas. It changes this structure, and is in its turn modified by being incorporated into a different system. The same applies if opposition arises in the conversation. Then the ideas of one party enter into the inner dialogue of the other as an adversary, and so drive on his thoughts.<sup>10</sup>

Like Benhabib, Elias argues that the influence exercised by conversational partners on one another is not contingent on consensus, but on the power to generate in each other ideas that were not there before, or to unfold ideas already present. In terms of the psychological habitus, the reshaping of present ideas and the generating of new ones lead to permeable ego boundaries. It follows that moral autonomy is not articulated as the capacity to formulate universal laws in a social vacuum that ignores human interdependencies, but 'as growth and change, sustained by a network of relationships'.<sup>11</sup> Elias uses the term 'network-figure' (*Verflechtungsfigur*) to describe conversation between two or more people – a term that conveys the relatedness of human existence and the incompleteness of any moral theory that starts off from a single, isolated and abstract thinking agent. Consequently, he argues that the direction and content of conversation cannot originate from the structure of either partner, but instead develops from the relationship between the two.

In literary theory, Elias's assessment of conversation finds its counterpart in Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of dialogical thinking, where dialogue, understood in his most schematic purpose of conversation,

is composed of an utterance, a reply, and a relation between the two. It is the relation that is the most important of the two, for without it the other two would have no meaning. They would be isolated, and the most primary of Bakhtinian *a priori* is that nothing is anything in itself.<sup>12</sup>

Conversation is used by Bakhtin as a metaphor that informs his thought as a literary critic and a philosopher. What justifies one to draw on Bakhtin's literary theory, Elias's sociology and Benhabib's philosophical thought at the same

time is their insistence on the process of interaction, the relation between moral agents in Benhabib's and Elias's thought, or the relation between utterance and reply, between the 'I' and the 'other' in Bakhtin's. I will use these three accounts to suggest that moral judgements cannot result from automatic consensus between disembodied thinking agents as Rousseau would have it in the *Social Contract*. Neither is consensus the necessary outcome that legitimates the validity of interaction, but the recognition of otherness in all its particularity that in return feeds into the consciousness of the self. As Holquist aptly puts it, in dialogism, meant as existence (i.e. way of living in the world) and verbal dialogue, 'the very capacity to have consciousness is based on otherness ... in dialogism consciousness is otherness'.<sup>13</sup> Taking the dialogical emphasis of these considerations as my point of departure, it will be argued that the narratives of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* point out the necessity of morality being the result of an ongoing exchange of ideas that allows for the particular situatedness of moral agents. The ultimate goal of this conversation is not to agree about what is morally permissible or impermissible (e.g., sense and sensibility), but to develop a practice that fuels mutual understanding within heterogeneous moral subjects, even when it fails to produce agreement.

### *Sense and Sensibility*: The 'I' in 'the Other'

*Sense and Sensibility* is the story of a mother and her three daughters: Mrs Dashwood, Elinor, Marianne and Margaret. The novel opens with the death of Mr Dashwood and these four women being left dependent upon the whim of a half-brother, John Dashwood. The latter is described as not being 'an ill-disposed young man, unless to be rather cold-hearted and rather selfish, is to be ill-disposed'.<sup>14</sup> Selfishness gets the better of him upon marrying a woman who is 'a strong caricature of himself' (SS 7). Under her unfavourable influence, his step-mother and half-sisters see themselves forced to move to a cottage that belongs to a distant cousin of Mrs Dashwood, Sir John Middleton. The precarious financial state of the four women and their approach to love and society are at the centre of the plot. According to family memory, the novel was first written in epistolary form, entitled 'Elinor and Marianne', in 1795 and turned into *Sense and Sensibility* in November 1797.<sup>15</sup> Since the epistolary production was never found, it is impossible to say how Austen revised the version that was eventually published in 1811 under the title *Sense and Sensibility*. Thematically, the original manuscript, 'Elinor and Marianne', suggests a focus on the two elder sisters, while *Sense and Sensibility* implies a juxtaposition of two highly debated terms in the eighteenth century.

Austen inherited this juxtaposition from the early eighteenth century, first from stage productions known as sentimental comedy (as opposed to the

comedy of manners that chastised human foibles and excess), and later from sentimental novels and poetry.<sup>16</sup> Sentimental fiction distinguishes itself as it 'asserts the superiority of the inarticulate language of the heart to the artifice of literary and social forms, the articulate mind and the fluent pen'.<sup>17</sup> By the mid-century, Adam Smith theorizes the dichotomy between reason and feeling in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), making a similar distinction between the stoicism of self-command and sympathetic indulgence. His theory found expression in many novels and Austen was one among many who discussed the rationality of feelings in fiction. Samuel Richardson's sentimental vein in *Pamela*, *Clarissa* or *Sir Charles Grandison* had given rise to various imitations and sentimental fiction had been popular for several decades. By the time Austen wrote *Sense and Sensibility*, women writers were discussing in fiction sensibility's relation to gender. Numerous novels, especially by women writers, such as Jane West's *A Gossip's Story* (1796) and *The Advantages of Education* (1793) and Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde* (1789) approached this question.<sup>18</sup> Most of them came down on the side of sense and denounced the excesses of sentimental behaviour. As Claudia Johnson states 'both progressive and conservative women writers agreed on their refusal of romantic passion'.<sup>19</sup> Wollstonecraft's political writings, including her novel *Maria or The Wrongs of Woman*, wrestled with the question of sensibility, but they eventually preferred prudent affection to romantic love. Even in progressive novels, such as Charlotte Smith's pro-revolutionary *Desmond* (1792), the heroine is capable of sympathetic response, but without making herself guilty of romantic infatuations.

Some critics have considered *Sense and Sensibility* as Austen's explicit condemnation of romantic passion and female impetuosity, arguing that the narrator rehashes what she had already ridiculed in her juvenilia: to a large degree, Marianne's 'inconvenience, and worse, that her behaviour brings on others' aligns her with Austen's earlier irresponsible heroines.<sup>20</sup> Janet Todd mentions *Sense and Sensibility* as a most 'vigorous conservative attack on sensibility'.<sup>21</sup> But to read Austen's intention as a rejection of the affectivity embodied by Marianne in favour of the sensible and decorous prudence practised by Elinor is too simplistic a view. Elinor's integration into the social structure is problematic and consequently not as worthy of emulation as it seems at first sight. Ruth ApRoberts observes that the novel 'is not a morality play, nor a set of Jonsonian humours, nor a simplistic cautionary tale' in which characters are personifications of virtues or vices.<sup>22</sup> Andrew Gibson rightly predicts an open-endedness to the question of 'how far Austen valued sense over sensibility', as '[e]ach would-be conclusive termination to rational debate merely gives it new licence to proliferate afresh'.<sup>23</sup>

Taking Gibson's advice to heart, I make debate central to this chapter's argument, arguing that, rather than a dichotomy between two 'widely differ-



ing responses' to disappointment, *Sense and Sensibility* renders acutely visible the necessary relation between the two.<sup>24</sup> The novel does not uphold a dialectic discourse, i.e. the juxtaposition of a thesis/antithesis that steers towards the formulation of synthesis. Its emphasis lies instead on the mediating power of the relation between differences that finds its most explicit and empowering expression in the form of dialogue. As this dialogical relation between the discourse of sense and sensibility is not understood by the female protagonists, they are for the majority of the novel engaged in searching individually for one putative solution. Yet, the narrative insists on the importance of an ongoing exchange of ideas and storytelling that makes otherness the very condition for self-knowledge. It is this awareness that offers the foundation for a life together, even on those occasions when it fails to produce consensus. In light of this, the novel prefigures a feminist reformulation of the doctrine of the separate spheres which includes sympathy as the bridging element within the social contract.

The upholding of difference or otherness is contained by the structure of the novel, which is profoundly dialogic. The emphasis here lies on a dialogic (i.e. a both/and stance) rather than dichotomous or dialectic (i.e. either/or) approach. The strength of Bakhtinian dialogism is to simultaneously maintain both sharedness and otherness. This dialogic perspective is already visible in the title where 'sense' and 'sensibility' share to a certain extent the same signifier. Had the narrator wanted to make a clear-cut distinction, she could have entitled the novel 'Reason and Sensibility'. In choosing the couple 'sense' and 'sensibility', the narrative signals the fact that irreducible differences do not exclude sharedness, thus making dichotomous categories fluid and complicating a monological reading.

This double discourse of sharedness and difference is embodied by the heroines, whose similarities, as Rachel Brownstein argues, outweigh their differences.<sup>25</sup> An early description of Marianne and Elinor helps enlighten this point. Neither sister distinguishes herself by a lack of the quality in which the other excels. Albeit prudent, Elinor's 'disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong', while the impetuous Marianne 'was sensible and clever' (SS 8). In order to drive this point home, Austen assures the reader of Elinor's affectionate heart by letting us into her consciousness and making us spectators of her silent suffering. As for Marianne's impulsive behaviour, the narrator goes to great lengths to exonerate the protagonist's affectivity by ushering in Lucy Steele's pseudo-sensibility. Lucy, the spiritual daughter of Lady Susan, is devoid of any other value but the monetary. Marianne's good sense is also emphasized by a comparison with her younger sister, Margaret: 'as she [Margaret] had already imbibed a good deal of Marianne's romance, without having much of her sense, she did not, at thirteen, bid fair to equal her sisters at a more advanced period of life' (SS 9). The narrator bestows an equal worth upon the elder sisters that the

youngest will never attain. There is also a correspondence of experiences – Elinor and Marianne have to part with their cherished home, are profoundly confused by their lovers' secret lives and disgusted by the laws of the marriage market. The double courtship plot underlines the dialogic relation between them. Significantly, when Marianne learns about Lucy's and Edward's engagement, we learn that to her 'Edward seemed a second Willoughby' (SS 245). Even though Marianne alone explicitly and impulsively declares that she knows the world and can hardly be changed by it, Elinor seems as immovable in her convictions as her sister. Her cool judgement invests her personality with an unabated distance from people and circumstances of all kinds.

This common ground being acknowledged, why can the reader barely shake off the gloomy aura reigning over the novel? More than once it has been pointed out that *Sense and Sensibility* is the 'least-beloved' of Austen's novels, if not the most austere.<sup>26</sup> Johnson crisply states that '*Sense and Sensibility* is unrelenting in its cynicism and iconoclasm.'<sup>27</sup> I identify the reason for this unfavourable reader response as inherent in the way the two protagonists perceive otherness. We must distinguish the way Elinor and Marianne see themselves from how the narrative constructs them before our eyes. While the novel conceives dialogism (both as existence and linguistic practice) as a potential mediator that makes otherness productive, this dialogic nature is for most of the narrative not understood by the heroines. Here, Johnson's note on cynicism can be helpful. Cynicism has its origins in the matriarchal Dashwood family. The three grown-up women are bound by mutual love, but their togetherness is threatened by cynicism. They do not merely have different personalities, which is always the case with human beings, but they choose to shape their characters in clear opposition to each other. By striving to be what the other is not, they implicitly refuse to regard otherness as fruitful. To start with Elinor, she defines herself in terms of not being like her mother, a lively and appealing woman in her late thirties who does not lack either sense or charm, but has yet to learn how to govern her feelings, a skill upon which Elinor takes pride. We learn quite early in the novel that Elinor's father had 'a cheerful and sanguine temper', which aligns him with his wife. Elinor, the first child of the couple, distinguishes herself for her prudence and self-control (SS 6). Thus Marianne grows up with two different personality models: her parents' sanguinity and her sister's stoicism. Her preference is for an open temper and she decides at an early age never to learn to curb her impulses (SS 8). The sisters deliberately want to escape each other's influence and throughout the novel the events that befall them are coped with in the light of this opposed self-fashioning that renders otherness undesirable.

Elinor stands rather alone, since Mrs Dashwood 'valued and cherished' Marianne's sensibility (SS 8). Elinor not only resists with stoic determination their system of conduct, but her language and attitude also betray cynicism and self-

professed superiority. She can be 'unpleasantly sharp', and accustomed to 'cutting Marianne's grandiose romantic effusions down to size'.<sup>28</sup> Her language is that of superior rationality and moderation as opposed to the excessive choice of words made by Mrs Dashwood and Marianne. She corrects Mrs Dashwood when the latter claims to love Edward:

'I think you will like him', said Elinor, 'when you know more of him.'

'Like him!' replied her mother, with a smile. 'I can feel no sentiment of approbation inferior to love.'

'You may esteem him.'

'I have never yet known what it was to separate esteem and love'. (SS 18)

A few pages later, Elinor's linguistic disassociation is exposed as illusory, when she tries to convince her mother that she grants Willoughby the benefit of the doubt by using Mrs Dashwood's passionate words: 'I love Willoughby, sincerely love him' (SS 81). This conscious disassociation becomes explicit at times and breaks out in the open. After a long eulogy in Edward's favour, Elinor has to subdue her enthusiasm by admitting to Marianne: 'I greatly esteem ... I like him.' Marianne's indignation is provoked by this sober, distanced and insincere account: 'Esteem him! Like him! Cold-hearted Elinor. Oh! worse than cold-hearted! Ashamed of being otherwise' (SS 23). Marianne's exclamation reveals a crucial point that lingers implicitly below the surface: Elinor is ashamed of being like her sister or mother and at times is even ashamed of Marianne herself. The latter acknowledges that 'Elinor has not my feelings' (SS 19) and that 'my feelings are not often shared, not often understood' (SS 87). From Marianne's viewpoint, Elinor's cynicism and ostensible superiority create a gap between the two sisters which eventually enables Willoughby to cause as much sorrow as he does. His absence is felt for more than romantic reasons, when upon his departure, Marianne nostalgically misses a time when her feelings were shared (SS 87). This leads to her disassociation from her sister when she explicitly asks Elinor to leave her alone, only to spend hours on solitary rambles or in her room 'without any desire of command over herself' (SS 82). Evidently, she consciously chooses to go against her sister's mantra of self-exertion and moderation in joy and sorrow.

My point here is that by fashioning themselves as different and subjected to aloneness, the heroines (but not the reader) fail to realize the likeness of their situation, the fact that they are connected through the very assumption of difference and aloneness.<sup>29</sup> However, the reader being outside the narrative and having a higher degree of what Bakhtin calls transgredience (the knowledge that is reached when 'the *whole* existence of others is seen from outside') already recognizes this self-fashioning to be a response, consequently immersed in an implicit dialogue.<sup>30</sup> Elinor and Marianne entertain the illusion of a solitary self that Holquist calls 'the Romantic claim for primacy of the absolute subject'.<sup>31</sup>

The narrative, on the other hand, impresses on the reader their being mutual points of reference for each other, thus making the dialogic claim that 'nothing can be perceived except against the perspective of something else'.<sup>32</sup> It is only through the dialogic relation of the 'I' to the other that the particular position of this 'I' is defined. Here the connection to Benhabib is not far-fetched: Bakhtin's insistence on the position from which reality is perceived is echoed in Benhabib's account of situatedness – a point supported by the narrative of *Sense and Sensibility*. While the heroines embody the illusion of an isolated moral agent, the narrative with its insistence on the relation between them calls attention to what Benhabib calls the situatedness within which moral agents form their judgement. In fact, for most of the novel, Elinor and Marianne construct themselves as Kant's moral agents, or what Benhabib names moral 'geometricians in different rooms', who reason and feel for themselves. However, Elinor's and Marianne's solitary musings fail to lead to that unanimity that Rousseau expected from his members of the assembly, and, far from being independent actions, they are responses. The concept of dialogism is also linked to Benhabib's thought from another viewpoint. Benhabib sees the strengths of Habermas's communicative ethics in its validation of conversation. As Holquist explicitly clarifies, dialogue is both 'a metaphor Bakhtin extracts from language's communicative aspect' and 'a master principle governing existence' which finds 'a paradigmatic expression in the language of conversation'.<sup>33</sup> Accordingly, both Bakhtin and Benhabib are concerned with the situatedness – thus contesting the primacy of the absolute self – as much as with the revelatory character of conversation. In the following paragraphs, I pay close attention to the way conversation can render otherness fruitful.

Before moving to a key conversation that ultimately disrupts the illusion of self-sufficient subjectivity, I dwell on a particular piece of conversation that occurs midway in the story. It is an aborted dialogue that fails to bring about advancement and that makes an important point about the necessary conditions that must be met for conversation to come into existence in the first place. After weeks of withdrawal and total secrecy, when Marianne receives Willoughby's cold reply along with her own letters which he has sent back, the need for disclosure becomes more pressing than ever. Elinor is the only character present to promote it and, as she expresses her wish to be helpful in any way possible, Marianne is ready to confide, avowing with disarming sincerity: "Oh Elinor, I am miserable indeed", before her voice was entirely lost in sobs.' It is in this crucial moment that Elinor censures a Wordsworthian outpour of feeling that Marianne has recollected for so long, because Elinor 'could no longer witness this torrent of unresisted grief in silence', by saying 'Exert yourself, dear Marianne' (SS 176). 'Exert yourself' is a speech act that wants to prevail upon the hearer to take certain actions and marks a shift in what Edwin Goffman has named 'foot-

ing'. By 'footing' Goffman means the 'participant's alignment, or set, or stance, or posture, or projected self'.<sup>34</sup> Elinor starts the conversation lending an attentive ear as a sympathetic listener, but abruptly adopts the authoritative voice of stern advice. Her intervention signals in Goffman's words an alignment that does not have the other, i.e. Marianne, in mind and as such, it conveys Elinor's unwillingness to listen and interrupts the exchange of information in which Marianne has engaged.

This sudden interruption asks from Marianne to agree and act upon Elinor's words; it is an appeal to reach a solution by converting Marianne before even hearing out the facts. It is an attempt to change the other that hinders what Elias deems the most valuable work of dialogue, namely the confrontation with ideas other than one's own: 'Then something from one passes into the other. It is assimilated into his or her individual structure of ideas. It changes this structure, and is in its turn modified by being incorporated into a different system.'<sup>35</sup> This possibility is nipped in the bud by Elinor's urge to reduce difference and achieve consensus on the very point of affectivity: to Elinor, conversation is possible when effusions of grief are avoided. With otherness being precluded, difference re-emerges as a threat. Indeed, her intervention has far-reaching ramifications, when read as an attempt to bracket, in Rousseau's words, 'the excesses and insufficiencies' of the private interests.<sup>36</sup> It represents the kind of impulse that strives for consensus and that according to Bakhtin contributes to 'processes of ideological centralization that undermine autonomy'.<sup>37</sup> Marianne's refusal to share and control herself can be read as a conscious act of resistance.

It follows that Marianne interprets Elinor's admonishment as the hollow advice of someone who does not know suffering or disappointment, and has no understanding for her situation. To Marianne, Elinor's dispassionate reasoning ignores and refuses to acknowledge the situatedness of the reasoning subject: her history, her physical experience, and emotional constitution. By retreating into her own shell, Marianne misses the opportunity to discover Elinor's situation. Elinor's reaction, like Rousseau's general will of rational citizens, excludes from the formation of moral judgement 'the suffering and emotive being'.<sup>38</sup> What does not take place here is that exchange of ideas that excites the imagination and enables one to take on to a certain extent the situatedness of another as Adam Smith understood it: 'By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him.'<sup>39</sup> The willingness to hear the particular story and enter the situation, even the body, within which the story unfolds is a necessary ingredient for the recognition of otherness and the formation of moral judgement. Smith summarizes this procedure as an act of imagination that leads to sympathetic response. In this key moment, Elinor has the opportunity to incorporate her own disappointed hopes into the experience

of her sister. But she does not, since she regards herself bound to secrecy by her promise to Lucy, and thus she fails to arouse Marianne's sympathy.

I dwell on the notion of sympathy as a component of a dialogical process because in *Sense and Sensibility* this capacity is invested with epistemological power. When speaking about Edward's taste for drawing, Marianne is afraid that because he cannot fully appreciate Elinor's work of art, he fails to see her sister's mental investment in such a work. She fears that Elinor's feelings will be handled with the same indifference as Edward reads Cowper, the poet of sensibility.<sup>40</sup> Marianne presumes that the failure to be moved by a work of art is the most alarming sign of lacking sympathy. She echoes the belief of Scottish moralists such as James Beattie, who linked sympathy directly to the appreciation of poetry: without 'sympathy, it will be impossible for him [the reader] to receive any true pleasure from a good poem'.<sup>41</sup> Elinor ridicules her sister's conception of artistic taste but, as the plot unfolds, Marianne is proven to have sensed the truth. Edward involves himself with Elinor and arouses her expectations, while being simultaneously engaged to Lucy Ferrars. His justification for spending so much time with Elinor reveals his scarce sympathetic perception (and his poor knowledge of Elinor): 'The danger is my own: I am doing no injury to anybody but myself' (SS 342). Elinor, who knows the pain Edward's imprudence imposed on her, 'shook her head and smiled' (SS 343). The narrative proves Marianne's foresight right when a rather dumbfounded Edward realizes the suffering he has unwittingly caused. One can even argue that Edward prefigures Frank Churchill, who embarks on a dubious courtship with Emma while having his affections already engaged elsewhere.

The potential of sympathy is explored and brought to fruition in the second piece of conversation, where Elinor and Marianne do no more than tell their stories. *Sense and Sensibility* is a text that illustrates Hannah Arendt's belief in the importance of making sense of the plurality of beings through storytelling: 'storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it' for 'it brings about consent and reconciliation with things as they really are'.<sup>42</sup> This storytelling, like poetry, can be appreciated and experienced only through the working of sympathy. When Elinor finally tells Marianne about having known of Edward's engagement to Lucy for four months, Marianne wonders at her sister's composure: 'how have you been supported?' (SS 246). She experiences Elinor's pain as her own. Initially, Elinor's answer tends to alienate Marianne with a reiteration of the doctrine of duty towards others and self-exertion, something Marianne cannot identify with:

'If such is your way of thinking,' said Marianne, 'if the loss of what is most valued is so easily made up by something else, your resolution, your self-command, are perhaps little less to be wondered at'. (SS 246)



Now Elinor realizes that her feelings are not understood and that she has to articulate for the first time a suffering that up to that moment has been only internalized. She reveals that her composure has not been a natural inclination, but a daily decision of will. So far, Marianne's understanding of pain is reduced to her own experience, since she can recognize herself only in people who are extensions of her self. This is best illustrated by her expectations on the male lover that come close to what Shelley in his *Essay on Love* formulated as 'an imagination which should enter into and seize upon the subtle and delicate peculiarities which we have delighted to cherish and unfold in secret'.<sup>43</sup> Marianne expects her lover to 'enter into all my feelings, the same books, the same music must charm us both' (SS 16). Her words convey the desire of some of the Romantic male poets to see themselves in a female form identical to the self. Anne Mellor argues that 'rather than embracing the female as a valued other, the male lover usually effaces her into a narcissistic projection of his own self'.<sup>44</sup> No wonder Marianne declares that she could never marry someone 'whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own' (SS 19). Thus, Marianne's identification with the other is dependent on sameness of taste, feelings and principles, taking for granted that such sameness exists. As the story unfolds, sameness is an illusion that the narrative entertains through the character of Willoughby only to relinquish it in the end.

However, Elinor's life-story teaches Marianne that one can enter into another's feelings, even when those feelings differ from those of the self. Elinor's openness raises Marianne's awareness of how somebody else's story can tie in with one's own beyond inevitable differences. It is as Smith would have it: sympathy is defined as our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever and is aroused as soon as we come to understand the motives of the actor.<sup>45</sup> In this light, sympathy bridges the epistemological gap between the sisters. Once Marianne realizes the presence of pain, she can identify with her sister to the point of self-condemnation: "Oh! Elinor," she cried, 'you have made me hate myself for ever. How barbarous have I been to you!'" (SS 247). I would argue this is the most dialogical moment in the novel, as it brings to the surface a crystallized version of dialogism, for 'the Bakhtinian just-so story of subjectivity is the tale of how I get my self from the other, it is the other's categories that will let me be an object for my own perception'.<sup>46</sup> In order to recognize herself, Marianne has to acknowledge Elinor's otherness, by an act of imagination enter her situatedness, and conceive herself as Elinor might see her. Through this conversation, the discourse of self-exertion is fleshed out by Elinor's particular story and it is through this embodied kind of sense, and not some abstract one, that Marianne reassesses herself. Elinor's perspective does to Marianne what dialogism sees otherness do to the 'I': in dialogism, 'In order to forge a self, I must do so from outside'.<sup>47</sup> Or as Elias would say

it, in order to face yourself you have to become your own spectator and observe yourself from outside in an act of detachment just like the other does:

The ability to see oneself through other people's eyes, and also the aim of so perceiving oneself, presupposes the ascent to a fairly high level of detachment. In order to achieve it one has, as it were, to go away from oneself and then look back at oneself from a distance.<sup>48</sup>

It is a capacity possible in advanced stages of the civilizing process, and if we agree with Elias, it is still in development, since the civilizing process is 'under way' and has not reached completion.<sup>49</sup>

The recognitions that the sisters gain through each other's stories lead to the most endearing moments between them: 'The tenderest caresses followed this confession' (SS 248). From this moment on, Marianne's attitude towards Elinor is never the same. Moreover, the self-control which Elinor had convulsively tried to inspire in her sister, by admonishing and posing as a model of sense, is produced ironically by a disclosure of feeling. Sympathetic response replaces didacticism, or more precisely fulfils a didactic purpose. The narrator observes that Marianne behaves with discretion for her sister's sake, because 'where Marianne felt she had injured, no reparation could be too much for her to make' (SS 248). Elinor and Marianne struggle throughout the novel to formulate universalizable moral maxims only to discover that these do not occur automatically, but are the result of a sympathetic response that is promoted through the kind of conversation that allows for otherness. It is along the same lines that the narrator justifies the love between Marianne and Colonel Brandon. Marianne's growing empathy for the two Elizas catalyses her attachment to Colonel Brandon. Before Colonel Brandon's disclosure of Willoughby's abuse of Eliza, Marianne is completely oblivious to his gaze. But when she learns the truth, she sympathetically turns to him 'in a pitying eye' and with 'the gentleness of her voice' (SS 204). There is a double identification with the Colonel's past: he was denied first love, like Marianne herself (interestingly, Marianne is the only Austen heroine whose first love does not end in marriage), and his ward was abandoned by the same man as Marianne, an act that eventually undoes Willoughby in the eyes of the Dashwoods: 'That crime has been the origin of every lesser one, and of all his present discontents' (SS 328).

*Sense and Sensibility* calls to the reader's attention the transformative power of what Adam Smith called 'sympathy', the ability to put ourselves in the place of another moral agent and by an act of imagination to 'place ourselves in [another's] situation ... we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure the same with him'.<sup>50</sup> This procedure emerges as the necessary ingredient to promote dialogue and the formation of moral judgement in the novel. Here, the emphasis lies on the mechanism that sets dialogue in motion, which concurs

with Glenn R. Morrow's assessment of sympathy in Smith's thought: 'To say that Smith's ethics is based upon sympathy does not mean that sympathy is the content of morality, but means rather that sympathy is the principle of communication between individuals which makes possible the moral judgment.'<sup>51</sup> *Sense and Sensibility* problematizes the foundations that make communication possible rather than its final outcome.

Sympathetic response is important in *Sense and Sensibility* also from the perspective of the narrator's allegiances in the novel. On which side does the author come down? A. W. Litz alludes to Austen's commitment to both heroines: 'It is as if Jane Austen's own sensibility were all on the side of Marianne, but her judgment had to decide for Elinor; perhaps the novel's uncertainty reflects that of its creator.'<sup>52</sup> If one chooses to see Elinor and Marianne as embodiments of sense and feeling, then the narrative suggests Austen's determination not to take sides, rather than her uncertainty. The narrative supports a dialogical relation that for most of the novel is not acknowledged by the protagonists themselves. But the dialogism is present and most poignant in its refusal to bring the narrative to a synthesis. We should not be fooled by Marianne's eagerness to make amends when declaring: 'my feelings shall be governed and my temper improved. They shall no longer worry others or torture myself. I shall now live solely for my family' (SS 323). These words have sometimes been interpreted as the narrator's attempt to yoke together in the end what she polarizes throughout the novel. This prompts Barbara Seiber to state that Marianne has undergone a most violent education that changes her from "a heroine of sensibility" to a member of the community of sense.<sup>53</sup> Yet, Marianne's words convey both her desire to become one with Elinor and the very impossibility of this desire. Her willingness to identify with Elinor's rationality is as much present as her emphatic use of language, an emotional quality that she does not relinquish until the end. This has left many a critic unsatisfied, because it resists reconciliation and undercuts the apparent consensus. But, in doing so, it is deeply dialogic, since although dialogue promises to make otherness fruitful, it is dependent on otherness for its very existence. Dialogue promotes self-knowledge through otherness, but always entails a certain opacity between speakers:

They (the speakers) remain only partially satisfied with each other's replies, because the continuation of dialogue is in large part dependent on neither party knowing exactly what the other means.<sup>54</sup>

Dialogue resists the appropriation of the other or otherness, because a certain dimension of individuality remains opaque and impenetrable. This opacity, which may seem to undermine sympathetic identification, resides in fact at the heart of sympathy as understood by Smith, for whom sympathy always implies an act of imagination that starts with the individual despite its being oriented

towards another. Smith never assumes the completeness of sympathetic identification; at the outset of *Theory of Moral Sentiments* he consents, advancing a Humean impasse, that 'we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected', but through imagination.<sup>55</sup> In other words, no matter how deeply the 'I' sympathizes with someone else's distress, it can never replicate that person's experience. Nancy Hirschmann captures this duality when explaining that 'sympathy contains an odd mixture of strong individualism and strong sociability. Sympathy translates self-reference into sociability by connecting our minds – or more accurately, our feelings and our inner lives with those of others.'<sup>56</sup> In this sense, dialogism and sympathy rest on the very impossibility of monological experience.

The narrative finally validates dialogism by permitting the difference to be there and by refusing to come to a synthesis. According to Anne Herrmann, this distinguishes the dialectic, which 'seeks to transcend oppositions by means of a synthetic third term', from the dialogical, 'which resists reconciliation of opposites by insisting on the reciprocity of two or more antagonistic voices.'<sup>57</sup> The presence of at least two antagonistic voices in Marianne's words signals the narrator's reluctance to come to a synthesis. Hence, the narrative of *Sense and Sensibility* is closer to a communicative ethics that emphasizes the dialogic character of existence and moral judgement, while nonetheless keeping a certain scepticism towards synthesis or consensus. As such, it is closer to Benhabib than Habermas, because for Benhabib, more than consensus, it is the ongoing conversation that offers the motivation for a life together.

Scepticism towards consensus as the ultimate goal of conversation does not diminish the unpredictable transformative potential of human verbal interaction. Whether the dialoguing partners come to agreement or fail to do so, in either case something from one partner flows over to the other. What the narrative of *Sense and Sensibility* problematizes is the cessation of this flow of ideas, of storytelling and the silencing of differences. It shows that isolated monological moral judgement generates repression and hinders reform. Elinor's and Marianne's dwelling in opposition to each other encourages a hardening of opinions, which only intensifies and perverts what is valuable in the other. Again Austen's language helps illustrate this point. When Marianne cannot help rising in defence of her sister's drawings, indignant that they should be compared to Miss Morton's, we learn that 'Marianne's feelings did not stop here' (SS 222). She, who has a wounded heart, imagines how Elinor must feel and approaches her with comforting words and 'hiding her face on Elinor's shoulder, she burst into tears' (SS 222). It is 'affectionate sensibility' that urges her identification with Elinor and makes her miserable for the rest of the evening (SS 222). Had Marianne known that this kind of exposure embarrassed Elinor, her emotions would have never reached such a high pitch. Thus, love, an otherwise noble feeling, is

unconsciously perverted into a source of suffering. The same pattern of behaviour is noticeable in Elinor: when she unexpectedly finds herself in the company of Lucy and Edward, Elinor feels compelled to manage this awkward situation, since Lucy 'seemed determined to make no contribution to the comfort of the others' (SS 227). But the narrator is sceptical of Elinor's self-exertion when she informs us:

Her exertions did not stop here; for she soon afterwards felt herself so heroically disposed as to determine, under pretence of fetching Marianne, to leave the others by themselves; and she really did it, and *that* in the handsomest manner, for she loitered away several minutes on the landing place, with the most high-minded fortitude, before she went to her sister. (SS 227)

It is noteworthy that an overdose of either fortitude or affectivity is underlined by the same expression: be it self-exertion or emotionality, they 'did not stop here'. This is another dialogical hint that, even though it goes unnoticed by the sisters, is registered by the narrative. Elinor's loyalty to Lucy or Edward becomes unreasonable and cannot but fall prey to the narrator's irony. Her self-exertion and heroic 'high-minded fortitude' verge on masochism and self-annihilation. Her tendency to masochism is emphasized by the disturbing way she faces Edward's upcoming marriage with Lucy. When she realizes that Edward will be Lucy's husband, she sits down to reflect on 'this pleasing anticipation' (SS 272). Although Elinor justifies her silent grief with her regard for Marianne and Mrs Dashwood, the outcome invalidates her good intentions, since they result in Marianne's self-hatred ('you have made me hate myself for ever') and her own masochism (SS 247). For David Monaghan, *Sense and Sensibility*, unlike *Northanger Abbey* and Austen's subsequent novels, is not structured around the courtship plot.<sup>58</sup> My argument is in line with Monaghan's observation that the nucleus of *Sense and Sensibility* is sisterhood and how competing ideologies about morality are enacted within this relationship. Despite what they have in common, Elinor and Marianne see their differences as precluding agreement – instead of conceiving of them as a possibility that could lead to self-recognition as it eventually does – to the point that they increase each other's isolation and hinder sympathetic response.

This reading has combined Bakhtin's dialogism with Benhabib's communicative ethics, intertwining literary with social theories. I believe this to be a justified association, because both approaches see the relation between 'I' and the 'other' immersed in the situatedness of a social context. In Holquist's words: 'dialogism sees social and ethical values as means by which the fundamental I/other split articulates itself in specific situations.'<sup>59</sup> Part of the specific situation in which communicative ethics takes root is the thought of Enlightenment, since it is an attempt to adjust Enlightenment rationality and contractarianism to a postmod-

ern society. The very same legacy had enormous impact on the political climate of the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. One can argue that Elinor and Marianne represent underlying competing endorsements of feminine sensibility. The *Anti-Jacobin Review* linked sensibility with the radicalism of the Jacobins, which it held responsible for England's turbulences. The radicals rejected this association and were repelled by the *Anti-Jacobin's* reactionary exploitation of emotional language (Burke was a prominent figure drawing on sentimental tropes in his *Reflections*). In the early nineteenth century, the time that Austen reworked *Sense and Sensibility*, the wars with France had caused a return to the British qualities of self-restraint and stoicism, while sensibility was attributed to the French.<sup>60</sup> Women writers wrestled in novels, poems and tracts with the question of how these ideologies affected their sex. Compelled by their writings, Richard Polwhele categorizes them into 'unsex'd females' and 'proper ones' in his notorious poem the 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798). However, Polwhele's antithetical categorization is contested by recent criticism. As William Stafford convincingly asserts, a comparison of the political agendas of so-called conservative and progressive women writers demonstrates that they bore more similarities than differences. He argues that 'in spite of Polwhele's separation of sheep from goats, the so-called proper women shared much common ground with "unsex'd" females on such matters as the intellectual capacities of women, their education and their social role.'<sup>61</sup> Polwhele's categorization ignores not only the linkage between the two groups he polarizes but also the differences among the women of the same group. One of these differences among so-called 'unsex'd' women was precisely the question of sensibility. While Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication* distinguishes between women of sensibility and rationality, Mary Robinson, another unsex'd woman, insists that 'tenderness of soul, and a love of social intercourse' remains a woman's province.<sup>62</sup> And even in Wollstonecraft's *Letters Written during a Short Residence in Norway, Sweden and Denmark* (1796), one encounters a writer who endorses in her private letters the kind of sensibility that she had checked in her political writings. It seems that woman of rationality and sensibility is just as unhelpful a dichotomy as Polwhele's.

Polwhele's dichotomy can be explained through the conceptualization of the public sphere in Rousseau's social contract, which became the groundwork of Jacobinism. In the social contract, the public assembly mediates the general will through rationality, while affectivity, expressions of joy and suffering, are exclusively enacted in the private sphere. Reason becomes the cornerstone of this assembly of men, as Iris Young writes: 'Impartial civilized reason characterizes the virtue of the republican man who rises above passion and desire.'<sup>63</sup> Thus normative reason and moral sense stand opposed to affectivity. The juxtaposition of normative reason and affectivity stipulates that 'women must be excluded from the public realm of citizenship, because they are the caretakers of affectivity.'<sup>64</sup>



In the late eighteenth century, 'the most current philosophical dichotomy was the intellect-emotion one.'<sup>65</sup> One can add that its occurrence at a time when a gendered doctrine of the separate spheres was becoming influential is not fortuitous. Writing against this backdrop, Wollstonecraft seeks to appropriate for her sex a language of rationality that would justify their participation in the public realm. However, the tension between affectivity (the historical, emotive and finite subjectivity) and rationality (the disembodied, abstract and universal moral subject) is to be felt throughout her writings. Austen registers this very tension in her novel, recognizing that the principle of exclusion impairs the formation of moral maxims. This is best reflected in Elinor's admonishment 'Exert yourself' – an attempt to rule out affectivity that immediately stops the dialogue. *Sense and Sensibility* challenges the kind of social contract that seeks to achieve homogeneity through reason by means of excluding affectivity from the public debate. The novel prefigures feminist accounts of social contract that allow for differentiation of needs and desires and call for sympathetic engagement with the other. If we follow Simon-Ingram's suggestion and read Rousseau's *Social Contract* alongside one of his lesser-known writings, *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, we discover sympathy to be the missing link between the private realm and the public assembly: 'The bond of sympathy, so crucial to good judgment in *Rousseau Juge de Jean-Jacques*, is the necessary guarantee against the tyranny of a one-sided, theoretical and homogenizing conception of reason.'<sup>66</sup> Sympathy emerges as the relation between the public and the private, without which the public and the private remain isolated, just as the utterance and reply in human dialogue are meaningless without the dialogic relation between them.

### *Pride and Prejudice*: Negotiations of Difference

In *Sense and Sensibility* intimacy is threatened by the self's conscious dissociation from the other. In continuation of the issues raised in *Sense and Sensibility*, this reading of *Pride and Prejudice* centres on Austen's exploration of otherness in heterosexual relationships. The narrator in *Pride and Prejudice* makes a case for the necessity of a praxis of dialogue that can transmute otherness into a complementary instrument, thus enriching the self and the other with a kind of knowledge that a self-absorbed approach can never provide. The novel explores concrete strategies for coping with otherness that circumvent the pitfalls of abstract optimism. In terms of its genesis, *Pride and Prejudice* shares a common history with *Sense and Sensibility*: it came into being in 1796–7, one year after the first version of *Sense and Sensibility* and was unsuccessfully submitted for publication under the title 'First Impressions'. It took more than ten years (1813) and a thorough reworking before the novel reached the public in the form we

know it today. Its concerns can be read as the pursuit of matters already discussed in *Sense and Sensibility*: How can a free-thinking subject stand her ground and still remain approachable to the other? Marianne and Elinor are so wrapped up in their own systems of belief that exchanges are severely hindered. *Pride and Prejudice* insists upon the conviction that an exchange of ideas between the self and the other is necessary for the expansion of human consciousness. At the same time, it acknowledges the fact that such exchange harbours the potential for escalations of interest and opinions. Indeed, the novel abounds in power struggles. It opens up with Mrs Bennet's obdurate attempts to prevail over her husband to visit Mr Bingley, and it ends with Lady Catherine's indignation at her nephew's marriage. In between, the protagonist couple delivers the most sagacious verbal exchange in the history of Austen's courtships.

Here, Austen's main focus is the heterosexual relationship, and the purpose of the narrative is to elaborate an attitude that values difference. Interest in heterosexual relationships aligns Austen with feminist philosophers like Luce Irigaray, whose work is a continuing discussion of the difference between men and women. Irigaray ascribes to heterosexual relationships the primary power to generate fruitful approaches to otherness, because 'between man and woman there's a negative, a type of irreducibility that doesn't exist between a woman and a woman.'<sup>67</sup> For Irigaray, 'a new relation of maturity' involves irreducibility and difference.<sup>68</sup> In *Pride and Prejudice*, the most developed heterosexual relationship is between Mr Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet. Their acquaintance starts under the sign of difference: Darcy's first appearance in the neighbourhood is related in terms of strangeness and standoffishness. While Bingley knows how to mix with new acquaintances, Darcy's unwillingness to converse or dance with anyone but his friends establish him as an outsider, whose otherness alienates the Longbourn neighbourhood. From that moment, he is marked as a proud man and an undesirable presence. I read Elizabeth's and Darcy's developing relationship in connection to the conjugal life of Mr and Mrs Bennet and Charlotte Lucas and Mr Collins, arguing that, in each one of these heterosexual relationships, the narrator deploys distinctive strategies for coping with otherness.

Before tackling heterosexual relationships, I start with a few observations on sisterhood, not only because it links to *Sense and Sensibility*, but also because chronologically sisterhood is the first reliable relationship presented in *Pride and Prejudice*. This is not to say that the novel offers an exclusively positive view of sisterhood; on the contrary, sisterhood is the most selfless relationship, as well as the most susceptible to abuse and disappointment. The Bennet family with its five daughters offers sufficient examples in support of both cases. My main interest goes to the bond that unites Jane and Elizabeth, which surpasses any other in Austen's narratives. It is one of the few blood relationships that the narrator cherishes. This is seen in the immediate contrast that the two sisters offer

to the rest of their family. We meet the Bennets *in medias res*, when Mrs Bennet is scheming to get the attention of the eligible bachelor, Mr Bingley; where Austen's mimetic skills are amply displayed in a heated discussion between Mr Bennet and his lady; where the narrator's irony, Mr Bennet's sarcasm and Mrs Bennet's relentless insistence are the first to impress themselves upon the reader. The Bennets are presented as insensitive parents: the mother cannot wait to marry her daughters off and the father cannot be bothered with thoughts of their future or his wife's concerns. The first three chapters end with the couple's either boisterous or quarrelsome discussions. In the midst of an environment where people talk past each other, the narrator draws us into the privacy of the bedchamber, where Jane and Elizabeth impatiently share their intimate thoughts: 'When Jane and Elizabeth were alone, the former, who had previously been cautious in her praise of Mr Bingley, expressed to her sister how very much she admired him' (PP 15).<sup>69</sup>

This unrestrained openness between sisters is quite new, especially if we bear in mind Elinor's and Marianne's secrecy when the first plays down her attraction to Edward Ferrars, and the latter is reluctant to disclose the nature of her relationship with Willoughby. Instead, Jane's growing affection for Bingley is continually related to Elizabeth, which makes falling in love a communal experience. Elizabeth is not seen as a threatening other, but as a companion and confidante. Interestingly, if we ask for the reasons of their intimacy, the ensuing dialogue between Jane and Elizabeth suggests that their closeness is not founded on sameness. Quite the contrary, Elizabeth wonders at Jane's capacity to accept people as they are and her willingness to overlook their faults, a quality that she herself lacks. She does not shrink back from confronting Jane, who, when urged to explain her position, insists that her words reflect her true feelings: 'I wish not to be hasty in censuring any one; but I always speak what I think' (PP 15). In return, Elizabeth does not doubt Jane's truthfulness, but is nevertheless puzzled by her unaffected candour: 'Affectation of candour is common enough; – one meets it everywhere. But to be candid without ostentation or design – to take the good of everybody's character and make it still better, and say nothing of the bad – belongs to you alone' (PP 15). *Pride and Prejudice* shares its interest in candour with *Sense and Sensibility*, since Elinor believes herself candid and even critics value her candour as 'extending charity to others by putting the best possible interpretation on their words and actions'.<sup>70</sup> However, her mother precisely reproaches her with a lack of candour: 'Oh! Elinor how incomprehensible are your feelings! You had rather take evil upon credit than good.' Elinor fervently protests 'it is my wish to be candid in my judgment of everybody' (SS 79), to which Mrs Dashwood replies, 'Ungracious girl!' (SS 81). When Elinor revises her opinion of Willoughby, it turns out that her mother has been right to suppose her eldest daughter would 'rather take evil upon credit than good'.<sup>71</sup> Elinor

realizes that she has distrusted Willoughby more than he deserved. Her characteristic shrewdness, which of course is an extension of her *sense*, seems to impair her candour. In the light of Jane Bennet's absence of prejudice, the representation of Elinor's self-professed candour becomes problematic.

With Jane Bennet, Austen enlarges the notion of sense moving away from stoic reason. If sense and sensibility are not mutually exclusive, neither are sense and candour. Elizabeth wonders how Jane can possibly unite these qualities: 'With *your* good sense, to be so honestly blind to the follies and nonsense of others' (PP 15). Thus, the sensible woman is not a fixed category; instead she gains in shades of personality. The narrator saves the character of Jane from the image of an easy-to-please girl by making her Elizabeth's favourite confidante: Jane is dearly cherished when present and much missed when absent. After Darcy's first proposal and his disclosure of Wickham's infamous behaviour to the Darcy family, Elizabeth's 'impatience to acquaint Jane with what had happened could no longer be overcome' (PP 184). The disheartening conversation between her and Darcy is aggravated by there being 'no one to speak to, of what I felt, and no Jane to comfort me' (PP 185). No other heroine formulates so directly and acutely the need to confide in someone as Elizabeth does, although they all feel the urge. Elizabeth depends not only upon Jane's candour, but also upon her 'good sense' when deciding what to do with her knowledge of Wickham's past. Jane is Elizabeth's point of reference in the novel and Elizabeth's esteem for her never wavers: 'All loveliness and goodness as she is! Her understanding excellent, her mind improved, and her manners captivating' (PP 154). Her appreciation of both Jane's sense and candour makes the reader take Jane seriously. In this relationship, otherness complements the self. The unfolding relationship with Darcy will require from Elizabeth that 'pliancy of temper' that her sister possesses (PP 16). This can be observed when, although much tempted to point out Bingley's blind reliance on Darcy's judgement and the latter's narcissistic pleasure, Elizabeth 'checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin' (PP 300). On the other hand, Jane, whose view of Bingley's abusing sisters is blurred by her attachment to him, requires Elizabeth's 'quickness of observation' to keep them at bay (PP 16). This sisterhood implies that letting oneself be transformed by otherness can lead to growth and maturity.

Elizabeth's and Darcy's acquaintance starts off on the wrong foot. On his first appearance, Elizabeth overhears Darcy's dismissing her physical charms as being 'not handsome enough to tempt *me*' (PP 13). Her reaction is quite original, as she mockingly exposes his megalomania to her friends, 'for she had a lively, playful disposition, which delighted in any thing ridiculous' (PP 13). This moment is particularly important, because here Elizabeth reveals her attitude on a very significant point. In a society where, as Catherine Macaulay writes in 1790, 'the

admiration of the sex is held out to women as the highest honour they can attain ... their *summum bonum* and the beauty of their persons the chief *desideratum* of men, Darcy's rejection must be her greatest loss.<sup>72</sup> We realize that this is Darcy's assumption when he expects Elizabeth to be grateful for his first proposal. Being surrounded mostly by women of Miss Bingley's ilk, who go to great lengths to have their bodies admired, to follow his whims in always agreeing with him or, as the narrator puts it, in being 'incapable of disappointing Mr Darcy in any thing', he is baffled to see that Elizabeth is far from considering his preference of her as her 'chief *desideratum*' (PP 50). Elizabeth takes away from Darcy the power of definition by posing herself as an 'other', different from and outside Darcy's single discourse. With such a starting point, the heterosexual relationship in *Pride and Prejudice* gets off the ground of what Luce Irigaray calls 'the auto-monocentrism of the Western subject' in refusing to accept a world that 'a single subject, traditionally the masculine subject, had constructed the world and interpreted the world according to a single perspective'.<sup>73</sup>

From this point of view, Darcy cannot but be challenged by Elizabeth's approach to gender. Jan Fergus aptly summarizes Darcy's confrontation with Elizabeth's otherness:

Her irony is so successful at disrupting and deflecting the power built into Darcy's male, moralizing discourse, its regime of truth, that the only way he can engage her is by abandoning his own system and trying to enter hers.<sup>74</sup>

The abandonment of one's own system and the entering of new territory are at first experienced as a threat. After the rather rapid familiarity that ensues, and their witty and occasionally belligerent discussions, Darcy 'began to feel the danger of paying Elizabeth too much attention' (PP 51). It is noteworthy that sometimes dialogues between Darcy and Elizabeth are generated by fear. When Elizabeth realizes early in the relationship that Darcy 'has a very satirical eye', she sets up a strategy of defence: 'if I do not begin by being impertinent myself, I shall soon grow afraid of him' (PP 23). Or later when conversing with Darcy: 'There is a stubbornness about me that never can bear to be frightened at the will of others. My courage always rises with every attempt to intimidate me' (PP 144). Elizabeth's otherness leads to his feeling 'never so bewitched by any woman as he was by her' and 'were it not for the inferiority of her connections, he should be in some *danger*' (PP 46, my emphasis). The word 'bewitched' is of particular interest here: first, it announces the transformation that Elizabeth's influence will effectuate; second, Darcy's recognition of this influence is identical to the observation of outsiders. Sir William's remark, when admiring Darcy's and Elizabeth's superior skills as dancers, comes very close to how Darcy sees himself in this relationship: 'You will not thank me for detaining you from the bewitching converse of that young lady' (PP 79). The striking parallelism of the expressions

implies that despite the compromising danger that Elizabeth's otherness represents, Darcy has the capacity to see himself from the outside. He sees himself as subjected to bewitching powers and is seen by the spectator, Sir William, in the same light. Recognition that the individual gains by observing the self from the outside 'as perceived by "an external observer"' is what Norbert Elias calls the ability of detachment. This acceptance and validity of a new knowledge depends on people's capacity for a degree of detachment which enables them to accept cognitive material that contradicts their self love: it is the 'people's capacity for greater detachment and, as part of that, their capacity for accepting knowledge about this world which runs counter to their wishes and their self love'.<sup>75</sup>

The capacity of accepting a perspective that runs counter to the self's established stock of ideas starts with Darcy's shift of aesthetic taste for female beauty. Only one ball after his unfavourable comment on Elizabeth's looks, Darcy unexpectedly revises his opinion and comes to appreciate what he had not previously realized: 'I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow' (PP 25). A similar recognition follows Elizabeth's appearance in Netherfield to meet sick Jane. This time, he meditates upon 'the brilliancy which exercise had given to her complexion' (PP 30). The narrator insists that such recognition has not come easily and entails a threat to self-love:

But no sooner had he made it clear to himself and his friends that she had hardly a good feature in her face, than he began to find it was rendered uncommonly intelligent by the beautiful expression of her dark eyes. To this discovery succeeded some others equally *mortifying*. Though he had detected with a critical eye more than one failure of perfect symmetry in her form, he was forced to acknowledge her figure to be light and pleasing; and in spite of his asserting that her manners were not those of the fashionable world, he was caught by their easy playfulness. (PP 23, my emphasis)

Darcy's ideas of female beauty and admirable femininity begin to grow beyond a 'single perspective'. It is worth noting that the gradual discovery of the visual delight that Darcy takes in Elizabeth suggests that Elizabeth's appearance is always in flux and cannot be captured or categorized.<sup>76</sup> Elizabeth's playfulness implies even more that the other can never be fully understood, since there will always be some unpredictable content to discover. The female other cannot be 'circumscribed' because, as Luce Irigaray relates, it is 'an open volume'.<sup>77</sup> Being 'an open volume', the other cannot be objectified: as Darcy explains to Caroline Bingley, the painter's brush could hardly catch the expression of Elizabeth's eyes 'although their colour and shape, and the eye-lashes so remarkably fine, might be copied' (PP 46). These observations of the female body display a growing awareness that knowing the other is a process that requires the ongoing willingness to



detach ourselves from what we think we know and to acquire an ever-evolving knowledge.

By an act of detachment, the self recognizes what goes against its inclination, and, by an act of involvement, integrates the newly gained knowledge into the former stock of ideas. As this recognition not only stretches but also calls into question existing conceptions, the self experiences otherness as a threat and mortification. Despite the irreducible difference between them, Darcy and Elizabeth undergo similar processes of involvement and detachment. It is with no less reluctance that Elizabeth resists the acquisition of new facts when Darcy's truth threatens to supersede Wickham's words, which she has been so eager to believe. She protests: 'This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!' (PP 168). Her involvement in sympathizing with Wickham has gone hand in hand with her desire to condemn Darcy for his haughtiness towards her family and friends. Only after Darcy's disclosure is Elizabeth forced to step out of herself and take turns in her identification with Wickham, as well as with Darcy, and judge the behaviour of those involved – hers included – from the outside. As a result of this self-examination, she is perplexed at Wickham's 'impropriety of such communications to a stranger, and wondered it had escaped her before' (PP 170). Wickham's ingratiating manners, and Darcy's alienating otherness from the moment he sets foot in Netherfield, have biased her judgement. The recognition of this self-deception leads to a similar self-condemnation as in Marianne's case: 'How despicably have I acted! ... How humiliating is this discovery! ... Till this moment I never knew myself' (PP 171). Elizabeth's highest act of detachment follows when she becomes a spectator of her own family and judges her parents and sisters as they might be seen from Darcy's viewpoint, and feels the justice of his critique 'too forcibly for denial' (PP 37).

Elizabeth's ideas of heterosexuality need to be reconstructed in the light of her parents' conjugal life. The partnership of Mr and Mrs Bennet provides a model in which otherness hinders the exchange of ideas. We are told that this relationship was the result of pure sexual attraction. It is at first incomprehensible how Mr Bennet could be 'captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour' and overlook his future wife's 'weak understanding' (PP 194). However, when we learn that Mr Bennet surrounds himself by what provides him pleasure without any personal investment, we come to understand how Mrs Bennet's vulgarity escaped him. In disclosing to the reader Elizabeth's reflections on her parents' marriage and personalities, the narrator tells us that Mr Bennet loved books and the country. This is the reason why he is most of the time confined in his library and seldom leaves his estate. Unlike the energetic young men of Netherfield, who are often in London on business, or his brother-in-law, Mr Gardiner, whose active life takes him all over the country, Mr Bennet keeps himself to his books and his grounds. However, neither source of enjoyment

is cultivated to bring benefits other than one-sided, self-indulging pleasure. It is only logical to expect his love of knowledge to induce him to take over his daughters' education to cultivate their minds. Instead, they are left to depend upon Mrs Bennet's 'mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper' (PP 7). As for his estate, the narrator is adamant in her description of Mr Bennet as an irresponsible landowner. A better administration of his property would have left him with more money to give to his daughters and was even more necessary with a wife like Mrs Bennet, who 'had no turn for economy' (PP 249). Unfortunately, Mr Bennet's 'love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income' (PP 249). Mr Bennet consumes whatever gives him pleasure: books, his country estate and his wife. Once she has no physical charms to offer, he amuses himself at 'her ignorance and folly' (PP 194). In that respect, his ironical remark about Wickham being his favourite son-in-law hits the nail on the head: they share parasitical features, since they both take without reciprocating and exploit whatever gratifies them.

From the distanced relationship with his daughters – two of whom are sensible enough to deserve his attention – we assume that Mr Bennet never invested in relationships, especially in female ones. The first pages of the novel contain one of the most misogynistic statements in Austen's novels when Mr Bennet openly avows that his daughters are by no means recommendable, since 'they are all silly and ignorant like other girls' (PP 6). The question arises: what has he done to prevent their ignorance? His daughters and Mrs Bennet could have been improved, had he cultivated a praxis of dialogue in the family. Mr Bennet's policy of withdrawal has significant implications upon domestic politics. The dismissive categorization of his daughters unjustly aligns them with Mrs Bennet's silliness, robbing each young woman of their individual characteristics, and ultimately of their otherness. It is no wonder that Elizabeth is his favourite daughter, since having 'something more of quickness than her sisters' she bears likeness to him (PP 6). Mr Bennet recognizes his wit in Lizzy's quickness of observation, a projection of himself that makes her more accessible to him. In this, he shares the same vision of love with the male Romantic poets, where the 'I' is drawn to someone with whom it experiences an extension of the self, as poignantly shown by Wordsworth's apostrophe to Dorothy at the end of 'Tintern Abbey'. I agree with D. A. Miller's observation that Elizabeth unconsciously and projectively mistakes Darcy for Mr Bennet and mimics her father's wit, hoping that she can counteract Darcy's pride just as she has counteracted Mr Bennet's disdain of the female members of his household.<sup>78</sup> Darcy delineates this weakness when he confronts Elizabeth: 'you find great enjoyment in occasionally professing opinions which in fact are not your own' (PP 144). Mr Bennet's narcissism cannot come to terms with the presence of the other (symbolically, this is seen in his absolute dislike of people entering his library). The only other he can accept is

his own reflection, an image he sees and cultivates in Elizabeth. In Hegel's words, 'it [the self] has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being; but in the other sees its own self'.<sup>79</sup> During verbal exchanges with Darcy, Elizabeth's 'superseded' self is unearthed. With their growing intimacy, the scales fall from Elizabeth's eyes and she sees not only herself, but also the domestic policy of the Bennet household from the outside. She recognizes that she is not an extension of her father's individuality, nor is Darcy equal to Mr Bennet as a partner.

The relationship with Darcy opens for Elizabeth a whole new perspective of partnership by ushering in the notion of complementarity. This is a new approach to heterosexuality, especially because Mr Bennet upholds similarity as the formula of conjugal success: 'I have no doubt of your doing very well together. Your tempers are by no means unlike', he states in congratulating Jane on her union with Bingley (PP 280). In *Sense and Sensibility*, similarity of opinions brings together Elinor and Edward, Marianne and Willoughby, and even Marianne and Colonel Brandon, who can identify more than anybody else with Marianne's ideas and experience. *Pride and Prejudice*, however, thrives on the unpredictable avenues of knowledge opened by difference when they are cultivated through conversation, as delineated in the following dialogue between Darcy and Lizzy:

'What think you of books?' said he, smiling.

'Books – Oh! no. – I am sure we never read the same, or not with the same feelings.'

'I am sorry you think so; but if that be the case, there can at least be no want of subject. – We may compare our different opinions.' (PP 79)

Darcy's reluctance to mingle with the Longbourn family, his self-fashioning as someone outside that circle, gives Elizabeth reason to believe that he bases interaction upon sameness. She assumes that his dissociation from her family can only be interpreted as reluctance to interact with people beyond his own taste, opinion or class. Yet, Elizabeth is not aware of the new recognition that has taken place within Darcy's consciousness. As described above, he has reached the point of reforming his opinion on Elizabeth's female beauty and femininity, which enables him to integrate difference and expand himself towards the unknown. Darcy realizes that when people have the same opinions, the subjects are soon covered, as happens during Marianne's and Willoughby's meeting, where Elinor rightly wonders whether there remains any subject to discuss. Instead, an interchangeable flow between different ideas can be a fruitful ground for discussion. It is impossible to imagine that Elizabeth does not understand the truth of this statement, but it should also be noted that her parents experience the exactly opposite model. Elizabeth may have successfully cultivated dialogue with Jane,

despite their differences, but her parents' partnership has taught her that divergences are dealt with through avoidance and withdrawal.

Conversation promotes identification with the other and the expansion of the 'I' identity. John Millar, in his analysis of Western civilization, suggests a direct link between the expansion of civilized consciousness and linguistic exchange, especially the one between the sexes. Accordingly, the lack of conversation due to women's segregation to domesticity 'undoubtedly prevented the two sexes from improving the arts of conversation, and from giving a polish to the expression of their thoughts and sentiments'.<sup>80</sup> The developing relationship between Elizabeth and Darcy lays bare the necessity for conversation even more, since non-verbal communication not only puzzles them continuously, but tends to suggest a threat rather than rapprochement. Elizabeth cannot explain Darcy's gaze in Netherfield, nor his visits of few words while she is Charlotte's guest, nor his silent presence in Longbourn prior to his second proposal. By this time, Elizabeth is eager to have the chance to converse with him and 'envied every one to whom he spoke' (PP 275). Once the hope for conversation is disappointed, she frets: 'If he fears me, why come hither? If he no longer cares for me, why silent?' (PP 273).

As Tony Tanner points out, in the society of *Pride and Prejudice* linguistic experience is particularly important.<sup>81</sup> Tellingly, the first connections between Elizabeth and Darcy are forged through language, when a rather reserved but compliant Darcy is spurred by Elizabeth to partake in the necessary conversation that accompanies a country dance. Elizabeth insists that the amount of conversation should meet the inclinations of those involved, his and hers, because 'We are each of an unsocial, taciturn disposition' (PP 78). The appearance of a 'we' at this stage of their relationship not only betrays Elizabeth's fascination with 'so great a man' as Darcy, but suggests an unconscious desire to bond with him despite all undeniable discordance and mortification (PP 45).<sup>82</sup> Later, when Elizabeth's hostility has reached a peak due to Darcy's meddling in the Jane-Bingley affair, and his treatment of Wickham, Darcy has learned from her the bonding power of the 'we'. When criticized for his standoffish behaviour, he admits that he mixes as unwillingly with strangers as Elizabeth displays her piano skills: 'We neither of us perform to strangers' (PP 146). John Halperin mistakenly attributes this statement to Elizabeth: "'We neither of us perform to strangers'", Elizabeth says.<sup>83</sup> Significantly, this 'we' comes from Darcy as a belated, but well-thought response to Elizabeth's 'we' in the beginning of their relationship. It is also noteworthy that the shift from the 'I' to the 'we' is preceded by a change of attitude towards the other: 'I am not afraid of you', Darcy says to Elizabeth, implying that when the other is not considered a threat, the 'we' can come into existence (PP 145). This evolution of consciousness leads to a self-recognition that extending beyond the self, sees humanity 'as a more and more integrated

though highly vulnerable unit,' an approach characteristic of civilized subjectivity, where the 'I' is capable of seeing itself as part of a 'we'.<sup>84</sup>

However, it would be simplistic of Austen to assume the absolute effectiveness of a praxis of dialogue between the self and the other. One could argue that Darcy and Elizabeth have enough in common to overcome difference. But how can the silly, the arrogant and the self-conceited other be put up with? Austen does not shrink away from exposing human incompatibility, and she does it by depicting two incompatible couples, the Bennets and the Collinses, whose relationships challenge the belief in the exchange of ideas. Can there be an ongoing moral conversation between the intellectual Mr Bennet and his lightheaded wife, or between the sensible Charlotte and the ludicrous Mr Collins? Mr Bennet has answered that question negatively; unable to erase the presence of past mistakes embodied by his wife, he has erased himself from domestic life. With Charlotte, however, Austen introduces another option. Unlike Mr Bennet's blindness to folly, Charlotte enters married life fully aware of what to expect of her husband and, instead of despairing, she makes use of her good sense and pragmatic keenness. Her strategy is one of self-preservation of the 'I' and commitment to the 'we'. As Elizabeth observes, Charlotte, like Mr Bennet, claims a territory of her own: what the library is to Mr Bennet, the room at the back of the house is to Charlotte, suggesting that the company of an incompatible partner needs to be alleviated by some kind of retreat:

The room in which the ladies sat was backwards. Elizabeth at first had rather wondered that Charlotte should not prefer the dining parlour for common use; it was a better sized room, and had a pleasanter aspect; but she soon saw that her friend had an excellent reason for what she did, for Mr. Collins would undoubtedly have been much less in his own apartment, had they sat in one equally lively; and she gave Charlotte credit for the arrangement. (PP 140)

And yet, there is a crucial difference between Mr Bennet and Charlotte. In Elizabeth's eyes, Mr Bennet has committed 'that continual breach of conjugal obligation and decorum which, in exposing his wife to the contempt of her own children, was so highly reprehensible' (PP 194). Admiring Charlotte, on the other hand, for 'her address in guiding, and composure in bearing with her husband,' Elizabeth suggests that Charlotte has succeeded where Mr Bennet failed (PP 132).

Wollstonecraft is quite grim with women who endure abusive marriages. In the preface to *Maria or the Wrongs of Woman*, she writes: 'I should despise, or rather call her an ordinary woman, who could endure such a husband as I have sketched.'<sup>85</sup> Although Mr Collins is not abusive, he is despicable. At first, Charlotte's choice provokes Elizabeth's contempt; however, the narrator's attitude implies a silent admiration for enduring such a husband with good sense and pragmatic shrewdness. There are at least two instances that exemplify Charlotte's

wise management of Mr Collins. First, she takes the task of introducing her family members and Elizabeth to Lady Catherine: 'Mrs. Collins had settled it with her husband that the office of introduction should be hers, it was performed in a proper manner, without any of those apologies and thanks which he would have thought necessary' (PP 135). Charlotte checks her husband's pompous servility, sparing him and her guests unnecessary embarrassment. Second, she promotes Mr Collins's interest in gardening – in itself a useful and healthy activity. Needless to say, this is an effective way of providing him with a sensible occupation, since most of his day is spent running from one window to the other keeping track of Lady Catherine's rides.

The comparison of these incompatible marriages hints at the potential for human improvement when otherness is not dismissed as an insurmountable obstacle. If we take into account the distribution of agency in the Bennet family, it is safe to assume that Mr Bennet would have had the power to guide his wife, had he cared to do so: 'Mrs. Bennet had no turn for economy, and her husband's love of independence had alone prevented their exceeding their income' (PP 249). One wonders why Mr Bennet controls Mrs Bennet's expenditure, but fails to invest in other aspects of her conduct – or that of his daughters for that matter. The inconsistency is due to his motivations: keeping at bay his wife's spending habits ensures Mr Bennet's independence, whereas investing himself in conjugal and paternal duties entails a reduction of freedom and independence. Mr Bennet's lack of personal engagement is aggravated by his parasitism, and is best illustrated by his attitude towards letter-writing. When Elizabeth leaves Longbourn to visit Charlotte, she witnesses with pain that her father 'so little liked her going, that he told her to write him, and almost promised to answer her letter' (PP 127). Mr Bennet has no awareness of reciprocity; he is the kind of character we meet in industrial societies that Elias compares to 'a little sun around which the universe revolves' and has a hard time coming to a full understanding of the fact that 'individual identity is closely linked to a group identity'.<sup>86</sup> He presents us with the vision of an autonomous self who fails to recognize the boundaries of self-gratification, and whose narcissism excludes the possibility of taking the other's standpoint. Significantly, we learn nothing about Mr Bennet's family, whereas substantial information is given about Mrs Bennet's genealogy: like Hobbes's citizen, he appears un-mothered and un-fathered. This awareness of embedded identity is so underdeveloped in Mr Bennet that even when his wife and daughters, agonizing over Lydia's elopement, anxiously wait for his letters from London, he disappoints their hopes: 'His family knew him to be, on all common occasions, a most negligent and dilatory correspondent, but at such a time they had hoped for exertion' (PP 238). Even in face of domestic despair, Mr Bennet fails to see the situation through the eyes of his family members, and to meet the most basic need for communication.



The novels investigated in this chapter wrestle with the question of the interaction of dissimilarities, a necessity that arises from the awareness that the 'I' can never be isolated from the 'we'. Such a recognition requires the capacity of the self's detachment from its own perceptions and ideas in order to see oneself from the outside, as others see the 'I'. Darcy's manners improve with his growing awareness of Elizabeth's perspective. Similarly, Elizabeth's knowledge of her family increases as she learns to see her personality and family structure from Darcy's viewpoint. In *Pride and Prejudice*, dissimilarities are pregnant with fruitful interaction. Being aware of the limits and the potential incompatibility arising from the self's meeting with otherness, *Pride and Prejudice* proposes what recent feminist research has come to describe as 'interactive universalism', a vision of human consciousness and morality 'that regards difference as a starting point for reflection and action'.<sup>87</sup> To put it in Jane Bennet's words, in this novel, the 'I' is constantly asked not to despair and to 'make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper' (PP 114). Benhabib echoes Jane Bennet, when promoting 'interactive' instead of 'substitutionalist' universalism, the latter being the recognition of the experiences of a specific group as the paradigm for all human beings:

Interactive universalism acknowledges the plurality of modes of being human, and differences among humans, without endorsing all these pluralities and differences as morally and politically valid.<sup>88</sup>

If we see the other as having the same rights, duties and moral conceptions, we adopt the standpoint of 'the generalized' other, and 'we abstract from the individuality and the concrete identity of the other'.<sup>89</sup> According to Ruth ApRoberts, good artistry does not allow the readers to give in to 'easy generalities'.<sup>90</sup> One might add that the good artist discourages the imaginative bond between readers and characters to abstract itself from the situatedness of human existence. Elizabeth may resent Charlotte's marriage to Mr Collins, but the narrator resists any explicit condemnation. Mrs Bennet may be a ridiculous subject, but the narrative does not endorse her husband's narcissistic withdrawal. Instead, Jane, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Darcy rise beyond ordinariness because they allow for 'the plurality of modes of being human' so that moral conversation may continue. The last effort to maintain this conversation is when Darcy, spurred by Elizabeth, is willing to forgive his obnoxious aunt and to welcome her to Pemberley. This final act illustrates a readiness to credit good rather than evil, and a willingness to 'make allowance enough for difference of situation and temper' (PP 114).

## 4 MANSFIELD PARK: EMANCIPATING 'PUNY' FANNY PRICE

*Mansfield Park* places civilizing processes at the heart of the family. No other Austen novel addresses the question of civilized subjectivity with greater insistence than her third published novel. The plot itself is themed around the raising of a young woman, her education and introduction into civil society, and her inculcation with civilized values.

*Mansfield Park* anticipates what Norbert Elias stresses time and again, namely the family as the 'primary site' where civilizing processes are set in motion.<sup>1</sup> Within the figuration of the family, the parent-child relationship plays a highly formative role, so that Elias speaks of parents as 'the primary agents of conditioning' through which the figuration of an entire society exerts pressure on the shaping of the new generation.<sup>2</sup> Elias writes this early in his career, while working on a theory of Western civilization, but his considerations of the parent-child relationship and especially childhood appear in later works as well. The most explicit example is his 'The Civilizing of Parents', a lecture given in the 1980s, where he addresses the changes undergone by the parent-child figuration. What Elias opposes in this sketch 'of the broad contours of the civilizing process of the parent-child relationship' is a static idea of 'family relations as something which is more or less given by nature'.<sup>3</sup> His focus is on the power ratio within the family, its processual character and its relation to the autonomy appropriated by parents and children. This is another way for Elias to make an important argument about the relative autonomy of human subjects, as much as it is a step away from social and philosophical accounts that ignore the genealogy of the self. Both these arguments were, in his opinion, erroneous ramifications of a long-standing philosophical tradition. In *Involvement and Detachment* (1987), Elias criticizes the Cartesian approach that had a grip on the philosophical thought of the Enlightenment and he calls Descartes's philosophical subject 'a man of straw'.<sup>4</sup> According to Elias, this tradition with its emphasis on a self-reasoning adult is impregnated by the solipsistic tendency of the '*homo philosophicus* - a phantom apparently thrown into the world as an adult and naturally endowed all by himself with powers of perception, reason and conscience'.<sup>5</sup>

Elias's dissatisfaction is echoed by Seyla Benhabib, who mounts a similar critique when arguing that social and philosophical theories tend to ignore the genealogy of the self. Benhabib points out that in the last two decades of the twentieth century at least two philosophical strands, Neo-Aristotelian and feminist theorists, concur in their critique of the theoretical tradition that is about moral agents who seem to have been born rational adults instead of 'human children':

Neo-Aristotelians as well as feminist theorists in recent years have argued that we are children before we are adults, and that as human children we can only survive and develop within networks of dependence with others, and ... these networks of dependence constitute the moral bonds that continue to bind us even as moral adults.<sup>6</sup>

Benhabib's view of philosophical accounts hinges on the notion of 'networks of dependence' that start with birth and persist throughout human existence. As such, it is very close to Elias's call for a shift from an isolated, grown-up philosophical subject to the study of the figurations that sustain the formation of such a subject. The fact that moral agents can survive and develop only within 'these networks of dependence' should influence our conceptualization of morality and moral agency. According to Elias and Benhabib, the moral autonomy of the subject theorized in sociological and philosophical approaches fails to take into account this period of conditioning, a time when most mechanisms of self-restraint, foresight and self-observation imprint themselves upon the young. Elias and Benhabib share the assumption that all (relatively) autonomous behaviour of the adult is neither isolated from the past, nor fixed in a historical context, because the mechanisms of self-restraint, foresight and self-observation do not emerge out of nowhere, but are an enactment of social and economic relations within and outside the family. In Elias's words:

Family relations are often presented as the foundation of all social relations. But this is a misunderstanding. The structure of the family, the socially-given form of the relations between man, woman and child, changes in connection with, and corresponding to, the larger society it is part of.<sup>7</sup>

Not only individuals, but also families and communities are embedded within a network whose dynamics are in continual flux. Elias's replacement of a rigid metaphor of society as a structure built upon the foundations of the family with the image of society as a network composed by families and communities highlights the ever correlating changes of society and the family. This approach allows one to emphasize the crucial difference that childhood and the distribution of power in the parent-child figuration make in one's assessment of moral autonomy and

to consider the civilizing of children as connected to broader social improvement projects.

This chapter pursues two lines of argument. First, moral development cannot be separated from the emotional and physical history of the moral agent. Agreeing with Elias's and Benhabib's critique of the abstractness of most sociological approaches to the studies of the individual, I emphasize the importance of the situatedness (the life story and physicality) of moral agents in the development of moral autonomy. Indeed, agency is the reworking of power-relations within the limits and the opportunities of situatedness. In this novel, agency expresses itself as the reiteration of hegemonic ideologies that seeks to fill these ideologies with new contents. Second, *Mansfield Park* complicates the question of the civilizing process by linking it to improvement on different levels: to gender, class and colonial issues. The question here is not merely about what civilized subjectivity comprises, but also how projects of progress and improvement are to be administered. In contrast to critics who read *Mansfield Park* either as Austen's preoccupation with the coming out of girls in the marriage market, or as her assessment of the imperialist project, i.e. the slave trade, I address the limitations of each approach. In *Mansfield Park*, gender makes a difference and imperialist ideology hovers above the notion of patronage. Yet, an equation of Fanny Price's story with a slave narrative works only to a certain extent, since Fanny's development opposes the subordination that characterizes the slave narrative. Fanny's narrative pursues the formation of critical thinking within the limits imposed by ideology.

### The Civilizing of 'the Little Girl'

After reading *Mansfield Park*, Austen's family and friends felt compelled to compare it with her previous publications, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Austen's brother, Edward Austen Knight, thought it 'Not so clever as *P & P*', although her literary niece, Anna Lefroy, 'liked it better than *P & P*, but not so well as *S & S*'.<sup>8</sup> The character of Fanny Price was subject to similarly divided opinions: Austen's favourite niece, Fanny Knight, and her best friend, Miss Lloyd, were 'delighted' with the heroine, while her other niece, Anna Lefroy, 'could not bear Fanny', even though Anna's husband was 'highly pleased with' the character.<sup>9</sup> *Mansfield Park* was mostly appreciated for its natural characters, its sound moral foundations and its amusing depictions of human foibles such as Mr Rushworth's stupidity or Mrs Norris's insidious selfishness. Yet, when compared to *Pride and Prejudice*, it was mostly thought to be deficient in brilliance and spirit.

Modern scholars have given in to similar temptations: Marvin Mudrick cannot wait to be done with the 'uneasy stiffness' of *Mansfield Park* and move to

the freedom of Austen's next production, *Emma*.<sup>10</sup> For him, *Mansfield Park* is the novel where Austen gives up irony and settles for frigidity as the standard of sexuality, a novel in Stanley Cavell's words, where 'there is mostly no one to identify with'.<sup>11</sup> Alastair M. Duckworth revises Mudrick's assumption that the Fanny Price story endorses cold and unquestioning obedience, by arguing: 'Mutual concessions and contributions permit a dynamic integration of self and society, of energy and culture.'<sup>12</sup> Tony Tanner is sceptical of Fanny Price, not so much for her immobility, as for her being 'never, ever wrong'; this makes her a rather unpopular heroine. While Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse are amongst the most beloved heroines in British literature, 'nobody falls in love with Fanny Price'. Tanner himself is perplexed, for at the same time – and despite Fanny's unattractiveness – he considers *Mansfield Park* one of the most profound novels of the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> This opinion is not far from Duckworth's appreciation, whose study of Austen's body of work starts off with his reading of *Mansfield Park* – a rather uncommon practice in Austen criticism.

*Mansfield Park*'s immediate reception, as well as late-twentieth-century research, hint at a certain deficiency of wit in the heroine, Fanny Price. What to make of Fanny Price is the 'central puzzle presented to the reader, testing the soundness of his moral attitudes and the quickness of his wits'.<sup>14</sup> Her charm, or lack of it, hinges on her personal growth. Does Fanny Price end as an independent being, does she free herself from the Bertrams' ideology endorsed by Sir Thomas and Edmund Bertram and does she develop her own viewpoint at all? If the Bertrams' adoption is to contribute to her improvement, does she become their projection or does she shape her own subjectivity? I believe that this novel, by giving voice to repressed subjectivity and deliberately associating it with gender, participates in the contemporary debate related to 'the revolution in female manners'. The novel particularly addresses the question of the civilizing process in terms of education and personal improvement, as performed in inegalitarian relationships such as patronage.

One of the reasons *Mansfield Park* is particularly important is the fact that raising civilized consciousness is nowhere trickier than in this novel. Its intricacy weighs on the narrator, and her reader, from the moment one witnesses Fanny Price's sad childhood. *Mansfield Park* is truly unique in Austen's oeuvre because it traces back human consciousness through its depictions from the child's perspective. Fanny is ten years old when she is unexpectedly given over to the Bertrams. Her uprooting is sudden, and her consent never asked. The Fanny we first meet is a child subjected to adult decision-making, powerless to share or oppose the powers dictating her fate. Austen's technique in describing Fanny's entrance into Mansfield Park serves a double intent. First, the individual depiction of the welcoming party provides the reader with a panoply of impressions that assault the child's perception: Sir Thomas's attempt to overcome his

'most untoward gravity of deportment'; Lady Bertram's easy air and smile; Mrs Norris's indoctrinating speeches on gratitude; the boys' mastery of the rules of introduction; and the girls' increasing confidence 'from their cousin's total want of it'.<sup>15</sup> Second, only after relating the context in which we meet Fanny does the narrator move inside the child's consciousness:

The little visitor meanwhile was as unhappy as possible. Afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying. (MP 14)

This description gives voice to an array of feelings and sensations: fear, shame and nostalgia mingle in 'the little visitor' and endow her with a complex personality, and more importantly with a sense of self. Being 'ashamed of herself' implies the capacity for self-reflection and self-surveillance, a capacity that in Austen's fiction is embodied only by characters who develop. Shame remains an unknown feeling to characters like Lady Susan, General Tilney, Isabella Thorpe, Mrs Bennet, Mr Collins, Mr Wickham or Sir Elliot. The narrator's insistence upon the presence of a consciousness in young Fanny is coupled with her regret that such consciousness is not perceived, let alone appreciated, by her foster family: 'Her feelings were very acute, and too little understood to be properly attended to' (MP 15). This statement suggests that a responsible integration of the visitor obligates the Bertrams to provide not only food, shelter and education, but also empathy and understanding. The first encounter between Fanny and her benefactors sets the tone for what is to come: the efficacy of authority and its well-meaning schemes is undercut by its failure to see the powerless child as a subject.

The right of the child to have his/her feelings considered had already started to preoccupy eighteenth-century England, but was still a daring political agenda. Hannah More, for instance, despite her denunciation of child labour, opposed the extension of human rights to children:

The rights of man have been discussed, till we are somewhat wearied with the discussion. To these have been opposed with more presumption than prudence the rights of woman. It follows according to the natural progression of human things, that the next stage of that irradiation which our enlighteners are pouring in upon us will produce grave descants on the rights of children.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, the narrator of *Mansfield Park* advocates for the recognition of the child as a subject that registers pain, happiness and a wide range of human feelings. More's use of the word 'enlighteners' to address the proponents of the rights of children properly describes the narrator of *Mansfield Park*, whose first step in the narration is the 'irradiation' of childhood. Fanny is associated throughout Chapter 2 with littleness: 'the little girl', 'their little cousin', 'the little visitor',



'her little heart' and 'my dear little Fanny'. When used by the narrator the epithet conveys sympathy, by emphasizing the overwhelming feelings contained in the little body: 'the despondence that sunk her little heart was severe' (MP 15). Hence, the narrator steps into an emotional breach that the Bertram family fails to perceive and address, spurring readers not to fall for the same mistake.

One of the reasons Tanner might think that Fanny Price is never wrong is because the narrator clothes her judgement of Fanny Price with sympathy and understanding for the limitations of her situation. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the narrator uncritically endorses her attitudes. There is a distinction between the narrator and her creation and this point is clearly embedded in the childhood narrative: Fanny Price needs to assert her claims. This truth must sink in among the Bertrams, but must occur first and foremost in Fanny's own consciousness. Austen unmistakably places the power of Fanny's emancipation in the heroine's hands, implying that respect grows out of self-respect. However, this process is more difficult when self-respect is contested from early on by the fostering community, as the association of Fanny with littleness suggests. While to the narrator, 'little' Fanny reflects only her age and defenseless position, to others the epithet implies inferiority. We are told that she is considerably smaller than Julia and Maria Bertram, but her cousins soon translate this inferiority of size into inferiority of mind. Fanny is to be pitied for her 'deficiency', for being 'so odd and so stupid' (MP 19). The only positive thing to be said about Fanny Price is that 'except her being so dull, she [Lady Bertram] must add she saw no harm in the poor *little* thing' (MP 20, my emphasis). It is the projection of 'littleness' that constructs much of Fanny's identity. Being confronted day-to-day with the image of a 'dull', 'deficient' and 'odd' self, she is bound to perform to expectations. This disadvantageous premise runs throughout the novel and interferes with Fanny Price's growth.

'The naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm', writes Judith Butler in her discussion of the performative effect of discourse.<sup>17</sup> It is for 'little' Fanny a norm to think little of herself and to adapt to the Bertrams by trying to 'to catch the best manner of conforming with them' (MP 17–18). This construction of identity impairs what the narrator regards as legitimate, namely the right to be seen and treated well: Fanny 'thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured' by her cousins' treatment (MP 20). *Mansfield Park's* project is to restore her awareness of what she owes to herself and what she owes to others. If we agree with Judith Butler that 'performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act", but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names', it is not hard to see that the years in Mansfield have a performative impact on Fanny's identity-fashioning.<sup>18</sup> One of Austen's family friends, Mrs Carrick, wrote: 'All who think deeply & feel much will give the Preference to

*Mansfield Park*.<sup>19</sup> The narrative insists on Fanny Price being viewed as a child torn away from her natural habitat and subjected to spiteful treatment. Only with this point in mind are we able to follow her development, first as a girl and then as a woman with an attitude of deep thought and feeling, as Mrs Carrick suggests. *Mansfield Park* depicts the genealogy of the self, which, in Benhabib's witty phrasing, sociologists and philosophers usually have treated as 'the murky and the shadowy background out of which the light of reason emerges'.<sup>20</sup> *Mansfield Park* is the only Austen novel that penetrates 'the murky and the shadowy background' of childhood, implying that 'the light of reason' in adult life can be grasped by uncovering its origins.

There is so much working against Fanny Price – being a child, a destitute relative, and a shy and uneducated female – that her condition in *Mansfield Park* has been considered more than once reminiscent of slavery. Two of the most influential readings of *Mansfield Park*, by Edward Said and Moira Ferguson, regard the novel as a chapter in colonialist fiction, with Sir Thomas's estate in Antigua being 'the colonial garden'<sup>21</sup> and Fanny Price's removal to Mansfield Park a slave narrative.<sup>22</sup> This opinion is contested by John Wiltshire, who does not see sufficient evidence for the colonial and historical analogies drawn by Said and Ferguson. Wiltshire argues instead that the novel participates in the rhetoric of the late eighteenth century that compared young Englishwomen with slaves. Especially convincing is Wiltshire's reference to Hannah More's pamphlet 'The White Slave Trade, hints towards forming a Bill for the Abolition of the White Female Slave Trade in the Cities of London and Westminster' (1805).<sup>23</sup> Here, More is up against the practice of introducing young ladies into society, which she compares to slave auctioning, while the *coming out* of the girls of seventeen and eighteen recalls the importation of slaves. Evidently, these readings are not mutually exclusive; in fact, they share some important common ground. The invocation of More and the white female slave trade complicates whatever statement *Mansfield Park* wants to make by rendering gender a key element. As Clara Tuite points out, an adoption such as Fanny Price's 'works not so much as an abduction but as an act of patronage', which according to the historian Leonore Davidoff was in Austen's time 'a reciprocal but highly inequalitarian form of social linkage'.<sup>24</sup> Since Austen experienced such a practice within her own family, when her brother Edward was adopted by wealthy and childless relatives in search of an heir, gender becomes even more relevant for *Mansfield Park*, where patronage is bestowed upon a girl. In fact, Fanny Price's mother is the first to wonder at the choice of the Bertrams: 'Mrs. Price seemed rather surprised that a girl should be fixed on, when she had many fine boys' (MP 12). Mrs Price herself is particularly fond of William, Fanny's favourite brother, whose naval carrier is later supported by the Bertrams. So why choose a girl?

Ironically enough, Fanny's adoption by the Bertrams is due to the officious Mrs Norris: 'Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody' (MP 4). Mrs Norris expects a female adoption to be the cheapest, while Sir Thomas resists her eagerness, being aware of the necessity to provide his charge with 'the provision of a gentlewoman' in case no favourable marriage is arranged. However, all his fear and anxiety are set at naught by his sister-in-law's professions of earnest commitment to the child whenever financial support is needed: 'could I bear to see her want while I had a bit of bread to give her?' (MP 8). As Fanny grows and life takes its course in Mansfield Park, we realize that the tight-fisted Mrs Norris considers her part of the deal fulfilled by bringing Fanny to Mansfield Park. From then on, it is Fanny who serves her true motivation by cutting the roses in the hot sun, walking back and forth on errands for Aunt Norris, and helping her cut the calico; and also by doing for her what everybody considers beneath themselves, including keeping company with Lady Bertram when Mrs Norris accompanies the young of the house on excursions or balls.<sup>25</sup> In return, Mrs Norris cannot spare even a drop of her aromatic vinegar when Fanny comes down with a headache after having accomplished one of her cruel tasks (MP 68). Mrs Norris always knows what has to be done and how it can be done with the least expense to herself. She prompts Lady Bertram to lend Fanny some aromatic vinegar as she allegedly forgot to refill hers. In short, Mrs Norris could never have used a boy the way she does Fanny Price.

Mrs Norris's certainty regarding the success of the adoption scheme relies on Fanny's proper introduction into the world, which can be better afforded by Sir Thomas than Fanny's poor parents. Only by being entrusted to Miss Lee, the governess of Mansfield Park, can Fanny be made fit to take part in the ritual described by More as the white female slave trade. A girl need not be encouraged, nor educated towards financial independence, for she has no claims to a professional career. She is perpetually kept dependent and used for household chores until the moment arrives to be handed over to her future master. These are Mrs Norris's true calculations, and indeed the hidden 'pleasures of so benevolent a scheme' (MP 9). If patronage is an inegalitarian act, how much more unbalanced is the power in a relationship between protégée and patron, if the protégée is a girl destined never to acquire independence?

Although the parallel is not wholly accurate, the adoption scheme does resemble the slave narrative in one respect. With Fanny becoming an object of 'charity and exploitation', at least according to Mrs Norris's plans, the association with the project of slavery is not far-fetched.<sup>26</sup> The idea of one party being superior in power and therefore entitled to advance the improvement of the other is central to both the imperialistic and patronage project. Said sets out on his reading of *Mansfield Park* by formulating the thought underlying the imperi-

alistic endeavour behind slavery: 'Almost all colonial schemes begin with the assumption of native backwardness and general inadequacy to be independent, "equal", and fit.'<sup>27</sup> Fanny's dependence on the Bertrams is never questioned by her benefactors and inequality is not only enforced by age (Fanny is the youngest in Mansfield Park) and gender, but it is maintained as a moral maxim. On top of the inequality existing between a young female protégée and a male patron, where the adult has the financial and emotional upper hand, hierarchy is legitimized as necessary also in terms of the superiority of a group of civilized subjects over inferior others.<sup>28</sup> Long before Sir Thomas meets Fanny, he has formed an opinion of her: 'We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and a very distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults' (MP 8). Sir Thomas anxiously waits to see these evils cured in Fanny, although Fanny, as the narrator assures us, had 'nothing to disgust her relations' (MP 13). Nevertheless six years fail to bring about the fulfilment of Sir Thomas's expectations, as he personally communicates to Fanny before leaving for Antigua. His parting words are worth quoting:

But he had ended his speech in a way to sink her in sad mortification, by adding, 'If William does come to Mansfield, I hope you may be able to convince him that the many years which have passed since you parted have not been spent on your side entirely without improvement; though, I fear, he must find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten.' She cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone; and her cousins, on seeing her with red eyes, set her down as a hypocrite. (MP 32)

Fanny's tears can be read as a sign of sadness for being such a source of disappointment to her benefactor, but they also point up the frustration of someone who after years of efforts 'to catch the best manner of conforming' with her host, eventually wonders what improvement she is asked to produce (MP 17). But before we ask ourselves what kind of improvement would have answered Sir Thomas's hopes, it would be helpful to briefly take into account how adoption schemes were handled by two female novelists that Austen appreciated and mentioned in *Northanger Abbey*, Fanny Burney and Maria Edgeworth.

Fanny Burney's *Evelina, The Entrance of a Girl into the World* (1778) revolves around a young orphan girl, who is in regular correspondence with her preceptor and adoptive father, Mr Villars. Evelina's deceased mother, who used to be Mr Villars's ward, died after being abused by Evelina's father, the rake Lord Belmont. Fanny Burney insists that the young girl's path into society is paved with struggles against misogyny and denial of agency. But no character in the novel presumes that Evelina is in dire need of improvement; on the contrary, she has the unabated recognition of her preceptor, Mr Villars, and the general admira-

tion of the circles she enters. Mr Villars not only has no doubt about Evelina's superiority in every respect, but he fears that her vulgar relations might pervert an almost angelic creature like his protégée. In contrast, when Fanny is introduced in Mansfield Park, Sir Thomas worries for a moment that uncouth Fanny might be a bad influence on his daughters, but then consoles himself because of their superior age (MP 11).

In Maria Edgeworth's *The Absentee* (1812), Grace Nugent is the poor orphaned relative, who was raised by her aristocratic aunt and, like Fanny, is her aunt's companion. However, Grace is observed in enthusiastic terms: 'Beautiful and gracious, yet so unconscious was she of her charms, that the eye of admiration could rest upon her without her perceiving it.'<sup>29</sup> Although Edgeworth does not deny Grace's dependence on the welfare and the decisions of the Clonbrony family, Grace is considered a valuable member and integrated into their decision-making. When her adoptive family discuss their return to their long-abandoned estate in Ireland, Grace is asked to plead with Lady Clonbrony to resume the responsibilities that her rank and national identity demand. Although the theme of patronage links *The Absentee* to *Mansfield Park*, the latter has been more often brought into relation to another of Edgeworth's works, 'The Grateful Negro' (1804). I see the reason for this association precisely in *Mansfield Park*'s fusion of patronage with imperialistic ideology. None of the above-mentioned protégées is burdened by that aspect of patronage which aligns Fanny's adoption with imperialistic enterprise, namely otherness, backwardness or even uncouthness. Neither Burney's nor Edgeworth's novel makes the power relationship of such improvement projects its focus. However, Austen, by disclosing to the reader about the motivations for Fanny's integration into Mansfield Park and how it is to be carried out, makes us aware that the imperialistic project, with regard to the slave trade and the self-acclaimed superiority of the colonizer, was very much her concern. As Moira Ferguson reminds us, the pro-planter lobby propagated the slave trade as being beneficial to the slaves themselves: 'a good deed, a way of civilizing those whose environment provided them with nothing but barbarism – precisely the same basis for the justification of bringing Fanny Price to *Mansfield Park*'.<sup>30</sup> This assumption was such a central motivation for the imperial enterprise that the Committee of Planters opposed the slave trade (i.e. the buying and selling of human flesh should cease) but not the institution of slavery since 'African slaves should be regarded as "children" who required a benevolent master to teach them the civilizing benefits of Christian doctrine and the Protestant work ethic.'<sup>31</sup> The scheme of adoption in *Mansfield Park* resembles a slave narrative in its insistence on benevolence towards children, for the narrative's staging of the child intersects with the figure of the slave who is envisioned in perpetual childhood and therefore in need of guidance.

This brings my argument to the nature of the improvement effectuated by Fanny's transplantation. Sir Thomas, Mansfield's civilizing agent, endeavours

to provide his charge with the accomplishments and manners of a well-bred woman. It is only at Fanny's first ball that his 'complacency' about these achievements is evident:

Sir Thomas himself was watching her progress down the dance with much complacency; he was proud of his niece; and without attributing all her personal beauty, as Mrs. Norris seemed to do, to her *transplantation* to Mansfield, he was pleased with himself for having supplied everything else: education and manners she owed to him. (MP 255, my emphasis)

Sir Thomas's parting remark about Fanny being the same person at sixteen as when she first entered Mansfield Park hints at his superficial knowledge of his young charge and the kind of improvement that would answer his expectations. For six years, Fanny employed her time acquiring shallow accomplishments, together with Maria and Julia Bertram, under Miss Lee's guidance. This education was complemented with Edward's books, which eventually fill her mind with those lessons that Maria and Julia were never taught: 'the less common acquirements of self-knowledge, generosity, humility' (MP 20).<sup>32</sup> Unfortunately, Sir Thomas is unable to detect any improvement in her, because she does not correspond to the concept of the socially skilled female who pleases and accommodates a company through easy conversation. The eighteenth century inherited this conception of good breeding from Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), and saw it later developed in Chesterfield's *Letters to His Son Philip Stanhope* (1774).<sup>33</sup> Because Fanny fails to display any signs of this kind of improvement, Sir Thomas judges her six-year stay at Mansfield to have been fruitless. As soon as he witnesses that her physical charms draw the attention of the ball, and her character strikes with modesty and shyness, he considers his mission accomplished. At this moment, Fanny qualifies as a candidate for what More describes as the 'white female slave trade'.

### (Self)-Knowledge and Improvement

Improvement is a running theme in *Mansfield Park* and takes its more obvious form in landscape improvement, as Alistar Duckworth has shown in his influential study *The Improvement of the Estate*. Without wanting to reiterate the ideas of his book, I will concentrate on two aspects of improvements that I believe to be linked to Fanny's personal development: the content and the performance of improvement. These two aspects are the subject of an interesting discussion that Maria Bertram's future husband initiates. Not satisfied with the unfashionable condition of his estate, Mr Rushworth has become engrossed with the dramatic changes performed on the estate of one of his friends: 'I never saw a place so altered in my life.' According to him, this estate is improved so much for the better that his own estate, Sotherton, seems 'a prison' in comparison (MP 51).



Although 'a prison' is an exaggeration, those familiar with Sotherton agree that it is ill-situated and in need of improvement. But what changes are required? Mr Rushworth would like the same sort of face-changing improvements as those produced on his friend's estate, and implies coolly that a whole avenue of old trees will have to be cut down for this to occur. However, he ignores the position of the house, which according to Edmund stands in the lowest point of the park, 'in that respect unfavourable for improvement' (MP 54). Nonetheless, Edmund sees great advantages in Sotherton's natural beauties and suggests that 'a modern dress' will produce the necessary improvement. But Mr Rushworth dwells on his wish to duplicate his friend's improvements at Sotherton. The inherent qualities of the house, its position and surroundings, and its natural and historical values are neglected in this ambitious improvement project. Fanny's reaction to this project is surprisingly outspoken: 'Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? "Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited"' (MP 53). Quoting Cowper's 'The Garden', she voices a critique of such thoughtless intrusions into nature, implying that improvements which do not take into account the history and features related to the object of improvement can hardly be called such.

Mr Rushworth's conception of improvement is as impersonal – i.e. unrelated to the particularities of the object of improvement – as his way of carrying it out. He relies on improvers such as Mr Repton or Mr Crawford rather than take the matter into his own hands, as Edmund suggests: 'I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders, than by his' (MP 54). Mr Rushworth is probably dumbfounded by this statement, because the only reaction to Edmund's argument comes from Mary: 'I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it, and give me as much beauty as he could for my money; and I should never look at it till it was complete' (MP 54). To which follows Fanny's remark: 'It would be delightful to me to see the progress of it all' (MP 54). My point here is that far from denying the necessity of improvement, Fanny and Edmund opt for organic renewal, one that harmonizes with the inherent characteristics of the object to be improved through personal involvement. This also implies that an improvement that handles its object personally and respectfully results in the growing intimacy between the object in question and its improver. Mr Rushworth's, or Mary Crawford's, idea of improvement is one that not only delegates the needs and concerns of the estate, but even assumes that its comfort and beauty can be bought. Thus, monetary power dominates nature and the estate as Sir Thomas expects Fanny to be dominated by a profitable marriage scheme. This is a hierarchical relationship that assumes that change and the distribution of knowledge

is performed exclusively by the improver. Here, mutual growth and exchange of benefits are excluded.

Fanny, on the other end of the spectrum, embodies an organic improvement with herself in symbiosis with the object of improvement, rather than in imposition. In her East Room, Fanny attends regularly to her collection of books and plants, where books stand for culture and the achievements of the human mind, and the plants for natural resources. But she conceptualizes culture and nature not in antagonism, but in a constant exchange where both the knowledgeable improver and nature are in constant interaction: 'One cannot fix one's eyes on the commonest natural production without finding food for a rambling fancy' (MP 194). Before moving to the Parsonage, Fanny has established a realm in the East Room, where human health improves nature, and in return is improved by it:

To this nest of comforts Fanny now walked down to try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit, to see if by looking at Edmund's profile she could catch any of his counsel, or by giving air to her geraniums she might inhale a breeze of mental strength herself. (MP 141)

As regards Fanny and her patron, how does the improvement of the estate relate to her or, in other words, what kind of improvement project has been hers? It is important to note that between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries the garden was transformed from a site that provided landowners with food, medicine and dye to a political one. As the members of the aristocracy were looking for means of establishing their validity, the 'country house' was transformed into an advertisement that displayed their dominance.<sup>34</sup> Fanny's story is also one of the dominions of the Bertrams' 'polite world' over the working and the unrefined class of the Prices. As Sir Thomas's charge, Fanny is denied the particularity that results from her specific life story, from her provenance or physical constitution. Unlike Sir Thomas, she is a keen observer of particularities. For example, she wonders at the variety of plants and flowers that grow under the same conditions, but are each particular in their own way: 'the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of their existence' (MP 194). Overlooking Fanny's particularities and the improvement of mind that education and reading have accomplished, Sir Thomas regrets that, after six years on the Mansfield estate, Fanny has not become the embodiment of what *he* considers improvement. Just like Mr Rushworth, who wants to see his friend's altered grounds implanted at Sotherton, Sir Thomas wishes that Mansfield's 'civilizing' influence would supersede Fanny's subjectivity, remake her individuality and eradicate her class characteristics. To Sir Thomas, Fanny, the daughter of nature, has to be reshaped and assimilated into Mansfield's culture. This hierarchical relationship assumes that change and the distribution of knowledge are performed exclusively by the improver.

Sir Thomas's conception of human improvement corresponds to Mr Rushworth's and Mary's notion of estate improvement. His readiness to adopt Fanny is overshadowed by his impersonal take on the education of his own daughters. The narrator informs the reader about the uncongenial bond between father and daughters: 'Their father was no object of love to them; he had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily most welcome' (MP 31). Never having engaged personally their hours of joy and sorrow, Sir Thomas simply does not know them. He wrongly assumes that the future adulteress Maria, who is not afraid of conquering the forbidding spikes of Sotherton with Henry Crawford, has her mother's placid nature. He is also in the dark about the continual rivalry between the sisters. The narrator insists on Sir Thomas's distanced and imposing presence: 'he was not affectionate and the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him' (MP 20). In addressing Fanny, his goal is to promote his young charge, but also to refrain from encouraging equality between her and his daughters, though an inculcation of arrogance on their part is to be avoided. This is a delicate – if not impossible – task which at first he hopes to accomplish with the help of Mrs Norris, but, which due to impending duties in Antigua, he entirely delegates to her; for many years he has delegated his duties as a plantation owner in Antigua to overseers, a decision that has had catastrophic results. At home, he repeatedly fails to recognize his children's dispositions, and consequently the means by which they can improve. Sir Thomas's presence is performative; his posture – let alone words – suffices to bring about the act it stands for. The moment of parting from Fanny, before his voyage to Antigua, highlights his lack of personal involvement and his failure to recognize the needs of his charge: 'would he only have smiled upon her, and called her "my dear Fanny", while he said it, every former frown or cold address might have been forgotten' (MP 32).

Instead of collaboration with (human) nature, dominion and an impersonal approach to the improvement project are the evils that undermine the welfare of the estate and of its inhabitants. The master of Mansfield Park neglects subjectivity, especially that of females. His reaction to the play that the young party has eagerly prepared during his absence is paradigmatic of his 'advice of absolute power' (MP 259). Far from addressing the expectations, wishes and disappointment of his children, he hastily restores Mansfield Park to his notion of order and tranquillity: 'The evening [of his arrival] passed with external smoothness, though almost every mind was ruffled; and the music which Sir Thomas called for from his daughters helped to conceal the want of real harmony' (MP 178). This is a telling episode about the purpose of female education, and its intention to serve and secure patriarchal stability at the cost of self-expression. This is the sort of improvement in female manners in which Sir Thomas is invested.

It is evident that the narrator's idea of improvement and civilizing influence differs from what Fanny is offered by the Bertram clan, Edmund included. The narrator from early on states that Fanny should become aware of her claims, while Sir Thomas feels that Fanny's 'foolishness' and 'awkwardness' in social transactions are the greatest evils in need of correction (MP 26). It is undeniable that the engaging charms of women who know how to move in society (like those of Elizabeth Bennet, Mary Crawford and Emma) do not fail to bring forth our sympathy. Understandably, Sir Thomas is disappointed by Fanny's lack of social skills and expects that the acquirement of manners will have a civilizing effect. He wishes that Fanny be trained to overcome that aura of shyness that she had about her from the first time she set foot in Mansfield as a little girl. For Austen though, shyness is not a matter of personal awkwardness, but a result of powerlessness and dependence. For example, in *Emma*, Jane Fairfax, exposed as she is to Frank Churchill's careless double-dealings and the gloomy prospect of becoming a governess, cannot afford openness and unrestrained social involvement. In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas's intention is to cure Fanny's awkwardness, while the narrator follows a higher aim. Sir Thomas's idea of improvement consists of implanting refined manners, whereas the narrator wants to cure the underlying practice that causes Fanny's uneasiness and generates (self-)deprecation. Keeping in mind Fanny's assigned status at the age of ten as an inferior, the narrative exposes the double standard of a practice that promotes backwardness, so as to turn it against its victim. This echoes Wolstonecraft's denunciation of the patriarchal practice that kept women in a state 'of perpetual childhood' and then dismissed them as the deficient, weak and frivolous gender.<sup>35</sup>

From Fanny's point of view, her 'situation', 'foolishness' and 'awkwardness' will always hinder her social relevance. Thus, she is caught in a downward spiral: the more self-deprecating she becomes, the smaller the chance that she might arise to importance, and the more her sense of unworthiness is reinforced. Edmund deduces correctly that this spiral has to be interrupted by her being 'forced to speak for yourself' (MP 26). But he cannot foresee that Fanny's speaking for herself might have serious implications that run contrary to his own wish. The narrator, however, writes with the intent of showing how Fanny Price could become relevant against all odds, but is clear from the start that 'Kept back as she was by everybody, his [Edmund's] single support could not bring her forward' (MP 22). In this respect, Fanny must learn to speak for herself; she has to be her own cure and transform the assumptions that generate social insignificance. Fanny must first gain significance in her own eyes and acknowledge her own entitlement to respect. Austen is acutely aware that this process is set in motion once the subject allows for his/her desires to be at least as valid as those of others. Maria and Julia Bertram have as much selfishness about them

as Fanny has self-effacement, but this is not to say that she does not have desires. It is just that 'she was so totally unused to have her pleasure consulted, or to have anything take place at all in the way she could desire' (MP 258). Accordingly, she must challenge the Bertrams' initial assumption that she is void of desire. This is seen when she insists, though mildly, that she prefers to live in Mansfield and not with Mrs Norris. Unlike Lady Bertram's conviction that 'It can make very little difference to you, whether you are in one house or the other', Fanny cannot be reconciled to the idea, no matter how hard Edmund tries to persuade her (MP 25). The narrator repeats with increasing strength that Fanny has a low 'opinion of her claims', a statement that implies an improvement envisaged by the narrator (MP 164).

The courtship plot serves the narrator more than anything else to develop Fanny Price's awareness of legitimate desire, and to rework power relationships. From the moment that Sir Thomas and Edmund equate her reluctance to act in the play with female gratitude and decorous behaviour, Fanny is seen as a sexual being, eligible for matchmaking. Fanny, on the other hand, redefines the notions of gratitude and modesty by becoming the mistress of her own destiny in the midst of a matchmaking scheme. Henry Crawford's advances enable the narrator to rehash an argument previously made in *Pride and Prejudice*, namely a woman's claim to choice. If Elizabeth rejects Mr Collins by saying: 'Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me' (PP 90), Fanny Price experiences Henry Crawford's advances as something that 'injured' herself (MP 278). No feeling of gratitude for being selected by such a ladies' man finds its way into Fanny's heart, although Mary Crawford insinuates that it should. Even Edmund entreats her in the name of gratitude to accept Henry: 'You have proved yourself upright and disinterested, prove yourself grateful and tender-hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman, which I have always believed you born for' (MP 322). Edmund refers to the gratitude that a woman owes a man who prefers her among the female mass as being the model of feminine modesty and decorum. Fanny rejects this principle:

'I *should* have thought', said Fanny, after a pause of recollection and exertion, 'that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being approved, not being loved by some one of her sex at least, let him be ever so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself'. (MP 327)

She communicates to Edmund what she only suggests to Sir Thomas, namely that her own inclinations are to be consulted as much as those of the man who courts her. Sir Thomas grasps the implications of Fanny's refusal when he declares her to be 'be wilful and perverse' and infected by 'that independence of spirit which prevails so much in modern days' (MP 293).<sup>36</sup> Sir Thomas's

resentment addresses Fanny's independence ('without paying my opinion or my regard the compliment of any consultation'), because it infringes his notion of due gratitude. Although Fanny is willing to respect the way he leads his household, when it comes to personal conduct and the construction of happiness that results from it, she is peculiarly emancipated: 'We have all a better guide in ourselves if we attend to it, than any other person can be' (MP 383). It is this guide of the self that Austen developed in Catherine Morland, another inexperienced heroine promoting self-surveillance, a capacity that makes external monitoring redundant. Sir Thomas's conservative notion of duty in terms of docility and gratitude is contrasted by Fanny's duty towards her own principles and her claim to truthfulness. Without abandoning all due gratitude and dependence on others, Fanny moves towards a balance between what she expects from herself and what is expected of her. At this moment, the self and its particular desires and aspirations begin to emerge.

Individual particularities make a significant difference in *Mansfield Park*. Sir Thomas rightly recognizes that he should have attended more to the dispositions of his children. This follows upon his misunderstanding of a person's character and failure to acknowledge that there is a subject beneath outward manners. He is perplexed by Fanny's reaction, and for the first time in the novel betrays signs of insecurity: 'She was always so gentle and retiring, that her emotions were beyond his discrimination. He did not understand her; he felt that he did not' (MP 339). The decay of the Bertram household is underscored by the master's loss of his grip over subjectivities that cannot be contained by the established power. Claudia Johnson observes: 'if *Mansfield Park* appears to let conservative ideologues have it their way, it is only to give them the chance to show how little, rather than how much, they can do, and so to oblige them to discredit themselves with their own voices'.<sup>37</sup> Since this conservative ideology fails to guide and instruct as it professes to do, the narrative suggests that social improvement and the safeguarding of civilization rely on the development of mature, self-monitored subjects. Norbert Elias establishes this very point clearly in his analysis of the relationship between society at large and the personality structure of its individuals:

Societies without a permanently autocratic central authority can only function and indeed can only survive for long in that form if the relative weakness and instability of the central authority, of the leading external regulating agency, is matched by the relative strength and stability of the self-regulation of their members.<sup>38</sup>

The necessity for such individuals in societies where the 'central authority' fails explains Fanny's urgent return to Mansfield. Where the 'central authority' has wrongly pulled out all stops to subdue individuality, Fanny Price, in agreement with her desires and own self-regulated intensity, pursues her romance with



Edmund. Thus, because the narrative acknowledges the fallibility of all 'central authority', it endorses the self-regulation of the subject. However, this self-regulation does not imply the self-sufficiency and the ability of moral subjects to forgo 'the moral bonds that continue to bind us even as moral adults', as Benhabib aptly puts it.<sup>39</sup> The narrator takes these 'moral bonds' particularly to heart when deciding to take Fanny back to Mansfield.

Fanny's return has offered scholars the ultimate reason to read her character unfavourably, by interpreting it as a self-chosen reinstatement in subordination. In the following section of the present chapter, I assess Fanny's attraction to Mansfield as I take into account both the situatedness of that decision-making and Fanny's emancipatory function in Mansfield. For feminist critics, Sir Thomas's ideology has infiltrated Fanny's consciousness to the point that the indoctrinated victim becomes the preserver of the indoctrinating power. Barbara Britton Wenner participates in the discussion by asking: 'Does Fanny "Make" the Place – or does the Place "Make" Fanny?'<sup>40</sup> Moira Ferguson concludes that the place makes Fanny, because Fanny's rejection of her Portsmouth origins is due to her assimilation by Mansfield Park, which leads to the effacement of the subjectivity of Fanny, the slave.<sup>41</sup> I believe that a 'both/and' stance answers Wenner's question more accurately. Ferguson's 'either/or' approach is strongly influenced by her equation of Fanny Price with slavery. Yet, this is the moment where the slave narrative differs from Fanny Price's. Despite her gratitude towards the Bertrams, which, according to Anne Mellor, aligns Fanny with Maria Edgeworth's 'The Grateful Negro', Fanny Price returns after she has made a statement of independent thought, and not at the expense of it.<sup>42</sup> Her permanent station at Mansfield can be interpreted as an act of resistance that recreates a dominant culture from the inside out, and here I refer to Judith Butler's insights on gender performativity: 'The "I" who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its opposition.'<sup>43</sup> In other words, the question as to whether Fanny overcomes that projected lack of agency can be dealt with only in Mansfield Park. There, Fanny can negotiate her claims since, according to Butler, 'the "I" draws what is called its "agency" in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose.'<sup>44</sup> The subjectivity resulting from the daily negotiations of the self with the power it draws upon is neither re-subordinated nor revolutionary.

This self embodies a reformatory agent that resists and pursues the remaking of those power relations that determine its very construction. In my opinion, this is an accurate description of Fanny Price: she rises from invisibility to a person of convenience (preparing tea and reading to Lady Bertram) to finally become a member of the Bertram household. Her increasing participation must impact the daily practices at the Parsonage and later at Mansfield Park. If, like Butler, we believe that performativity bears within its constructing power also

the potential to change (since reiteration is susceptible to modification), it is noteworthy that Fanny reiterates dominant ideology with crucial emancipatory modifications. One such moment is when Sir Thomas confronts her with Henry Crawford's proposal: Fanny's refusal to tackle the topic is part of the code of feminine modesty and her insistence on good principles is a reiteration of the rhetoric of 'the proper lady'. However, as Sir Thomas soon discovers, she reiterates these conventional codes by modifying the underlying assumption that a woman should please the man who proposes to her by obeying. Fanny's opposing conclusion is that 'it ought not to be set down as certain that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself' (MP 327). Her reasoning flows out of a source other than the 'blind propriety' that Wollstonecraft despised in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* when writing 'Why subject her to propriety – blind propriety, if she be capable of acting from a nobler spring?'<sup>45</sup> Fanny Price disappoints the standards of 'blind propriety' and this is a conscious step by which she sets herself apart from the morality of her foster family. As it is shown in Mary Jean Corbett's revisionist study of incest and the now-called endogamous marriage in novels of the long nineteenth century, Fanny becomes 'something different from the object of exchange subject to the patriarchal plots that designate marriage a man's game and expel an errant object from the familial fold.'<sup>46</sup> From this perspective, it is important that Fanny has her own way, by both remaining in the game and bending its rules.

Furthermore, the narrative denies Fanny the hope of escape, when her expectations are sorely disappointed by her parents' reception. The bustle about William's impending assignment and departure from Portsmouth eclipses the parental warmth that she desires after such a long absence from home. Even when William's concerns leave room for the nostalgic visitor to settle down in the quietness of the Prices' parlour, no substantial exchange takes place. All Mrs Price eagerly inquires is how her sister Bertram or Norris manage the servants at Mansfield, and whether they also experience such hardships as she does with hers. Certain questions are never asked, nor even alluded to. What did her child experience during those many years with the Bertrams? How did she adjust to the new lifestyle, and how did she cope with homesickness? How did she employ her time, and what sort of education did the Bertrams give her? Fanny's subjectivity remains unknown and unasked. Before leaving Mansfield Park for Portsmouth, Fanny hopes to make sense of her traumatic years with the Bertrams, reconnect to her former self, and eventually reconstruct a self that integrates the Portsmouth and the Mansfield chapters of her life. It is an attempt to bring together fragments of oneself, to hook disjointed narratives of one's own life. This is an indispensable step, as Adriana Cavarero writes in her impressive study on story-telling, because 'a life about which a story cannot be told risks remaining a mere empirical existence, or rather an intolerable sequence of

events.<sup>47</sup> Fanny's parents are the only ones who can provide the account of her birth and infant years, i.e. that part of the story that Cavarero argues can only be told by others and that Fanny anticipates getting from her parents. In Portsmouth, Fanny embodies what Cavarero calls the search 'in the memory of others for her lost text'.<sup>48</sup> But there Fanny's story remains untold because, as Susan J. Brison emphasizes in her personal yet scholarly study of trauma victims, a self-narrative requires, not only the restoration of a language to put one's experience into words in the aftermath of trauma, but also 'an audience able and willing to hear us and to understand our words as we intend them'.<sup>49</sup> The Prices fail to be the kind of audience that Cavarero and Brison deem indispensable for the stitching together of a life story: they neither provide through their memory Fanny's 'lost text' nor engage in listening. For Fanny, to remain in Portsmouth would mean the 'burial' of her self-narrative.

Fanny's return to Mansfield Park undoes the opposition between affection and agency, because Fanny overcomes the danger of becoming voiceless out of fear of losing important relationships.<sup>50</sup> Fanny's affection for the Bertrams, which is eventually requited ironically more than it ever is by the Prices, does not eliminate her growing awareness of their shortcomings and of her right to counter them, especially when her claims as a subject are at stake. Fanny's self-narrative has to emerge in Mansfield Park and within the power that has shaped her. The first sign of her urge to construct a self-narrative, as a subject, is recorded as a result of her awakening anger in the face of disappointed desires and unjust treatment. Diana T. Meyers points out that 'getting angry constitutes a claim for equality and can be an act of insubordination'.<sup>51</sup> Anger is evoked in connection with almost every character of the novel, and three times with Fanny. The two first instances are provoked by the Crawfords' flippant manners, and by Henry's romantic attentions towards her (*MP* 209). But the last instance, the one that occurs before her return to Mansfield Park, signals Fanny's critique of Sir Thomas: 'Sir Thomas was quite unkind, both to her aunt and herself' for delaying her journey home (*MP* 393). This thought is followed by being 'almost vexed into displeasure and anger against Edmund' for overlooking Mary Crawford's coquettish character, and assuming 'The loss of Mary ... as comprehending the loss of Crawford and Fanny' (*MP* 393). Edmund's empowerment of Mary as the binding element, and his consideration of Fanny as an attachment to the Crawford-package, annihilates Fanny's value as a person in her own right. This moment signals the greatest epistemological distance between her and Edmund: 'Edmund, you do not know *me*' (*MP* 394). But Fanny knows herself.

Carol Gilligan builds an important argument upon the conviction of knowing oneself:

The difference between women and men which I describe centers on a tendency for women and men to make different relational errors – for men to think that if they

know themselves, following Socrates' dictum, they will also know women, and for women to think that if only they know others, they will come to know themselves.<sup>52</sup>

Edmund's supposition illustrates Gilligan's point: he is dissociated from Fanny's voice and assumes that he knows her just because he knows himself or he thinks he does. However, Fanny is more emancipated than the women analysed by Gilligan: she knows herself enough not to depend upon Edmund's knowledge. Her anger at Edmund's assumption registers her distance from the Marys and Henrys of this world and posits her dissociation from her mentor's ideology. As we learn in the closing chapter, knowing becomes the condition upon which the regeneration of the Mansfield household rests. Sir Thomas's ignorance of Fanny's worth over the past years has 'deprived him of her early love; and now on *really knowing* each other, their mutual attachment became very strong' (*MP* 438, my emphasis). Fanny Price's story teaches the established ideology that domestic affections and stability are not fostered by covering 'ruffled' minds with 'external smoothness', but by getting to know those minds (*MP* 178).

Not only does Fanny Price become indispensable to Mansfield when her subjectivity is acknowledged, but her influence is expanded by the introduction of another subject. Fanny does not return alone to Mansfield, but takes her sister Susan, who assumes her responsibilities to Lady Bertram. This detail has been read as the concluding reason to consider *Mansfield Park* as a slave narrative, with Susan as the new transplanted slave on the Bertram plantation.<sup>53</sup> However, this interpretation neglects the fact that Susan Price's arrival heralds an era of new manners and new motivations. Instead of throwing us back to the beginnings of Fanny Price, Susan's entrance into Mansfield can signify a reformatory move. First of all, Susan is fourteen when she takes her place at Mansfield Park. Her personality is considerably more shaped than Fanny Price's was at the age of ten. Second, she is not introduced by the abusing Mrs Norris, but by Fanny, who as I have shown above has undergone a considerable growth of consciousness during the course of the novel. Moreover, Austen is explicit that Susan's disposition represents a novelty for Mansfield Park:

Susan became the stationary niece – delighted to be so! – and equally well adapted for it by a readiness of mind, and an inclination for usefulness, as Fanny had been by sweetness of temper, and strong feelings of gratitude. Susan could never be spared. ... Her more fearless disposition and happier nerves made everything easy to her there. With quickness in understanding the tempers of those she had to deal with, and no natural timidity to restrain any consequent wishes, she was soon welcome and useful to all; and after Fanny's removal succeeded so naturally to her influence over the hourly comfort of her aunt, as gradually to become, perhaps, the most beloved of the two. (*MP* 438)

Fanny's shy 'gratitude' is transformed into Susan's 'usefulness', a quality that underscores her social participation and agency. Like Fanny, though, she must learn how to handle the tempers of Mansfield's inhabitants, but her strategy is to negotiate where Fanny's timid and fearful nature at that age could not but conform. Anthony Mandal aptly identifies Fanny's 'inability to connect' as her 'greatest dislocation' underlying her silent presence.<sup>54</sup> Without unfolding Susan's character at great length, Austen explicitly endows her with 'happier nerves', 'quickness of understanding' and 'a fearless disposition'; charms that she had bestowed on Mary Crawford (who was an excellent socialite), but perceived as being clouded by vanity and self-engrossment. Consequently, Susan's transplantation to Mansfield is, as Ferguson suggests, a reiteration of Fanny's story, but because of its modifications it is the kind of reiteration that according to Butler 'seeks to make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency ... which repeats in order to remake – and sometimes succeeds'.<sup>55</sup> It is possible to argue, as Roger Sales does in his interpretation of *Lovers' Vows*, that Susan, William and Fanny 'prove themselves to be superior to most members of the gentry' and, while *Lovers' Vows* portrays the lower classes as less corrupt and truer to nature, *Mansfield Park* gives more space to class mobility and, therefore, may be more radical than the play.<sup>56</sup>

Austen is keenly aware that characters with Susan's capacities have nature on their side, and can excel over the fearful and the shy. If we agree with Elias that human individuality is the result of the interplay of natural constitution and socialization, then *Mansfield Park* takes a rather unpromising point of departure, where both constitution and social standing threaten to overpower the subject.<sup>57</sup> In 'The Civilizing of Parents', Elias's insights can help one to read Fanny in the context of Mansfield's figuration, where the power ratio is acutely uneven. In such families, writes Elias, 'the relation between parent, and children, like that of men and women, tends to be formalized' and to have 'a socially sanctioned, relatively fixed form'.<sup>58</sup> There is some room for 'individual variations', but there is greater room for the 'superordinate than the subordinate'.<sup>59</sup> Elias insists that our considerations of agency need to take into account the development of the power ratio within the figuration parent-child, since only with the decrease of the power imbalance between parent and children does the room for variation on the part of the subordinate increase. In light of this, Fanny's resistance to Sir Thomas can be evaluated as a moment that reduces his power over her and increases the chances of agency for Fanny. As Karen O'Brien observes, stories of generational conflict would remain a central plot of the nineteenth-century novel but, unlike in the eighteenth-century novel, would transmute into 'tragic dramas of historical displacement', where the tragedy is owing to the mental superiority achieved by the younger generation.<sup>60</sup> Fanny Price can be rather aligned with the novel of the later eighteenth century, 'where these generational

stories were more usually treated as tales of modernization, in which a hero or a heroine represented the next phase in the progress of civilization'.<sup>61</sup>

When discussing the evolution of subjectivity from Descartes to Lacan and Luce Irigaray, Tina Chanter recognizes the shaping role that social and biological forces play in human lives. Admitting that the line between nature and nurture is blurred, she asserts that

we are not completely passive or without resources in the face of such culturally and historically specific determinants. Although the available resources at the disposal of individuals will themselves be implicated in political agendas, never innocent and neutral, always liable to exploitation, and to subversion by the social forces that produce and maintain the systems against which and in terms of which individuals define themselves, these resources are not completely negligible. Subjects are capable of adopting strategies that can harness power with varying degrees of success, that can produce new power relations, negotiate new communities, and overturn or transform well-established lines of power.<sup>62</sup>

Fanny Price is not the kind of heroine to 'overturn' power, but she is a presence of resistance that stands for the transformation of oppressive systems and not a displacement of oppression (which would have been endorsed by her definite stay in Portsmouth). Her place is in Mansfield Park, where she stays to 'produce new power relations'; therefore, Fanny is not the static 'Heroine who is Right' as Marilyn Butler would have it.<sup>63</sup> But Fanny's social integration is what engrosses the narrator's attention.<sup>64</sup> In the course of the novel, residency with the Bertrams has confronted her with political debates concerning the colonial plantation, the church and the Navy. Living at Mansfield Park means partaking in the development and transformation of these social and political structures. By placing transformational power in the 'puny' Fanny Price, as Mrs Price calls her, Austen creates potential for every woman (*MP* 12). If Fanny Price does not satisfy entirely, we will have to wait for *Persuasion*, where Fanny Price has matured and been transformed into the twenty-seven-year-old Anne Elliot. With Anne, we see a marginalized member grow both self-aware and community-related. But as with gardens, trees and plants, nature – human nature included – matures slowly. This applies especially to Fanny Price, whose very physical appearance requires time to be appreciated, as expert Mary Crawford notices, Fanny is 'a sort of beauty that grows on one' (*MP* 213). Fanny Price has grown considerably and *Mansfield Park* ends at a state where 'while much is actually given to the sight, more yet remains for the imagination' (*MP* 414).

As Susan Croag Bell demonstrates, due to the fact that throughout the late eighteenth century the estate was used by wealthy estate owners as a display for political and economic power, the role of women was to occupy a mere 'decorative space'.<sup>65</sup> In *Mansfield Park*'s landscape, Fanny Price emerges not as a 'decorative space', but as a civilizing force that cultivates 'the genius of the place'



by respecting its inherent qualities, and by attending personally to its improvement. Moving away from the slave narrative, *Mansfield Park* could represent *man's field*, whose regeneration depends on the acknowledgement of female subjectivity, and in which woman's subjectivity unfolds and evolves in daily negotiations with the established power. The estate, *man's field*, is not meant to be abandoned, but rather renewed, or to use an important word in this chapter, improved, by the likes of Fanny Price with increasing success, despite bodily and social limitations.

Mansfield Park's natural and cultural comforts hold an undeniable attraction for Fanny, and she is aware of its benefits despite the equally undeniable drawbacks they entail. In this novel, the aristocracy controls much of the nation's cultural and natural resources, with the estate being an important political representation of power. Social change depends upon the renewal of this social stratum by subjects that can improve without imposing, and achieve independent thought without abstracting themselves from community. Sales notes that, technically speaking, it is inaccurate to see, as it has often been the case, Edmund and Fanny as inheritors of Mansfield Park, since in fact they move into the Parsonage.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the significance of this difference is more than technical: the Parsonage where Edmund and Fanny settle, takes the place of the East Room, where nature and culture live in symbiosis, where the moor soil is more fertile than in Mansfield, and where fruit trees grow stronger (*MP* 194). Maggie Lane demonstrates in her thorough study of botany in Austen's novels that, because in Austen's work fruit suggests 'conjugal happiness,' it may be no coincidence that all the homes to which the heroines will be taken are fruitful places: Delaford has its mulberry, Mansfield Park its apricot, Woodston its apple trees.<sup>67</sup> Like the apricot tree that Mrs Norris transplanted into the Parsonage and Sir Thomas paid for, Fanny will thrive. If the apricot is considered an insipid fruit by Dr Grant, so is Fanny considered dull by her cousins and some readers. Actually, Austen's mother is the one who used precisely the epithet 'insipid' to describe Fanny Price.<sup>68</sup> Like the apricot, which is vulnerable to frost, Fanny has endured and almost succumbed to hardship from a tender age, but after being transplanted into the moor soil of the Parsonage, we can expect her to mature slowly into a stout and productive person.<sup>69</sup>

## 5 *EMMA*: THE ART OF QUARRELLING

Austen must have felt the contradictory reader response that Fanny Price had aroused, opinions ranging from praise to deep dislike (Austen's mother calling Fanny 'insipid' testifies to the latter). Prior to *Emma*'s composition, the novelist is said to have declared: 'I am going to take a heroine whom no one but myself will much like.'<sup>1</sup> This statement has more often invited critics 'to search out what is objectionable about Emma than [regard it] as a calculated challenge to the judgments of her audience'<sup>2</sup>. Some are uncomfortable with it to the point of denying it having originated from the novelist at all.<sup>3</sup> For example, Barbara Z. Thaden dismisses the statement, arguing that Emma is quite different from all Austen's heroines and that, if we see Jane Fairfax as the heroine that Austen initially had in mind, we end up recognizing that Emma is not meant to be a sympathetic character at all. What I wish to draw attention to is that Thaden's comment has curiously more in common with Austen's presumed statement than Thaden is ready to admit. Whether Emma is an atypical case among Austen's female protagonists, as Thaden argues, or a heroine liked by no one but her creator, as Austen's handed-down expression suggests, *Emma* has something of exclusivity and novelty about it. Both accounts announce a deviation from what had been the practice of the novelist up to that point, a deviation that sets the heroine and the novel apart from the rest.

In fact, *Emma*, with its textual richness and unprecedented psychological insights, marks 'a turning point in representations of the mind, enabling Austen to fashion one of the most precise early models of the unconscious.'<sup>4</sup> Moreover, *Emma* represents a turning point in the sense that no other heroine is marked by such an unusual mixture of independence and confinement, self-indulgence and privation, egocentricity and empathy. This chapter investigates the relation between power and responsibility arguing that in *Emma*, Austen addresses the question of agency by offering new alternatives to the self-sufficient ego. Critics have alluded to the prominence of agency in this narrative by way of commenting on Emma's independence, self-sufficiency (or self-efficiency) and masculine self-love. I will briefly delineate the directions that these approaches have taken in Austen criticism, by starting with Richard Simpson, who is one of the first

to link Emma's agency with the heterosexual plot (as the present chapter does, although to another end). Writing in 1870, Simpson speaks of Emma's 'talent for management which is only great enough to produce entanglements, but not to unravel them', and is finally 'cured' when 'the scholar gratefully marries her master'.<sup>5</sup> The comment hints at both Emma's complex power, not only as a human being but as a specifically female one, and its enactment within a social setting that emphasizes heterosexual relations. Those who view Emma as the picture of a free-thinking moral agent follow Simpson's lead and equate her self-sufficiency with the heroine's self-delusion, which is the narrator's target. James Thompson writes that, although 'presented as the very pattern of self-satisfied efficiency' for most of the narrative, Emma in the end is 'made to feel inadequate and insufficient'.<sup>6</sup> Despite the novel's opening on Emma's dread of 'intellectual solitude', Thompson concludes that only as the plot unfolds does she come to know real solitude. Emma's education then partly consists in accepting dependence as part of the human condition. However, feminist readings state that Emma's recognition of dependence reinstates her in the patriarchal order, since patriarchy links dependence to women in order to ensure their subordination.

This reading has been influenced by Sandra Gilbert's and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979), which reinterprets the notion of agency as a male right that progressive eighteenth-century writers want to appropriate for women. Gilbert and Gubar find that Austen falls short of these efforts.<sup>7</sup> Following in their footsteps, Ruth Perry reads Emma's agency as succumbing to the marriage plot, but she allows for a subversive Austen who denounces a phallogocentric society that must destroy women's self-sufficiency. Yet, *Emma's* heterosexual courtship allegedly accommodates the 'critical obliviousness' of 'those who choose to ignore the commentary on marriage, friendship, and women's self-sufficiency'.<sup>8</sup> Thompson uses the term 'self-efficiency' with caution, yet his comments boil down to Emma's painful awakening to self-insufficiency, while for Perry this recognition is imposed by a conventional narrative. Thus, the marriage to Knightley stands either for a private intimacy that cures the evils of solipsism, or (as in many feminist readings) for the subjection of a woman's willpower: 'Emma must be made to acknowledge her dependence on Knightley'.<sup>9</sup> Nancy Armstrong, along similar lines, regards the Emma of the first chapters as feeling 'no sense of deficiency' and the novelist as the only one 'who can turn Emma's self-sufficiency into a deficiency that instigates desire independent of social origin'.<sup>10</sup> Beatrice Marie registers Austen's social critique and wilful gender confusion by aligning Emma's 'conceit and her determination to exploit social convention to her own ends' with some of Stendhal's egoistical protagonists.<sup>11</sup> It is implicit that self-determination and egoistical conceit are masculine since the protagonist to whom Marie compares Emma is Julien Sorel in *Le Rouge et le Noir* (and not his female

counterpart, Lamiel, in Stendhal's unfinished novel of the same name). Emma's masculine determination conveys her desire to dominate, but this appears to be the very quality that makes her a moral agent.<sup>12</sup> Claudia Johnson participates in the line of criticism that regards Emma's self-sufficiency as a masculine attribute which Austen covets but retrieves in the end, however, with a significant shift: 'If Emma begins with the assumption of a broad arena for legitimate and useful female rule, independent from masculine supervision, then it does not end with the assertion of its sufficiency'.<sup>13</sup> I see the operative words in Johnson's statement as being 'supervision' (which is the kind of relationship that Simpson and Perry envision between Knightley and Emma) and 'sufficiency'. Developing on Johnson's conclusion that the novel's criticism has betrayed 'a profound discomfort with female authority', in this reading of *Emma*, I elaborate on the impossibility of the moral self-sufficiency of any kind of rule; at the same time, I demonstrate that the contestation of opinions works as a replacement for the idea of supervision or inculcation.<sup>14</sup>

My starting point is Elias's figurational sociology, which signals a departure from the closed personality of the 'homo clausus' with 'its emphasis on autonomy, freedom and independent agency' that is inherent in most criticism of *Emma*, feminist and otherwise.<sup>15</sup> The 'homo clausus' with his abstract and unlimited self-sufficiency makes room in Elias's thought for 'the image of man as an "open personality"', who can never possess absolute independence but is born and remains fundamentally dependent on others:

The image of man as a 'closed personality' is here replaced by the image of man as an 'open personality' who possesses a greater or lesser degree of relative (but never absolute and total) autonomy vis-à-vis other people and who is, in fact, fundamentally oriented toward and dependent on other people throughout his life.<sup>16</sup>

Elias's approach to society conceptualizes individuality not only as formulated within the social context, but as crystallized and transformed through interdependencies. It is exactly within the figurations of human interdependencies (which Elias cannot stress enough) and not in the forgoing of them that feminist philosophy has tried to redefine agency. According to Diana T. Meyers, moral agency should be adequate to the contexts of human embeddedness ignored by traditional accounts. By traditional accounts she means those indebted to the Enlightenment conceptualization of the subject summed up by Foucault as a philosophical interrogation 'that problematizes man's relation to the present, man's historical mode of being, and the constitution of the self as an autonomous subject – [which] is rooted in the Enlightenment'.<sup>17</sup> The feminist critique consists in sketching post-Enlightenment models of agency that include 'the reality of physical dependence during infancy and childhood and during periods of frailty and infirmities later in life, and also the reality of lifelong psychic

dependency on others for emotional sustenance and fulfilment and for intellectual stimulation and enrichment'.<sup>18</sup>

First, the representation of Emma explores alternative kinds of moral agency by emphasizing both physical and emotional dependency and refusing to set off from the atomic individualism that some critics have ascribed to the heroine when speaking of Emma's initial self-sufficiency (that eventually has to come to terms with its shortcomings). Second, rather than concentrate on its faulty nature, one can read matchmaking as part of Emma's social profile without which the heroine threatens to resemble the loving and subservient female of the conduct books. Matchmaking then provides the narrative with a topic where a balance between intellectual exchange and self-assessment is enacted. Third, this balance leads us back to alternative concepts of agency, which in the light of feminist theories incorporate the need 'for intellectual stimulation and enrichment' that is situated outside the subject. I see the reason for the novel's richness of psychological insights not in Emma's individualism, but in her interactive agency and self-detachment that depends on – without being undermined by – the very dependency 'for intellectual stimulation and enrichment' on some of the novel's characters.<sup>19</sup> Therefore the need 'for intellectual stimulation' represents a component of agency, and the heterosexual partnership between Emma and Mr Knightley validates rather than eradicates individuality. Such an approach allows us to transcend discourses of guilt, 'humiliation' or the dangers of individualism that have directed the criticism of this novel.<sup>20</sup>

### Care-Based Agency

Modern scholars have not been alone in their perception of *Emma's* otherness. Already in 1820, a reader of Austen pondered its newness with puzzled admiration:

Formerly, in my time, a heroine was merely a piece of beautiful matter, with long fair hair and soft blue eyes who was buffeted up and down the world like a shuttle cock, and visited with all sorts of possible and impossible miseries. Now they are black-haired, sensible women, who do plain work, pay morning visits, and make presents of legs of pork; – vide 'Emma', which, notwithstanding, I do think a very capital performance.<sup>21</sup>

Three years after Austen's death, this remark made by an unknown correspondent of Lady Bury points out the metamorphosis that female representations had experienced under Austen's pen. She had taken the soft-eyed heroine and transformed her into the marginalized, easy-going and simple-minded Harriet Smith, Emma's inferior companion, who is virtually 'buffeted' between three potential lovers within a year. Interestingly, Emma, herself hazel-eyed, is first and foremost attracted by Harriet's soft blue eyes, a hint at her malleable character (*E* 22). Mis-

ery and heartbreak are not spared to Harriet Smith and much of it is ascribed to Emma's zealous matchmaking. Although, as the story develops, Harriet's disappointment excites compassion, her lack of agency fails to arouse interest. The comment from 1820 links transformations of female beauty standards with an unprecedented distribution of agency in *Emma*. While the earlier heroine had been subjected to the will of male preceptors – think of Burney's Evelina and Cecilia – Emma is in charge of all social intercourse with and within Hartfield: 'I believe few married women are half as much mistress of their husband's house as I am of Hartfield' (*E* 73). She is proud of the fact that Hartfield is under her rule and clearly agency is not a novelty she expects to obtain through marriage. With her thirty thousand pounds and as heiress of Hartfield, she has the right means and is in the right place to claim economic independence (*E* 113).

Independence was a much discussed concept in Austen's time and – when endorsed by women – it was considered particularly dangerous and unnatural because it entailed the right to carry out one's own convictions and turn from a subject into an agent. It inspired women and children to lead, when in fact they ought to follow. Hannah More regrets that the rise of civil society witnessed an increasing tendency towards independence:

Among the real improvements of modern times, and they are not a few, it is to be feared that the growth of filial obedience cannot be included. Who can forbear observing and regretting in a variety of instances, that not only sons but daughters have adopted that spirit of independence, and disdain of control, which characterize the times?<sup>22</sup>

More connects 'the spirit of independence' and the grasp of agency with rebellion against parental control and as such independence and agency are to be regretted. Obviously, Emma's agency as the mistress of Hartfield stems from the locus of authority that according to More should fear it – her father. But because the valetudinarian Mr Woodhouse is absolutely dependent on Emma's securing his comfort at every moment, Emma's agency is not only welcome but preserves in the first place Hartfield's legacy of civil culture. Her initiative administers those practices of civility such as neighbourhood visits, philanthropic relief and hospitality – all these being indicators of her social involvement. Here lies one of *Emma's* novelties: the daughter's agency that disquiets More is beneficial to the family, society and civil culture. Claudia Johnson rightly observes that the power to rule Hartfield is a matter of course to Emma, not eked out through manipulations as in the case of Mrs Churchill, who terrorizes her family with her nervous fits. Emma knows that her power is as legitimate as it is freely bestowed, because she is 'so always first and always right' in her father's eyes and because she is 'a woman who possesses and enjoys power, without bothering to demur about it' (*E* 73).<sup>23</sup>



This being acknowledged, Emma's agency is not 'total independence', to use Elias's words. On the contrary, there is a strong sense in *Emma* that rule is seldom unlimited self-rule and that agency cannot comprehend absolute autonomy. Self-monitoring and self-restraint is attuned to Emma's social position, a mechanism that, according to Elias, describes the most pregnant feature of the 'civilized' habitus: 'his constant and differentiated self-constraint, is connected to the growing differentiation and stabilizing of social functions and the growing multiplicity and variety of activities that continuously have to be attuned to each other.'<sup>24</sup> In the following paragraphs, I pay attention to certain passages that illustrate the attunement of self-restraint to social function and how this attunement relates to agency.

Nowhere else in her novels has Austen linked the joy of rule with its less appealing consequences – such as responsibility and restrictions of freedom: Emma is the heroine with the greatest agency, but she is also 'the most confined and home-ridden' of Austen's heroines.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, the narrator allows Emma to indulge her vanity with the conviction of being irreplaceable and irreproachable in her father's eyes, precisely because her situation has not been exclusively one of indulgence. Emma not only is indulged to be first, but she deserves it, since she never demurs about the privations that come with power. When Isabella and Mr Woodhouse discuss sea-bathing, Emma interrupts them, lamenting: 'I must beg you not to talk of the sea. It makes me envious and miserable; – I who have never seen it!' (E 85). She never leaves Hartfield for more than day excursions, such as the one at Box Hill or Donwell Abbey. Even Harriet, an illegitimate child without consequence or connections, manages to spend a month in London, a thought never afforded by Emma. For the few hours that she absents herself from home, she arranges some sort of father-sitting and, if Mr Woodhouse can be induced to follow her outside of Hartfield, she provides comparable comfort to what he enjoys within his own walls: no draft, a good fire, a party of cards, and someone to keep him company.

Hence, the question that prompted Austen to write *Emma* cannot have been the one suggested by Alistair Duckworth: 'What consequences will ensue, she asks, if, instead of describing a heroine in a position of insecurity as to her social place, I postulate an heiress as my central figure and give her complete freedom of action?' But 'complete freedom of action' is an illusion that *Emma* not only does not support, but that the heroine herself neither embodies nor entertains. For this reason, it is cynical to draw a parallel between Emma Woodhouse and Henry James's Isabel Archer, as Duckworth does, since the latter stands for a physical mobility that crosses the Atlantic and roams Europe embodying 'the American abroad', while Emma hardly has the heart to spend her honeymoon away from Highbury and to visit eventually the English seaside.<sup>26</sup> Coming right after the

ill-treated Fanny Price, Emma may seem a representation of freedom and uncontested agency, however, I believe that feminist accounts that expand the notion of agency from 'merely a matter of choosing actions' to 'self-chosen constraints on choice' apply in more fruitful ways to the kind of agency depicted in *Emma*.<sup>27</sup> Here, agency does not consist of 'complete freedom of action' but of conscious self-retrencing and respect for human physical and emotional dependency. If we keep in mind that Austen dedicates *Emma* to the Prince Regent, whose rule was far from mirroring the balanced interplay between privileges and responsibilities, let alone privations, the novel offers itself as a reflection on power and agency beyond its domestic setting.

Emma's existence with Mr Woodhouse – but not only with him – requires constant exertion. Her interjection on sea-bathing is primarily made not to draw attention to her unfulfilled wishes, but to divert Isabella and her father from what she considers 'an unsafe subject' for Mr Woodhouse's nerves (E 85). Such interventions on Emma's part occur quite often: when John Knightley sullenly reprimands his wife, Emma immediately changes the subject, asking after some friend's business; Frank Churchill's imprudent ball plans are mitigated and made acceptable by her tactful and persuasive work with Mr Woodhouse; in her role as hostess, her efforts are divided between ensuring her father's entertainment with his old friends – 'there was scarcely an evening in the week in which Emma could not make up a card-table for him' – and those friends' comfort not being thwarted by his hypochondriac habits (E 19). Were it up to Mr Woodhouse, his guests would be 'irritated into an absolute fever' by his fire (E 290), or leave his home hungry unless they agreed to a basin of gruel (E 22). When Mr Woodhouse risks enervating his son-in-law and Mr Knightley by imposing gruel on them all, Emma unobtrusively disregards her father's wish. On one occasion, the narrator assures the reader that 'Emma allowed her father to talk – but supplied her visitors in a much more satisfactory style' (E 22). Her great achievement as organizer of Hartfield's social life is to poise compliance and resistance, tenderness and strength of mind, affective and leading skills. Despite her flaws, which have been very often highlighted, the representation of Emma can be placed within a female tradition that furthers connections. Her management promotes *harmonia* such as was understood by the women of the Pythagorean tradition: 'the building, continuation, preservation, and enhancement of close relationships.'<sup>28</sup> This social role embodies the awareness that the cultivation of relationships takes one outside one's own house, habits and solipsistic boundaries – a thought that has never dawned on her otherwise sociable father. Due to this lack of understanding, Mr Woodhouse prefers to stay at home and have his other daughter and friends visit him rather than paying them the honour of his visit.

An individualistic reading of *Emma* ignores this communitarian character of the protagonist and Austen's successful attempt to complicate the prevailing notion of agency that envisions individuals as atomistic, autonomous and self-related beings in possession of 'complete freedom'. Neglecting this aspect of *Emma*'s complexity, Duckworth's approach to the heroine reflects a conception of autonomy which prompts him to write that in the end Emma 'chooses society rather than self'.<sup>29</sup> So his discussion revolves around the traditional divide between individual and society, implying that by choosing society, Emma commits to the right cause. Such a reading has a tinge of self-sacrifice that upsets a feminist progressive interpretation of agency. But why suppose Emma to be an individualist in the first place? We first meet her at Hartfield with her father, looking back on Mrs Weston's marriage with a mixture of melancholy and pleasure and readily engaging in debates with Mr Knightley. We find her in society and we last meet her there as Mrs Knightley, surrounded by the very same men. The denouement of the novel cannot consist in Emma's giving up the self in order to join society, instead, I believe that it works towards the formation of a civilized habitus. As Elias puts it, the advancement of civilizing processes depends on an attunement: 'a more durable balance, a better attunement, between the overall demands of man's social existence on the one hand, and his personal needs and inclinations on the other'.<sup>30</sup> There is a significant difference between giving up selfhood and the finding of an attunement between self and the other that grows out of the need for a community of others. I believe that the latter seeks to do justice to both the subjective and communal features of human existence.

The novel's concern with power and responsibility is implied in every social intercourse that takes place in Hartfield. Through the observation of Mr Knightley, who in the course of the novel becomes one of its most reliable characters, the reader learns to appreciate Emma's administration of Hartfield:

Mr. Knightley must take his seat with the rest round the large modern circular table which Emma had introduced at Hartfield, and which none but Emma could have had power to place there and persuade her father to use, instead of the small-sized Pembroke, on which two of his daily meals had, for forty years been crowded. (E 287)

There is reason to believe that these are Mr Knightley's thoughts since what happens before – the meeting of the Westons, Frank, the Bateses and Jane and their entering into Hartfield – is the result of his observations and reflections that the narrator renders to perfection in the free indirect speech. This passage reveals important indicators about Emma's power. First, her power is not oppressive, but persuasive, a quality that no patriarch in Austen's novels possesses. Emma's persuasive skills imply that Mr Woodhouse's forty-year-old habits have been reformed after being acknowledged and taken into consideration in the first

place. The round table itself indicates Emma's desire to treat her guests as equals and hints at her unconscious attraction to social mobility and democratization of culture. Hence, it cannot be that '*Emma* focuses on the individual self as it becomes a conceivable threat to culture', since here the round table stands for a renewal of culture through individual participation.<sup>31</sup> I read the use of the term 'modern' as Habermas elaborates: it expresses 'the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from old to the new'.<sup>32</sup> It is a consciousness that seeks the attunement between past heritage and the transition to new forms of culture. Reading *Emma* as resistant to individualist enterprise leads to a polemical Tory Austen who allegedly aligns herself with Burkean conservatism. Duckworth emphasizes the narrator's felt tension between Burkean conservative stability and radical innovation. Yet, one could just as well align Emma's power to bring about change through persuasive work with the gradual progress that Wollstonecraft endorsed after the Reign of Terror. As O' Brien demonstrates, Wollstonecraft argued in her *Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution* (1795) that 'the best way to achieve reform is gradually, with due regard to people's prejudices and their need for political stability'.<sup>33</sup> This particular regard for people's prejudices with which Austen invests Emma undoes the self-sufficiency of individualistic reason that many scholars attribute to the heroine.

### Oppositional Agency

What I want to draw attention to is that Emma's enactment of her role as mistress of Hartfield offers a new kind of moral agency. Here, the social network becomes the means by which the individual shapes his/her own moral profile in daily intercourse with other individuals. Elias contests the view that conceptions of agency which account for human interdependence emphasize society over individuality. On the contrary: 'It sharpens and deepens our understanding of individuality if people are seen as forming figuration with other people'.<sup>34</sup> Elias's approach is opposed to the educational model Rousseau proposes in *Emile, or on Education*, where Emile faces society only after a long first phase of isolation that should ensure his independence as a free agent. The exemplary citizen that Rousseau constructs chapter after chapter in *Emile* strives for impartiality and the elimination of external influences. I stress this contrast because Rousseau's model has been so influential as to direct the hegemonic discourse of an abstract autonomy. Feminist philosophy, unsatisfied with the definition of autonomy as the 'transcendence of social relations through free will', has made a case for alternative models of agency that can be attained within the 'context of lifelong socialization'.<sup>35</sup> Depending on the social context, agency takes two different shapes: care-based and oppositional moral agency.<sup>36</sup> Care-based agency empha-

sizes the relational self, its need for intimacy and the preservation of human relationships. Care-based agency needs to be 'particularistic', i.e. it has to attend to the specific needs of the care receiver, which implies the care-giver's ability to act 'improvisationally' and allow for 'fluid, sometimes peculiar circumstances that give rise to special needs or necessitate a reordering of priorities.'<sup>37</sup> When exercising the role of the care-giver, Emma's agency emerges as attentive and conscious of the particularities of her father and her guests (as in the case of John Knightley's surly temper or Frank Churchill's impetuosity). Care-based agency does not exclude emotions, since affectivity can enhance moral sensitivity to the priorities in question. Lastly, and this is pertinent to the passage on the round table, care-based agency is 'interactive'. The care-giver needs to keep the lines of communication open, which is also Emma's strategy when replacing the table or when convincing Mr Woodhouse to visit Mrs Weston at Christmas, join the Donwell party, or to approve of the ball scheme.

However, it is a fact that the introduction of the 'large modern circular table' to Hartfield puts an end to the Pembroke era and Emma with her persuasive skills manages to renew Hartfield. This detail suggests that care-based agency is complemented by oppositional agency. To avoid the pitfalls of subordination and self-effacement, feminists call attention to the necessity of opposition to wrongful – in the case of the circular table one can speak of out-dated – social practices. Austen circumvents the danger of making Emma's conscientious treatment of her father dependent on blind filial devotedness, thus endorsing the feminist stance that 'a care ethic can be extricated from its historic role in women's subordination and cooptation.'<sup>38</sup> In the name of care for her guests, Emma goes against her father's wish of serving gruel and has the muffin passed round more than once (*E* 142). It is because she understands that new needs call for new practices that she opts for the large round table. The ability to oppose and reform saves Emma from the taint of subordination, which the feminist tradition has apprehended to be the downside of care-based agency. Austen's awareness of the limits of care-based agency unfolds in the representation of Emma's sister, Isabella. Oppositional moral agency gives Emma the edge that her sister lacks. Instead of seeing such things as flaws in any of her family members, Isabella is 'a worshipping wife' and eager to project on her husband every unrealistic quality. Although Emma acknowledges John Knightley's positive qualities as a good father and a sensible man, she cannot overlook his breaches of conjugal respect: 'Nothing wrong in him escaped her. She was quick in feeling the little injuries to Isabella, which Isabella never felt' (*E* 79). While Emma lives every moment of her sister's stay at Hartfield in the apprehension that John Knightley's 'sharp retorts' could disrupt domestic harmony, Isabella considers him to be one of the best-tempered men ever (*E* 79). The Christmas reunion of the Hartfield party with the Westons justifies Emma's fears. John Knightley, discontented with every

plan that takes him away from home, discharges his sarcasm on Mr Woodhouse, prognosticating a disastrous return to Hartfield. The old man's nerves are agitated to the point that an immediate return (upon his daughter's and Mr Knightley's intervention) is the only remedy for his son-in-law's alarming augury.

With the representation of Emma, Austen demonstrates that care-based and oppositional agency can blend in the judgement of the very same moral virtue. While oppositional moral agency is most explicit in Emma's condemnation of Frank Churchill's double-dealing games among the Highbury people, she excuses Jane Fairfax. Women of Jane's social standing are entitled to think only of themselves, since 'the world is not their's, nor the world's law' (*E* 329). Emma's refusal to condemn female selfishness is an audacious step, since selfishness was considered one of the three worst evils against female virtue. According to Hannah More, the other two were vanity and inconsideration.<sup>39</sup> Hence, virtue is not an absolute value in Emma's world, but one embodied, constructed and contested by social practice. Opposing a system that marginalizes and neglects woman's rights, Emma bestows on the oppressed the right to transcend the law, arguing that a law that does not protect is not entitled to condemn. Ignored as they are, women like Jane Fairfax are beyond the indictment of justice or opposition and deserve to be taken under the wings of an 'ethic of care', to put it in Gilligan's terminology. Moreover, through Emma's observation, Jane Fairfax outgrows the limits of isolated female distress and becomes what Mary Poovey calls 'a political unit'.<sup>40</sup>

However, when it comes to Frank Churchill, Emma's moral judgement on the affair points out the wrongful procedure underlying his behaviour:

But I shall always think it a very abominable sort of proceeding. What has it been but a system of hypocrisy and deceit, – espionage, and treachery? – To come among us with professions of openness and simplicity; and such a league in secret to judge us all! (*E* 328–9)

From a man such as Frank, to whom the law accords more freedom of choice, more is expected. While Mrs Weston's main worry has been Emma's shattered romance, Emma regards herself not as the principal injured party. In fact, on hearing the news, Jane's bruised reputation (for whom Emma holds herself responsible) and Harriet's presupposed disappointment are the first concerns to engross her attention: 'Her mind was divided between two ideas – her own conversations with him about Miss Fairfax; and poor Harriet' (*E* 325–6). Emma cannot excuse Frank's unbecoming behaviour as readily as Mrs Weston, just because his hypocrisy did not have the feared impact on her. Her retort is of exceptional sharpness:

I have escaped; and that I should escape, may be a matter of grateful wonder to you and myself. But this does not acquit him, Mrs. Weston; and I must say, that I think



him greatly to blame. What right had he to come among us with affection and faith engaged, and with manners so very disengaged? What right had he to endeavour to please, as he certainly did – to distinguish any one young woman with persevering attention, as he certainly did – while he really belonged to another? – How could he tell what mischief he might be doing? – How could he tell that he might not be making me in love with him? – very wrong, very wrong indeed. (E 326–7)

The fact that Emma survives Frank's manoeuvres unharmed cannot do away with his premeditated wantonly negligent conduct. If a wrongful practice for some reason fails to engender damage, it should nevertheless be considered for what it is – wrong and unacceptable. Emma's verdict on the Churchill–Fairfax affair is quite important for the understanding of her own actions. She has come to realize that Mr Knightley was right when arguing that her matchmaking enthusiasm should not find a confirmation in Mr Weston's and Mrs Weston's successful partnership, since it was probably a stroke of luck. In his opinion, it is a fact that matchmaking is more likely to do harm than good (E 13). Harriet pays the price for Emma's matchmaking and Jane Fairfax endures the consequences of Frank Churchill's carelessness. In this context, Emma's unconscious association of Jane with Harriet is penetrating, since both women are abused through wrongful practices by those who have committed themselves to promoting their social welfare.

This brings my discussion to Emma's greatest achievement as a moral agent. Her most significant oppositional moral agency is directed towards herself and the unforeseen consequences of her matchmaking quest. I investigate how oppositional agency towards oneself transforms Emma and enriches our notion of heterosexual partnership at the close of this chapter, but I first address the function of such an unbecoming activity as matchmaking in the novel. Matchmaking is that aspect of *Emma* that has induced the critics to dwell on Emma's self-love, her lack of employment and class consciousness in her occasionally heartless dealings with Harriet Smith. Thaden, preferring Jane Fairfax to Emma, sounds even weary of Emma's self-contentment and easy life, when she claims: 'All of Austen's other heroines are more or less oppressed' but for 'Emma [who] has been doing what she liked all her life'.<sup>41</sup>

Though Emma is not oppressed like Eleanor Tilney, Fanny Price or Anne Elliot, she does not enjoy nor allow herself the wish to follow her every whim. Apart from being confined at home as the companion and counsellor of an invalid father (Mr Woodhouse refers to himself as such), Emma values harmony and is willing to subdue her inclinations when her conscience tells her so. When Mr John Knightley underplays Mr Weston's paternal pain in giving up his little son to the Churchills, arguing that Mr Weston's comfort depends 'much more upon what is called society ... that is the power of eating and drinking, and playing whist with the neighbours five times a-week, than upon family affection', Emma is the only one among a large company to resent him:

Emma could not like what bordered on a reflection on Mr. Weston, and had half a mind to take it up; but she struggled, and let it pass. She would keep the peace if possible; and there was something honourable and valuable in the strong domestic habits, the all-sufficiency of home to himself, whence resulted her brother's disposition to look down on the common rate of social intercourse, and those to whom it was important. – It had a high claim to forbearance. (E 82)

Forbearance has to do with patience, self-control and self-restraint. Emma considers herself bound to keep domestic peace, but not without reflection. Self-monitoring and reflection are those characteristics of 'civilized' habitus that enable the consideration of long-term consequences. In Elias's words, one is prompted 'to take account of the effects of [one's] own or other people's actions on a whole series links in the social chain'.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, Emma interprets John Knightley's remark in the context of his disposition and habits demonstrating how her reflections stretch from past experience and knowledge to consecutive events. The narrator's focalization on Emma illustrates the expansion of thought that links the present with the past and the future that Elias identifies as a 'civilizing process'.<sup>43</sup> Emma's sense of oppositional agency does not slumber, but is outweighed by her readiness to enter into John Knightley's character and the desire not to compromise the duties of hospitality. What Emma might have liked to do, i.e. to take up his unjust remark, is not what Emma does; the word 'struggle' underlines her efforts. Her very strong social function, with its duties and privileges, constructs Emma's personality. However, there is another side to the story. As Ross Chambers aptly puts it: 'every rule produces its loophole, every authority can be countered by appeal to another authority, every front-stage social role one plays has a backstage where we are freer to do, say, or think as we will'.<sup>44</sup> Austen counterbalances Emma's physical confinement with freedom of mind (which is not to be confounded with freedom of action), expressed both in oppositional moral agency, but more unconsciously in her matchmaking strategies which contest any influence – Mr Knightley's included.

*Emma's* narrative poses matchmaking as 'the backstage' of a well-organized domestic and communal life through which Emma can gleefully declare her power: 'I must look for a wife for him', she declares to her father and Mr Knightley regarding her plans for Mr Elton (E 13). The matchmaking challenge is a source of self-gratification and by pursuing her plans, which she does not think for a second to be harmful or fallible, she takes liberties that compensate for a rather predictable life. Without the matchmaking mêlée, Emma's character risks succumbing to the flatness of the care-taking and acquiescent daughter of the conduct book, or of many novels for that matter. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall demonstrate, female virtue and devotion (like Emma's) went hand-in-hand with subordination.<sup>45</sup> Several women authors (to mention one, Sarah Stickney Ellis) hailed the selflessness of domestic femininity as the best means of women's gain-

ing influence upon society. Ellis's feminism was greatly inspired by Hannah More's belief that women could steer the progress of the public sphere through meek and useful domestic virtue. Even in 'progressive' novels (i.e. those in favour of the French Revolution), selfless womanhood is praised and valued as a distinctive feature of English womanliness. In Charlotte Smith's *Desmond* (1792), Geraldine devotes her life to her dying and abusing husband – who has sold her into prostitution – deliberately choosing to stand out among other female characters as the uncontested model of the virtuous and selfless wife.

Writing against this background, *Emma*'s narrator avoids this kind of female influence. Not selflessness, but 'a mind delighted with its own ideas' is Emma's source of power (*E* 22), a qualification that has led scholars to equate Emma's self-love with masculinity. Susan Morgan goes so far as to put it wryly: 'Emma is one of the boys.'<sup>46</sup> Although Emma's delight with her own ideas has been the stumbling block in criticism and identified as the root of her error of judgement, the narrator refuses to relinquish it. Even at the end, when Frank Churchill has secured Jane and Harriet Smith is finally united to Robert Martin, Emma insists on her right to receive the best treatment possible from Mr Knightley: 'Oh! I always deserve the best treatment, because I never put up with any other; and, therefore, you must give me a plain, direct answer' (*E* 388). Mr Knightley cannot help but submit and satisfy her. By making the most home-ridden heroine also the most single-minded and susceptible to self-love, Austen enlarges and liberates feminine consciousness, suggesting that a capacity to esteem the other should cohabit with self-esteem. This attitude is echoed in Austen's own appreciation of her artistic work. In a letter to James Stanier Clarke, the Prince Regent's librarian, she bluntly settles that she deserves the highest praise as a novelist: 'I must make use of this opportunity to thank you dear Sir, for the very high praise you bestow on my other Novels – I am too vain to wish to convince you that you have praised them beyond their Merits' (*Letters* 306). Interestingly enough, Clarke played intermediary between Austen and the Prince Regent during the publication of *Emma*. Bearing this in mind and their delight with their own ideas, one can infer that Emma and Austen share a similar source of power. Moreover, matchmaking stands as a topic where heterosexual love asserts itself. The heterosexual relationship between the protagonists is desirable because it understands moral agency as stemming from both care and opposition. My claim is to demonstrate that Emma's self-love (like her rule) is validated by a high degree of self-detachment that develops in close dialogue with others.

The narrative sets off suggesting that Emma's self-determination is thwarted by so commanding a man as Mr Knightley, who predicts that matchmaking is more likely to do harm than good. His opposition to Emma is stated from the beginning: 'Mr. Knightley, in fact, was one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse' (*E* 11). Once more in her work, Austen tackles the

figure of the mentor-lover, modifying two important aspects. First, Mr Knightley has the age, experience and reliable sense to deserve to be heard. If Henry Tilney or Edmund were still very young and very much engrossed with their fathers' morality, Mr Knightley is thirty-eight and as independent as a man can be. Good connections to his collaborators of inferior social standing and a sound work ethic, as a responsible and progressive landowner, complete his profile of an old family friend and caring neighbour. This makes Mr Knightley's judgement rather hard to dismiss.<sup>47</sup> Second, 'the girl being taught a lesson' is not the inexperienced Catherine or the compliant Fanny Price.<sup>48</sup> Being twenty-one years old, the mistress of Hartfield, 'so great a personage in Highbury', worshipped by her father and Mrs Weston, Emma surpasses Catherine's and Fanny's social standing (*E* 23). But the most significant change that matchmaking introduces in Mr Knightley's and Emma's relationship is the reversal of traditional roles that ascribed power to male agency and influence to female. According to More, 'Power was for man, influence for woman' and women writers like Edgeworth or Sarah Stickney Ellis agree with her.<sup>49</sup> Maria Edgeworth grants influence to women, however, setting the boundaries of this influence in the domestic, as she writes in *Helen* (1834): 'Female influence must, will, and ought to exist on political subjects as on all others; but this influence should always be domestic, not public.'<sup>50</sup> Women's impact should be indirect, i.e. an influence rather than authority, and mediated through the domestic. Their positive moral influence would effectuate the improvement of the family circle from where men would carry their mothers' and wives' lessons into the public realm. Yet, matchmaking puts Emma in the position of the power-holder and leaves to Mr Knightley no more space than that of influence. Emma holds the public power that patriarchs like the awe-inspiring Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* does when he bestows patronage on Fanny Price.

Furthermore, in *Emma* the traditional relation between male instructor and female student is much more complex, since the heroine is as eager to instruct as the presupposed instructor. The couple's first discussion on Mrs Weston's marriage and Emma's self-acclaimed successful intervention in the matter show that their relationship outgrows the mentor-mentee pattern:

'I do not understand what you mean by "success"', said Mr. Knightley. 'Success supposes endeavour. Your time has been properly and delicately spent, if you have been endeavouring for the last four years to bring about this marriage. A worthy employment for a young lady's mind! But if, which I rather imagine, your making the match, as you call it, means only your planning it, your saying to yourself one idle day, "I think it would be a very good thing for Miss Taylor if Mr. Weston were to marry her," and saying it again to yourself every now and then afterwards, why do you talk of success? Where is your merit? What are you proud of? You made a lucky guess; and that is all that can be said'.

'And have you never known the pleasure and triumph of a lucky guess? – I pity you. – I thought you cleverer – for, depend upon it a lucky guess is never merely luck. There is always some talent in it. And as to my poor word "success", which you quarrel with, I do not know that I am so entirely without any claim to it. You have drawn two pretty pictures; but I think there may be a third – a something between the do-nothing and the do-all. If I had not promoted Mr. Weston's visits here, and given many little encouragements, and smoothed many little matters, it might not have come to any thing after all. I think you must know Hartfield enough to comprehend that.' (E 13)

This passage hints at the readiness of Emma and Mr Knightley to have their opinions expressed and contested. Emma calls this practice that seems to have occurred quite often in the past 'quarrelling' and admits it as a valid channel of communication between them. As it is used by Emma and Mr Knightley, 'quarrel' carries the connotation of *controversy* or *disputation*, implying the presentation of each party's approach to a given controversial topic. The passage reveals a methodical approach on the part of both interlocutors: each argument of one party is acknowledged by the other and upon close examination granted or contested. Mr Knightley argues that those feelings that ultimately spurred Mr and Mrs Weston to marry cannot have been produced by Emma's efforts. Feelings happen naturally and no bystander's endeavour could have possibly produced mutual attraction between the now newly-weds. Emma contests his view, offering a synthesis of what Mr Knightley has just depicted. Between the producibility of erotic attraction and its uncontrollable and involuntary nature, there lies another option, namely that of assistance. Emma defines her role in matchmaking as assistant and provider of opportunities for interest to develop into attraction and the latter into attachment.

This is quite a valid argument, since opportunity is what allows erotic desire to grow and unfold in most lovers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs Bennet's machinations lead to Jane's illness and this prolongs Elizabeth's stay in Netherfield, promoting the gradual rapprochement of the protagonist couples; and in *Sense and Sensibility*, Mrs Dashwood's liberal manners promote intimacy between Marianne and Willoughby. Even in Emma's case, the opportunities she offers to Mr Elton are not fruitless: Mr Elton's interest is aroused, only it is placed in the wrong person. Mr Knightley's idea of agency builds on the absolute autonomy of the moral agent and fails to take into account the restrictions that situation, rank and role must bring on the range of activities available to moral agents. Emma, on the other hand, sees agency active when individuals decide to make use of the opportunities that crop up unexpectedly. Emma's notion of agency comes close to that of Elias, who understands agency as consisting in the seizure and not the creating of opportunities, because the latter are 'prescribed and limited by the specific structure of his society and the nature of the functions people exercise within it'.<sup>51</sup> Emma shows a middle way between the 'two pretty pictures'

drawn by Mr Knightley, 'a something between the do-nothing and the do-all', between an absolutely autonomous subject and a powerless one. In *Emma*, the moral agent is neither self-sufficient nor is it whimsically 'buffeted up and down the world like a shuttle cock', to borrow a phrase quoted early in this chapter.<sup>52</sup> Emma reminds Mr Knightley of Hartfield's particularities in the face of which good sense, an open heart and individual autonomy are insufficient. It is high time Mr Knightley knew that the 'smoothing of some little matters' and 'lucky' occurrences can make a world of difference in Hartfield. Critics like Gertrude Himmelfarb end their analysis of this episode giving preference to Mr Knightley's rational dismissal of luck, without devoting any attention to Emma's answer about the relevance of facilitative opportunities and their co-existence with agency.<sup>53</sup> However, we will have to await the conclusion of the novel to laugh at Mr Knightley (benignly), who thanks his own wedding to the unexpected opportunity opened by a poultry robbery in the neighbourhood, an event that makes Mr Woodhouse so dependent on the protection of his son-in-law as to consent to his marrying his daughter. The narrator seems reluctant to give her blessing to the marriage before Mr Knightley has learned this lesson that Emma teaches him in the first chapters. Viewed from this perspective, it seems more accurate to speak of Mr Knightley's 'insufficient attention to reality' rather than Emma's, as it has often been the case.<sup>54</sup>

As Jan Fergus states, Emma's 'frequent use of the second-person pronoun "you" announces their intimacy at the same time that it commands what he "should do"'.<sup>55</sup> Thus, this is not the worn-out instructor–student relationship, and it is too simplistic a view to maintain that 'Emma is the character whose education we observe'.<sup>56</sup> As a matter of fact, none of the characters is exempt from education. Frank Churchill, Jane Fairfax, Emma and Mr Knightley, Mrs Weston: they all have something to regret, new self-knowledge to gain and apologies to make. The only ones without regrets and epiphanies are the likes of Mr and Mrs Elton. If we observe Emma's so-called education, this is due to the fact that hers is the only window into consciousness that the narrator opens before our eyes and allows our gaze to enter. Emma's assertiveness is reminiscent of Elizabeth Bennet's ready wit, but here familiarity supersedes severity. Unlike Elizabeth, who confesses to Darcy, 'I never spoke to you without rather wishing to give you pain than not', Emma does not engage in conversation with Mr Knightley while struggling for acknowledgement (PP 306). Elizabeth takes Darcy's condescension as a given and all her rhetoric aims at proving him wrong and overcoming the inferiority of those connections of hers that disgust him. This would not do for Emma: she has secured Mr Knightley's amicability and takes for granted his appreciation of her intellectual powers. She is only surprised and intrigued that he does not revere her unconditionally. Emma and Mr Knightley share at the point we meet them far more common history than Elizabeth and Darcy



do when we leave these installed at Pemberley. There is a kind of intimacy and familiarity in the later novel, which *Pride and Prejudice* promises, but cannot fulfil within the timeframe of a twelve-month acquaintance. In the penultimate chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*, the narrator lets us into Elizabeth's thoughts: 'She remembered that he [Darcy] had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin' (PP 300). Emma, on the other hand, assures us that she and Mr Knightley 'say what they like to one another' and there is enough mutual knowledge and understanding between them for Emma to address him with patronizing irony: 'I thought you cleverer than that' (E 11). If Darcy and Elizabeth achieve equal moral worth at the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, that equality of moral judgement is *Emma's* point of departure.

### Opposing the Self

Oppositional moral agency saves Emma from the profile of the voiceless and dutiful daughter. Furthermore, opposition in this novel has to do with the ability to quarrel, a word that occurs comparatively often and is particularly telling in *Emma*. Depending on the interlocutors, 'quarrel' conveys distinctive qualities of intimacy and relationship. Mostly, the word is used by Mr Knightley and Emma or Mrs Weston and Mr Knightley. When the latter discusses Emma's doings, Mrs Weston says: 'This will certainly be the beginning of one of our quarrels about Emma, Mr. Knightley.' To which Mr Knightley responds: 'Perhaps you think I am come on purpose to quarrel with you, knowing Weston to be out, and that you must still fight your own battle' (E 32). What follows is an insightful dialogue on Emma's sense, weaknesses and her new relationship with Harriet Smith. Mrs Weston approves of the friendship, since it leads to Harriet's improvement and it fills the void that her own marriage has left in Emma's life. This is of significant import to her, who, as a woman, appreciates a female companion in a way that Mr Knightley cannot. Mr Knightley does not contest Mrs Weston's claim, which signals his acknowledgement of Emma's need for a girlfriend, but he believes that a friendship based on such a disparity will harm both of them. The reciprocal reiteration of arguments illustrates that this kind of 'quarrel' has more in common with its synonym 'dispute', as in *disputatio*, and carries the meaning of a constructive examination of a topic in question. 'Quarrel' understood as a *disputatio* postulates the rational approach by two equal parties to each other's position and a thorough understanding of it. What a novelty such a practice represents when performed between the sexes can be better understood if we turn to Hannah More, whose expectations of a lady are 'not that she may qualify herself to become an orator or a pleader; not that she may learn to debate, but to act'.<sup>57</sup> In More's thought, action encompasses the set of female domestic responsibilities and her 'usefulness' to community, the sum of

which constitutes a woman's only worth. Debating and oratory are unbecoming for a woman and she had better leave them to her male counterpart, whose abilities More appraises as by nature more apt for this task.<sup>58</sup> Emma and, to a certain extent, Mrs Weston contest the impossibility of the coexistence of skilful female domestic management (the capacity to 'act' in More's words) and female intellectual power to plead and debate.

The nature of their 'quarrels' is perfectly understood by these characters. In William Deresiewicz's words, 'the complexity of their relationship has tuned Emma and Knightley's sensibilities to be able to perceive the subtlest communicative inflections – small tonal shifts, facial expressions, body language'.<sup>59</sup> This explains why the 'quarrel' at Box Hill, where Emma tells Miss Bates to refrain from saying more than three silly things at a time, is as deeply felt by Emma as it is earnestly argued by Mr Knightley. When Emma dismisses Mr Knightley's reproach that she of all people should not have allowed herself such a faux pas, saying that after all 'what is good and what is ridiculous are most unfortunately blended' in Miss Bates, Mr Knightley grants her that point: 'I acknowledge [it]' (E 309). Emma, on the other hand, understands the rightness of his argumentation, namely that patronizing familiarity is only ethical between equals (which is not the case between Emma and Miss Bates). Emma can wittily tease Mr Knightley ('I thought you cleverer'), because she considers herself his equal, but that same tone is irresponsible in other kinds of relationships. The loss of wealth puts Miss Bates in a vulnerable position that does not allow for saucy jokes. Those who by fortune or frailty have been reduced to social or physical inferiority do still deserve our respect.

The irony is that Emma has been guided by this rule in her dealings with her father. The similarity between Miss Bates and Mr Woodhouse cannot and does not escape Emma. Her first reflections after the trespass at Box Hill go to her father: 'She hoped no one could have said to her, "How could you be so unfeeling to your father?"' (E 311). Mr Woodhouse once even admits to being 'fanciful and troublesome', but Emma is deeply distressed when even a close family member like John Knightley lacks respect for him. One is not allowed to quarrel with Mr Woodhouse's habits and Emma might well boast that she never had a quarrel with her father, just as Miss Bates boasts of never having quarrelled with her niece. The common feature that underlies these relationships is that they are both based on respect and love, without embodying a space where criticism is given and received. Seldom does mutual knowledge grow in such relationships (Miss Bates is completely in the dark as to Jane's inner life), even though love remains the supporting element. Austen allows this to be a viable model which ensures harmony between those who are united by equal attachment but not by equality of mind. According to Tanner, the worst 'terror' in *Emma* is to have no one adequate to talk to. This is most true for Emma and Jane,

who are surrounded either by loving but unequal interlocutors (Mr Woodhouse, Miss Bates to mention a few) or impertinent ones like the unremittingly meddlesome Mrs Elton.<sup>60</sup>

Conjugal life, however, is a different matter. Here equality must be guaranteed and a space in which to 'quarrel' is indispensable. Emma and Mr Knightley do not dispute in spite of their intimacy, but in the name of an intimacy that assumes equality as its underlying principle. Mr Knightley's comment on Miss Bates to Emma – 'Were she a woman of fortune, I would leave every harmless absurdity to take its chance, I would not *quarrel* with you for any liberties of manner. Were she your equal in situation ...' – induces us to attribute the debates, witty retorts and mutual corrections to an acknowledged equality between Emma and Mr Knightley (E 309, my emphasis). The character of Mr Knightley – the neighbour enlightens that of Mr Knightley – the lover and once we have said yes to his consideration for inferiors, we have also opted for the frankness he promotes between equals. I agree with Patricia Menon that the incident at Box Hill has 'demonstrated he has been successful in relinquishing his role as fatherly advisor for that of "friend" without swinging to the opposite extreme, a lover with a love-induced blindness to her faults, a condition already explicitly condemned by Emma and implicitly by the narrator herself'.<sup>61</sup> Frank Churchill, on the other hand, is more susceptible to erotically induced blindness, since all he has to praise about Jane during their last meeting with Emma is Jane's complexion, her eye-lashes and hair: 'Did you ever see such a skin? – such smoothness! Such delicacy! – and yet without being actually fair' (E 391). We have so few insights into Jane's and Frank's 'quarrels' that when he praises her as his superior, one cannot shake off the feeling that he is primarily taken by her looks. When Emma concludes that she and Frank have had the good fortune to engage the affections of superior partners, Frank once again sinks to mere appreciation of Jane's body:

You can have no superior, but most true on mine. – She is a complete angel. Look at her. Is not she an angel in every gesture? Observe the turn of her throat. Observe her eyes, as she is looking up at my father. – You will be glad to hear (inclining his head, and whispering seriously) that my uncle means to give her all my aunt's jewels. They are to be new set. I am resolved to have some in an ornament for the head. Will not it be beautiful in her dark hair? (E 392)

His sensuous gaze stages Jane as a trophy, captured and possessed by a rather jealous owner – she is his 'own Jane' (E 309). The emphasis I have put on Frank Churchill's gaze is not meant to imply the narrator's distrust of erotic sensation and ultimately her rejection of the body in favour of the mind. After all, Mr Knightley admits the pleasurable sensations produced by his gaze on Emma's features: 'I shall not deny Emma's being pretty ... I confess that I have seldom

seen a face or figure more pleasing to me than her's' (E 34). But this is avowed along with praises of her mind, appreciation of her strong hand-writing – a synecdoche for her strong character – and is completed by his certainty that she possesses a 'serious spirit' to lead her right (E 273).

Coming full circle to the first issue that interests this chapter – the concept of agency – Emma's 'serious spirit' generates the moral oppositional agency that is needed to oppose not only the wrongs of others, but her own. This is best illustrated in the following dialogue between Emma and Mr Knightley:

'Can you trust me with such flatterers? – Does my vain spirit ever tell me I am wrong?'

'Not your vain spirit, but your serious spirit. – If one leads you wrong, I am sure the other tells you of it.' (E 273)

Mr Knightley delivers the assurance towards which the narrator's emphasis on Emma's reflections and self-analysis has been working: Emma can be trusted to judge for herself. Patricia Menon observes in her study on the mentor-lover that Austen's novels 'either downplay [as in *Northanger Abbey*] or work towards the elimination of the need for mentorship [as in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*]'.<sup>62</sup> The transformation that takes place in the course of the novel is not that Emma becomes less of an individual, as Duckworth would have it, but a more intrinsically autonomous individual. Through Mr Knightley's relatively long absences from Hartfield, which bespeak his self-imposed withdrawal from mentorship, and 'because Emma and Knightley's relationship leaves so much room for negotiation – for disagreement, for face-saving, for new kinds of appeal', Emma has time and leisure to have her own experiences.<sup>63</sup>

The crucial experience that I want to highlight here is the capacity to quarrel with oneself, in other words debating with one's own beliefs and deeds. In Chapter 9 of Volume I, we meet with a rather uncritical Emma: 'Mr. Knightley might quarrel with her, but Emma could not quarrel with herself' (E 60). The capacity to dispute with oneself requires a higher degree of self-detachment and of individuation. Elias asserts that the capacity to distance oneself from one's feelings and actions and become one's own observer develops with the progress of civilization. This ability is a sign for a higher level in what Elias calls the 'spiral staircase of consciousness' from which people can see and observe themselves acting with others: 'From it they can see themselves standing and acting on the floor below, can contemplate and observe themselves interacting with other people'.<sup>64</sup> Judging somebody else's actions from the outside requires the agency of observation, but stepping outside one's own mind and thus rendering other people's assessment redundant proves a much higher degree of autonomy, because one is 'capable of self-detachment and self-confrontation'.<sup>65</sup> Before Elias, John Millar linked this capacity with moral development and virtuous behaviour: 'The degree of applause

excited by virtue is not dependent solely on the propriety and utility of the action, but also on the difficulty which we know the agent must have overcome, and the mental energy which he has displayed, in reducing his feelings to the level of those of the unconcerned spectator.<sup>66</sup> Hence the absence of paternal dictate and the reduction of the authoritative voice that one is tempted to ascribe to Mr Knightley is compensated by Emma's self-criticism and self-monitored behaviour. As the story evolves we see Emma's ability to 'quarrel' with herself unfold; we experience her ponder the motives and ethical consequences of her actions.

Critics find fault with Emma, because she never apologizes for the power she exercises over other people's lives. For them, Emma is not punished for her mistakes, but saved by Mr Knightley.<sup>67</sup> Such interpretations focus on guilt and see its remedy in humiliation and punishment. Refusing to give us insights into Emma's public humiliation, the narrator disappoints this expectation. Austen is so keenly aware of this expectation that she anticipates it by quoting Goldsmith who 'tells us, that when lovely woman stoops to folly, she has nothing to do but to die; and when she stoops to be disagreeable, it is equally to be recommended as a clearer of ill-fame' (E 319). Although the narrator reminds us of Goldsmith's treatment of female trespassing, on the occasion of the death of Mrs Churchill, whose abuse can be expiated only by bodily extinguishment, 'folly' in the novel is mostly linked to Emma, quite often by Emma herself. There is one instance where Emma genders 'folly' when she calls her intimacy with Harriet 'the worst of all her womanly follies' – a probable periphrasis of Goldsmith's famous line and an implicit reminder of his verdict on female punishment (E 379). However, the narrator's focus is not about culpability but about assuming responsibility, and in doing so she moves away from Goldsmith's death-inflicting circle of mistake and punishment towards a solution-oriented ending which enables the self to live with its own and others' imperfections. Mr Knightley implicitly censures the reader's condemnation of Emma's meddling with Mr Elton and Harriet and puts the power of criticism in Emma's self-reflexive powers: 'I shall not scold you. I leave you to your own reflections' (E 273). 'Her own reflections', or in other words learning 'to quarrel' with oneself, is Austen's focus. It must be Emma's own reflections, triggered by an interplay of several events, that lead her to avow her 'blunders' regarding Harriet and Mr Elton to Mr Knightley. As Diana T. Meyers points out, 'autonomous agents cannot allow outside forces to displace their own desires and thereby to assume control over their lives'.<sup>68</sup> However, although control is not yielded to outside forces, self-knowledge and autonomy emerge as qualities in need of external response and reaction. So then, it is not quite accurate to maintain with Hazel Jones that Austen's most successful heroines possess self-knowledge: they rather develop it in a process that the narrative does not portray as completed by the end of the novels.<sup>69</sup>

Although the topic of matchmaking appears throughout the novel, its evolution with regard to Emma's role in it is significant because it marks a noteworthy

sense of self-surveillance or, in Elias's words, 'self-detachment', on Emma's part. After Mr Elton has made himself clear on the issue of matrimony, Emma abandons her matchmaking schemes. From this moment on, she restricts herself to observation and guesswork. She assumes a romance between Harriet and Frank Churchill. There is no reason to expect her to apologize for guessing wrong since Harriet is susceptible to love those who assist her: she falls for Mr Knightley because, by asking her to dance, he makes up for Mr Elton's affront. Consequently, Emma's conjecture that Harriet has fallen for Frank Churchill who rescues her from the gypsies is not far-fetched. However, in order to reduce temptation and her own power over Harriet, Emma refuses to know the name of the gentleman or to discuss the matter with Harriet at all. One cannot help noticing that Emma relinquishes her influence over Harriet just as Mr Knightley relinquishes his over her. Emma's second wrong guess regards a love affair between Jane Fairfax and Mr Dixon, the husband of Jane's best friend. Her transgression against Jane is so deeply felt and with such revealing consequences that her own critique makes an external verdict redundant. She acknowledges that by confiding her suspicions of Jane's affair with Mr Dixon to Frank, she has betrayed 'the duty of woman by woman' (E 191). It is noteworthy that she regrets sharing her thoughts with Frank, but has no remorse for having had them. Coming from a reading of *Mansfield Park*, we should know that women like Fanny Price or Jane Fairfax – both dependent on patronage – can be easily drawn into love triangles. Emma's intuition suggests that when the fate of vulnerable women is at stake, double-dealings (like Henry Crawford's or Frank Churchill's) are not exceptional. Some of her saddest thoughts follow upon her better knowledge of Jane's situation: 'The contrast between Mrs Churchill's importance in the world, and Jane Fairfax's, struck her; one was every thing, the other nothing – and she sat musing on the difference of woman's destiny' (E 316). The more Emma learns about Jane Fairfax, the more deeply she identifies with her precarious social condition, the greater her opposition becomes towards those practices that harm defenceless women, her own transgressions included: 'the duty of woman by woman'.

The gravity of this self-critique notwithstanding, her mistakes do not induce Emma to condemn herself and sink in fervent self-distrust. Matchmaking 'blunders' and 'folly' are acknowledged for what they are – blunder and folly – but they do not annihilate self-respect, which is why even in her most guilt-ridden moments Emma is not tempted to self-effacement. Although she reproaches herself with Harriet's disappointment upon Mr Knightley's unrequited love, the narrator comments in skilled free-indirect speech:

... for as to any of that heroism of sentiment which might have prompted her to entreat him to transfer his affection from herself to Harriet, as infinitely the most worthy of the two – or even the more simple sublimity of resolving to refuse him at



once and for ever, without vouchsafing any motive, because he could not marry them both, Emma had it not. She felt for Harriet, with pain and with contrition; but no flight of generosity run mad ... (E 353)

Emma knows herself to be morally what Harriet is not, namely Mr Knightley's equal. To relinquish this conviction, it would be 'generosity run mad.' Gary Kelly warns us that this passage serves Emma's 'self-exculpation' and that, when referring to the heroine's lacking 'heroism', Austen stands wilfully in the way of the reader's identification with the protagonist.<sup>70</sup> In my opinion, this is not 'self-exculpation', but it is the upholding of self-respect even in the face of personal failure. Over and over again, Emma's regret at the disappointed turn that her friendships have taken is translated through her sense of shame and grief: 'Emma grieved', we are told, for not being open with Mr Knightley, for not foreseeing Harriet's heartbreak and contributing to Jane's discomfort (E 379). Nevertheless, Emma's self-worth is not obliterated by her mistakes; her self-respect does not expire under the weight of conscious guilt. This is of particular import, if we agree with Diana T. Meyers, who links self-respect to agency – self-respect is 'a standing favorable attitude toward oneself predicated upon a sense of one's worth as a person.'<sup>71</sup> At this point in the narrative, Emma acknowledges her wrongs and takes responsibility for all her actions without, however, courting self-effacement.

This is a moment where the reader is prompted to identify as much with Emma's guilty conscience as with her self-respect, and exactly because Emma yokes the conflicting attitudes of self-distancing and self-love, she is a protagonist worth identifying with. Even the shameful incident at Box Hill is employed by the narrator to boost her protagonist's self-worth, by refreshing her sense of social influence that she herself has seen shaken by the class mobility of Highbury. Mr Knightley builds his critique on Emma's performative function, emphasizing that her behaviour to Miss Bates has a public impact: 'many ... would be entirely guided by your treatment of her' (E 309). Later, he reinforces her worth in declaring her personality exceptional: 'I have blamed you, and lectured you, and you have borne it as no other woman in England would have borne it. – Bear with the truths I would tell you now, dearest Emma, as well as you have borne with them' (E 352). It is again the capacity to bear with one's own failures without self-hate and without the stubbornness of never-changing characters that enlarges our field of influence. If in the beginning Emma's character stands out among the society of Highbury, now she has risen to an exceptional national symbol of female virtue and fortitude. Mastering the art of 'quarrelling' with our equals and our own selves without losing (self-)respect, bearing with imperfections, yet without giving up improvement – this is Emma's, Mr Knightley's and the novel's strongest asset. Through Emma and Mr Knightley the narrator

stages the kind of moral agency that does not occlude the dependency on others for 'intellectual stimulation and enrichment.'<sup>72</sup> Mary Waldron's words on this new kind of heterosexual love are worth quoting: 'Entertained – and perhaps obliquely instructed – as we have been by their conflicts, we have to hope that Emma and Mr. Knightley *quarrel* happily ever after – a unique conclusion for a novel of its time.'<sup>73</sup> One might add that *Emma* is an invaluable representation of agency for Austen's time as much as for ours.

## 6 PERSUASION: DEVELOPING AN 'ELASTICITY OF MIND'

Austen's last finished novel, *Persuasion*, was published together with *Northanger Abbey* in 1818. While the latter was one of the early writings to which Austen added an advertisement in 1816, *Persuasion's* composition was begun in August 1815.<sup>1</sup> On 13 March 1817, Austen wrote to her niece Fanny Knight confidentially: 'Miss Catherine is put upon the shelf for the present, and I do not know that she will ever come out; – but I have a something ready for Publication, which may perhaps appear about a twelvemonth hence' (*Letters* 333). 'Miss Catherine' stands for *Northanger Abbey* that in fact did come out with *Persuasion* and they were both published in 1818, about a year after the novelist's death, just as she had predicted it. This first edition brings Austen's youngest and most mature female representations curiously close together: Catherine is only seventeen years old, while Anne Elliot is past twenty-seven. At Anne's age, Charlotte Lucas in *Pride and Prejudice* escapes spinsterhood by marrying Mr Collins. From this perspective, Anne Elliot delineates the female protagonist as a grown-up woman, who has passed the age of the heroine of the *Bildungsroman*. Emma already embodied a new kind of autonomy that, although grounded in the communal, promoted the ability to question the other and oneself as the foundation of egalitarianism. Until *Persuasion*, Austen focuses on female growth and interaction with otherness, female consciousness-raising and forms of autonomy that include human ties. *Persuasion* interweaves these aspects in the portrayal of Anne Elliot giving a condensed expression to the concept of the civilized woman.

I consciously opt for the signifier 'woman' and not for the more comprehensive term 'habitus', because this novel seems to feed directly into Wollstonecraft's attempt to reassess the features of the civilized woman. When she writes in the opening paragraph of *A Vindication*, 'the civilized women of the present century ... are only anxious to inspire love', she has in sight a clear reformatory agenda which she goes on to elaborate and which, by the end of *A Vindication*, transforms the reader's idea of the civilized woman. My reading of *Persuasion* centres on the progressive modifications that the novel brings to the depictions of heroines and heroes through its analysis of the moral development that underlies

manners. These modifications stand in dialogue with Wollstonecraft's philosophical thought and her dissatisfaction with the unequal criteria of heroism and heroism in the novels of her time. As she laments in the preface to *The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria*, in 1798:

In many works of this species, the hero is allowed to be mortal, and to become wise and virtuous as well as happy, by a train of events and circumstances. The heroines on the contrary, are to be born immaculate; and to act like goddesses of wisdom, just come forth highly finished Minervas from the head of Jove.<sup>2</sup>

Here, Wollstonecraft expands on a discontent that she had brought up in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, when arguing that conduct books taught women 'to acquire manners before morals' and thus to submit to authority before forming individual judgement.<sup>3</sup> As for the novels, Wollstonecraft regrets that they represent a gendered character formation: while male heroism undergoes stages of growth and development, heroines seem the fully formed products of authority. The consequence is that women are denied a process of betterment through experience and hence precluded from a process of civilization that participates in a collective experience. It is in this sense that Wollstonecraft observes that 'the civilization which has hitherto taken place in the world has been very partial' and novels have helped bolster this practice.<sup>4</sup> Such were the models proposed by prescriptive novels: despite worldly inexperience, Hannah More's Lucilla Stanley is hailed as the indispensable manager of the English household and Edgeworth made Belinda the picture of prudence.

Austen sought the dialogue between different approaches to women's civilizing influence that she met with in contemporary fiction or philosophy, enlarging, deepening and investing it with moral and epistemological value. One such value deserves special attention, namely, female gentleness. Austen treats gentleness as a parameter of moral development rather than the natural by-product of female nature. The emphasis on a moral conviction or 'persuasion' that motivates such civilizing elements as gentleness is liberated from essentialist assumptions and attributed to the particular situatedness and particularity of female moral agents. This agent differs from those novels that irritate Wollstonecraft with their representations of a static, impersonalized womanhood by making knowledge gained through personal experience relevant to the production of collective knowledge. In the twentieth century, the importance of such an agent for a theory of epistemology has been aptly summarized by the feminist philosopher Sandra Harding, for whom we 'become agents of knowledge and agents of history only through this process of testifying to one's experience – which is, of course, a collective process. It is done in front of other people; it's done together.'<sup>5</sup> *Persuasion's* merit is to vindicate female experience and endow it

with the particularity of an individualized life as much as make it participate in a collective civilizing process that takes place 'in front of others'.

### Between Fortitude and Gentleness

*Persuasion's* heroine is in Austen's words 'almost too good' and fixed by the hero at the end of the narrative as 'perfection itself' (P 226).<sup>6</sup> An 'almost too good' heroine from a writer who declared in the same letter that 'pictures of perfection as you know make me sick & wicked' appears to be the recipe for disaster (Letters 335). The statements seem contradictory and a logical question arises: why would Austen depict 'almost' perfection if she did not derive any pleasure from it? My first step is to tackle the narrator's insistence on Anne's worthiness as a heroine who accommodates different and seemingly exclusive expectations raised by female representations in contemporary fiction. Captain Wentworth, a proud and self-asserting man who holds an eight-year-old grudge against Anne Elliot for having broken off their engagement, submissively settles the question of Anne's superior character: 'Her character was now fixed on his mind as perfection itself, maintaining the loveliest medium of fortitude and gentleness' (P 226). Anne's gentleness is reiterated by the narrator: from the beginning, Anne appears as 'an extremely pretty girl, with gentleness, modesty, taste, and feeling' (P 26). As a teenager of fourteen, she is a girl 'of strong sensibility' – reminiscent of Marianne Dashwood (P 143). In her late twenties, she has grown into 'the elegant little woman ... with manners as consciously right as they were invariably gentle' (P 144). Eight years later, Anne may have lost her bloom, but cannot help hearing Wentworth's name with 'flushed cheeks' and 'a gentle sigh' – not a bit of her modesty and gentleness has been lost through the years (P 25).

Perhaps it was this invariable gentleness that Austen regarded as almost too good to be true and a source of uneasiness that Anne might be aligned with the standards of the conduct book. However, she does not relinquish it, because in doing so, she participates in a larger discourse that had started long before *Persuasion* and haunts all her previous novels: in the representation of Charlotte of the juvenilia's 'Frederic and Elfrida', who seeks to oblige everyone; in the sociopath Lady Susan, whose great accomplishment is to fake gentleness, or in her daughter Frederica Vernon about whom we learn that 'There cannot be a more gentle, affectionate heart; or more obliging manners, when acting without restraint' (LS 68); or in the 'earnest, though gentle' Eleanor Tilney (NA 133); or in the gentleness of Marianne Dashwood's voice (SS 210); or in Miss Darcy, whose 'manners were perfectly unassuming and gentle' (PP 213); or in the praise of Fanny Price and the 'gentleness and gratitude of her disposition' (MP 297); and lastly, in Emma's sister, Isabella, whose description comes closest to Anne's – 'a pretty, elegant little woman, of gentle, quiet manners, and a disposition



remarkably amiable and affectionate' (E 79). The point is not to imply that Isabella foreshadows Anne Elliot, but instead suggest that already while sketching the two sisters in *Emma*, the novelist was brooding over 'the medium of fortitude and gentleness'. Significantly, Isabella does not satisfy, since to put it in Mr Knightley's words when comparing both sisters' handwriting, 'Emma's hand is the strongest', another indication of the narrator's pondering how fortitude and gentleness mingle (E 243). In *Persuasion*'s Anne, the narrator revisits Isabella's love of family and caring motherhood. Isabella's life and disposition unfold in her domestic interests just like Anne's, who is praised for her 'domestic habits' and abilities as a surrogate mother to the children of her good-for-nothing sister, Mary Musgrove (P 29). Furthermore, Isabella's gentleness is best illustrated in being a good listener to Mr Woodhouse's 'gentle selfishness', which resembles Anne's gentle and patient nature while bearing with the complaints and ill-usages of hypochondriac Mary (E 9).

Austen's interest in the construction of female gentleness rests on the debates of the late eighteenth century. In *Emile, or On Education* (1762), Rousseau hailed gentleness not only as the first and foremost requirement in a woman, but also linked it to subordination:

The first and most important quality of a woman is gentleness; as she is made to obey a being who is so imperfect, often so full of vices, and always so full of defects as man, she ought to learn early to endure even injustice and to bear a husband's wrongs without complaining.<sup>7</sup>

We should understand Rousseau's opinion neither as an isolated statement nor as an attitude exclusively characteristic of the Enlightenment. In fact, gentleness continued to remain a prominent, if not the most endearing quality of womanhood also in second-generation Romantic fiction. A few examples should illustrate my point. In Lord Byron's *Don Juan*, the description of Haidée praises her gentleness, Juan's ideal of femininity: thanks to the 'gentle touch' of the 'soft warm hand of youth' and to 'the gentle girl', Juan comes back to life.<sup>8</sup> In *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein's wife, Elizabeth, is 'docile and good tempered' with hazel eyes of 'attractive softness'.<sup>9</sup> Female gentleness was praised by Rousseau and particularly fuelled by Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757): smallness (notice Anne's description as 'a little woman') and smoothness were translated onto the female physiognomy and expected to lead to gentleness of manners and moral purity. As O'Neill demonstrates, Burke appropriated the centrality accorded by the Scottish philosophers to women in the civilizing process, however, adopting it to the aesthetic and political categories of the sublime and beautiful, as well as to his critique of the French Revolution. According to Burke, 'Women's capacity to embody the principle of beauty and be loved by the masses helped their aris-

tocratic men govern smoothly.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, Burke saw the participation of women in the French Revolution as a clear sign of the denaturalization of moral sentiments and relapse into savagery.

The equation of women with the beautiful, the smooth and gentle ran counter to the belief that encumbered femininity with lax morals and insatiable sexual appetites.<sup>11</sup> In contrast to this animalistic prejudice against women, the benefits coupled with women's gentleness were not negligible, for their assumed innate meekness helped promote civilization by filing off the 'rough angles' of the male sex and having 'their harshness and asperities smoothed and polished by assimilating with beings of more softness and refinement', as Hannah More argued.<sup>12</sup> Female gentleness should reform men and cure them from their inherent aggressiveness. *Persuasion* partakes in this debate by bringing up models of gentleness and the fear of violence respectively in the depictions of Anne and Wentworth. More than one critic has commented on the Byronic aggressiveness engendered in Wentworth's pride, independence and self-assertiveness.<sup>13</sup> A less noted aspect is Wentworth's uneasiness with seemingly exclusive expectations of women who fuse fortitude of mind and meekness. His unconditioned adherence to fortitude almost costs the life of Louisa Musgrove, who, longing to impress him with her unbowed self-will, jumps from the stairs of Lyme and almost succumbs to a severe concussion. On the other hand, he is attracted to Burke's or Rousseau's conception of female gentleness. With regard to the character of Wentworth, *Persuasion* represents a mature version of the *Bildungsroman*, since the narrative progressively delineates Wentworth's *Bildung* in his exploration of these expectations and his understanding of Anne Elliot.

Anne is quite an interesting figure and the novel's ramifications are illuminated as we read her character along with other writers' reflections on female gentleness. Mary Wollstonecraft wrestled with gentleness. On the one hand, Rousseau's association of gentleness with subordination alarmed her; on the other hand, she regarded genuine gentleness as the highest expression of humanity:

Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long-suffering, are such amiable God-like qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them; and, perhaps, no representation of his goodness so strongly fastens on the human affections as those that represent him abundant in mercy and willing to pardon. Gentleness, considered in this point of view, bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl.<sup>14</sup>

Wollstonecraft associates gentleness with manners only to go on elaborating that morals are the foundations of that very quality: gentleness is the unforced result of human affection but also a product of moral agency. Similarly, Hannah

More is afraid of girls being educated into artificiality just for the sake of appearing feminine: woman's submissiveness is unquestioned in her writings but, in her opinion, it should be the result of parents inculcating their daughters with 'Christian meekness' and not the false refinement propagated in doctrines of femininity.<sup>15</sup> However, Wollstonecraft addresses gentleness as one of the 'God-like qualities' that the Christian religion wants to see running through the veins of all, while More holds fast to a gendered conception: girls should be taught meekness, if not for pleasing men, then for pleasing God.

Where does Anne Elliot stand with respect to these opinions? Anne's gentleness is explicitly invested with Christian qualities and agency: being the most socially involved, she is the most Christian of all Austen's heroines. Her participation is continually translated in terms of usefulness. Even her small body size is employed to underpin helpfulness instead of frailty, as Mr and Mrs Musgrove wonder 'how those little fingers of yours fly about' while playing country dances for the Uppercross party (P 45). Wentworth acknowledges that 'only at Uppercross had he learned to do her justice' (P 226). What Wentworth meets with at Uppercross is both Anne's agency and tenderness in mothering the Musgrove children, and in mediating between Mary, her husband and her in-laws. The reader, however, has more hints than Wentworth to recognize the content and extent of Anne's gentleness, especially as she satisfies Wollstonecraft's criteria of godlike qualities and More's idea of usefulness by her philanthropic work. Without much propaganda, Austen informs us of Anne's going on 'any visit of charity in the village', implying that they are as frequent as her solitary walks on her father's estate (P 125). Judging from Anne's deep identification with nature, we can safely assume that she is quite often on philanthropic missions. No other Austen heroine is as busy a protagonist as Anne. When plaintive Mary whines about being neglected by Anne's long absence, her sister assures her that she has many things on her hands, which provokes Mary's surprise:

'Dear me! what can you possibly have to do?'

'A great many things, I assure you. More than I can recollect in a moment; but I can tell you some. I have been making a duplicate of the catalogue of my father's books and pictures. I have been several times in the garden with Mackenzie, trying to understand, and make him understand, which of Elizabeth's plants are for Lady Russell. I have had all my own little concerns to arrange, books and music to divide, and all my trunks to repack, from not having understood in time what was intended as to the waggons: and one thing I have had to do, Mary, of a more trying nature: going to almost every house in the parish, as a sort of take-leave. I was told that they wished it. But all these things took up a great deal of time'. (P 37)

This passage is proof of Anne's interest in three important areas: literary heritage, cultivation of nature and philanthropy. Interest in natural sciences, especially botany, was an accomplishment that female writers wanted to see inculcated

in the women of the younger generation. Maria Edgeworth, for example, promotes in *Belinda* (1801) female knowledge of botany through her depiction of the young Helena Delacour, who takes an eager interest in plants and insects. Philanthropy was desired, especially when prompted by the identification with disadvantaged fellow beings.

The mentioning of philanthropic visits takes us back to Emma, whose character gains social depth by emphasizing not only her sense of practical relief, when she brings soup to the sick cottagers, but also her sober evaluation of the labouring class:

She understood their ways, could allow for their ignorance and their temptations, had no romantic expectations of extraordinary virtue from those for whom education had done so little; entered into their troubles with ready sympathy, and always gave her assistance with as much intelligence as good-will. In the present instance, it was sickness and poverty together which she came to visit. (E 75)

Emma's attitude echoes Wollstonecraft's sympathy with working women whose deficiency in virtue and dignity is explained by their lack of education. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft writes that those whom Burke had called 'the vilest of women' are those 'who gained a livelihood by selling vegetables or fish, who never, had any advantages of education ... they have almost insuperable obstacles to surmount in their progress towards true dignity and character'.<sup>16</sup> In Austen's novels, philanthropy is the result of a sympathy that helps us identify with others through an awareness of their resources and limits. Thus, Anne sympathetically admits that the change of leadership that has taken Sir Elliot to Bath and established the Crofts in Kellynch-hall will have a positive impact on the community: she 'felt the parish to be so sure of a good example, and the poor of the best attention and relief' and believed that in spite of her losing a home, 'Kellynch-hall had passed into better hands than its owners' (P 117). But in order to be sympathetic with the poor, one has to visit their cottages and experience first-hand their needs and living conditions. Thus, philanthropic work increases considerably both one's field of cognition and action. From the viewpoint of contemporary theories of civilization as formulated by John Millar, 'the progress of women equates with greater public visibility'.<sup>17</sup> It cannot be a coincidence that Austen seeks in her later novels to expand this 'public visibility' beyond women's increasing opportunities to leave their retirement and appear in public spaces in mixed company, which Millar recognizes as a liberty brought about by commercial civilization (and which occurs in all Austen novels). In *Emma* and *Persuasion*, heightened female public appearance is invested with socio-economic impact and underscored by a kind of morality that 'entered into their [the poor's] troubles with ready sympathy' (E 75).

Due to her philanthropic commitment, Anne comes close to More's ideal upper- and middle-class woman and at first sight Anne seems to prove More's conviction that 'a docile girl won't lack understanding for all purposes of a useful, happy and pious life'.<sup>18</sup> Both More and Wollstonecraft wanted to see their female fellows as active and useful society members, and critics have at times failed to see that their writings had similar targets: 'We may adopt it as a general maxim, that an obliging, weak, yielding, complaisant friend, full of small attentions, with little religion, little judgment, and much natural acquiescence and civility, is a most dangerous, though generally a too much desired confidante'.<sup>19</sup> We would readily attribute these clear-sighted words to Wollstonecraft, who lamented the fact that men degraded themselves by courting such weak beings. However, the quotation stems from More, rendering the differences between More and Wollstonecraft more nuanced. Against this backdrop, we can read Austen's portrayal of Anne Elliot as an ingenious participation in this discourse.

Austen read More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1809) and as Peter Knox-Shaw argues she must have been familiar with Mary Wollstonecraft's reformatory agenda.<sup>20</sup> While in More's fiction the admirable wife is useful and active (like Anne Elliot), she is also compliant, obedient to her father. The latter part is what distinguishes Austen from More and it is precisely what Wentworth has a hard time grasping. However useful and active, Anne Elliot differs from More's compliant and voiceless Lucilla Stanley. This association would be a reiteration of Wentworth's assessment, who has mistaken Anne for someone lacking the resoluteness to carry out her own ideas, interpreting Anne's withdrawal as the victory of parental influence over the child's independent judgement, evoking an important statement made by Wollstonecraft: 'A slavish bondage to parents cramps every faculty of the mind'.<sup>21</sup> This explains also his analogy of female fortitude with the 'beautiful glossy nut' which 'has outlived all the storms of autumn' without a 'puncture' or 'a weak spot'. While such a hazel nut has resisted the violence of nature and kept its form unchanged, 'his brethren have fallen and been trodden under foot' (P 81). The latter kind of nuts exemplify Wentworth's evaluation of Anne's faculties as 'trodden' or 'cramped', to use Wollstonecraft's words, by parental opposition. In his opinion, Anne's attachment to Lady Russell, the subordination of her judgement to that lady's prejudice, has cramped her faculties: 'She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity' (P 57). Subordination in Wentworth's world is lack of fortitude, and gentleness gone too far. That Austen takes his critique seriously, becomes evident through Anne's chagrin and sense of irreparable loss in her mature evaluation of the past:

She was persuaded that under every disadvantage of disapprobation at home, and every anxiety attending his profession, all their probable fears, delays, and disappoint-

ments, she should yet have been a happier woman in maintaining the engagement, than she had been in the sacrifice of it. (P 29)

The last two quotations contrast the two different meanings that 'persuasion' has in *Persuasion*.<sup>22</sup> Wentworth understands persuasion as a weakness that subdues free thinking, the triumph of authority over Anne's timidity and acquiescent will. Anne, on the other hand, is persuaded, as in 'convinced', that although an early engagement would have spared her a great deal of heartbreak, she made the right choice at that moment in the past. However, it is precisely Wentworth's critique and his interpretation of 'persuasion' that has aroused Anne's consciousness for the tightrope walk between gentleness and submissiveness, as her reflections show: 'She had only meant to oppose the too-common idea of spirit and gentleness being incompatible with each other' (P 161). In the narrative, 'persuasion' is a linguistically elastic term that holds together the idea of spirit and gentleness, self-confidence and malleability, self-sufficient reasoning and affections. These ideas are conceptualized as exclusive by Wentworth, while Anne believes them to co-exist as they do within the word 'persuasion'. She embodies the ideological elasticity that enables not only the reconciliation of these ideas but the fruitful exchange between them.

The word 'spirit' deserves closer attention since it is brought into connection with the most interesting characters of the novels. Spirit in *Persuasion* participates in the discourse of moral character, standing for individual judgement and fortitude. Louisa Musgrove's self-will is supported by her being a 'high-spirited, joyous, talking' girl, while Mrs Smith's fortitude is conveyed through the fact that 'neither sickness nor sorrow seemed to have closed her heart or ruined her spirits' (P 157, 144). As Anne observes in awe, Mrs Smith's is not a stoic fortitude (like Elinor Dashwood's), neither 'a submissive spirit' but 'that elasticity of mind, that disposition to be comforted, that power of turning readily from evil to good, and of finding employment which carried her out of herself, which was from Nature alone' (P 145). However, we should notice that with this definition of 'spirit' Anne unknowingly delivers a description of herself: she has lived eight years of wretchedness while improving her mind through a wide range of literature. Scott's and Byron's poetry are well-known to her, so are the philosophical and moralist writings; she has learned to appreciate and cultivate nature as a locus of emotional relief through walking and gardening and she has been an active participant in domestic and communal life through philanthropy. So then, Wentworth's wish for a woman with 'a strong mind' is satisfied in Anne's mental elasticity, i.e. her ability to make the best of unfavourable circumstances. One realizes how unfavourable Anne's station is only if we take into consideration that after her mother's death, she has enough reason to sink into paralysing despondence while living with a vain, unloving father like Sir Elliot and two abu-



sive sisters. The party of Kellynch-hall has no higher description for Anne than that she 'was nobody ... she was only Anne' (P 7). Although 'Anne herself was become hardened to such affronts', her heart has not turned away from human affections (P 33). Here is one crucial difference between Anne and Isabella: the latter's gentleness stems from her inability to feel 'the little injuries' caused by her husband's sullenness, while Anne registers domestic neglect painfully (E 79).

The bleakness of an unhappy domestic life was explored by many women writers for the reformatory purpose of domestic relations, but also to develop understanding for the difficulties and the estrangement arising from dysfunctional families. Lady Delacour in Edgeworth's *Belinda* (1801), only to mention one such exploration of the tragic turn that domestic alienation could take in an aristocratic family, is thrown upon dangerous 'frolic', prodigal lifestyle, consumption of opium and complete estrangement from maternal ties.<sup>23</sup> Belinda's merit consists in awakening Lady Delacour's desire to turn from evil to good and find fulfilment in human affections. In contrast to Lady Delacour, Anne does not need the intervention of a friend to be reminded of a purposeful way of living. On the contrary, literary interests, love of nature, and cultural and social discourse have become of greater import to her because of the aching void left by a loveless family life. In other words, this is the most valid proof of her elasticity and fortitude that consist in 'turning readily from evil to good'. Anne's gentleness is not simply as deeply rooted as her spirit, but seems to spring from that very source: an affirmative attitude to what life has to offer in natural resources, cultural heritage and domestic affections, despite adversities.

The desire to belong, love and be loved by someone is in fact what paradoxically induces her to give up Frederick Wentworth. She refuses to see her decision as 'feebleness of character' or as the result of 'over-persuasion', as Frederick speculates, and we have to wait until the end of the novel to hear Anne's vindication against the charge of 'submissiveness' and lack of fortitude (P 57). She has been advised by Lady Russell, whose affection rather than authority has gained her respect and trust: 'I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it, that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me she was in the place of a parent' (P 230). This may mislead one to read Anne's submission as the 'slavish bondage to a parent' that Wollstonecraft abhors, but it is not. This is ruled out right in the beginning, when we learn that Sir Elliot did not approve of the match either, but towards him Anne does not feel any sense of duty, because there is no affection between them. With a swift sentence that highlights Anne's resolution and gentleness at the same time, the narrator dispels any tinge of blind filial obedience: 'Young and gentle as she was, it might yet have been possible to withstand her father's ill-will' (P 27). Had Anne met only with his resistance, she would not have broken off the engagement. However, things are different with Lady Russell;

she is a friend who has kindly chosen to compensate for a mother's love: 'her steadiness of opinion and such tenderness of manners' had to have their share of weight in the argument. Once adding to a friend's disapproval 'The belief of being prudent, and self-denying principally for *his* advantage', Anne came to the persuasion – i.e. the conviction – that the engagement would have been a harmful thing (P 27).

From Wentworth's point of view, the right moral decision would have been the continuation of the engagement. In his eyes, Anne has failed to individuate herself through independent actions. Individual reason, supported by their mutual feeling, should have been enough for Anne to oppose anyone. Wentworth's dissatisfaction with Anne anticipates Freud's with women as the other sex, because they 'show less sense of justice than men ... [and] are less ready to submit to the great exigencies of life, that they are more often influenced in their judgments by feelings of affection or hostility', which he identifies as a problem in women's development and particularly their experience of relationships.<sup>24</sup> To stretch the comparison a bit further, Wentworth equates Anne's deference with subordination, betraying his own uneasiness with female construction, just as Freud puzzled over women's otherness.<sup>25</sup> Wentworth (like Freud) from his masculine standpoint cannot allow for another explanation. But Anne comes from another standpoint: what Wentworth names deference has been in fact a moral concern, and she never regrets having made her decision by including the feelings towards both Wentworth and her surrogate mother. Lady Russell has deserved this attention by investing time and love in Anne; as for Wentworth, Anne's greatest proof of love is having self-denyingly given him up for his own good. The long engagement at a time when he was about to start a rather insecure career would have but increased his cares. Anne's analysis of the past reminds one of Gilligan's ethic of care, according to which decisions upon rightful or wrongful moral behaviour escape the universality of an ethic of justice. From the standpoint of an ethic of care, 'judgments are tied to feelings of empathy and compassion.'<sup>26</sup> Freud explicitly finds women deficient in their understanding of justice, ignoring that consideration for all parties involved in moral quandaries is a valid way of being morally mature and responsible.

The emphasis on empathy in philosophical writings is not a postmodern phenomenon. Empathy, a synonym for the eighteenth-century term 'sympathy', moves Emma and Anne to philanthropy, while empathy has been Anne's motivation in decision-making. By the time Austen wrote *Persuasion*, the French Revolution had ended in bloodshed and the human sacrifice it had claimed had already started to appeal to the sympathy of those who in the name of reason and justice had been its very supporters. Sympathy gained significance in the political writings of the end of the eighteenth century. Godwin, for instance, who in his first edition of *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, and Its Influence*

on *General Virtue and Happiness* (1793) had established reason as the sole determinant of human action, in the second edition (1796) and in the third (1798), puts increasing emphasis on the role of sympathy in moral judgements: 'Not only the passions of men, but their very judgments, are to a great degree the creatures of sympathy.'<sup>27</sup> His *Things as They Are, or The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), with its two endings, testifies to Godwin's growing appreciation of sympathy in moral judgements.<sup>28</sup> In its final version, the heroism embodied by Caleb is articulated as the sympathy he can arouse in the audience through the account of his sufferings and his affection for his persecutor, Falkland.<sup>29</sup> Personal fortitude is not translated exclusively in terms of justice based on reason, but on the ongoing dialogue between reason and feeling. In the final version, Falkland is a reformed man, because Caleb succeeds in awakening his sympathy: 'he was penetrated with my grief and compunction'.<sup>30</sup> The same connotation of being penetrated with the other's feelings is conveyed by Wentworth in his letter to Anne: 'You pierce my soul', he writes, after having eavesdropped on Anne's eulogy of female constancy 'when existence or when hope is gone' (P 222). The common feature of the sympathy endorsed by these two narratives is that heroism is realized in the relinquishing of a discourse of individual rights and the hero's adherence to human connectedness. To a certain extent, Caleb feels himself responsible for the misery he has gone through and brought upon Falkland, because he has failed to appeal to Falkland's sympathy before the trial: 'I am sure that if I had opened my heart to Mr. Falkland, if I had told to him privately the tale that I have now been telling, he could not have resisted my reasonable demand.'<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Wentworth wants to know from Anne whether she would have accepted him, had he renewed his advances six years ago, to which Anne answers affirmatively. Wentworth's self-reproach resembles Caleb's:

'Good God!' he cried, 'you would! It is not that I did not think of it, or desire it, as what could alone crown all my other success; but I was proud, too proud to ask again. I did not understand you. I shut my eyes, and would not understand you, or do you justice ...' (P 231)

Both Caleb and Wentworth recognize that because they have been alien to a discourse of sympathy and insisted on their just resentment, they have unwittingly increased pain. Both novels identify 'the origins of aggression in the failure of connection', which, according to Gilligan, corresponds to an ethics of care rather than justice.<sup>32</sup> Gilligan's distinction between an ethic of justice and an ethic of care can be read as describing Wentworth before and after his sympathy for Anne's viewpoint is activated: 'the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationships, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach.'<sup>33</sup> Wentworth has gone a long way when he

realizes that care cannot be subordinated to justice and that to do justice to someone means to open one's eyes and heart to their particular standpoint.

This offers some valuable insights into heroism. When Wentworth starts to do Anne justice, he becomes the true hero of the novel. What I want to suggest here is not a denial of the prominence of Frederick Wentworth in the novel's plot. He is upheld in Anne's recollection as the protagonist of her life story, outshining William Elliot, Charles Musgrove or Captain Benwick – in short all other male representations that the novelist stages as Anne's potential companions. In the course of the novel, heroism/heroism has undergone significant changes and the criteria that make a person a hero/heroine have shifted considerably. Wentworth is first and foremost associated with a kind of heroism that is allegedly grounded in the independence of a fearless young man. His first appearance in Anne's recollections of the broken engagement as the one with whom no other man 'could bear a comparison' is rather a humble one, when all his additional professional success is revealed (P 28). His reception by the Musgroves establishes him as a national hero. This is partly fuelled by their engrossment with members of the navy, having had themselves a son under Captain Wentworth's command. However, Captain Wentworth's heroism is not revealed in his dealings with the Musgrove's profligate son, but in his naval career and especially the ships he has commanded. Wentworth captures immediately everybody's attention: 'His profession qualified him, his disposition led him to talk' (P 59). He exercises a profession of 'national importance', the narrator admits, and Anne herself acknowledges that 'he had everything to elevate him' (P 236, 67). In a time when Britain's safety depended on its control of the seas, it is not surprising that Wentworth's character should arouse interest. Moreover, he is a man of masculine beauty and of intriguing character. Proud and resolute, critics have identified him with the self-made man, evoking, as Jocelyn Harris has noted, the legend about Nelson's meritorious rise in the navy.<sup>34</sup>

Due to the numerous representations that naval affairs receive in *Persuasion* and especially Captain Wentworth's social rise, critics have assumed that the navy is portrayed in 'a wholly positive light' and celebrated for its rewards as 'a properly meritocratic system which rewards heroism and ability.'<sup>35</sup> However, a quick look at Captain Wentworth's own accounts reveals the narrator's intention to demystify 'the ostentatious cult of heroism and state service that arose during the war' and was particularly visible in the veneration of Nelson after his death at Trafalgar in 1805.<sup>36</sup> Wentworth's own account fails to offer any specific information on the political issues of the epoch and the national concerns at stake. Critics have had to look behind the names of the ships and the places he has visited to gain a picture of the political dimension of his endeavours as a national hero. However, what his accounts register specifically is the money-making process that motivates naval interests in general. First, it was not heroic

feelings that prompted him to enter the navy, but unemployment: 'I wanted to be doing something' (P 61). Second, no patriotic fervour is invoked when he recalls falling in 'with the very French frigate I wanted' (P 61). The ship is remembered simply because the commission made from its capture increased not only his fortune, but also his influence. He was assigned a new ship, which he recalls nostalgically, though again not for heroic reasons: 'Ah! Those were pleasant days when I had the *Laconia*! How fast I made money in her' (P 62). Far from contributing his successful career to outstanding heroism, Wentworth, a child of fortune, congratulates himself on sheer luck: it was a great luck to have the *Asp* assigned to him, says Admiral Croft; it was a stroke of luck to fall in with exactly the kind of ship he wanted and even greater luck to lead the *Asp* to shore a couple of hours prior to a gale that would have otherwise destroyed it.<sup>37</sup> No great naval forbearance was asked from him, since 'I never had two days of foul weather all the time I was at sea in her' (P 61).

How he got his first employment on the *Asp* should not be such a matter of luck, unless we consider luck his sister's being married to an admiral. With *Mansfield Park*'s William Price in mind, we know that having an admiral as one's connection can indeed make your luck. Patronage lurks behind Captain Wentworth's, even more so when he humbly acknowledges: 'I felt my luck, admiral, I assure you' (P 61). With such a connection as the admiral, whose range of influence and acquaintance we recognize during his walk with Anne through Bath, Frederic Wentworth's sanguine hopes of rising socially can hardly be disappointed. Naval heroism in *Persuasion* takes its final cut from Admiral Croft, who, hoping to prove wrong Wentworth's resolution not to take his wife aboard a ship, anticipates future wars gleefully: 'if we had the good luck to live to another war' (P 65). Considering that the plot starts unfolding 'in the summer of 1814', i.e. a couple of months after Napoleon's exile to Elba, and less than a year before the three eventful days of the battle at Waterloo in May 1815, the admiral's reference to a future war as a lucky occurrence has a somewhat macabre tinge (P 10). This is a mischievous detail, especially because the war anticipated by the admiral must have been fresh in Austen's mind when she started the novel in August 1815, and in that of *Persuasion*'s first readership in 1818. War and imperialist conflicts are less evoked as a time of national distress than as the opportunity to increase one's riches. In short, the navy seems to be the place where a young man with connections can make his fortune or be 'sent to sea, because he was stupid and unmanageable on shore', like the son of the Musgroves (P 48).

Jocelyn Harris convincingly points out that 'In *Persuasion*, Austen finds fault with all the available models for an English war hero.'<sup>38</sup> I would go even further and suggest that as the independent hero is demystified, Austen caters to the heroism embodied by Anne Elliot as the synthesis of gentleness and fortitude, connectedness and agency. With the increasing value that the narrator lays upon the unsaid

and hidden, heroism is undermined (naval heroism superseded by money-making, as Wentworth's rise is attributed to luck and possibly patronage) and vindicates heroism (Anne's intrinsic elasticity of mind). Why vindicate? Because although Anne is the unrivalled heroine of the novel, she is not the reigning character. Two comparisons help understand my word choice: Emma is the heroine of *Emma* and also of fictional Highbury. She enjoys no less a status than that of human 'perfection', to use Mr Weston's words, while *Persuasion*'s Anne, though equated in the end by the hero with 'perfection itself', is unseen and untalked of for most of the novel (E 306; P 226). She starts the narrative as a silent presence, and as such, she reminds one of More's Lucilla Stanley, another silent presence. However, the difference between these women is noteworthy. Lucilla is talked of as the perfect woman – an example to be followed. Her education has been greatly in her father's hands, while Anne is a 'nobody' in her family circle who 'had never, since the age of fourteen, never since the loss of her dear mother, known the happiness of being listened to, or encouraged by any just appreciation or real taste' (P 44). While Lucilla's character and accomplishments are continually advertised, Anne is ignored: even when she plays for the Musgroves, her talent goes unnoticed, 'her performance was little thought of', although 'she played a great deal better than either of the Miss Musgroves' (P 44). If silence stages Lucilla as a heroine of feminine modesty and grace, Anne Elliot's silence is the result of neglect and as such it is not aspired to but endured. While More relates the plot through the hero's eyes and fails to give a voice to Lucilla's thoughts and mental powers, Austen constructs the greatest part of the novel from Anne's perspective and thus registers what most of the novel's characters fail to do: Anne's unspoken opinions, secret discontents and unvindicated rights.

### Impartial Bodies

In *Persuasion*, silence emerges as an epitome for endurance and is increasingly associated with the domestic. When agitated by an encounter with Wentworth, Anne feels herself 'fit only for home, where she might be sure of being as silent as she chose' (P 213). As already noted, in *Persuasion*, silence is not celebrated; rather, it is the result of indifference and abandonment. Anne can dwell on her thoughts whether she likes it or not. Even though we are induced to think that this is Anne's particular case among the dysfunctional Elliot family, she herself links it with woman's condition. In her discussion with Captain Harville, she argues that women by their position in society tend to be more constant than men. Baffled by Captain Benwick's recovery from the death of his fiancée (Captain Harville's sister) and his rapid attachment to Louisa Musgrove, Captain Harville assures Anne that his sister would not have got over him so quickly. The following dialogue ensues:



'No,' replied Anne, in a low feeling voice. 'That, I can easily believe.'

'It was not in her nature. She doated on him.'

'It would not be the nature of any woman who truly loved.'

Captain Harville smiled, as much as to say, 'Do you claim that for your sex?' and she answered the question, smiling also, 'Yes. We certainly do not forget you, as soon as you forget us. It is, perhaps our fate rather than our merit. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey upon us. You are forced on exertion. You have always a profession, pursuits, business of some sort or other, to take you back into the world immediately, and continual occupation and change soon weaken impressions.' (P 218)

Here, Anne's discourse serves a double agenda: first, she bares masculine pursuits from their heroic claim in order to locate heroism in the domestic. Not surprisingly, *Persuasion* ends in a similar vein: 'She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm, for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues, than in its national importance' (P 236). Second, she maintains that domestic (female) heroism is not innate, but constructed through social practice. Unlike Dr George Cheyne (Richardson's doctor), who had argued by the mid-eighteenth century that, due to the female nervous system, the passions made greater impressions on women, Anne comes to the same conclusion by a different argument.<sup>39</sup> She attributes the greater constancy of women to the space they are given in society and to the rigid division of responsibilities between the sexes. Thus, distinctive gender features are suggested to be the product of social factors and not essentialist attributes and as such always in development.

This is very similar to Wollstonecraft, who, expanding the tradition of feminist thinkers such as Damaris Masham, asserts that from early childhood character formation is gendered: 'the doll will never excite attention unless confinement allows her [the little girl] no alternative'.<sup>40</sup> Both Wollstonecraft and Anne thematize what Judith Butler has famously baptized 'gender performativity', i.e. the formation of gender features which results from reiterated acts that become universalized and naturalized. To take the little girl with the doll, Butler would say, as does Wollstonecraft, that it is not nature that induces girls to play with dolls, but the reiteration of the assumption that it is natural for girls to do so: thus, a social practice is reiterated long enough to appear as a law of nature. It is precisely in nature that Captain Harville takes refuge to make a case for essentialist instead of performed genders: 'I believe in a true analogy between our bodily frames and our mental; and that our bodies are the strongest, so are our feelings; capable of bearing most rough usage, and riding out the heaviest weather' (P 219). The distinction is crucial, since the idea that women's existence is bound to certain innate features shuts down the possibility of change and progress, while gender performativity, as Butler insists, carries inside the

seed for reform.<sup>41</sup> Harville rehashes the rhetoric of the lady of sensibility, bringing forward the theory of the weaker nerves that make women susceptible to irritable tempers and unstable feelings. For this reason, I disagree with Mary Waldron's conclusion that Anne's intervention does not encompass the condition of woman as a category, but is only employed to drive home to Wentworth Anne's unchanged attachment to him.<sup>42</sup>

Captain Harville's conviction of a man's stronger passion is not an exception and Austen's critique of that claim is not one either. His claim was a stumbling stone for many radical women writers, such as Mary Darby Robinson, who wrote in *A Letter to the Women of England* (1799):

Man will say his passions are stronger than those of women; yet we see women rush not only to ruin, but to death, for objects they love; while men exult in an unmeaning display of caprice, intrigue, and seduction, frequently, without even a zest for the vices they exhibit.<sup>43</sup>

This passage speaks directly to the concerns of *Persuasion* and especially to the romance between Louisa Musgrove and Captain Wentworth. Louisa literally rushes almost to death in order to impress Wentworth with her resoluteness, while he uses her thoughtlessly as an object of 'caprice' and 'seduction' without even being aware of the damage he causes. Wentworth's later self-criticism reveals – to put it in Mary Robinson's words – the lack of a zest for vice: 'I had not thought seriously on this subject before. I had not considered that my excessive intimacy must have its danger of ill consequence in many ways' (P 227). Evidently, Austen was keenly attuned to the debates of her time and that she had thought deeply enough on the subject to be able to contradict those claims that wronged women. Although Anne has made herself clear that she regards gender as being constructed rather than innate, she is willing to level with Harville, only to finally turn the tables on his essentialist belief: 'the same spirit of analogy will authorise me to assert that ours are the most tender. Man is more robust than woman, but he is not longer-lived; which exactly explains my view of the nature of their attachments' (P 219). She exploits essentialist grounds only to demonstrate that what they purport as universal and self-evident truths are in fact susceptible to interpretation. Her argument offers a new perspective: if the body materializes emotional life (as Harville claims), then why set out from female physical inferiority and not the longer life of the female body? Ultimately, the body, whether male or female, ceases to be an unquestionable fact, but emerges as a site of interpretation, and these interpretations, as Anne goes on to explain, are always partial and dependent on the party that furthers them.

Anne can be aligned with that strand of the Scottish Enlightenment represented by Hume, Smith and Millar, for whom the social position of women changes along with the evolving civilization and should not be analysed by rely-

ing on the evidence of nature, but rather the workings of history. This stance is opposed to Rousseau's emphasis on nature as the barometer of the order of things and of natural gender rights. As Karen O'Brien has shown, this approach of the Scottish philosophers to the progress of civilization 'set firmer limits to man's powers of moral cognition that saw moral consciousness itself as a historical formation, and history itself essential to the understanding of how moral, legal and political rules come about again and gain their obligatory force'.<sup>44</sup> Anne's words share the important assumption with these Scottish philosophers that womanhood is not a stable category and that the differences between man and woman can be accounted for in social, economic and even geographical terms. For instance, Sophia Croft's easy manners and her 'looking as intelligent and keen as any of the officers around here' are strongly influenced by her geographical mobility (P 158).

Anne not only claims constancy for her own sex due to the retirement they mostly live in, but also believes it to be disadvantageous for women: 'All the privilege I claim for my own sex (it is not a very enviable one, you need not covet it) is that of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone' (P 221). If women presumably 'merely suffered the experience of the world, in contrast to the wilful engagement and self-fashioning that Lockean psychology promised to all men', Anne makes a convincing case that this is not the natural consequence of physical constitution, but of a socio-economic setting that denied 'wilful engagement and self-fashioning' to the female sex.<sup>45</sup> Having also the theory of physical distinction turned against him, Captain Harville has nothing left but to fall back on wiser men, those who throughout the centuries have reiterated woman's inconstancy: 'Songs and proverbs, all talk of woman's fickleness', adding significantly 'But perhaps you will say, these were all written by men' (P 220). As Anne's famous answer demonstrates, authorship makes all the difference in story-telling: 'Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything' (P 220). These lines echo Catherine Morland's discontent with womanless Western history. But it is even more telling that the dissatisfaction with masculine history-writing comes from Anne, who, as mentioned above, is linked to the domestic, while the domestic itself is associated with silence. Hence Anne can be read as an embodiment of the private, unwritten and silenced pages of history. During Austen's time, the study of history and its veracity were being much discussed, but, according to Isobel Grundy, although women showed increased interest and participated in history-writing, their productions were not different from their male fellows. A desire to conform to an existing male model makes their works 'fall under the stricture of Austen's Catherine Morland about history writing'.<sup>46</sup> Such an example of interest and conformity is Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) and

particularly the chapter on history and romance, where a clergyman converts the heroine, Arabella, to his notions of historicity. Anne argues that because women are bound to confinement and because their education has been inferior to that of their male fellows, even when they participate in the production of knowledge (like Lennox's Arabella), they emulate the masculine style and topic, while the private experience of history remains an unwritten page.

Anne's story implies that the importance of this silenced page of history is to be particularly regretted because, in *Persuasion*, domesticity is the private and the private is the most reliable source of information. This is clearly supported by the narrator's introduction of Mrs Smith, and the importance Anne lays upon it. She gratefully acknowledges that what she hears from Mrs Smith is a valuable and irreplaceable piece of information: 'Mrs. Smith had been able to tell her what no one else could have done' (P 199). She offers Anne what Godwin distinguished as the most adequate and instructive source of knowledge when it comes to writing about historical figures – the private persona:

I am not contented to observe such a man [the historical man] upon the public stage, I would follow him into his closet. I would see the friend and the father of family, as well as the patriot. I would read his works and his letters, if any remain to us.<sup>47</sup>

In both *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*, the discovery of 'the father' or of 'the friend' incriminates 'the patriot'. As a guest in the abbey, Catherine is then quite perceptive to enter literally the closet of the General's wife hoping to find proof for her husband's atrocity. It suffices to observe the General as a father and to endure the consequences of his friendship in order to discover that the vest of the patriot is thin. As for *Persuasion*, Mr Elliot's letter to Mr Smith, occasioned by the latter's distress, reveals his cruelty. Of course, this letter does not make an entry in any history annals, since it remains in Mrs Smith's hands, nor does Mr Elliot's disdain of the cultural heritage of the estate of the Kellynch-hall make it into Sir Elliot's favourite reading, the Baronetage. In this kind of history that participates in the public sphere, the only things recorded are names, dates, property and lineage. Anthony Mandal has convincingly shown that, in *Persuasion*, 'it is the public sphere that is essentially untrustworthy ... the private world of conversation and correspondence offers the most unambiguous indication of people's characters and relationships'.<sup>48</sup> While this is exactly the type of information that history fails to report, it is the one valued by the novel. Catherine Morland and Anne Elliot, moving themselves in a domestic setting, feel themselves unrepresented in the pages of history. Anne's resistance to Captain Harville's arguments and her unbending eulogy on behalf of her sex mark a turn towards the personal story-writing of female subjects.

Captain Harville rightly asks if books are unreliable, how then can knowledge be achieved. He echoes the clergyman in Lennox's *The Female Quixote*, who

instructs Arabella that 'the great Use of Books, is that of participating without Labour or Hazard the Experience of others.'<sup>49</sup> But what if the stories we are told do not corroborate with our life story, when the correspondences between reading and living are inexistent?

This is in fact Anne's case. She knows her own heart; she knows it to have been constant. Her experience is a paramount proof that Harville ignores. Her individual story testifies to woman's constancy and that determines her position in the discussion. It is noteworthy that she refuses to strive for impartiality. Like teenage Austen, who wrote 'The History of England' with the self-assurance of a partial author, unlike Goldsmith who guaranteed impartiality in his *History of England* (1771), she knows human knowledge cannot be impartial: 'We never can expect to prove anything upon such a point. It is a difference of opinion which does not admit of proof. We each begin probably with a little bias towards our sex' (P 220).<sup>50</sup> Captain Harville's strategy of argumentation brings forward two patriarchal stances: first, the claim of male superiority and, when this fails, the urge for unity. But Anne refuses to relinquish partiality, and in doing so, she stands for what the political theorist Iris Young has called 'an emancipatory conception of public life' that 'can best ensure the inclusion of all persons and groups not by claiming a unified universality, but by explicitly promoting heterogeneity in public'.<sup>51</sup> Young is one of several twentieth-century theorists who challenge the claim of moral impartiality, an idea that found its most radical proponent in Godwin, or more precisely in his first edition of the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* (1793). Here, Godwin presents the reader with a moral quandary. If two people are caught in a fire and the writer is in the position to save one of them, which of the two should he choose? According to Godwin, ethical justice requires that the writer save the person who is of greater benefit to mankind. So if the people in danger are Fenelon and his chambermaid, then Fenelon has precedence over his chambermaid, even if the chambermaid was the writer himself, his mother or his wife. Godwin's radicalism and anarchism rests on the conviction that reason is the sole determinant of human action and that such a thing as impartial reason is possible and desirable. Interestingly, in his subsequent editions, he makes room for private feeling and experience-informed reason, an attitude, as mentioned earlier, anticipated by the second ending of *Caleb Williams*.

Yet, impartiality remains a central and fraught concept. With regard to *Persuasion*, it is important to emphasize that by endorsing the partiality of reasoning, Anne anticipates feminist theorists like Seyla Benhabib, Iris Young and Sandra Harding. In particular, Young comes very close to Anne Elliot's opinion when arguing:

The ideal of impartiality is an idealist fiction. It is impossible to adopt an unsituated point of view, and if a point of view is situated, it cannot stand apart from and understand all points of view ... one subject cannot fully empathize with another in a different social location, adopt her point of view; if that were possible then the social locations would not be different.<sup>52</sup>

First, Young couples partiality with empathy, stating that in order to understand the other, one needs to imagine his/her viewpoint, which is reminiscent of Adam Smith's notion of sympathy, and is exactly what Anne does when attempting to understand what it means for men to be exposed to the hardships of a life at sea. Second, although admitting the importance of this sympathetic change of perspectives, Young concludes that social locations are not fully reversible, because the 'I' can never become the 'other'. This reminds us of the discussion of *Sense and Sensibility*, which, drawing on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, argued that Austen sees a certain opacity between the 'I' and the 'other' as necessary for the continuation of dialogue. We can never become transparent to each other, because we can never share the same social and physical location. Anne recognizes gender to be one of the coordinates that determines our social location, i.e. the way we think, feel and act. Significantly, this is the difference that fuels the dialogue between her and Harville and leads to important issues, such as the authority of books and history.

In dismissing the authority of the books which tell about women from a supposedly impartial position that she demystifies as biased, Anne relies on women's experience.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, though, she acknowledges the partiality of all experience and its versatility, thus handling experience with the care with which standpoint theorists have recently handled it. As Sandra Harding, its most influential proponent, explains, standpoint theory sees experience 'not as the foundation for knowledge' in 'a pre-social, unmediated sense', but as 'a generator of critical perspectives' in the production of knowledge.<sup>54</sup> One important ramification of the validation of women's experience is the calling forth of what has been marginalized under the label of private to participate in and challenge the public heritage. This entails the importance of 'testifying to one's experience' and doing this 'in front of other people'.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, moral judgements cannot be assessed from the point of view of nowhere and in the absence of a community of knowledge. Instead, they are always situated and directed to a collective experience. Harding astutely elucidates that this approach to individual experience produces a new agent of knowledge: 'a collective subject of knowledge, not the kind of individualist subject who becomes a genius alone, and not the kind who joins a community and never has a thought outside the community either'.<sup>56</sup> I believe that this depiction applies to Anne Elliot, who is as reflective and individualized a person as she is committed to human connectedness and affections.



In *Persuasion*, Anne's moral development has been shaped by her particular position in the Elliot household. It is the experience of her mother's loss which has brought Anne to the conviction that she was right to follow Lady Russell's advice. It is her experience with the cottagers' poverty that has endowed her character with sympathy for Mrs Smith's social decline. It is experience with her own feelings that convinces her that no other man but Wentworth would do.<sup>57</sup> The valorization of experience, especially of female experience, brings us back to the beginning of this chapter. Experience is an important right that *Persuasion* grants to female development, to those creatures that, like Minerva, are expected to spring out fully formed from Jove's head. *Persuasion*'s insistence on experience widens our understanding of another female, namely Fanny Price, who resembles the wise and prudent Minerva. Anne and Fanny have often been assigned almost saint-like profiles and indeed there is a likeness of situation and character: they share a loveless family and strong principles. However, Anne's principles and beliefs bear the mark of time and experience. One of the reasons for Fanny's wooden (or 'insipid' as Mrs Austen would have it) impression on the reader is that her knowledge is acquired indirectly, just as was expected of a proper young lady.<sup>58</sup> Where Fanny relies on manuals of history or on Edmund's representation of reality, Anne has had first-hand experiences. Anthony Mandal states that *Persuasion* steers 'towards establishing a new destiny based on knowledge of past mistakes'.<sup>59</sup> I would say rather than acknowledging past mistakes, it works towards knowledge gained through past experiences and that elasticity of mind that makes the best of the past. Experience sets apart *Persuasion*'s heroism from other representations by Austen's contemporaries such as Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), where 'timeless femininity is eulogized and foregrounded'.<sup>60</sup> The freezing of the heroine that robs her of personally gained knowledge and its resulting maturity could explain Austen's dismissive commentary on *The Wild Irish Girl*: '[Owenson's] Irish Girl does not make me expect much. - If the warmth of her Language could affect the Body, it might be worth reading in this weather' (*Letters* 166).

*Persuasion* is a complex narrative: Anne, who is praised for her domestic habits, is also the one who mounts a critique of the division of late-eighteenth-century society into separate spheres sustained by the lack of female education and female participation in the public culture. According to Anne, the rigid distinction between feminine and masculine duties is also injurious to men:

'You have difficulties, and privations, and dangers enough to struggle with. You are always laboring and toiling, exposed to every risk and hardship. Your home, country, friends, all quitted. Neither time, nor health, nor life, to be called your own. It would be too hard, indeed' (with a faltering voice) 'if a woman's feelings were to be added to all this'. (P 219)

It is an equal distribution of responsibilities that Anne has in mind and that *Persuasion* allows for through the representation of Wentworth's sister, Sophia Croft: a woman who has accompanied her husband for fifteen years on almost all professional endeavours; who, when about to rent Kellynch-hall, 'asked more questions about the house, and terms, and taxes, than the admiral himself and seemed more conversant with business' (P 23); who is with her husband 'generally outdoors together, interesting themselves in their new possessions' (P 69); who 'whenever she spoke at all, it was very sensibly' (P 216); and who shares the reins of the carriage literally and figuratively. As Anne herself notices, 'their style of driving ... she imagined [was] no bad representation of the general guidance of their affairs' (P 85-6). No wonder the admiral can afford 'being called to order by his wife' (P 64) and is so used to her company that he asks Anne to take his arm during their stroll through Bath saying: 'I do not feel comfortable if I have not a woman here' (P 159).<sup>61</sup>

Anne's early identification with Sophia Croft is signalled by her unmatched admiration for this progressive woman. She enjoys the Crofts' company and observes their partnership in exclusively positive terms. It is good that Wentworth is Sophia's brother, because her experience has an emancipating influence on him, who generally is against women's presence on a ship. However, Sophia Croft has no difficulties in calling her brother to order too: 'I hate to hear you talking so, like a fine gentleman, and as if women were all fine ladies, instead of rational creatures. We none of us expect to be in smooth water all our days.' The admiral foresees that once married Wentworth 'will sing another tune' (P 65). At the end of the novel, Anne is described in naval terms as if she were already part of the naval routine: to be with Anne means to be 'in a very good anchorage' and 'wanting for nothing' (P 219). In contrast to other protagonist couples, whom Austen settles into precise dwellings, 'she never even hints as to where these two will finally live'.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the shifts of heroic values that occur during the novel signal Anne's gradual liberation from the confinement of silence and insignificance. As Wentworth's romantic heroism is questioned fundamentally, when he fails to catch Louisa and helplessly cries 'Is there no one to help me?', Anne's importance increases: 'Anne, Anne ... what is to be done next? What, in the heaven's name, is to be done next?' (P 103). Her practical sense is called forth and her experience appreciated. We can only imagine how easily she would adapt on a ship and how effectively she would lead where her husband's courage wavers.

Anne is Austen's lasting proof that 'education cannot unsex a woman; that tenderness of soul, and a love of social intercourse, will still be hers, even though she become a rational friend, and an intellectual companion. She will not by education be less tenacious of an husband's honour; though she may be rendered more capable of defending her own'.<sup>63</sup> These are the words of Mary Darby Robinson, another female novelist, but they provide us with an accurate description

of *Persuasion*'s heroine. The more *Persuasion*'s plot unfolds, the more we feel that Anne emerges as the link between those heated discussions around femininity and education, reason and sympathy, the public and the private sphere. Anne revises the ideal of civil public life which strives for homogeneity and equality relying on reason and eliminating desire and feeling, an ideal that, according to postmodern theorists, is inherent in Enlightenment thought.<sup>64</sup> Already in 1817, Reginald Farrer praised the vindication of feeling in *Persuasion*:

the book is purely a cry of feeling; and if you miss the feeling, you miss all ... Jane Austen has here reached the culminating point in her art of conveying emotion without expression. Though 'Persuasion' moves very quietly, without sobs or screams, in drawing-rooms and country-lanes, it is yet among the most emotional novels in our literature.<sup>65</sup>

No wonder that in comparison to Anne, Owenson's timelessly frozen Irish Girl fails to warm the body, because heroinism without experience precludes feeling. Anne departs from the ideology of the Proper Lady which ascribed only emotional responsiveness to female spectatorship, but no agency. In *Persuasion*, personal maturity and emotional responsiveness grow out of the particularities of a lived life whose heroine is not the spectator, but the agent of that life. The ideological implication of such a step is that what once was linked with submission and marginalization is now a component of 'the self-determination that the Enlightenment seemed to promise to every human being'.<sup>66</sup>

Anne's last act of communication with Captain Harville and later Captain Wentworth is not merely prompted by the need to find a reasonable consensus, but by the desire to love and belong. Regardless of her opinions, Anne's greatest regret would be: 'God forbid that I should undervalue the warm and faithful feelings of any of my fellow-creatures' (P 221). What a disarming effect her candour has on Captain Harville is best felt in his words and gestures: "You are a good soul", cried Captain Harville putting his hand on her arm quite affectionately' (P 221). In *Persuasion*, Austen questions the authority and impartiality of any narrator, herself included, however, without undercutting the significant weight assigned to 'physical gestures as modes of communication'.<sup>67</sup> If Habermas's communicative ethics focuses on the validity of people's reasons offered in support of their claims, Austen integrates in her communicative ethics the feelings that accompany and prompt people's utterances.<sup>68</sup> Wollstonecraft wrote along the same lines: 'We reason deeply when we feel forcibly'.<sup>69</sup> In vindicating feeling as being conversant with reason, Anne brings into dialogue different sets of dichotomies such as masculine and feminine, the public and the private, the individual and the communal. She ushers in a vision of civil society where 'sharing may not always be the goal' – because we all are biased by upbringing, education and gender – 'but the recognition and appreciation of difference in the con-

text of confrontation with power' is the premise for egalitarianism.<sup>70</sup> Otherness (which has historically been equated with femininity) is not perceived as a threat thanks to an 'elasticity of mind' that does not attempt to appropriate and unify what seems opposed. On the contrary, this 'elasticity of mind' does not perceive the world as a set of binary systems, but as simultaneous and embedded modes of being, different sources of knowledge that interact with each other and cannot be reduced to unity. Civilized consciousness features an elasticity that caters simultaneously to the exigencies of personal individuation and group awareness.

## AFTERWORD

This book has drawn on eighteenth-century and contemporary philosophical accounts of human society, gender and Western psychogenesis. It has used gender as a form of fulcrum on which to move Austen's novels and their relationship to thinkers who formed the *Zeitgeist* of the late eighteenth century, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Millar and Mary Wollstonecraft. It has also explored the ways in which Austen's novels interact with more recent ideas that grew out of the tradition of the Enlightenment, such as those of Norbert Elias and feminist theorists.

When mapping the human psyche, Freud drew on the universalizable categories furthered by several Enlightenment philosophers. According to Goudsblom and Mennell, Elias found missing in Freud's account 'a historical and sociological dimension to psychoanalysis' that 'necessitated a revision of some of its basic concepts and assumptions'.<sup>1</sup> Elias sought to rework the essentialist, ahistorical assumptions underlying Freudian psychoanalysis by tracing the processual character of the psyche through the last six centuries of Western societies, thus giving an account of the rise of the civilized habitus. His work is indebted to the conjectural history of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially John Millar's *The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks* (1771), where the processual character of society is already stated in the second part of its title: *An Inquiry in the Circumstances which Give Rise to Influence and Authority, in the Different Members of Society*. Millar's is a work that engages to a comparatively great extent with the position of women and the increasing significance they experience with the rise of commercial society. Its most valuable insight for the present study is that women have a history, that far from representing a stable, natural category, they are ascribed a rank and this rank has evolved with the evolution of modes of subsistence.

Austen's novels can be read in this intellectual context because they address women both as members of a rank who by ascription share distinct social responsibilities and expectations, and as a group whose social responsibilities and expectations change with time and social figurations. Despite the differences between the versatile female representations, Austen's work rests on the underlying and feminist recognition that to be born a woman means to be assigned



a gendered position. One of Austen's clearest pronouncements on women as a group with distinct features (while simultaneously resisting generalization) can be found in *Sanditon*, her latest unfinished work, where she writes: 'With due exceptions – woman feels for woman very promptly and compassionately' (*LS* 167). Even though Austen is cautious not to endorse an innate feminine subjectivity, she addresses the question of femininity as if women form a social group for which a distinction of gender works as a distinction of rank and, as such, contains general though not universalizable features that women share. It is not because women are worthier human beings than men that 'woman feels for woman very promptly and compassionately', but because they are ascribed a status through a practice of socialization that reiterates a set of common features.

Pursued by the feminist and post-structuralist debates of the twentieth century, this premise culminated in Judith Butler's gender performativity: although not essential and universalizable, gender carries distinctive features that are enforced through the reiteration of gender discourse and expectations as they are rooted in social life. However, this enforcement cannot be seen as fixed, because a reiterated process of socialization holds together both the contingency of change and affinity between women at different times of the civilizing process. The late eighteenth century was a pivotal step in this process, as Leonore Davidoff suggests: 'the period from the end of the eighteenth century was crucial in setting the stage, both in structural and intellectual terms, for the present situation.'<sup>2</sup> It is precisely the double-edgedness of rank as both distinctive and changeable that enables Austen to address women as a historical and social group (the most famous example of this being *Persuasion*), without falling prey to a universal female character. This is where Austen differs from the recognitions of the Scottish Enlightenment and aligns herself with Wollstonecraft. While in conjectural history women emerge as necessary instruments for the civilizing of men through female natural gentleness and docility, Austen's fiction traces a history that takes women seriously as agents who undergo a moral development in their own right. Although Millar, for example, traces the history of women, concluding that their heightened public visibility and the spilling over of their innate sensibility onto men represents the pinnacle of the female rank, Austen's novels allow us to consider women as individuals capable of willed action, whose personal growth affects but is not in the service of men. This differs significantly even from the progressive Millar, who implied 'an assumed passivity for women.'<sup>3</sup>

Terry Eagleton's valuable insights into the feminist movement of the twentieth century apply to the debates of the late eighteenth century: 'Feminism was not an isolatable issue, a particular "campaign" alongside other political projects, but a dimension which informed and interrogated every facet of personal, social and political life.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Austen's novels are not just stories about women written for women, but are directed to the broad community (now and then)

intermingling with the preoccupations of these communities. Eagleton's assessment of the feminist movement as a phenomenon that impregnates culture is a possible context in which to read Austen's work: 'The message of the women's movement, as interpreted by some of those outside of it, is not just that women should have equality of power and status with men; it's a questioning of all such power and status. It is not that the world will be better off with more female participation in it; it is that without the "feminization" of human history, the world is unlikely to survive.'<sup>5</sup> The late eighteenth century signals a significant step towards the feminization of history, when, as Jane Rendall convincingly demonstrates, for Wollstonecraft and many other writers the condition of women became the guide to the level of civilization attained.<sup>6</sup>

The feminization of history, and not less importantly of literature, is realized in Austen's fiction by making women's embeddedness the starting point of socio-philosophical reflections. In her novels, the endowment of women – of their physical and psychic constitution – with a historical dimension is linked to their formation as moral agents and is already hinted at in her teenage writings. These works contain a double processual quality. First, the polishing of outward manners that starts crystallizing in the latest productions of the juvenilia, *Lady Susan* and *Northanger Abbey*, has at its foundation mechanisms of self-regulated monitoring. The emphasis on self-monitoring serves the psychological individuation of her heroines as much as it points to the ways this individuation is influenced by the social situatedness in which it develops. Second, situatedness resists essentialist claims by drawing attention to a gender-biased construction of morality and a dominant principle of exclusion. Austen's productions gain depth through the epistemological uncertainties generated by the ambiguous status of women such as Eliza, Lady Susan, Frederica Vernon, Mrs Tilney or Mrs Smith. Austen's narratives use these uncertainties to call into question hegemonic discourse by demystifying the claim for a universal, impartial point of view.

*Mansfield Park* and *Emma*, with their two very different narratives, suggest that human autonomy can never abstract itself from the embeddedness and situatedness of human life. Each narrative sets limits: *Mansfield Park* traces the limitations back to the frailty of the body and the performative role of hegemonic power, while *Emma* points out that moral agency entails self-chosen restrictions that are tied to human affections, as much as it includes the capacity for self-detachment and self-questioning. Moral agency in civilized societies, as an expression of maturity, sees the self not as 'the sun around which the world revolves', in Elias's words, but in their acknowledgement that the other is the premise upon which the 'I' comes to existence. Existence, argued Bakhtin, is dialogic because I can get myself only through the other. So self-monitoring, while an indisputable sign of individuation, does not stand for self-sufficiency, a temptation that is acutely addressed in *Sense and Sensibility* and further developed

in *Pride and Prejudice*. The ideal of self-confidence is often linked to the ability to do without others or even experience otherness as a threat, something that the novelist dismisses in favour of a dialogic relationship between diverse, even opposed ideologies. This process of demystification reaches its fullest expression in *Persuasion*, especially by denouncing the principle of (female) exclusion that leads to a monological view of the world. This novel enriches the discourse of justice and dispassionate reason with an ethic of care that takes into consideration more than one standpoint, while recognizing the partiality of all viewpoints. Partiality can count as strength, as Anne Elliot insists when it undoes the universal validity of a discourse of justice and the illusion of self-sufficient reason.

The historical and social embeddedness that Austen emphasizes not only liberates the contemporary understanding of femininity from fixed, unchangeable categories but becomes a source of human knowledge for generations to come. When arguing that women, the way they behave, think and perceive the world is fully immersed in the historical and social dimension of being, Austen envisions such cognitive and emotive qualities of human existence drenched in communal life. Traditionally, twentieth-century critics, when acknowledging Austen's attention to the communal, use it to undercut her progressive qualities, concluding that Austen 'places her trust in important ways in the *sensus communis*, in the judgment of the collectivity rather than in individual judgment'.<sup>7</sup> This assessment clearly underestimates the fact that Austen's stylistic investment in her heroines' self-monitoring quality stands precisely as a mechanism that foregrounds individual judgement. The role for self-monitoring and introspection as results of the civilizing process has been underappreciated and more often been ascribed to Austen's keen sense of decorum. This study has linked self-monitoring to moral judgement and agency. Austen does not allow us as readers to lose sight of the embeddedness of all moral subjects, because judgement cannot emerge in moral vacuity but only in the context of, at times in opposition to, but never disconnected from a *sensus communis* (as in *Northanger Abbey*, *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*).

The assumption that communal life automatically denies personal agency defined for a long time our way of understanding not only Austen and Romantic women writing, but the era they lived in. As Jeffrey N. Cox astutely observes, 'Over time romanticism came to be defined as an exceptional artistic process cut off from the communal life that it both reflected and helped create'.<sup>8</sup> The 'larger theoretical turn from the role of community in producing romantic culture' led to a 'limited canon [that is] a marker of the limitation of the social nature of literature'.<sup>9</sup> This evaluation of an era has penetrated Austen's criticism. What Cox argues has been the policy of scholars of Romanticism, for whom '[t]he social is either an impossible illusion or impossibly violent', is true for the evaluation of Austen's novels.<sup>10</sup> Allegedly, her novels with their happy endings either condone

the illusion of heterosexual love or the submission of the novelist to a violent patriarchal community. Thus, the only possible way to get a progressive Austen (and counteract readings that see her as the Proper Lady) is to align her with the turn from the communal by emphasizing the subversive or oppositional energies of her art. What happens then is the buttressing of a myth that has too long dominated Romantic studies: the myth of 'the solitary genius', the creative power of 'a self-sufficing mind ... as we leap directly from isolated poet to absolute truth'.<sup>11</sup>

The present study has attempted to move beyond this myth, by first reading Austen's novels as embedded in the philosophical and political questions of her time and by connecting them to ours, because as commentators of her novels, we are not exempt from the questions that preoccupy our time and inform our understanding of past works. If, following Elias, the most significant feature of civilized subjectivity is the attunement between the overall demands of people's social existence, on the one hand, and their personal needs and desires, on the other, then it is precisely this quality that makes Austen's heroines attractive embodiments of the civilized psyche.<sup>12</sup> In light of this, the question of what it means to be civilized (women) cannot be addressed and answered in terms of isolated personal judgement and growth, because maturity is defined as the daily negotiation between self and the other and not the musings of a solitary mind. According to Seyla Benhabib, this can point to future ideas of morality and agency:

The traditional attributes of the philosophical subject of the West, like self-reflexivity, the capacity for acting on principles, rational accountability for one's actions and the ability to project a life plan into the future, in short, some sort of autonomy and rationality, could then be reformulated by taking account of the radical situatedness of the subject.<sup>13</sup>

From a point of view of a theory of (Western) civilization, to be civilized means to be aware and reflect upon one's situatedness and embeddedness, allowing this knowledge to inform one's judgement and way of life.

## NOTES

### Introduction

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47. Moran, 'The Commerce of the Sexes', p. 63.
48. Ibid., p. 68.
49. L. Davidoff and C. Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the Middle Class 1780–1850*, 2nd edn (1987; London: Routledge, 2002), p. 29.
50. Ibid., pp. 29, 32.
51. Ibid., p. xvi.
52. Ibid., p. xvi.
53. J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), pp. 30–1.
54. N. Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, 25/26 (1990), pp. 56–80, on p. 59.
55. S. Benhabib, 'Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), pp. 89–90. Habermas engaged and agreed with most of the feminist criticism at the 1989 conference on his *Public Sphere*. For a reception of Habermas's work in the English- and German-speaking world, see M. Scrivener, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in the Age of Revolution and Reaction, 1776–1832* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), p. 41.
56. S. Benhabib, 'In Defense of Universalism. Yet Again! A Response to Critics of *Situating the Self*', *New German Critique*, 62 (1994), pp. 173–89, on p. 174.
57. N. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, ed. S. Quilley, 2nd edn (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 69.
58. Ibid., p. 69.
59. H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Meridian, 1961), pp. 220–1.
60. N. Chodorow, 'Family Structures and Feminine Personality', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 43–4. See also N. Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1979).
61. T. Hobbes, *The Citizen: Philosophical Rudiments Concerning Government and Society* (1642), ed. B. Gert (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), p. 205.
62. C. Di Stefano, 'Masculinity as Ideology in Political Theory: Hobbesian Man Considered', in S. M. Okin and J. Mansbridge (eds), *Schools of Thought in Politics: Feminism* (Aldershot: Elgar Publishing, 1994), p. 35.
63. Di Stefano, 'Masculinity as Ideology', pp. 30–41, on p. 35.
64. S. Freud, 'Femininity', in J. Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols (London: Hogarth Press, c. 1966–73), vol. 19, p. 134. According to Freud, femininity shows a weaker sense of justice and a slighter capacity to sublimate its instincts than masculinity.
65. O'Neill, *The Burke–Wollstonecraft Debate*, p. 172.
66. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 73. See P. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 100. Knox-Shaw demonstrates that Austen owned a copy of Robert Bage's radical novel *Hermesprong* (1796), which featured a substantial summary of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Before him, Margaret Kirkham convincingly argues that Austen's criticism of female



- accomplishments, her ridiculing of Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* in *Pride and Prejudice* and her unfavourable depiction of the standing armies, aligns her with Mary Wollstonecraft. See M. Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1983) and J. Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, 2 vols (London: A. Millar & T. Cadell, 1766).
67. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 119.
  68. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
  69. Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere', p. 61. Fraser here comments on how North American women sought ways to access the public political sphere, despite their exclusion from the official political one. See also M. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990). Interestingly, Wollstonecraft's legacy concurs with Norbert Elias's investigations of the changes that took place in Rome in the second century BC, when women were allowed to have property and similar educational chances to men. Elias concludes that the Roman example demonstrates that the equal treatment of men and women equates with advanced stages of civilization. See N. Elias, 'Wandlung der Machtbalance zwischen den Geschlechtern', *Aufsätze und andere Schriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), p. 179. One can also infer from his research that this happens when gendered concerns cease to be exclusively issues of the family, but are instead interwoven with the state's legislature.
  70. J. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 47.
  71. A. Esterhammer, *Romanticism and Improvisation 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 222.
  72. J.-J. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education* (1762), ed. and trans. A. Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 365. Translated from French: 'Ainsi toute l'éducation des femmes doit être relative aux hommes. Leur plaire, leur être utiles, se faire aimer et honorer d'eux, les élever jeunes, les soigner grands, les conseiller, les consoler, leur rendre la vie agréable et douce : voilà les devoirs des femmes dans tout les temps, et ce qu'on doit l'apprendre dès leur enfance', J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762), ed. M. Launay (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1966), pp. 482–3.
  73. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 73.
  74. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
  75. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
  76. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
  77. *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5.
  78. Wollstonecraft makes a corresponding distinction when she claims: 'It is sufficient to allow that she has always been either a slave or a despot, and remark that each of these situations equally retards the progress of reason.' Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 123.
  79. M. D. Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England and The Natural Daughter* (1799), ed. S. M. Setzer (Toronto: Broadview, 2003), p. 65.
  80. A. K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 151.
  81. M. Kimmel, 'The Birth of the Self-made Man', in R. Adams and D. Savran (eds), *The Masculinity Studies Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 140. Kimmel traces the use of the expression to Henry Clay's speech in the US Senate in 1832.
  82. Richard Polwhele's list of 'unsex'd females' includes Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Catharina Macaulay Graham, Charlotte Smith, Ann Yearsley, Mary Robinson, Anna Laetitia Barbauld and Anne Jebb. R. Polwhele, *The Unsex'd Females* (New York: W. M. Corbett, 1800).

83. M. Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 101. See Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 28. For a more nuanced reading of what Poovey qualifies as fairy-tale endings, see K. Newman, 'Can this Marriage be Saved: Jane Austen Makes Sense of an Ending', in R. Clark (ed.), *Sense and Sensibility and Pride and Prejudice* (New York: St Martin Press, 1994), pp. 193–212.
84. N. Auerbach, 'Jane Austen's Dangerous Charm', in J. Simons (ed.), *Mansfield Park and Persuasion* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 49–66, on pp. 51–2.
85. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 222.
86. I draw here on a commentary on Elizabeth Inchbald's choice to live alone: 'the age could bear a woman unattached to a man, but for a well-known, reputable woman to live entirely on her own was unusual and required courage'. See E. C. Denlinger, *Before Victoria: Extraordinary Women of the British Romantic Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 102.
87. Newman, 'Can this Marriage be Saved', p. 205.
88. J. Austen, *Emma* (1815), ed. F. Stafford (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 396. Hereafter referred to as *E*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
89. M. Cavell, *Becoming a Subject: Reflection in Philosophy and Psychoanalysis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), p. 1.
90. H. P. Bartels, *Menschen in Figurationen: Ein Lesebuch zur Einführung in die Prozess- und Figurationssoziologie von Norbert Elias* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1995), p. 24.
91. N. Elias, 'The Civilizing of Parents', in J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell (eds), *The Norbert Elias Reader: A Biographical Selection* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p. 68.
92. N. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, ed. M. Schröter and trans. E. Jephcott (New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 20.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 112; Bartels, *Menschen in Figurationen*, p. 23.
94. F. Oz-Salzberger, Introduction, in A. Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. xxiii.
95. Ferguson, *An Essay*, p. 21.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
98. P. Jimack, *Rousseau: Emile* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1983), p. 37.
99. S. Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 5.
100. C. Berry, *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 30.
101. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 5.
102. S. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics and Contemporary Controversies in Practical Philosophy', in S. Benhabib and F. Dallmayr (eds), *The Communicative Ethics Controversy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 330–70, on p. 356.
103. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, pp. 14–15.
104. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, p. 22.
105. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 6.
106. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 14.
107. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 334.
108. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 163.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 336. The proponents of these strands are Jürgen Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel. Some feminist philosophers follow this new development to a certain extent, praising its

- emphasis on discursive practice, but also showing its limitations with respect to upholding the general consensus as the ultimate goal of such practice. I will dwell on this aspect in my reading of *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* in Chapter 3.
110. C. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. xix. Gilligan wrote *In a Different Voice* as a re-evaluation of a research project she partook in under the guidance of Lawrence Kohlberg on the development of moral reasoning. Children of both genders were asked to make decisions in face of moral dilemmas and were assigned a certain moral stage according to Kohlberg's scale. According to Gilligan, solutions were mediated in different ways: 'he [the boy] impersonally through systems of logic and law, she [the girl] personally through communication in relationships'. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 29.
  111. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 95.
  112. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
  113. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 333.
  114. I borrow the phrase from the title of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*.
  115. H. Jones, *Jane Austen and Marriage* (London: Continuum, 2009).
  116. J. Davidson, *Hypocrisy and the Politics of Politeness: Manners and Morals from Locke to Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
  117. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*.
  118. S. Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
  119. N. Armstrong, *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 5.
  120. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
  121. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
  122. G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. xviii.
  123. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 4. 'Descartes gave the signal: "Cogito ergo sum." What can be more absurd! Merely in order to say it, one had to learn a communal language; and why say it if no one was there to listen, to accept or to reject it.'
  124. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 153.
  125. Moran, 'The Commerce of the Sexes', p. 76.

### 1 The Juvenilia: Untying the Knots

1. For a chronology of the three volumes, see the Introduction in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Jane Austen: Juvenilia*, ed. P. Sabor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. xxviii–xxix. Hereafter referred to as *J*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
2. F. Beer (ed.), Introduction, *Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 9.
3. J. Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1991), p. 22.
4. J. McAleer, 'What a Biographer Can Learn about Jane Austen from Her *Juvenilia*', in D. Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings: Juvenilia and Lady Susan* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), pp. 7–28, on p. 8.
5. Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, p. 61.
6. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, p. 16.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 37. 'On the contrary, one must start from the structure of the relations between individuals in order to understand the psyche of the individual person.'
8. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 6.
9. E. F. Martin, 'The Madness of Jane Austen: Metonymic Style and Literature's Resistance to Interpretation', in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 83–94, on p. 85.
10. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 19.
11. Newman, 'Can this Marriage be Saved', p. 194; Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 28.
12. C. Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2002), p. 173.
13. J. Halperin, 'Unengaged Laughter: Jane Austen's *Juvenilia*', in D. Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 29–44, on p. 32.
14. Beer, *Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë*, p. 12. See also J. Thompson, *Between Self and World: The Novels of Jane Austen* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1998), p. 164.
15. Fergus, *A Literary Life*, p. 41.
16. M. A. Doody, Introduction, in C. Lennox, *The Female Quixote, or The Adventures of Arabella*, ed. M. Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. xiv.
17. M. A. Doody, 'The Short Fiction', in E. Copeland and J. McMaster (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 84–99, on p. 91.
18. Fergus, *A Literary Life*, p. 53.
19. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, p. 200.
20. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 238.
21. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 238.
22. J. Austen, *Catharine and Other Writings*, ed. M. A. Doody and D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. xxxvii.
23. J. Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories*, ed. P. Washington (New York: Everyman's Library, 1996), p. xv.
24. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, p. 103.
25. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 200.
26. I borrow this phrase from A. W. Litz, 'Jane Austen: The *Juvenilia*', in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 1–6, on p. 1.
27. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 236.
28. Millar, *The Origin*, p. 94.
29. C. Tuite, *Romantic Austen: Sexual Politics and Literary Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 34.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
31. Doody, 'The Short Fiction', p. 91.
32. R. Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 123.
33. Freud, 'Civilization and Its Discontents', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 11, p. 142.
34. McAleer, 'What a Biographer Can Learn about Jane Austen', p. 13. See also Beer, *Juvenilia of Jane Austen and Charlotte Brontë*, p. 9.
35. Y. Gooneratne, *Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 34.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 35.
37. In Charlotte Lennox's last chapter of *The Female Quixote*, a representative of the clergy is given the task of curing Arabella's romantic notions, a chapter presumably written (or at least inspired) by Samuel Johnson.

38. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. M. Holquist and trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 273.
39. Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories*, p. xv.
40. A. Opie, 'The Black Man's Lament; or How to Make Sure' (1826), in S. King and J. B. Pierce (eds), *The Collected Poems of Amelia Alderson Opie* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 318–23, on p. 322.
41. The eponymous heroine of the novella *Lady Susan* is told to have such a command. J. Austen, *Lady Susan, The Watsons and Sanditon*, ed. M. Drabble (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 50. Hereafter referred to as *LS*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
42. T. G. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 9.
43. J. Heydt-Stevenson, *Austen's Unbecoming Conjunctions: Subversive Laughter, Embodied History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 207.
44. P. Wakefield, *Reflections on the Present Condition of the Female Sex with Suggestions for Its Improvement* (1798), ed. G. L. Walker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1974), p. 6.
45. D. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', in S. Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 81–101, on p. 89.
46. C. L. Johnson, 'Kingdom at Sixes and Sevens': Politics and the Juvenilia, in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 45–58, on p. 47.
47. M. A. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence: Women, Politics and the Fiction of Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 144.
48. G. Haggerty, *Unnatural Affections: Women and Fiction in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 3. See also G. Haggerty, *Men in Love: Masculinity and Sexuality in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).
49. C. Emerson quoted in S. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 154.
50. M. Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 89.
51. Ibid., p. 90.
52. Wakefield, *Reflections*, p. 6.
53. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 92.
54. Ibid., p. 187.
55. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', p. 89.
56. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 15.
57. A. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives: Storytelling and Selfhood*, trans. P. A. Kottman (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 39.

## 2 *Lady Susan* and *Northanger Abbey*: Riot in the Brain

1. A. W. Litz, *Jane Austen: A Study of Her Artistic Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 40. Litz compares Lady Susan to some of the female characters in 'The Three Sisters', 'Lesley Castle' and 'A Collection of Letters'.
2. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 4.
3. N. Elias, *The Court Society*, trans. E. Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), p. 104.

4. Ibid., p. 104.
5. S. Harding, 'Starting from Marginalized Lives: A Conversation with Sandra Harding', in G. Olson and E. Hirsh (eds), *Women Writing Culture* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 3–42, on p. 15.
6. R. W. Chapman distinguishes between *Major Works*, the six famous novels, and *Minor Works*, the three volumes of the juvenilia, *Lady Susan*, *The Watsons* and *Sanditon*. J. Austen, *The Minor Works*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954).
7. Austen, *Sanditon and Other Stories*, pp. xvii–xviii.
8. Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 104.
9. Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, p. 90.
10. Ibid., p. 90.
11. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 271.
12. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 271.
13. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 272.
14. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 24.
15. O. Smith, *The Politics of Language, 1791–1819* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1984), p. 2.
16. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 24.
17. Ibid., p. 24. Mary Poovey quotes Hannah More's 'unequivocal' silence as an external sign that assures the viewer that a woman is what she seems to be.
18. Translated from French: 'Croyez-moi, Vicomte, on acquiert rarement les qualités dont on peut se passer.' C. de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, ed. F. Marmande (Paris: Pocket, 1989), p. 209.
19. M. Kramp, *Disciplining Love: Austen and the Modern Man* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p. 42.
20. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 22.
21. 'To a Lady with Some Painted Flowers' in ibid., vol. 5, pp. 122–3, footnote 5.
22. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 123.
23. B. Horwitz, 'Lady Susan: The Wicked Mother in Jane Austen's Work', in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 181–91, on p. 188.
24. S. Harding, Introduction, in Harding (ed.), *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, p. 3.
25. Ibid., p. 1.
26. Ibid., p. 3.
27. B. Anderson, 'The Unmasking of Lady Susan', in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 193–203, on p. 201.
28. M. Mudrick, *Jane Austen: Irony as Defense and Discovery* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 140.
29. H. McKellar, 'Lady Susan: Sport or Cinderella?' in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 205–14, on p. 210.
30. Litz, *Jane Austen*, p. 45.
31. Ibid., p. 45.
32. McKellar, 'Lady Susan', p. 211.
33. Mudrick, *Jane Austen*, p. 138.
34. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 273.
35. H. Meyers, *Femicidal Fears: Narratives of the Female Gothic Experience* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 17.
36. T. Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 2.

37. Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, p. 17.
38. D. Heiland, *Gothic and Gender: An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 3.
39. T. Tanner, *Jane Austen* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), p. 47.
40. H. More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), ed. G. Luria, 2 vols (Oxford and New York: Woodstock Books, 1995), vol. 2, p. 147.
41. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 93.
42. J. Austen, *Northanger Abbey* (1818), ed. M. Butler (London: Penguin Book, 2003), p. 147. Hereafter referred to as *NA*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
43. Harding, *Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader*, p. 3.
44. At the beginning of the novel, Catherine is described as an outdoor person who leads an active life, but as she grows, her love of novels surpasses even nature's attractions.
45. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 44. Tanner mentions as a specimen of such articulation Sheila Rowbotham's Marxist study on class, gender and work, which scrutinizes the history of women from Puritan England to the socialist movement. S. Rowbotham, *Hidden from History: 300 Hundred Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It* (London: Pluto Press, 1973).
46. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 89. See 'the winning softness so warmly and frequently recommended, that governs by obeying'.
47. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 89.
48. P. Meyer Spacks, 'Plots and Possibilities: Jane Austen's Juvenilia', in Grey (ed.), *Jane Austen's Beginnings*, pp. 123–34, on p. 132.
49. D. Hoeveler, 'Vindicating *Northanger Abbey*', in D. Looser (ed.), *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), p. 121.
50. J. Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 103.
51. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 104.
52. A. M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), p. 100; A. G. Sulloway, *Jane Austen and the Province of Womanhood* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 124.
53. F. W. Bradbrook, *Jane Austen and Her Predecessors* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 93.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 91. Bradbrook argues that Catherine's ordinariness is contrasted by Arabella's romantic self-deception.
55. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 63.
56. Austen asks in her letter to her sister, Cassandra: 'Is it written only to Classical Scholars?' See Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 172.
57. Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, p. 17.
58. I refer here to the law of coverture, according to which the female body was legally conceptualized as being 'covered', i.e. the property of the husband: 'A man and wife are one person in law; the wife loses all her rights as a single woman, and her existence is entirely absorbed in that of her husband. He is civilly responsible for her acts; she lives under his protection or cover, and her condition is called coverture. A woman's body belongs to her husband; she is in his custody, and he can enforce his right by a writ of habeas corpus. What was her personal property before marriage, such as money in hand, money at the bank, jewels, household goods, clothes, etc., becomes absolutely her husband's, and he may assign or dispose of them at his pleasure whether he and his wife live together or

- not'. See B. L. S. Bodichon, *A Brief Summary in Plain Language of the Most Important Laws Concerning Women; Together with a Few Observations Thereon* (London: J. Chapman, 1854), p. 4.
59. Richardson underscored Clarissa's purity even after Lovelace's rape by having her wear a white gown.
60. C. Johnson, *Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 35.
61. This term is borrowed from A. M. Duckworth, who links Austen's approval of imagination (although he argues it is a limited one) with Adam Smith, who maintained that moral judgements are developed through sympathetic participation in the actions and feelings of the affected person as much as in those of the executor. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 98.
62. See W. Godwin, *Things as They Are or The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, ed. M. Hindle (London: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 3 (my emphasis).
63. For detailed commentaries on the correspondence Richardson held with his female supporters, see J. Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 4–5.
64. *Ibid.*, pp. 102–3.
65. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 95.
66. Hoeveler, 'Vindicating *Northanger Abbey*', p. 125.
67. T. C. Davis and T. Postlewait (eds), *Theatricality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 16–17.
68. J. Gregory, *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* (1761; Dublin: Thomas Ewing and Caleb Jenkin, 1774), pp. 80–3.
69. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 94.
70. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 47.
71. C. Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), pp. 102–3.
72. R. Miles, *Jane Austen* (Horndon: Northcote House Publishers, 2003), pp. 73–4.
73. A. Opie, *Adeline Mowbray: The Mother and Daughter* (1804), ed. S. King and B. Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 38.
74. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 90.
75. I borrow the phrasing from Norbert Elias's work *The Society of Individuals*.
76. Miles, *Jane Austen*, pp. 67–8.
77. Tuite, *Romantic Austen*, p. 55.
78. Kirkham, *Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction*, p. 16.
79. S. Johnson, *The Rambler* (1750), in B. W. Bates and A. B. Strauss (eds), *The Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson*, 23 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), vol. 3, p. 22.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
81. Favret, *Romantic Correspondence*, p. 141.
82. B. Tandon, *Jane Austen and the Morality of Conversation* (London: Anthem Press, 2003), p. 174.
83. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, p. 16.
84. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 272. Elias argues that the human habitus in court society is monitored by social constraint, whereas in bourgeois society constraint operates automatically and includes all relationships, thus developing into self-constraint.
85. Kirkham, *Jane Austen*, p. 13.



86. C. Siskin, 'Jane Austen and the Engendering of Disciplinarity', in Looser (ed.), *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism*, p. 61.
87. Meyers, *Femicidal Fears*, p. 32.

### 3 *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*: Allowing for Difference

1. T. Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651), ed. E. Curley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1994), pp. 93–4.
2. J.-J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (1762), trans. and ed. C. Betts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 66.
3. J. Simon-Ingram, 'Expanding the Social Contract: Rousseau, Gender and the Problem of Judgment', *Comparative Literature*, 43:2 (1991), pp. 134–49, on p. 138.
4. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 163.
5. Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 32.
6. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 336.
7. Ibid., p. 345.
8. Ibid., p. 346 (my emphasis).
9. Ibid., p. 358–9.
10. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, pp. 24–5.
11. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 357.
12. Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 38.
13. Ibid., p. 18.
14. J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), ed. R. Ballaster (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), p. 7. Hereafter referred to as SS. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
15. E. Copeland, Introduction, in J. Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*, ed. E. Copeland (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xxiii.
16. For a trajectory of sentimental literature, see J. Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).
17. L. Braudy, 'The Form of the Sentimental Novel', *A Forum on Fiction*, 7:1 (1973), pp. 6–13, on p. 6.
18. For a thorough comparison of *Sense and Sensibility* to other related novels of the period, see K. L. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art of Allusion* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), pp. 43–73; Litz, *Jane Austen*, p. 74.
19. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 68.
20. J. Lauber, *Jane Austen* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), p. 30.
21. Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 131.
22. R. ApRoberts, 'Sense and Sensibility or Growing up Dichotomous', *Nineteenth-century Fiction*, 3:3 (1975), pp. 351–25, on p. 355.
23. A. Gibson, 'Sense and Sensibility and Postmodern Ethics', in M. E. Novak and A. K. Mellor (eds), *Passionate Encounters in a Time of Sensibility* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2000), pp. 247–67, on p. 257.
24. Lauber, *Jane Austen*, p. 27.
25. R. M. Brownstein, 'Northanger Abbey, Sense and Sensibility, Pride and Prejudice', in E. Copeland and J. McMaster (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 32–57, on p. 43.
26. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 72. See also S. Morgan, *In the Meantime: Character and Perception in Jane Austen's Fiction* (Chicago, IL: University Chicago Press, 1980), p. 115.
27. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 72.
28. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art*, p. 67.
29. This interpretation is influenced by Michael Holquist's reading of Frankenstein and the monster, who are made the same by their 'over-determined sense of uniqueness' and their claims 'to an unexampled aloneness'. See Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 91.
30. Ibid., p. 32.
31. Ibid., p. 22–23.
32. Ibid., p. 22–23.
33. Ibid., p. 41.
34. E. Goffman, *The Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), p. 128.
35. Elias, *The Society of Individuals*, pp. 24–5.
36. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, p. 66.
37. T. G. Garvey, 'The Value of Opacity: A Bakhtinian Analysis of Habermas's Discourse Ethics', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 33:4 (2000), pp. 370–90, on p. 371.
38. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 356.
39. A. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 9.
40. Todd, *Sensibility*, p. 7.
41. W. J. Bate, *From Classic to Romanticism: Premises of Taste in Eighteenth Century England* (New York: Harper, 1961), p. 136.
42. H. Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981), p. 105.
43. P. Shelley, 'Essay on Love' (1818), in R. Holmes (ed.), *Shelley on Love: An Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California, 1980), p. 72.
44. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p. 25.
45. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 4–5.
46. Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 28.
47. Ibid., p. 28.
48. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 45.
49. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 333.
50. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 9.
51. G. R. Morrow, 'The Ethical and Economic Theories of Adam Smith', *Cornell Studies in Philosophy*, 13 (New York: Longmans, 1923), p. 29.
52. Litz, *Jane Austen*, p. 78–9.
53. B. Seeber, 'I See Every Thing as You Desire Me to Do': The Scolding and Schooling of Marianne Dashwood', *Eighteenth-century Fiction*, 11 (1999), pp. 223–33, on p. 225.
54. M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. xxxii.
55. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, p. 9.
56. N. J. Hirschmann, 'Sympathy, Empathy and Obligation: A Feminist Rereading', in A. Jaap Jacobson (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of David Hume* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), pp. 174–93, on p. 184.
57. A. Herrmann, *The Dialogic and Difference: 'An/other woman' in Virginia Woolf and Christa Wolf* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 15.
58. D. Monaghan, *Jane Austen: Structure and Social Vision* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p. 42.

59. Holquist, *Dialogism*, p. 33.
60. Todd, *Sensibility*, pp. 130–1. According to Tanner, Jane Austen revised *Sense and Sensibility* during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 76.
61. W. Stafford, *English Feminists and Their Opponents on the 1790s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 34.
62. Robinson, *Letter to the Women of England*, p. 65.
63. I. M. Young, 'Impartiality and Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory', in S. Benhabib and D. Cornell (eds), *Feminism as Critique: On the Politics of Gender* (Minneapolis, MD: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 57–76, on p. 67.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
65. ApRoberts, 'Sense and Sensibility', p. 354.
66. Simon-Ingram, 'Expanding the Social Contract', p. 148.
67. L. Irigaray, "Je-Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', in Olson and Hirsh (eds), *Women Writing Culture*, pp. 141–66, on p. 160.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
69. J. Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), ed. V. Jones (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 15. Hereafter referred to as *PP*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
70. Lauber, *Jane Austen*, p. 30.
71. Moler, *Jane Austen's Art*, p. 71.
72. C. S. Macaulay, *Letters on Education with Observations on Religious and Metaphysical Subjects* (London: Dilly, 1790), p. 208.
73. Irigaray, "Je-Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', p. 145.
74. J. Fergus, 'The Power of Women's Language and Laughter', in B. Stovel and L. W. Gregg (eds), *The Talk in Jane Austen* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), pp. 103–22, on p. 108.
75. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 34.
76. F. Burney, *Evelina, The Entrance of a Girl into the World* (1778), ed. E. Bloom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 35. By contrast, in Fanny Burney's *Evelina*, Lord Orville's instant appreciation of the heroine as 'a pretty modest-looking girl' with an 'elegant face' betrays an almost mechanical categorization.
77. Irigaray, "Je-Luce Irigaray": A Meeting with Luce Irigaray', p. 147.
78. D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen or the Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), p. 43.
79. G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (1807; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 111.
80. Millar, *The Origin*, p. 148.
81. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 130.
82. Elizabeth's resentment of Darcy originates in his neglect of other people's self-love: 'I could easily forgive his pride, if he had not mortified mine' (*PP* 19).
83. Halperin, *The Life of Jane Austen*, p. 71.
84. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 67.
85. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 84.
86. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 62.
87. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 153.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 153.
89. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–9.
90. ApRoberts, 'Sense and Sensibility', p. 364.

#### 4 *Mansfield Park*: Emancipating 'Puny' Fanny Price

1. Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, p. 155.
2. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 1, p. 140.
3. Elias, 'The Civilizing of Parents', pp. 189, 210.
4. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 14.
5. Goudsblom and Mennell (eds), *The Norbert Elias Reader*, p. 130.
6. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 356.
7. Elias, 'The Civilizing of Parents', p. 207.
8. Southam, *The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 48.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 49.
10. Mudrick, *Jane Austen*, p. 181.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 180; S. Cavell, *Philosophy the Day After Tomorrow* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 126.
12. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 37.
13. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 143.
14. M. Kirkham, 'Feminist Irony and the Priceless Heroine of *Mansfield Park*', in J. Todd (ed.), *Jane Austen: New Perspectives* (New York: Holmes & Meyers, 1983), pp. 231–47, on p. 231.
15. J. Austen, *Mansfield Park* (1814), ed. K. Sutherland (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 10, 11. Hereafter referred to as *MP*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
16. More, *Strictures*, vol. 1, p. 145.
17. J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 8.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
19. Southam, *The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 50.
20. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 356.
21. E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 102.
22. M. Ferguson, 'Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender', in L. M. White (ed.), *Critical Essays* (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998), pp. 103–20, on p. 106. Ferguson associates Mrs Norris with John Norris, who is said in Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* to have presented himself as an abolitionist in Liverpool and then later appeared in London as a pro-slave delegate representing Liverpool. Austen's appreciation of Thomas Clarkson and the depiction of Mrs Norris as a double-dealing woman seems to justify the association. According to G. D. V. White, *Mansfield Park* echoes concerns about slavery through its complex treatment of 'absenteeism [that] places the then status quo of chattel slavery under the spotlight'. G. D. V. White, *Jane Austen in the Context of Abolition: A Fling at the Slave Trade* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 51.
23. J. Wiltshire, 'Decolonising *Mansfield Park*', *Essays in Criticism*, 53:4 (2003), pp. 303–22.
24. L. Davidoff, *Worlds Between: Historical Perspectives on Gender and Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 208. Quoted in Tuite, *Romantic Austen*, p. 104.
25. In Maria's words, after 'spunging' cheese cake and pheasant eggs from Sotherton's housekeeper, Mrs Norris 'has been knocking my [Maria's] elbow unmercifully' with one of her baskets. Mrs Norris, who has a 'selfless' solution to everything, throws the basket on Fanny's lap while admonishing her: 'There, Fanny, you shall carry the parcel for me; take great care of it; do not let it fall' (*MP* 99).

26. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, p. 61.
27. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 96.
28. Ferguson, 'Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism, and Gender', p. 107.
29. M. Edgeworth, *The Absentee* (1812), ed. W. J. Mc Cormack and K. Walker (Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 15.
30. Ferguson, 'Mansfield Park: Slavery Colonialism and Gender', p. 107.
31. A. K. Mellor, 'Sex, Violence, and Slavery: Blake and Wollstonecraft', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 58:3/4 (1995), pp. 345–70, on p. 347.
32. John Wiltshire points out that 'their philistine indifference to geography and history was established in their schooldays'. See Wiltshire, 'Decolonising Mansfield Park', p. 316.
33. B. Southam, *Jane Austen: A Student's Guide to the Later Manuscript Works* (London: Concord Books, 2007), p. 35.
34. S. G. Bell, 'Women Create Gardens in Male Landscapes: A Revisionist Approach to Eighteenth-century English Garden History', *Feminist Studies*, 16:3 (Autumn 1990), pp. 471–91, on p. 474.
35. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 75.
36. I use 'infected' referring to Sir Thomas's observation that his niece's reason must be 'diseased' (MP 373).
37. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 120.
38. Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*, p. 64.
39. Benhabib, 'Communicative Ethics', p. 356.
40. B. Britton Wenner, *Prospect and Refuge in the Landscape of Jane Austen* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 66.
41. Ferguson, 'Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender', p. 115.
42. A. K. Mellor expands Ferguson's reading of Fanny Price as the slave of Mansfield Park: 'Fanny should be read as herself a slave, disciplined by Aunt Norris, the overseer from the "White House", and "chained" in a marriage with Edmund, a marriage she has been manipulated into seeing as desirable. From this perspective, Fanny is no different from Caesar, the "Grateful Negro" celebrated in Maria Edgeworth's tale of that title for children, a character who has been "brain-washed" into choosing his own subjection'. A. K. Mellor, 'Directions in Austen Criticism', in B. Battaglia and D. Saglia (eds), *Re-drawing Austen: Picturesque Travels in Austenland* (Naples: Liguori Editore, 2004), pp. 325–8, on pp. 327–8.
43. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 122.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
45. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 215.
46. M. J. Corbett, *Family Likeness: Sex, Marriage and Incest from Jane Austen to Virginia Woolf* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 56. Mary J. Corbett historicizes marriage within the family, demonstrating that the distinction between endogamy and exogamy is an invention that took shape during the entire nineteenth century and its history began around Austen's mature novels. This, she argues, helps us recover the value of marriage within family for Austen's readership: 'We forget too easily the force and scope the now-anomalous alternative plot of marriage within family had for Austen's original audience. Its erasure from our histories of domestic fiction prematurely forecloses the possibility that there might have been something valuable for some female characters and their authors, in that plot', p. 55.
47. Cavarero, *Relating Narratives*, p. 56.
48. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

49. S. J. Brison, 'Outliving Oneself: Trauma, Memory and Personal Identity', in D. T. Meyers, *Feminists Rethink the Self* (Colorado and Oxford: Westview Press, 1997), pp. 12–29, on p. 21. Part of this article relates Susan J. Brison's own recovery process after being assaulted, raped and left for dead.
50. I draw here on Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure*.
51. D. T. Meyers, 'Emotion and Heterodox Moral Perception: An Essay in Moral Social Psychology', in Meyers (ed.), *Feminists Rethink the Self*, pp. 197–218, on p. 205.
52. Gilligan, *The Birth of Pleasure*, p. xx.
53. Ferguson writes in 'Mansfield Park: Slavery, Colonialism and Gender': 'Susan, coded as a second Fanny', p. 108.
54. A. Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel: The Determined Author* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 121.
55. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 137.
56. Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p. 121.
57. 'Die unterscheidende Konstitution hat sicherlich eine unaufhebbare Bedeutung für sein ganzes Schicksal'. See Bartels, *Menschen in Figurationen*, p. 28.
58. Elias, 'The Civilizing of Parents', p. 210.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 210.
60. K. O'Brien, 'History and the Novel in Eighteenth-century Britain', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 68:1/2 (2005), pp. 397–413, on p. 409.
61. *Ibid.*, p. 409.
62. T. Chanter, 'Postmodern subjectivity', in A. M. Jaggar and I. M. Young (eds), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 263–71, on pp. 264–5.
63. Butler, *War of Ideas*, p. 166.
64. Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p. 119.
65. Bell, 'Women Create Gardens', p. 472.
66. Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p. 105.
67. M. Lane, *Jane Austen and Food* (London: Hambledon Press, 1995), pp. 145–6. Lane locates the apricot tree in Mansfield Park failing to specify that it grows in the Parsonage, a slip that confirms Sales's observation that 'It is, nevertheless, still very common for readers to form the impression that Fanny indeed ends up living in Mansfield Park itself'. Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England*, p. 105.
68. Southam, *The Critical Heritage*, vol. 1, p. 49.
69. R. Palter, *The Duchess of Malfi's Apricots, and Other Literary Fruits* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002). Palter states that the moor apricot grows slowly, but is the most resistant apricot culture to frost.

## 5 Emma: The Art of Quarrelling

1. J. E. Austen-Leigh, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* (1870), ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 157. The first edition shows 1816 as year of publication, but advertising for publication indicates late December 1815. Austen started *Emma* in January 1814 and finished it in March 1815. See Le Faye, *Jane Austen's Letters*, p. 304.
2. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 122.
3. B. Z. Thaden, 'Figure and Ground: The Receding Heroine in Jane Austen's *Emma*', *South Atlantic Review*, 25:1 (1990), pp. 47–62.
4. S. C. Greenfield, *Mothering Daughters: Novels and the Politics of Family Romance Frances Burney to Jane Austen* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 34.

5. R. Simpson, 'Jane Austen,' *North British Review*, 52 (1870), pp. 129–52. Quoted in D. Lodge (ed.), *Emma: A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 53.
6. Thompson, *Between Self and World*, p. 72.
7. S. Gilbert and S. Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-century Literary Imagination* (1979; New Haven, CT: Yale Nota Bene, 2000).
8. R. Perry, 'Interrupted Friendships in *Emma*', in Lodge (ed.), *Emma: A Casebook*, pp. 127–47, on p. 144.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
10. N. Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 152.
11. B. Marie, 'Emma and the Democracy of Desire', in Lodge (ed.), *Emma: A Casebook*, pp. 53–67, on p. 56.
12. L. Trilling, Introduction, in J. Austen, *Emma*, ed. L. Trilling (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin, 1957), pp. v–xxiv.
13. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 140.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
15. Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, p. 56.
16. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 261.
17. M. Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 42.
18. D. T. Meyers, 'Agency', in Jaggar and Young (eds), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, pp. 372–82, on p. 373.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 373.
20. M. Schorer, 'The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse', in I. Watt (ed.), *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 98–111. In *The Improvement of the Estate*, Duckworth titles his chapter on this novel 'Emma and the Dangers of Individualism'.
21. Cited in A. Bautz, *The Reception of Jane Austen and Walter Scott: A Comparative Longitudinal Study* (London: Continuum, 2007), p. 62. See also C. Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, ed. A. F. Stuart, 2 vols (London: John Lane, 1908), vol. 2, p. 261.
22. More, *Strictures*, vol. 1, p. 144.
23. Johnson, *Jane Austen*, p. 125.
24. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 234.
25. S. Cho, *An Ethics of Becoming: Configurations of Feminine Subjectivity in Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë, and George Eliot* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 52.
26. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 148.
27. D. T. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), p. 212.
28. R. H. Kotzin, 'Ancient Greek Philosophy', in Jaggar and Young (eds), *A Companion to Feminist Philosophy*, pp. 9–20, on p. 10. For further reading on the letters by Pythagorean women, see J. K. Ward, 'Harmonia and Koinonia: Moral Values for Pythagorean Women', in E. Browning Cole and S. Coultrap-Mc Quinn (eds), *Explorations in Feminist Ethics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 57–68.
29. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 148.
30. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 333.
31. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 147.
32. J. Habermas, 'Modernity – An Incomplete Project', in V. Leitch (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (New York: Norton, 2001), pp. 1748–59, on p. 1749.

33. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 196.
34. Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 212.
35. Meyers, 'Agency', p. 381.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 376–7.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 376.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 376.
39. More, *Strictures*, p. 63.
40. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 27. According to Mary Poovey, women were encouraged to think of themselves as a community, but 'not as a political unit'. They were to understand themselves as a universalized category described as the 'sex'.
41. Thaden, 'Figure and Ground', pp. 48–9.
42. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 236.
43. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 236.
44. R. Chamber, *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 7.
45. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, pp. 15, 185.
46. See E. Wilson, 'A Long Talk about Jane Austen', in I. Watt (ed.), *Jane Austen: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 35–40; Mudrick, *Jane Austen*, pp. 181–206; M. Schorer, 'The Humiliation of Emma Woodhouse', pp. 98–111. S. Morgan, *Sisters in Time: Imagining Gender in Nineteenth-century British Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 51.
47. For a thorough appreciation of Mr Knightley's novelty as a 'humane' rather than 'gallant' hero, see C. Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 191–205.
48. I borrow the phrase from E. K. Sedgwick's article 'Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl', *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (1991), pp. 818–37, on p. 833.
49. Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 170.
50. M. Edgeworth, *Helen* (1834), ed. S. Manly and C. ÓGallchoir (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1990), p. 214.
51. Quoted in Van Krieken, *Norbert Elias*, p. 54.
52. Bury, *The Diary of a Lady-in-Waiting*, p. 261.
53. G. Himmelfarb, *The Moral Imagination: From Edmund Burke to Lionel Trilling* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), p. 27.
54. Tara Goshal Wallace speaks of the 'insufficient attention to "reality"' that leads Emma to 'spectacular' 'misreadings' and 'airy speculations', while Joseph Wiesenfarth explains that Emma's education is complete once 'she allows the totality of reality to dictate her conduct'. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, p. 81; J. Wiesenfarth, *The Errand of Form: An Essay on Jane Austen's Art* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 138; Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, p. 212.
55. Fergus, 'The Power of Women's Language and Laughter', p. 119.
56. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate*, p. 148.
57. More, *Strictures*, vol. 2, pp. 1–2.
58. See also *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 28: 'women have equal parts, but are inferior in wholeness of mind, in the integral understanding'.
59. W. Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 94.
60. Tanner, *Jane Austen*, p. 203.



61. P. Menon, *Austen, Eliot, Charlotte Bronte and the Mentor-Lover* (New-York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 43.
62. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
63. Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*, p. 94.
64. Elias, *The Court Society*, p. 256.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
66. J. Craig, Introduction, in J. Millar, *The Origin*, p. 23.
67. Wayne Booth considers Mr Knightley the 'best thing that could happen to this heroine'. W. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 260. Booth's statement represents only half of the truth, implying that such an erroneous heroine is lucky to engage the affection of a man like Mr Knightley, while Austen insists that Mr Knightley considers himself exceptionally fortunate to be rewarded with such a woman as Emma. In his eyes, she is like 'no other woman in England' (E 353).
68. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, p. 19.
69. Jones, *Jane Austen*, p. 4.
70. G. Kelly, 'Jane Austen's Imagined Communities', B. Stovel and L. W. Gregg (eds), *The Talk in Jane Austen* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), pp. 123–38, on p. 135.
71. Meyers, *Self, Society, and Personal Choice*, p. 213.
72. Meyers, 'Agency', p. 373.
73. Mary Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 134.

### 6 *Persuasion*: Developing an 'Elasticity of Mind'

1. J. Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression: Jane Austen's Persuasion* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2007), pp. 20, 36.
2. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 247.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 93.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 73.
5. Harding, 'Starting from Marginalized Lives', p. 42.
6. J. Austen, *Persuasion* (1818), ed. G. Beer (London: Penguin Classics, 2004), p. 145. Hereafter referred to as *P*. Future references will be given parenthetically within the body of the text.
7. Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, p. 370. Translated from French: 'La première et la plus importante qualité d'une femme est la douceur: faite pour obéir à un être aussi imparfait que l'homme, souvent si plein de vices, et toujours si plein de défauts, elle doit apprendre de bonne heure à souffrir même l'injustice et à supporter les torts d'un mari sans se plaindre'. Rousseau, *Emile ou de l'éducation*, pp. 482–3.
8. G. G. Byron, *Don Juan* (1819–24), ed. T. G. Steffan, E. Steffan and W. W. Pratt (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996), p. 130.
9. M. Shelley, *The Mary Shelley Reader*, ed. B. T. Bennet and C. E. Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 28–9.
10. O'Neill, *The Burke–Wollstonecraft Debate*, p. 139.
11. Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 54.
12. More, *Strictures*, vol. 2, p. 22.

13. See Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, p. 149. Waldron argues that Anne, who has read Byron, reads and sometimes misreads Wentworth's energy and radicalism as Byronic. Also Anne Mellor describes Wentworth's revolutionary energy as on the verge of being aggressive. He stands for 'aggressive entrepreneurship'. See A. K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780–1830* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 126.
14. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 102.
15. More, *Strictures*, vol. 1, p. 155.
16. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 30.
17. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 89.
18. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 131; More, *Strictures*, vol. 1, p. 59.
19. More, *Strictures*, vol. 2, p. 106.
20. Knox-Shaw, *Jane Austen and the Enlightenment*, p. 100.
21. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 226.
22. Newman, 'Can this Marriage be Saved', p. 263.
23. M. Edgeworth, *Belinda* (1801), ed. K. J. Kirkpatrick, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 30.
24. Freud, 'Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 19, p. 258. See also Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 7.
25. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, p. 141.
26. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 69.
27. W. Godwin, *The Political and Philosophical Writings of William Godwin*, ed. M. Philps, 7 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1993), vol. 5, p. 106. Quoted in W. Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. P. Clemit and G. L. Walker (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2001), p. 16.
28. P. Clemit, *The Godwinian Novel: The Rational Fictions of Godwin, Brockden, Brown, Mary Shelley* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), pp. 66–9.
29. 'Everyone that heard me was in tears; they could not resist the ardour with which I praised the qualities of Falkland; they manifested their sympathy in the tokens of my penitence'. Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, p. 335.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 335.
32. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, p. 173.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
34. Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, p. 92.
35. V. Jones, 'Appendix D: Austen and the Navy', in J. Kinsley and D. S. Lynch (eds), *Persuasion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 224. Mary Poovey also sees Captain Wentworth as the embodiment of 'individual effort and merit'. See Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 181. So does Anne Mellor: 'He rises entirely through his own exertions and merit'. See Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation*, p. 124.
36. Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, p. 92. Admiral Nelson 'was virtually deified after his death at Trafalgar in 1805'.
37. Robert Miles quotes this passage, however, focusing on luck and moral judgement under uncertainty, but not on the efficiency of Wentworth's naval efforts and his professional merits. See R. Miles, 'Moral Luck and Judgment in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*', *Nineteenth-century Literature*, 42:2 (1987), pp. 143–58, on p. 153. Mary Waldron also mentions that luck and chance are important since Wentworth could have been unsuccessful or

- even died during those eight years. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, p. 137.
38. Harris, *A Revolution Almost Beyond Expression*, p. 106.
  39. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. 26.
  40. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 112. For more on Damaris Masham's pioneering attempts to formulate the social construction of female and male virtue, see O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 42.
  41. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 123.
  42. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, p. 152.
  43. Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England*, p. 44.
  44. O'Brien, *Women and Enlightenment*, p. 78.
  45. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility*, p. xviii.
  46. I. Grundy, 'Women's History? Writings by English Nuns', in I. Grundy and S. Wiseman (eds), *Women, Writing, History 1640–1740* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1992), pp. 126–38, on p. 126.
  47. Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, p. 364.
  48. Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, pp. 199–200.
  49. C. Lennox, *The Female Quixote: or The Adventures of Arabella* (1752), ed. M. Dalziel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 372.
  50. A. Burton, "'Invention is What Delights Me': Jane Austen's Remaking of 'English History'", in D. Looser (ed.), *Jane Austen and Discourses of Feminism* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), pp. 35–50, on p. 44. See also D. Looser, *British Women Writers and the Writing of History 1670–1820* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 190.
  51. Young, 'Impartiality', p. 59.
  52. I. M. Young, *Justice and Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 104–5.
  53. Emsley, *Jane Austen's Philosophy of the Virtues*, p. 155. Also Mary Waldron points out that unlike Eleanor, another almost perfect 'proper lady', Anne 'has come to her conclusion from experience'. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, p. 136.
  54. Harding, 'Starting from Marginalized Lives', pp. 40–1.
  55. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
  56. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
  57. According to Mary Waldron, by all contemporary fictional standards, Anne ought to disapprove of his unscrupulous flirtations with the Musgrove girls and give him up. Waldron, *Jane Austen and the Fiction of Her Time*, pp. 142–3.
  58. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 27. Mary Poovey draws a parallel between Fanny's sense of loss and insignificance among her family circle, p. 224.
  59. Mandal, *Jane Austen and the Popular Novel*, p. 194.
  60. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
  61. The energetic admiral is rather impatient indoors and needs Sophia Croft to remind him of self-exertion: 'The admiral, after taking two or three refreshing turns about the room with his hands behind him, being called to order by his wife, now came up to Captain Wentworth' (P 64).
  62. Deresiewicz, *Jane Austen and the Romantic Poets*, p. 158.
  63. Robinson, *A Letter to the Women of England*, p. 65.
  64. Young, 'Impartiality', p. 76.
  65. R. Farrer, 'Jane Austen', *Quarterly Review*, 228:452 (July 1917), pp. 1–30, on p. 29.

66. Poovey, *The Proper Lady*, p. 48. Mary Poovey convincingly demonstrates that the tension between the female feeling that kept women hostage to submission and the ideal of agency propagated by the Enlightenment is at the core of Wollstonecraft's writings.
67. Wallace, *Jane Austen and Narrative Authority*, p. 99.
68. Young, 'Impartiality', p. 72.
69. Wollstonecraft, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 325.
70. Young, 'Impartiality', p. 76.

## Afterword

1. Goudsblom and Mennell, 'Civilization and Rationalization', in *The Norbert Elias Reader* p. 62.
2. Davidoff, *Worlds Between*, p. 41.
3. J. Rendall, 'Gender, Race and the Progress of Civilization', in S. Knott and B. Taylor (eds), *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), pp. 70–4, on p. 73.
4. T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 130.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 130.
6. J. Rendall, 'Women and the Public Sphere', in L. Davidoff, K. McClelland, E. Varikas (eds), *Gender and History: Retrospect and Prospect* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), pp. 57–70, on p. 64.
7. H. Nazar, 'Imagination goes Visiting: Jane Austen, Judgment, and the Social', *Nineteenth-century Literature*, 59:2 (2004), pp. 145–78, on p. 155.
8. J. N. Cox, "'Diverse, Sheer Opposite, Antipodes': Diversity, Opposition, and Community in Romantic Culture", *European Romantic Review*, 20:2 (2009), pp. 139–58, on p. 139.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 150.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
12. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, vol. 2, p. 333.
13. Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, p. 214.

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